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# Gate 81: Saving Preston Bus Station

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## ABSTRACT

*The discovery and recognition of the embodied meaning of a place can be interpreted through the existing building. The installation artist, the designer and the architect regard the building not as a blank canvas but as multi-layered structure, which they have the opportunity to activate. They have the opportunity to reflect upon the contingency, usefulness and emotional resonance of a particular place and use this knowledge to heighten the viewer's perception of it.*

*The relationship between the building and its wider location has often been seen as somewhat ambiguous and yet it is possible to describe some spaces as encapsulating, in miniature, the characteristic qualities or features of a much wider situation. The interior has an obvious and direct relationship with the building that it occupies, the people who use it, and also it can have a connection with the area in which it is located.*

*Preston Bus Station is a marvellously brutal building. In 2012, the Preston City Council proposed its demolition and replacement with a surface car park; they refused to consider proposals for building re-use. This provocative act galvanised the various groups that were campaigning to save the building and proved to be the impetus for a number of different types of projects.*

*Gate 81, a collaboration between architects, designers, academics and arts organisations, curated a series of events within the Bus Station with the intention of raising the profile of the building. This paper will discuss the nature of the building, document the Gate 81 projects and report upon this sanguine approach to conservation.*

## INTRODUCTION

Buildings outlast civilisations. Throughout history buildings have been used, reused and adapted, they survive as culture and civilisations change. The already built provides a direct link with the past; it is a connection with the very building bricks of our society. The existing tells the tale or story of how a particular culture evolved. A simple building may depict a certain moment in time; it may relate the particular sensibility of specific era. A

more complex collection of structures may have a much more elaborate story to tell. Jorge Silvetti describes this direct link with the past as part of our 'fundamental urban condition'.<sup>1</sup> He links the physical survival of particular elements of any built environment with the spiritual survival of our civilisation, and it is this visibility and durability of the physical human-made environment that are testimonies to the societies that produced them.



At the risk of sounding too partisan and biased, I would say that even in historic times documents were not always available, and buildings (monuments, vernacular constructions, and public works) are themselves important texts, often providing the first and most lasting impression of a culture.<sup>2</sup>

Places are also defined by the people who live within them. As individuals and communities, deep significance is attached to familiar places, and thus complex relationships can develop between the residents and the place that they inhabit.<sup>3</sup> This quality that is present in the nature of the buildings and the streets is often generated by the ordinary actions of local people, many of whom believe that their identity is essentially tied to the place that they inhabit. Most people live relatively close to where they work, and therefore their activities form the environment and create the character of the place. This local distinctiveness is characterised by the activities that occur within

the specific environment. Thus, significant markers are formed, in both the present and in the past, which will allow a society to relate to a particular environment. Events that hold value in a community are often manifested in physical form, and therefore allow a population to trace back meanings and connections with their past. This organisation of the past seems to stimulate social cohesion and the feeling of being part of a community,<sup>4</sup> and so, physical links with the past are often important elements within the cohesion of a community.

Thus all environments are different, and all have evolved their own and individual characteristics. Places, whether interiors, buildings, situations or larger urban developments are particular to their own situation and have been formed by a huge collection of different factors. Meinig and Jackson celebrate these circumstances: '... one of the greatest riches of the earth is its immense variety of places ... individuality of places is a fundamental characteristic of subtle and immense importance.'<sup>5</sup>

*Above*  
Figure 1: Preston Bus Station. The enormous Brutalist structure consists of a series of car parks on extended floor-plates that float over the double-height space of the public concourse.  
Photograph: Sally Stone.

## PRESTON

The twenty-first century city is a combination of two different ideas; the traditional city of streets and squares, and the modern city of isolated elements surrounded by parkland. The traditional city is really composed of spaces, which are lined with buildings. So, for example, the primary street within an urban environment is a long thin space through which people travel, it is bounded by structures that face onto this space. The shapes of the buildings are somewhat deformed to accommodate the pure nature of the street, and thus it is the space that is the predominant element of the composition. The archetypal town- or city-square is a further illustration of this model or pattern. The open space of the square or piazza is usually regular or pure, with the primary facades of the buildings lining the edges of the space. The nature or organisation of the individual buildings does to a certain extent reflect this relationship, but it is not completely dependent upon it. The front facade may be regular, but the remainder of the building can be shaped somewhat irregularly to accommodate the nature of the location and the need for the purity of the exterior space.

The city-in-the-park is the opposite; isolated buildings set within open land, thus emphasising the purity of the building rather than the space, which just surrounds the structures in an ill-defined manner. The tenet of Modernism was that the whole building should be integral, and thus of a consistent quality. The building was a complete and unified whole, a primary structure. Vast swathes of many traditional European cities were razed and replaced in the name of Modernist progress. The new buildings themselves are often strong clear statements of intent and purpose, but the over-riding problem was, in general, the lack of consideration to local context and local conditions.<sup>6</sup>

Preston, a small provincial city in Lancashire in the north west of England is no exception; it has evolved into this awkward mixture of the traditional and the modern. Neither situation really responds to or complements the other, and so the city has grown into a collection of individual structures and spaces.

