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Preston Bus Station: Heritage, Regeneration, and Resistance

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Abstract

Since 2000 Preston Bus Station has twice been threatened with demolition as part of proposed regeneration schemes in the city. Both times there has been sustained public resistance against its destruction. Based on interviews and participant observation, the research on which this paper draws asked why a formerly unloved and unprotected example of Brutalist 1960s architecture has become a public icon. The paper identifies and explores the diverse range and significance of peoples' articulations and actions — ranging from the local to global; from economic argument to affective and embodied interventions. These articulations are often non-expert, diffuse, expressed within social networks, as well as in inventive performative actions. Such activity has tacitly and productively blurred together forming an 'assemblage' of resistance. This assemblage of disparate agents represents a fresh public re-evaluation and democratisation of the building's value, in addition to rejecting the building's planned demise. More broadly we suggest that this 'non-' or 'tacit' campaign also contests prevalent retail-led, investment-driven urban regeneration and articulates different possibilities for the Bus Station within Preston and its putative redevelopment.

Key words

Preston Bus Station; heritage; geography of architecture; iconic architecture

Introduction

Use the term 'icon Preston' in a web search and the returns will include images dominated by photographs, predominantly in black and white, of the Brutalist horizontal lines of Preston Bus Station (hereafter PBS). Why such a building should have come to be regarded as

the contemporary icon of a city normally associated with the sometimes baleful history of the cotton industry is the focus of this article. Drawing on geographical debate about architecture, the article contributes to debates surrounding of the social and cultural significance of Preston Bus Station at a juncture when the building's future is uncertain.



Figure 1: PBS exterior (source: authors).

Preston Bus Station (Figure 1) is a huge concrete structure at the eastern end of Preston city centre. Bland and apologetic PBS is not. PBS was opened in 1969, a grand transport interchange in the civic plan for a part-realised new town called Central Lancashire (Figure 2). The architects were a local firm called Building Design Partnership (BDP), who more recently have achieved prominence for their masterplanning of Manchester's Millennium Quarter and Liverpool One. PBS integrates a bus station of 80 bays; a five-level multi-story car park; a taxi rank; pedestrian subways, and; a covered foot bridge connecting to Preston Guildhall and Charter Theatre.

The building is rectangular, measuring 120 metres by 40 metres with long sweeping entrance ramps at either end. The ground floor, enclosed by glass curtain walls, is high enough to permit double-decker buses to drive right up to the building. The interior space contains toilets, shops, offices and what, until recently, was called the canteen. Many of the original materials are in situ, still in good condition: white glazed wall tiling (fabricated in Darwen, Lancashire); hardwood bay dividers and seating; Pirelli rubber flooring; huge plain-faced clocks (Figure 3); innovative use of glass-reinforced polyester (Malathouni 2013); and all tied together throughout by a consistent use of Helvetica typeface on signage.



Figure 3: PBS interior (source: authors).

PBS was to be demolished as part of the Tithebarn scheme – a £700m, retail-driven regeneration plan for the city first conceived of in 2000. Along with the threat of demolition came a diverse range of local people and outside observers who, as we set out in this paper, organised to counteract the well-resourced Tithebarn advocates' characterisation of PBS. This characterisation can be seen as one typical of 'regenerators' and international property developers keen to demolish 1960s buildings, both the good and the bad, as 'dysfunctional'; never fit for purpose; as having outlived its purpose; in the wrong place; irrelevant, and; a drain on the public purse (PBS's owner is Preston City Council). Indeed, similar arguments have been effectively used elsewhere to influence decisions to demolish and redevelop other Brutalist icons e.g. the Tricorn Centre in Portsmouth and the Trinity Centre in Gateshead. As While (2007: 2399) has noted, 'Largely unloved, often poorly maintained and out-of-step with current design principles, the 1950s/60s cityscape is fast disappearing as urban leaders seek to refunctionalise their cities for a post-industrial future.'