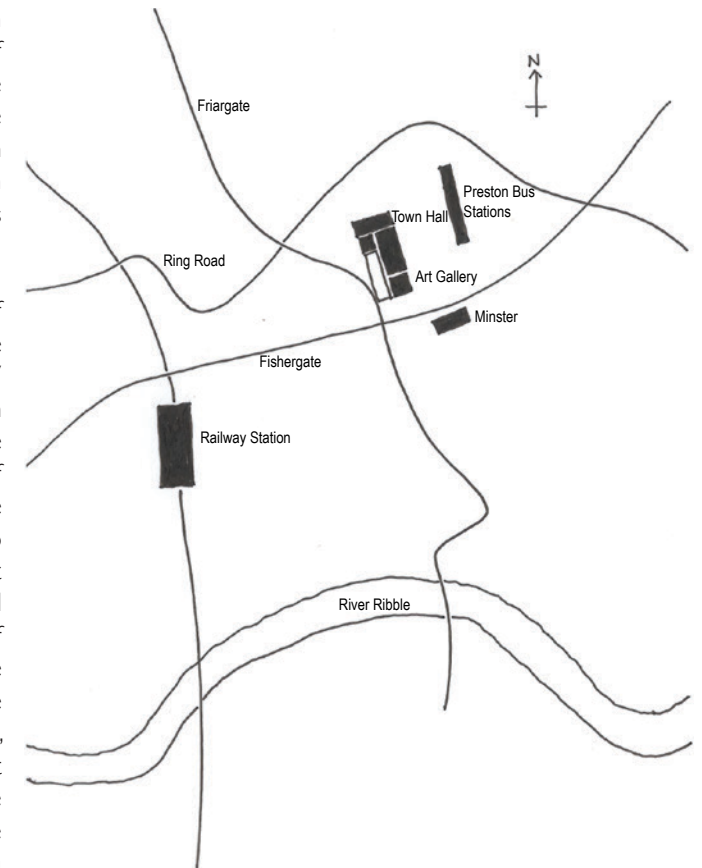
Preston is an estuary town, well positioned on a ridge above the floodplains of the River Ribble. This line or edge, known as Fishergate, is part of pre-Roman route that crossed the country in an east-west direction. It intersects at the Flag Market Square with a north-south track, Friargate. This road was formed by its connection with the first and lowest crossing point of the river. The Minster marks the eastern end of the city centre, while the train station is positioned at the western point and Fishergate is stretched between them. Close to the Minster are the open Flag Market Square, the Harris Art Gallery, the Victorian cast-iron covered markets and the Town Hall. These civic elements are testament to the once great wealth of the city.

The settlements that were established here in the Bronze Age show how strategically important is the position of the city. The tidal river certainly provided a safe landing point that allowed for relatively straightforward travel across the country into Yorkshire and Northumberland, while

also offering the first safe crossing of the river for north-south travellers. The Romans built an important fort just a couple of miles away and it is one of the few places mentioned in the really rather hazy record of the Northwest of England in the Domesday Book.<sup>7</sup> The name of city is thought to derive from Priest-Town,<sup>8</sup> which shows its pre-Reformation relationship with the string of abbeys that cross the country at approximately this latitude, ending at Fountains Abbey in North Yorkshire.

Preston in some respects is a typical industrial city. By virtue of its connections with the cotton industry, it experienced massive expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and by 1867 it possessed seventy factories.<sup>9</sup> (Charles Dickens used Preston as a model for Coke Town, the industrial town described in the book *Hard Times*.)<sup>10</sup> This rapid development destroyed many of the mediaeval structures, but the pattern of the city centre, to the most part, was retained. Indeed, many of the small streets or, to use the Lancashire term, weinds to the south of Fishergate reflect the pre-industrial routes and field patterns. The city experienced another surge of optimism at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. Slums were cleared to accommodate the redevelopment of the city centre, and steps were taken to ease traffic congestion with the construction of the Preston By-pass, which opened in 1958 and subsequently became Britain's first motorway.<sup>11</sup> Even given this, the city has retained an attractive disposition, especially when viewed from a distance against the Lancashire hills. 'Preston has a picturesqueness of outline and a suggestion of spaciousness from a distance which distinguish it from most Lancashire cotton towns.'<sup>12</sup>

In the middle of this farrago of different styles and approaches is the 'marvellously brutal' Bus Station,<sup>13</sup> which was constructed in 1969 by BDP Architects.<sup>14</sup> It is situated to the north-east of the Town Hall and the markets. It is an incredibly long and elegant building, and is reputedly the largest Bus Station in Europe. The building contains a series of car parks situated on extended floor plates with upturned curving parapets, which appear to float over the double-height space of the public concourse; the interior of which still contains the original rubber flooring, timber benches and white-tiled walls. The building itself very much reflects the



confident and positive attitude that was prevalent at that time; after all, it opened in the same year that the first man walked upon the surface of the moon. For a provincial town (Preston was not endowed with city status until the Queen of England's Golden Jubilee of 2002) to construct such a building shows bold self-confidence, in both the place itself and also in the future of public transport. The architectural language of the building can be described as Brutal, in that it is constructed from raw concrete, but it was also designed to emulate an airport; even the different bus stops were referred to as Gates.