Developers inferred that PBS was unloved by the local public because of the cultural 'irrelevance' of its modern architecture. However, local individuals asserted and defended its cultural significance, particularly through use of social media, including blogs, Twitter, and a film. They constituted what we call here an heterogeneous 'assemblage' of support for PBS (Verran 2009). This diverse group of individual users and supporters expanded to include national heritage organisations, and international architects such as the world-renowned Rem Koolhaas, who called PBS an "emblem of a period when architecture was interested in doing good things" (Radio 4, 2011). This interweaving of local and global concern culminated in PBS being designated, in October 2011, by the World Monuments

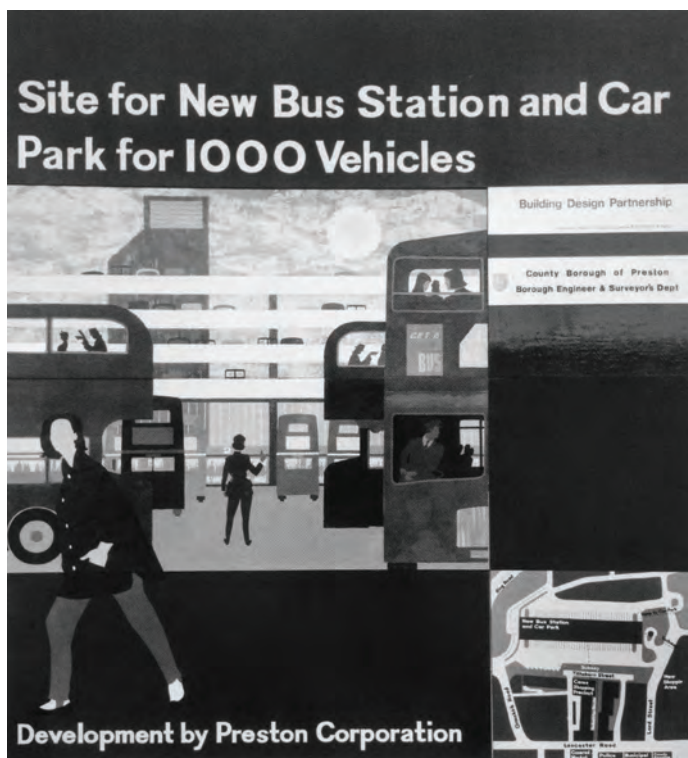


Figure 2: PBS as hub of Central Lancashire new town (source: Gate 81).

Fund as being 'at risk' alongside Birmingham Central Library and London's South Bank Centre, all of which are deemed to be significant examples of 'British Brutalism' (WMF n.d). Nevertheless, previous attempts to get PBS statutory protection under English Heritage listing have twice been unsuccessful.

In November 2011, the Tithebarn scheme collapsed, partly because of a challenge to ministerial consent for the plan by Blackburn and Darwen Council (Lancashire Telegraph 2011), and partly because of John Lewis (the flagship retail partner) pulling out. The groundswell of interest in PBS was reinforced in January 2012 when a petition with 1,500 signatories was put to Preston City Council calling for formal debate about its future.

Since Manchester Geographical Society funded this research at the beginning of 2012 there have been significant developments around PBS. First, the above-mentioned public petition calling for the council to consider the future of PBS in the form of a referendum for Prestonians was rejected by local politicians. Second, there has been the emergence of a new plan for the eastern end of Preston City Centre based on the apparent need of the council to make budgetary savings; to initiate regeneration post-Tithebarn; and to take account of a study of the area commissioned from an international architectural and master planning firm (Benoy 2012). In late December 2012 the cabinet of Preston City Council voted to accept the advice of their senior officers' interpretation of Benoy's and other consultant's reports and, in principle, to allow the demolition of PBS. On 27 December 2012 Twentieth Century Society submitted a third application to English Heritage for the building to be listed.

While (2007, 2417) has argued that 'for much of the surviving 1950s/60s legacy, the question of what survives and why (and in what form) will be determined by multiscaled negotiation over the meaning and value of particular buildings relative to competing economic and design aspirations for the sites they occupy.' However, the challenge faced with this research project has been how to characterise all the activity that hinges round Preston Bus Station. This is activity that goes beyond the realm of economic or design aspirations, and frequently touches upon emotional and embodied responses to space and place identity. The research sought to understand what lies behind the fascination with the building and how this has been used to counter arguments of regeneration and renewal. This article therefore examines the dynamics of the controversy that has been generated around the building. Is it that PBS is valued because of its functional value as a regional transport hub and a backdrop to everyday life?

Is it venerated because its 'Brutalist' aesthetic has become somehow meaningful as 'heritage', something 'fashionably unfashionable' for design and style elites? Is it an icon for 'Proud' Preston? Does its association with the architectural firm BDP (which was first established in Preston), affect its local significance? What other factors worked to position Preston Bus Station as a focus for resistance, and for a different, re-imagined future for the city?

Our approach relates to geographical debate about the cultural status of twentieth-century built environments (Jacobs 2006; Lees and Baxter 2011). This debate has particularly focused on a shift away from architecture as symbol towards architecture as practice, as material and social hybridity (Jacobs and Merriman 2011; Tait and While 2009). Another concern has been on re-evaluating public participation in urban renewal, particularly about the way that heritage value emerges from knowledges that appear in the context of public debate and resistance (Bell 2011; Craggs *et al* in press). Emphasis has particularly been laid on modernist, twentieth century architectural forms – the high rise, the council estate – which specifically address how past visions for 'modern' planning become part of the production and performance of public resistance (such as in relation to contemporary notions of urban regeneration) in the present (Jones 2009; While 2007; While and Short 2011). We amplify the idea of architecture as practice below. The main body of the paper which follows then discusses formal and informal dimensions of this practice.

Architecture as Practice

As noted above, the approach to architecture in contemporary human geography is multifaceted, often combining representational approaches and interpretations, and more recent moves towards accounting for emotional and affective registers (Pile 2010; Davidson, Bondi and Smith, 2005; Brown and Pickerill 2009). Geographers have begun to reappraise the idea that architecture is about understanding buildings purely as objects, as material artefacts. Architecture is now also conceptualised as practice. In this sense architecture is, on the one hand, the material matter of buildings: the spatial arrangement and design of the exterior and interior of a building; its physical presence in the urban fabric; the materialities of stone, steel, glass, wood, rubber, plastic, concrete and so forth. But, at the same time, architecture is also the consideration, deliberation, theorising and judgements made about buildings. That is to say the multiple influences on the forms and functions in design, construction, aesthetics and so on. Architecture can be considered in terms of the diverse uses and experiences

connected with particular contingencies in relation to buildings that develop in relation to and beyond the intentionality connected to architects' visions or urbanists' plans, which are not necessarily about the utility or official aesthetics of a building, but are of the foremost significance in understanding architecture as practice (Jacobs and Merriman 2011). The emphasis here allows us to approach architecture not as an outcome of technical processes, but to regard architecture as contingent, emerging from "[...] different kinds of embodied engagements with and sensory apprehensions of buildings, as well as different modes of dwelling and inhabiting, and different perspectives on architectural spaces" (Jacobs and Merriman 2011, 213-214).

Our method in the present study of PBS was based on in-depth interviews with people who had been involved in the Tithebarn scheme and in varying degrees of resistance to it. The research focussed on how PBS was at the centre of what we have already described as an assemblage of expert and non-expert actors. We adopted the approach that these actors in their campaigning, their interactions, their everyday practices of using or, visiting, talking about, and representing PBS, all were performing the building's significance. Therefore this approach allows us to characterise the assemblage of a diverse range of actors resisting the destruction of PBS.

We conceptualise the diverse actors who have been, and continue to be involved with campaigning, lobbying and promoting PBS as architectural agents. In this way they are all, in their different ways, practitioners who are contributing to shaping the value and significance of the Bus Station. Some of these agents have a professional standing – be they architects, designers, or heritage consultants – whilst others have less of a 'formal' status, but nevertheless utilise knowledge and experiences of PBS to contribute an informal, but nonetheless knowledgeable form of resistance to regeneration plans. In the following section we set out four different types of architectural agents who contribute to the assemblage that is resistance to the demolition of PBS: built heritage; public interest; campaigning; and creative responses. We discuss these diverse agents in order to set out how they all contribute to overlapping categories of formal and informal resistance and thereby complicate what are often positioned as clearly formed spheres of 'expert' and 'lay' architectural knowledge and valuation.