Above

Figure 2: The centre of the city of Preston is situated at the junction of Friargate, which runs north-south through the city, and Fishergate, which extends east-west. The Bus Station is located just to the north of the Minster and to the east of the civic buildings. Image credit: Reuben Roberts and Sally Stone.



The area was previously densely occupied with mills and terraced houses, many of which were simply demolished to accommodate the building and its apron. The building is situated a couple of blocks from the Town Hall, but is very simply parallel to it and therefore to Friargate. It is placed within an open expanse or concourse, which was designed to allow the buses to flow freely around the building. Pedestrians are separated from the traffic with distinct underground routes. However, the position of Preston Bus Station within the city doesn't work – it is essentially cut off from the centre by the 1970s Guild Hall, the St. John's Shopping Centre and the concourse itself. The relationship with Church Street is lamentable; in fact this area of the city, which was once thriving and profitable, has become, in places, derelict. The ring road has exacerbated the problems; effectively cutting the north of the city from the centre, and thus the land to the east, beyond the Bus Station is almost inaccessible. This is not something new, it was actually foreseen by Derek Linstrum in his mostly ecstatic 1969 review of the building for the *Architectural Journal*: '... the failure to estimate the building's potential as an important addition to the town's social life.'<sup>15</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, it is a significant building. It is an enormous and elegant 171 meters long (560ft – it is, after all, a pre-decimalisation building), and can quite fairly be described as a landmark,<sup>16</sup> and therefore an important element within the collective memory of the city. Preston is very much defined by this building. Even though, when it was constructed, it paid little heed to the pattern of the place, it has become a well-loved element within the bricolage of Preston. Thomas Schumacher described how the historic and the modern city can develop an uneasy yet settled relationship, with each style complementing and contrasting with the other: 'Some ideal forms can exist as fragments, collaged into an empirical environment ...'<sup>17</sup>

The post-industrial economic downturn hit Preston as hard as any other provincial northern English city, but the conviction typical of the early twenty-first century encouraged the city council to embark upon an ambitious program of city centre redevelopment. The (unfulfilled) Tithebarn Scheme,<sup>18</sup> (ironically, it was designed by BDP Architects) was a project to remodel a

huge area of the city centre with the construction of an enormous shopping centre. The idea was that this would encourage more people to visit the place, spend more money, which would in turn encourage more growth. By virtue of its location at a pivotal position between the markets and the proposed department store, the Bus Station was to be a casualty of this project.

What initially saved the Bus Station were the financial crisis and the internet. The developers, Grosvenor Estates, realised that a shopping centre was not necessarily the investment opportunity it once was, and began to seriously question their involvement with Preston. The city council attempted to negotiate with other developers, but everyone was beginning to question the future of the shopping centre.

The council felt that the Bus Station was a huge burden; the everyday running costs were about a thousand pounds (sterling) a day.<sup>19</sup> The number of people using public transport had considerably fallen since the building was constructed and, because the city centre had to compete with huge out-of-town shopping centres such as the Trafford Centre,<sup>20</sup> visitors to the city centre had also dropped. The funding supplied by central government to the council was severely cut, and so the city council was placed in an extremely difficult situation; they had to choose between those services that they considered imperative and those that were a luxury. They felt that they were subsidising a White Elephant. To compound this, very little had been spent on the maintenance of the building, and so by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, Preston itself was in a fairly lamentable state and the Bus Station needed some serious money spent on it. The council argued that if the site were cleared, when the economic crisis was over they would own a very profitable piece of land ready for development. Demolition would not only make this site available, but also make accessible the somewhat inaccessible land behind the building.

There had been a campaign to save the building when the Tithebarn Project was proposed, and listing, which would have made demolition extremely difficult, had been applied for twice, and twice refused. The Twentieth Century Society<sup>21</sup> had actively

campaigning to save the building and was instrumental in the listing application, and a number of lone campaigners and small organisations were also very vociferous in their attempts to bring notice to the structure. The building was well recognised and supported by designers and architects, indeed it almost won the poll organised by BDP Architects to select the favourite building constructed by the practice during their 60-year history.<sup>22</sup> However, within the city of Preston, the building was very much taken for granted; residents considered it just part of the landscape of the city.<sup>23</sup>

The lack of a real development plan for the city centre meant that for a long time the status quo remained. However, in December 2012, the city council announced that its intention was, within six months, to demolish the Bus Station and replace it with a surface car park.<sup>24</sup> This provocative act actually galvanised the various groups that were campaigning to save the building and proved to be the impetus for a number of projects.