Architecture as Formal and Informal Resistance

In terms of PBS the relationship between professional and non-professional is very important in constructing the complex nature of value of PBS and its relation to

Preston. Architects and other experts from outside the area, sometimes from outside the UK, have proclaimed the international and local merits of PBS. Simultaneously, local campaigners have generated all sorts of evidence, entertainment and political interventions which have resonated with members of the public. This assemblage is a complex network of relationships in which the nature of PBS and more broadly of Preston as a place is contested and renegotiated. It is also substantially created in the co-existence and permeable boundary between formalised expertise of professionals, such as architectural historians, case workers for the Twentieth Century Society, urbanists and architects, and the informal expertise of bloggers, artists, and some polymath actors hard to assign a label to.

Preston Bus Station as Built Heritage

... they don't build buildings like that anymore and they're never going to build buildings like that. You've got to look at it in the bigger picture that basically it is such a historical piece of architecture, knock it down and it's gone. (Northwest Urban Designer A, interview)

It would be erroneous to regard the public controversy over the future of PBS as solely a matter of whether or not it has sufficient objective value as to deserve listing. That said, the ability (or inability) of the building to gain statutory protection is an important way that particular types of expertise and judgment are being used to lobby for its protection. Because of the way that the listing system works (whether or not a building is graded I, II* or II and given certain stipulations to retain its architectural integrity) in both legal and technical senses the value of buildings like PBS can emerge through formal appraisal of heritage value. Formal heritage appraisal on which listed status rests is dominated by architectural history. One of the key elements sought out in such assessments of modern buildings is temporal continuity between the past of the building and its present. When original design, materials and intended purpose, by intent or serendipity, survive relatively unscathed into the present then value is ostensibly greatest (English Heritage, 2011). The process of listing PBS has proved to be a fractious process, which has resulted in it being turned down for listing twice, with a third application awaiting decision at the time of writing. In 2009 English Heritage recommended that PBS was listed Grade II for the following reasons:

- The bus station, car park, and taxi rank, opened in 1969 to the designs of BDP, remains a little-altered and remarkably good example of integrated 1960s traffic planning that still functions as originally intended.

- The curved concrete front to the car park decks are signature features of the design and focus attention on the building's great length, whilst creating an elegant light and dark horizontal banding effect along the entire main east and west elevations.
- The building displays an unusual blend of New Brutalist architecture that is mellowed by an inspired application of upturned curves to the main elevations, sweeping car park ramps and contrasting small-scale taxi rank.
- It is a notable example of an integrated bus station and car park, embodying the increasingly important place of motor traffic in the modern city.
- It represents an important stage in the evolution of integrated architectural and design practice in post-war England, pioneered by Building Design Partnership with architecture, interior design, landscaping, graphic and typographic design working to a common end, and is an important work from this prominent practice. (English Heritage advice report, 8.12.09, quoted in Malathouni 2012, 1).

So whilst listing, and gaining recognition for PBS in terms of its architectural significance and value is supported by heritage organisations and interest groups (English Heritage, Twentieth Century Society, World Monuments Fund), as the following quote from a respondent demonstrates, focussing efforts through designation is double edged. Often judgements based on architectural expertise and appraisal are incommensurable with and usurped by a politics informed by economic judgments and the logics of urban growth regimes:

Everybody knows it has to do with politics; it's a combination of local and national politics. So the final decision is down to the minister, and of course they are ... they sense what the feeling is locally. If the local authority has reasons to not support the listing ... it's not always the case. It's a very delicate balance ... The local authority was against, they thought they could attract investment by keeping it a free site for development, which is what developers prefer generally. So it was turned down. (Campaigner A, interview).

Although this type of formalised heritage is, or might be proved to be, vital to the survival of PBS it is in itself not the focus of the public and professional assertions of PBS's value. As one respondent, an architect and heritage consultant remarked: 'The reality of listing is that you can still have it demolished.'

Preston Bus Station and Public Interest

Who does like it? Is it people like me who now live in Manchester and kind of see it as this nice romantic piece of Brutalist architecture but don't have a day-to-day relationship with it and never really have had? (North West Architect A, interview)

The preceding quote outlines the tensions that contribute to PBS and how it is valued. On the one hand heritage organisations, who have a professional interest in supporting and championing PBS for its architectural merits serve a purpose in terms of gaining recognition for this iconic building. Yet, such expert, or even elite opinions are only one of the set of agents that have begun to speak up for saving PBS. Indeed, as Knox (1984) has argued, these professional organisations may be open to accusations of 'fetishising design', viewing PBS within the frameworks of architectural knowledge and practice, rather than considering the everyday practices of the general public who use PBS or interact with it outside of professional networks. Indeed the leader of Preston City Council recently characterised the diverse campaigning for PBS as perpetuated by an architectural elite imposing their values on the majority thereby financially burdening Preston tax payers. Yet, at the same time, 'more than half the councillors, in my opinion, have come to like the Bus Station for what it is' (Preston City Councillor A, interview).

PBS as a focus of public interest has taken the form of significantly grown support ('likes') in the online Save Preston Bus Station campaign (prestonbusstation.co.uk), various polls run by the Lancashire Evening Post, public statements made by the Royal Institute of British Architects, special seminars held in Preston such as *Revisiting Utopia* that took place in July 2012, and others such as *RIP Preston Bus Station* that took place in February 2013. These have seen academics, architects, and, in some instances city councillors publicly debating the fate of the bus station, and has resulted in architectural commentators such as Owen Hatherley and Tom Dyckhoff travelling to Preston to speak up for PBS. This groundswell of interest has resulted in PBS featuring the BBC One *Daily Politics* programme and the BBC Two *The Culture Show*, with both programmes addressing the bus station's architectural merits and uncertain future as matters of national significance.

The public in this case are not dominated by everyday protest about 'local' space, or by national elitist arbiters of architectural style. The 'campaigners' are a diffuse, relatively uncoordinated and heterogeneous part of this assemblage who collectively have begun to contribute a type of informal, yet quite visible resistance to the demolition of PBS. This

is a type of resistance that operates in a different way to the formal resistance constructed within the expertise and procedures of listing, although there are overlapping arguments shared with both these groups: that PBS is an important building, and to demolish it would be detrimental to the city. It is interesting, however, that around PBS a very wide range of valuations and interventions arose which, perhaps counter-intuitively for the neutral observer, did not centre on the sole aim of achieving formal listing. All sorts of value has been expressed. Though public support for PBS is not something that has always been guaranteed, it has, however, grown into something of a formidable force:

I think it was in the *Evening Post*, they'd always refer to it as the, something like Preston's ugliest building or something – this is years ago. Until there was a big backlash to that, I think it really shocked them, the backlash from people saying "We really like it." which is quite unusual for a modernist sort of building, for this building to be liked by the general public. (North West Urban Designer A, interview)

In this way the public are not just barometers of local opinion, but are also contributing in important ways to the revaluation of PBS from an unattractive concrete relic, to something that should be saved. Comments on online forums continue to feature a fair number of PBS detractors who would gladly see it knocked down, though these are frequently outweighed by polls which invariably speak out in favour of PBS. For example, an online poll run by the *Lancashire Evening Post* suggested 70% did not want it demolished (n=548); and 73% agreed that it is a 'fantastic icon' or an 'architectural gem' (n=693) (LEP 2013) – but the positive public assessment is certainly a constant feature of online discussion irrespective of local politicians' proclamations that PBS simply cannot be afforded.

What this local level of support suggests is that in terms of PBS and the threat of demolition, support for saving it is not a simple question of heritage value. It is also a question of whether it is central to Preston's sense of itself. PBS is a question of place and how this building is part and parcel of Preston's identity, and thus serves the function as an icon of the city:

It's so much the visual identity that makes it what it is. But I think that idea of the fact that you enter Preston through that, as a gateway, if that was gone you might lose something. (North West Architect A, interview)

We see here how PBS works as a visual icon, a significant presence in terms of Preston's built environment, yet it is also a working, functioning space as a bus station and car park. It is a place of everyday architectural engagement used, on average, by 56,000 people per day. This highlights

that there are some very tangible ways that the space is inhabited, which suggest that it has multiple types of local significance, as commented by one interviewee:

... it's quite a strange space in many ways, but it's a space where a lot of people go and tend to loiter, I think. I think you do get a lot of, like, people who perhaps aren't welcome in other places. (Preston Council Officer A, interview)