## GATE 81

*Gate 81* was formed in the face of this intended demolition.<sup>25</sup> It was a collaborative project created by an architect, an academic and an art director, all of whom were residents of the city, and who believed that the building was a major cultural landmark that should be preserved and creatively adapted to serve the city. The instigators of *Gate 81* were convinced that the Bus Station could act as a key building and public space to make Preston accessible and temper the decay that was (and still is) affecting the city.

The position of the designer or architect, in the last generation, has radically changed. The role is far greater than the 'masterly, correct, and magnificent play of masses brought together in light'.<sup>26</sup> Dan Hill, in the foreword to Rory Hyde's book *Future Practice*, describes the designer as: 'Community Enabler, Contractual Innovator, Educator of Excess, Double Agent, Strategic Designer.'<sup>27</sup> A new type of generalised design practitioner is developing, one who is involved with horizontal connections across disciplines. And on the very edge of this,

beyond the Strategic Generalist and those engaged with Multidisciplinary Orchestration, is the designer, architect or activist engaged with Disruptive Change Agency.<sup>28</sup> These are people for whom the built environment is important, and they feel that they can make a difference, not through the traditional craft of architecture but through non-antagonistic, small, local interventions, whether they be social, physical and/or temporal. As custodians of the built environment they use non-traditional models of practice to generate a feeling of civic responsibility within the local population of urban users and dwellers. Guerrilla knitters and embroiderers<sup>29</sup> are a fantastic example of this type of activist; local people who bring attention to specific elements and fixtures in the city by decorating them. The 'Slow' movement is also a fine example of this type of gentle activism. From Slow Food, to Slow Homes, the idea is that things are prepared in accordance with local customs and practices, using high quality, locally sourced ingredients. These principles, which are embedded in the climate, the context, and the people, are based upon the idea that we celebrate what is good and distinct about what we already have: vernacular food, clothes and buildings that have evolved directly from the individual place or region. Slow Food,<sup>30</sup> which was founded in 1989 in Italy, is a global, grassroots movement that now has thousands of members around the world. It links the pleasure of food with a commitment to community and the environment.

The urban activist is not actually a twenty-first century phenomenon. Patrick Geddes used a process of darning and repairs to create collective public gardens from disused and abandoned patches of land in Victorian Edinburgh. Geddes championed a mode of planning that sought to consider primary human needs in every intervention, engaging in constructive and conservative surgery rather than the massive swathes of reconstruction that were popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Geddes encouraged close observation as the way to discover and work with the relationships among place, work and folk.<sup>31</sup> In this sense he can be viewed as prefiguring the work of seminal urban thinkers such as Jane Jacobs<sup>32</sup> and other highly contextual region-specific planning movements, by encouraging the planner to consider the situation, the inherent virtue and the potential

in a given site, rather than an abstract ideal that could be imposed by authority or force from the outside. He firmly believed in these ideas, and chose to live in a remodelled home, rather than build something new. He also instigated the renovation of a number of important buildings in Edinburgh, arguing that the adaptation process was much more productive than simply razing the structures and erecting something new.

This uncovering of alternative practices can define a different way of working. Small temporary interventions within a place can change its meaning, by highlighting, juxtaposing and transforming features, thus the interventions become a spatial collage. Temporal changes can make visible the potential of a building by changing the users' perception of a place, and so the practice can encourage the place to be viewed differently, to be studied from a different angle, to be reconsidered.

Interventions can subvert how people think and feel about a place and are often used to start finding out what, if any, changes local people want. Participants and instigators play a more active role in this category. Instigators of these methods tend to be artists, community groups, and other informal collectives. Interventions can be a positive way of stimulating ideas for an area, and can make people aware that changes are happening.<sup>33</sup>

The specific intention of *Gate 81* was to create a series of projects that would bring to greater attention the plight of Preston's Bus Station, with the objective of raising the profile of the building, and therefore increasing the chance of saving it from the intended demolition. There had been a considerable amount of negativity surrounding the future of the Bus Station, and this was an attempt to bring some optimism to the situation. The aims of the groups were deliberately non-antagonistic; that is, provocative but not confrontational. It was not about demands, demonstration and protest, rather *Gate 81* wanted to celebrate and appreciate the building; indeed, explicit within the manifesto was the intention to '... enjoy the building while we still can',<sup>34</sup> and with reference to the airport-style agenda of the original architects: 'Preston Bus Station has 80 Gates, we'd like to keep it this way.'<sup>35</sup>

*Gate 81* was launched in January 2013 by myself, an academic and director of Continuity in Architecture (CiA)<sup>36</sup> at the Manchester School of Architecture (MSA), together with creative producer Ruth Heritage from They Eat Culture (TEC)<sup>37</sup> and architect Dominic Roberts, partner at Francis Roberts Architects.<sup>38</sup> It was an:

... open data, co-design project that staged a series of live and virtual projects that used Preston Bus Station as a vehicle for discussion of such issues as: citizen engagement, cultural heritage, urban design, artistic engagement, sustainable redevelopment, preservation and protection, and it acted as catalyst for discussions about the consequences that Modernist buildings have upon dense historic town centres in the twenty-first century.<sup>39</sup>

The idea was to generate a series of different types of projects, with different user groups using the building as the vehicle. The notion of removing art and cultural events from the rarefied atmosphere of the art gallery or institution, and relocating them into the open situation of the publicly accessible building is not new. The removal offers greater possibilities of interpretation, and certainly, larger and more culturally varied audiences. The building can be considered as an object that has been taken out of context and understood from an unexpected viewpoint; this is a process that will disrupt the familiar and rational structure of a given everyday. This is a strategic act of interruption, which effectively promotes the de-familiarisation of the everyday environment and habitual scenario. The ephemerality can suggest alternative situations and different possibilities, and thus the familiar becomes strange. The everyday context also not only blurs the distinction between the different disciplines that contribute to the project, but also ensures that the work is more accessible. Audience members may have encountered the site previously and therefore have a different memory of the space, or have varied perspectives of the site informed by their knowledge or lack of knowledge of the surroundings. The artist Gordon Matta-Clark described this as 'a kind of complexity which comes from taking an otherwise completely normal, conventional, albeit anonymous situation and defining it, translating it into overlapping into multiple readings of conditions past and present.'<sup>40</sup>

## THE PROJECTS

The first act of *Gate 81* was to empower people with knowledge. The complete archive of the original architects, BDP, had been lost in a fire at their storage warehouse in the 1980s, so there was no drawn record of the Bus Station. *Gate 81* commissioned a set of downloadable drawings that were made freely available to everyone. These were in both CAD and PDF form, so that anyone could make a proposal for the redevelopment of the building. All proposals were then exhibited on the *Gate 81* website. There had been a lot of suggestions made for the adaptation of the building on social media sites; this allowed more definite proposals to be made and actively encouraged people to have greater involvement with the future of the building.

The first physical project was a midnight poetry reading, *Journey to the End of the World*. This was staged on the night of the equinox, and used the interior of the Bus Station as a continuous stage. As those reciting their poetry moved around the building, so the audience followed them, using the very character of the spaces to emphasise the emotion of the performance. So poetry was sung to the echo of the stairwells, shouted in the massiveness of the ground floor concourse, and whispered in the darkness of the disused retail units.

**Preston Bus Station Workshop** **Gate 81**

**11.05.2013**

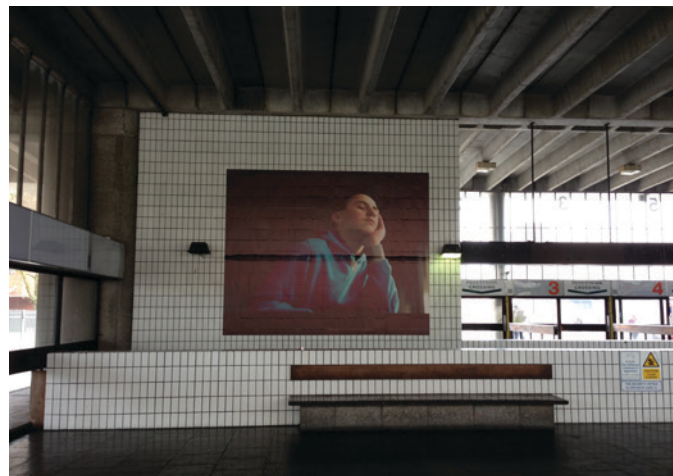
A **workshop** to develop ideas for the future of Preston Bus Station and its surrounds. Join us for this one day, all day, free event in the Bus Station starting about 8:30am. Register for free at Reimagine Preston Bus Station @ [www.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.eventbrite.co.uk) [www.gate81.com](http://www.gate81.com)

TEC | MSA Manchester School of Architecture | CONTINUITY IN ARCHITECTURE | ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Above  
Figure 3: Invitation to the Gate 81 workshop or HaCLab. Image credit: Sally Stone.