This speaks of alternative narratives of PBS that exist beyond heritage and economic value and significance. For many people PBS is a functional backdrop to everyday life, a 'free space' where, if you want, you can sit on a bench next to a bus stand without being moved on. This contrasts with the notion of the 'consumerist/oppressive city' that Sklair (2009: 2703) argues comes about when places are subjected to regeneration and undergo 'progressive regulation of architecture and planning in a post-capitalist future'. The very fact that PBS is a bit rough around the edges means that it is valued as an expression of a type of resistance to the blandifying commercialised notion of regeneration envisaged within the reconfiguration of Preston city centre as a large-scale regeneration through retail scheme.

Campaigning for Preston Bus Station

An interesting departure in the notion of PBS as a focus of heritage value and of resistance to local council policy, is that there was no single campaign to 'save' it which members of the public if so inclined could join up to. Saving PBS was a non-campaign, or tacit campaign in that sense. What took place, and what continues to take place, are micro-scale activities that are local in terms of production, but which often have instant and extensive geographical impact. Blogs, online forums, social networks, and websites representing new visions or arguments about PBS exist in heterogeneous uncoordinated mutuality. What appears in such spaces can include, for example: political debate; a sort of online encyclopaedia about PBS; and exhibition spaces of PBS-inspired art or perhaps, more exactly, art that constitutes on-going reappraisal of PBS.

Recent research on one way such local informal 'expertise' and knowledge has a role in 'revaluing' architecture has been termed 'embodied persuasion' (Bell 2011). In the context of the process of listing the modernist Spa Green estate in London, Bell notes,

'embodied knowledges [which] are generated before, during, and after a building's listing [...] become part of the way in which heritage value is produced and performed.' (2011, 224)

Many individuals and groups, both public and expert have asserted the value of PBS and not in one single campaign

that one might associate with conventional opposition. These interventions are suggestive of how the value of PBS has been asserted through other conduits outside the formally technical. Many of these actors are uncoordinated with one and other and often address the PBS issue in their own terms. These are people without specialist education or pre-existing cultural capital about architecture, who have developed and articulated ways of demonstrating the value of PBS which work alongside, and are complimentary to more conventional expertise. Architectural practitioners who are speaking for PBS from beyond the city were most likely to capture column inches in national papers, of course. Nevertheless, as the following excerpt shows, a combination of formal and informal expertise could be persuasive:

Well many councillors have slowly been persuaded about it after decades of regarding it as a millstone. In my case it was Ben Casey's ideas for the area, the impact of the Preston Passion, and the persuasiveness of local campaigners often coming up with interesting nuggets about its history, what it means to Preston, or the value of it as a piece of modern architecture. (Lancashire County Councillor A, interview)

In fact, some of the local campaigners (such as John Wilson and Save Preston Bus Station) are themselves highly expert:

It was then that the drip-feed from the town hall started to the media and everyone around Preston that the building's got concrete cancer, that it's going to fall down in a few years and we could close it down under health and safety if we needed to, and it was never a good bus station and it's dirty and it's horrible – it's dirty and it's horrible because they don't look after the bloody thing and they don't maintain ... There's nothing there that cannot be repaired and I know that because structural engineers have actually been round and looked at it. I've been round and looked at it and I've had a lifetime in construction so I know the swathes of that



Figure 4: PBS as social network

building could be cut out to have new staircases put in, new lifts, new mezzanine floor. You can do a lot of things with that building, inside, without effecting the external elevation. (Bus Station Campaigner B, interview)

Much of the campaigning takes place via social networks, with the fate of PBS being debated vociferously on Twitter and Facebook. The sheer diversity and range of such interventions have themselves has become a reason for actors to be drawn to PBS (Figure 4).

The effect of the sustained deployment of this type of online media is to at once open up debate to parties outside of Preston, and also to ensure that there is a constant presence for PBS, something which constructs the air of concerted organisation of efforts, whereas, as several interviewees confirmed, campaigning for PBS is being carried out by different groups, who sometimes have diverse agendas and motivations.



Figure 5: The Preston Passion, 2012 (source: BBC).