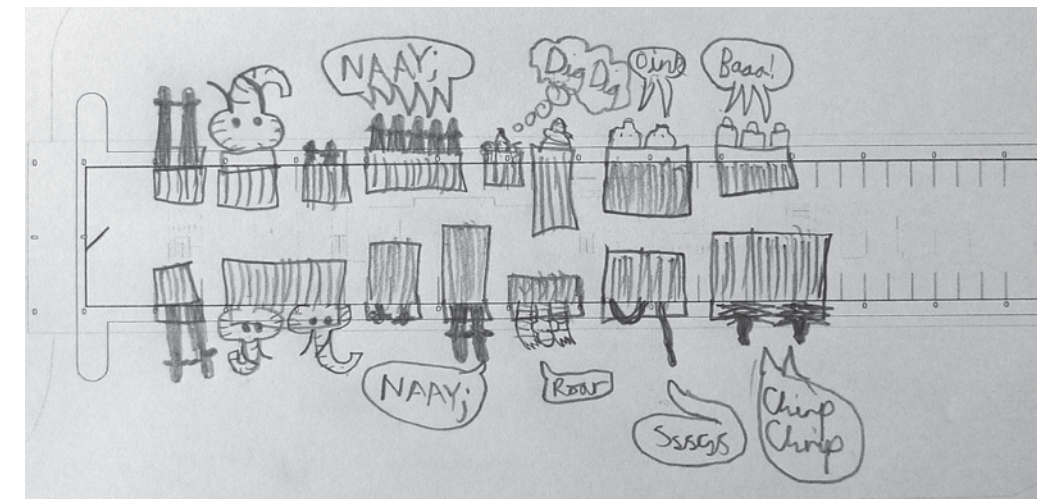
The most ambitious project was the workshop or *HacLab*, which was held on a Saturday in May, at the northern end of the ground level concourse of the Bus Station. This was a one-day event that could be likened to a village gala. It was deliberately highly accessible and open to anyone and everyone. Lots of different activities were planned; some were more serious than others. The day centred upon an open charrette or workshop, which was interspersed with a series of lectures. The workshop was really well attended; some people actively joined in the search for ideas for the future of the building, some noted their memories of the place on specially printed postcards, while others just listened. Alternative activities occurred during the day; *Four Lost Buildings*<sup>41</sup> was a curated walk around the city, deliberately highlighting a number of great Preston buildings that had already been demolished – or were about to be. *Gate 81* also curated three exhibitions, all of which were designed to open at the workshop. Chris Jones,<sup>42</sup> an installation artist who was born in Preston, constructed a large model of a distorted Bus Station, based upon his early memories of travelling into the building on the curved flying ramps. This was displayed in an unoccupied shop unit. Jamie Hawksworth<sup>43</sup> was commissioned to photograph users of the building. His images of empowered local residents looking directly back into the camera and at the viewer were printed on vinyl and stuck straight onto the tiled interior walls of the building (these images are still, over a year later, on display).<sup>44</sup>



an artists' collective that works with light and sound, built an installation that collected fragments of images of the users of the Bus Station; these were distorted, then projected onto the tiled interior wall of the building. A café set up a stall selling locally-sourced food, and a group of school kids screen-printed tee shirts with their own images of the building. A number of important academics and facilitators spoke during the day; these included the director of the Guild Celebrations, which had taken place the year before. She encouraged 'action, more action and then yet more action' if the building was to be given the sort of attention that *Gate 81* felt it deserved.<sup>45</sup>

BDP Architects sponsored a one-day charrette, which was held in their head office in Manchester. Ironically these were the architects of the original building and the now-abandoned Tithebarn shopping centre scheme that was intended to replace the building. Academics and students from the schools of architecture in Manchester, Liverpool and Central Lancashire, as well as professional architects and designers, attended the charrette. BDP's chairman David Cash, who quite romantically remembered the time that BDP was still in Preston and the legacy of the founder Sir George Grenfell-Baines, launched the event. Professor Kevin Rhowbotham – an academic, architect, author and broadcaster – delivered the keynote talk, which was more like a call-to-arms. He invoked the memory of Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's seminal book *Collage City* and pressed contributors to consider the dialectical opposition of the object and the field, and how each can distinguish the other.<sup>46</sup>

Other projects included visits to local primary schools to discuss the importance of the cultural legacy of place, and a one-week project entitled *Preston Interotta* at the Antwerp Winter School.<sup>47</sup> A group of internationally mixed students were asked to explore the nature of the fragment within an historic city. They brought the Bus Station to Antwerp, with the intention of it occupying a definite place within the urban environment; it interrupted the city.



**Opposite bottom left**  
Figure 4: The Open Workshop encouraged conversation and debate from all members of Preston society.  
Photograph: Sally Stone

**Opposite bottom right**  
Figure 5: Photographs by Jamie Hawksworth of people in the Bus Station were printed onto vinyl and displayed directly onto the tiled interior of the building.  
Photograph: Sally Stone.

**Opposite top**  
Figure 6: Four Lost Buildings: a celebration of buildings in Preston that had already been lost, or were about to be to so.  
Photograph: Sally Stone.

**Above**  
Figure 7: Bus Station Zoo – pupils from local primary schools joined the debate about the building. Members of Gate 81 discussed the ideas of collective memory and place with the children, before asking them to consider ideas for the building's future. Image credit: Sally Stone.





The last project was a procession; not an aggressive march, demonstration or protest making demands and ultimatums, but more like a cavalcade or cortège. It was again an opportunity to celebrate, recognise and enjoy the building. *Continuity in Architecture* in collaboration with the *Gate 81* project team constructed a huge model of the building, which was based upon the Ancient Roman warfare technique of the turtle formation. This was carried in sections through the streets with the intention of creating recognition and delight.

Amazingly, the council supported all of the projects, and were very happy for the building to be used as a venue for a series of artistic interventions. The very people who had condemned the building actually attended (and enjoyed) many of the events.

The Twentieth Century Society kept up their pressure and again applied for the building to be listed.<sup>48</sup> The RIBA launched a Twitter campaign and a tee-shirt competition; the president, Angela Brady, mentioned the need to save the building at every opportunity<sup>49</sup> and John Wilson, a Preston resident, appeared on television and radio voicing his support.<sup>50</sup>

The campaign to save the building was widely reported, locally, nationally and internationally. The local daily newspaper, *Lancashire Evening Post*,<sup>51</sup> provided the campaign to save the building with a significant amount of coverage, and the local radio and television stations reported on the individual projects. (Talking to the reporter in the Bus Station before 7am on a dark and cold winter's morning was not fun, but it was worth it). The national TV and press picked up on the story, initially through their architectural pages and later, within the more general news. A BBC children's program even wrote a song about the building!<sup>52</sup> The plight of the Bus Station even received international coverage, from Italian design magazines to a New York radio station.

## CONCLUSION

We won! In September 2013, Preston Bus Station was granted Grade II Listed Status.<sup>53</sup> This means that the building cannot be demolished or altered without permission. Obviously, this



Opposite  
Figure 8: Antwerp Interrupted – students at the Antwerp Winter School developed proposals for the transposition of the building from Preston to Antwerp. Photograph: Sally Stone.

Above top  
Figure 9: The procession – a huge model of the Bus Station was carried in large sections along the main street in Preston. Photograph: Sally Stone.

Above bottom  
Figure 10: The procession finished in front of the Bus Station; the rain stopped and for ten glorious minutes the sun came out. Photograph: Sally Stone.



doesn't mean that its future is absolutely secure and that it can be forgotten about. Great care needs to be taken when considering its future. The building could still be demolished if the council finds the right buyer for the site and can convince the government that it is in the best interests of the city for the area to be free of all existing structures and other impediments. Attention must also be paid to any remodelling of the building; the city needs a thoughtful, contextual response rather than an overpowering and gratuitously flamboyant solution. But still, this is a great victory for those who regard the building as having quality and worth and as an important element in the make-up of this northern English city.

English Heritage posted this notice about the listing:

English Heritage is very pleased that the Heritage Minister has agreed with its advice to list Preston Central Bus Station and Car Park at Grade II. A dramatic building which combines innovation with architectural panache, the Bus Station fully deserves this marker of special recognition.

With an unusual blend of New Brutalist architecture mellowed by the curves of the roof and the sweeping ranks of the car park, this 'megastructure' was designed to recreate a sense of the monumental within the British town scene: it is a landmark in the innovation of transport-related buildings as well as a landmark of Preston.<sup>54</sup>

*Gate 81* has helped empower local people to contribute towards the future of their own city. As the profile of the building began to rise within the city, so did the numbers of local people wanting to keep it. The city newspaper, which ran a poll of the residents' favourite building, declared that it moved from the most hated to the most loved.<sup>55</sup> The live interactive workshop encouraged debate, design and exchange. It was attended by a large cross-section of interested people, including people who were neither academics nor artists. Other events, including the site-specific exhibitions and the procession, also engaged local people with this local project.

*Gate 81* was supported by the Arts Council and by Manchester Metropolitan University. It actively engaged academics and students of architecture from the schools in Manchester and Preston, it involved professional artists, architects and designers, and it engaged with the residents of Preston, from the drivers and the passengers of the buses to the teachers, lawyers and nurses who live in the city. This was nationally recognised when in December 2014 the Heritage Alliance awarded the campaign to save the Bus Station their prestigious Heritage Alliance Heroes Award.<sup>56</sup> The Heritage Alliance is a coalition of 97 independent heritage organisations in England, and as such it acts as a powerful, effective and independent advocate for the movement. They specifically cited the Save the Preston Bus Station campaign as a 'phenomenal example of people power' and a fine example of how it is possible to save a piece of heritage through public pressure.<sup>57</sup>

Inevitably the Bus Station will have a great impact upon the condition of the city, in that redevelopment plans will have to consider the presence of a hugely loved enormous modernist structure on the edge of the city centre. The building will continue to be a landmark within the city and the city will continue to be redefined by the Bus Station. When Preston City Council failed to appreciate affection that was felt for the building within the city, it fell to local people to actively agitate, to attract attention, to make their opinions noticed, and through the power of public opinion combined with local design activism, the Bus Station will continue to be part of the cultural legacy of the city of Preston.