Preston Bus Station and Creative Interventions

There have been several artistic interventions which have celebrated and drawn national attention to PBS. Notably, it was the setting for the live broadcast BBC One production of the Easter Passion (on 6th April 2012). PBS itself acting as a Brutalist Calvary with the musical drama being played out the bus station apron (Figure 5).

Other such creative interventions include a feature film (*Piercing Brightness* (2011) directed by artist Shezad Dawood), music videos, theatrical performances, spoken word events (Figure 6) and photography. In addition to responses that use PBS as a source of inspiration another recurring trend is to open up the bus station to suggestions for creative regeneration, i.e. to leave it open to being reinterpreted and redesigned, be it in the form of retail, residential units, transforming the roof into an urban garden, or even turning into an arts centre.

Some of these formal interventions might not really fit with the technical value of PBS, in as much as they actively campaign to retain the PBS, but suggest radical alteration of its purpose or design affecting its 'bus-stationness'. As one interviewee remarked 'certainly in terms of its future, it might stop being a bus station, but it'll still be known as the bus station, even though it's not a bus station' (North West Architect A, interview). This suggests that the identity of the building is something that regardless of its future use



Figure 6: PBS as venue – *Journey to the End of the World* event (source: *The New Continental, Preston*).



Figure 7: 'Preston Hacklab': "remixing" the Bus Station (source: Gate 81).

is seen to be potent enough to ensure its longevity, even if it ceases to retain its use as a transport hub.

These sometimes contradictory expressions of support for the bus station include turning it into something that fits into the mantra of regeneration – that of producing an icon. There is even one website solely devoted to 'creative' regeneration (Figure 7).

These interventions are difficult to position – on the one hand they open up space for creative dialogue as to what the future of PBS will be. On the other they can also be viewed as arguments, albeit unintentional ones, which resonate with the sort of top-down, corporate regeneration which has formally threatened PBS's existence.

And I don't think the fact that it was originally a bus station and designed specifically to be a bus station restricts it from being something else. I mean, the refurbishment of architecture is the current thing to be doing really in the current economic climate. Look at Tate Modern, it was a power station, wasn't it? Now it's an art gallery. But there's so many other examples of buildings that become something else and I think the way a lot of Brutalist buildings, the frame system, it just lends itself to being anything. (North West Architect A, interview)

For some, however, this type of response is problematic, and not necessarily fitting for Preston:

It [PBS] kind of works as what it is ... and I find it quite frustrating and, in Preston, particularly at the moment there's a tendency for people to still cling to this creative city idea, you know, that the salvation of the city is cappuccino bars and lots of creative types hanging around which is, you know, all well and good. (Preston Council Officer A, interview)

What post-Tithebarn Preston might be become has turned into a matter of what it shouldn't be. As the Director of Preston-based urban space and arts groups put it:

People are now putting their heads above the parapet and saying they like the bus station, which they wouldn't have at the time [of Tithebarn]. A hole in the ground like Bradford has ended up with [after its retail-driven regeneration scheme stalled] is no good for any city. Some in Preston still feel that the only way to regenerate a place is to knock things down and build something new, an idea which has had its day, I think. (North West Urban Arts Professional A, interview)

Conclusion

We conclude by suggesting that as seen in the tacit campaign to save and reposition PBS, architecture is not simply about the pre-given values somehow inherent in the building,

(although, perhaps ironically, that is, technically speaking, the qualities for which PBS might permissibly achieve statutory protection). In the 'assemblage' of different actors and interactions we have identified, formal discourses of significance; informal discourses of significance; everyday practices and staged performances – all are in a kind of interplay. This is as much a performance of the value of PBS as much as it is resistance to its destruction. In it we see new types of 'expertise' coming into circulation: auto-didacticism about the building; design sensibility, all by which people self-consciously narrate and perform the building's status and, especially, its value in Preston's geography. It is perhaps a shift away from ontology of expertise which seeks to fix the symbolic meaning of a 'great' building towards material and social hybridity related to understanding buildings in terms of their wider social and cultural history and, we might add, their contemporary social significance (Tait and While 2009). Generally this points to a building's significance as being contextual rather than a given. In PBS's case that significance has been, and continues to be, a product of a most mutable and vibrant set of interactions.

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