## NOTES

1. Jorge Silvetti, "Interactive Realms," in *Form Modernism and History*, ed. Alexander von Hoffman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 32.
2. Ibid.
3. P. Davis, "Ecomuseums and the Representation of Place," *Leicester University Journal* (1999) (London and New York, 1999): 19-20.
4. Ibid.
5. Donald Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Buildings: Geographical Essays*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 45.
6. See Thomas L. Schumacher, "Contextualism: Urban Ideals and Deformations," *Cassabella* 359-360 (1971): 79-86. Reproduced in: *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, ed. Kate Nesbit (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press 1996). Here Schumacher discusses the theory of 'contextualism' as the reconciliation of modern urbanism with traditional old towns; an alternative to the destruction of central parts of cities. This theory tries to find a middle ground between a kind of unrealistic 'freezing' of the existing that allows no changes, and urban renewal that completely destroys the existing urban fabric and its qualities.
7. David Hunt, *A History of Preston* (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing Ltd, 1992).
8. The name Preston is thought to be derived from the Old English (Anglo-Saxon) *Preosta-Tun*, the 'tun of the Priests' – Ibid., 13.
9. W. G. Hoskins, *The Making of the English Landscape* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1955).
10. 'It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness.' Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (first published 1854) (London, UK: Penguin, 1985), 65.
11. Claire Hartwell and Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England. Lancashire: North* (London: Yale University Press, 2009).
12. Derek Linstrum, "Preston Bus Station," *Architects Journal* (May 6, 1970): 28-36.
13. Hartwell and Pevsner, *The Buildings of England. Lancashire: North* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 510.
14. Building Design Partnership (BDP) Architects is a major international, interdisciplinary practice of architects, designers, engineers and urbanists. They were founded in Preston by Sir George Grenfell-Baines in 1961.
15. Linstrum, "Preston Bus Station," 34.
16. Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960). Lynch distinguished five elements for analysing



the built environment: paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. He describes landmarks as: readily identifiable objects that serve as external reference points.

17. Thomas L. Schumacher, "Contextualism: Urban Ideals and Deformations," *Cassabella* 359-360 (1971): 79-86. Reproduced in: *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, ed. Kate Nesbit (Princeton: Princeton Architectural Press 1996), 301.
18. "Preston's Tithebarn Gets the Go Ahead," Building Design Architects, November 24, 2010, accessed February 2014, <http://www.bdp.com/News/2010/Prestons-Tithebarn-Gets-the-Go-Ahead/>
19. "Leader defends plans to bulldoze bus station," *Lancashire Evening Post*, Jan 5, 2013, accessed February 2014, <http://www.lep.co.uk/news/traffic-travel/leader-defends-plans-to-bulldoze-bus-station-1-5280313>
20. The Trafford Centre is a huge shopping mall constructed in 1998 on the outskirts of Manchester, just 40 minutes drive from Preston.
21. The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979, and exists to safeguard the heritage of architecture and design in Britain from 1914 onwards. <http://www.c20society.org.uk>
22. "Top Projects," BDP Placebook, accessed February 2014, <http://placebook.bdp.com/about/top-projects>
23. "Unloved, unwanted, and now city's bus station is given the final insult," *Lancashire Evening Post*, June 20, 2006, accessed February 2014, <http://www.lep.co.uk/news/local/unloved-unwanted-now-city-s-bus-station-is-given-final-insult-1-108287>
24. Taken from the minutes of the Council Meeting of 17th December 2012. Item 60(iv) 'The Cabinet agree in principle, to demolish the Bus station and Car Park and devise proposals to bring forward, for the development of the site...' accessed February 2014, <http://preston.moderngov.co.uk/ielListDocuments.aspx?CId=104&MID=4542>
25. Gate 81, accessed February 2014, <http://gate81.tumblr.com>
26. 'The masterly, correct, and magnificent play of masses brought together in light' was of course le Corbusier's definition of architecture.
27. Rory Hyde, *Future Practice: Conversations from the Edge of Architecture* (Oxon: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 13.
28. Ibid.
29. For example, see "Knit The City: your friendly neighbourhood graffiti knitting art collective," accessed February 2014, <http://knitthecity.com>
30. Slow Food, accessed February 2014, <http://www.slowfood.com>
31. Volker M. Welter & James Lawson, *The City after Patrick Geddes* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000).
32. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961).
33. Helen Aston & Stefan White, *Not Content: Projects for a Shared City* (Devon: Book Publishing, 2011), 145.
34. Gate 81, accessed February 2014, <http://gate81.tumblr.com>
35. Ibid.
36. Continuity in Architecture is a studio for teaching and research at Manchester School of Architecture, accessed February 2014, <http://www.msa.mmu.ac.uk/continuity/>
37. They Eat Culture is a Lancashire based strategic arts organisation who make direct interventions into the cultural life of the area, accessed February 2014, <http://theyeatculture.org>
38. Francis Roberts Architects' work is characterised by a feeling for place translated into building form, materials and detail. Their buildings incorporate both traditional and modern techniques and materials. Accessed February 2014, <http://www.francisroberts.com>
39. Gate 81, accessed February 2014,

<http://gate81.tumblr.com>

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42. Chris Jones, accessed February 2014, <http://www.emptykingdom.com/featured/chris-jones/>
43. Jamie Hawksworth, accessed February 2014, <http://www.jamiehawksworth.com>
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54. "Preston Bus Station Advice Report," English Heritage, accessed February 2014, <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/content/imported-docs/p-t/preston-bus-station-advice-report.pdf>
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56. The Heritage Alliance, accessed November 2014 <http://www.theheritagealliance.org.uk>
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