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**TITLE:**  
Ulterior Motives:  
The Equivocal Nature of Paul Rudolph's Contextual Architecture

As Richard Padovan has argued, the pursuit of a universal answer to architecture is a common theme that arises from early modernism. Early modern architects such as Le Corbusier, Mies, and the De Stijl movement all showed the increased interest on the transition from ‘individual-natural to universal-abstract’.<sup>1</sup> After the end of World War II, the postwar era saw a continuation of this pursuit towards a timeless and universal architecture in the form of Brutalism.

In order to frame a post-war idea of timeless and universal architecture, we must first explore the pre-war idea of timeless and universal architecture. The notion of timeless universality is best expressed in De Stijl’s first manifesto that stated,

*“There is an old and a new consciousness of the age. The old one is directed towards the individual. The new one is directed towards the universal. The conflict of the individual and the universal is reflected in the World War as well as in art today. The war is destroying the old world with all that it contains: the pre-eminence of the individual in every field. The new art has revealed the substance of the new consciousness of the age: an equal balance between the universal and the individual.”*<sup>2</sup>

However, the new sensibility that emerged after the Second World War shows a return to regionalism and contextual design. One such architect that embodied that transition was Paul Rudolph.

Although he was trained under the modern architect Walter Gropius, Paul Rudolph took a different turn and consequently his work from early on reflected an anti attitude towards universality. His early works in Florida is a clear example of this sensibility. Joseph King mentioned in his monograph on Paul Rudolph’s Florida Houses

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<sup>1</sup> Padovan, R. *Towards Universality: le Corbusier, Mies + de Stijl* (Routledge, 2002), 4

<sup>2</sup> Frampton, K. *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 142

that, “the (Paul Rudolph’s) interest in regional expressionism at the time was an effort to counter the universalizing tendency of early modernism and was seen as a way of making the new architecture a meaningful contemporary expression of the cultures and climates in which it was designed.<sup>3</sup>” But as time goes by, Rudolph’s designs seem to diverge from its humble beginnings in Florida into monumental concrete structures. How did this seemingly modest agenda of sensitive contextual architecture evolved into monumental *beton brut*? For an architect who claimed that his work is regional and contextual, many might question how his mid and later works, particularly the concrete structures such as Yale’s Art and Architecture Building, the Boston Government Center, etc. and the mega-structure dreams of his New York projects is contextual and sensitive.

This paper argues that Paul Rudolph’s works after the Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley shows a decrease in contextual sensibility and an increase in monumentality, even though he argues otherwise. Paul Rudolph’s selfish agenda of pursuing monumentality (in both his architecture and his self-image) shadowed his humble origins of pursuing contextual design, thus making his later works less contextual. We will look at this transition through three different projects at three different periods of time: The Healey Guest House (the Cocoon House) of 1950 (the contextual period), the Jewett Arts Center of 1958 (the watershed period), and the Yale Art and Architecture Building of 1963 (the monumental period) and beyond.

The early 1950’s mark Paul Rudolph’s ‘contextual’ period. During this time period he continued to work with Ralph Twitchell on several houses in Sarasota,

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<sup>3</sup> King, J. *The Florida Houses* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 24

Florida. One example of a house that is contextual is the Healy Guest House<sup>a</sup>. When describing the house, Robert Breugmann described “the visibly raised floor levels, perhaps recalling those seen on Southern sharecroppers’ cottages, the attention to cross ventilation, the louvers designed to let in air but block the sun...<sup>4</sup>” as regionalist and contextual.

Although we can go on and on with different example of other Florida Houses that he designed that are contextual, what is more interesting in this case is the origin of his idea of a contextual architecture. Right before he returned to work with Twitchell after finishing his education at Harvard, Rudolph “avail himself of a foreign travel scholarship which enabled him to visit Europe at a time when war recovery work was at its height.<sup>5</sup>” Through these observations, he made it clear that his position on urban planning (which is heavily tied to his idea of contextual design, as explained by Tony Monk in his book “The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph”) is against Gropius’ position on urban planning: the design of the “urban fabric was the province of the architect and that Gropius’ delegation of such responsibility to planners was a gross dereliction of duty.<sup>6</sup>”

In other words, Rudolph is developing a genuine understanding of the importance of contextual design through his first hand experience from his European travels. As Tony Monk puts it, Rudolph’s personal experiences of both his Harvard training and travels in Europe directly influences “two design ingredients<sup>7</sup>”

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<sup>4</sup> Breugmann, R. *The Florida Houses: Introduction* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 19

<sup>5</sup> Spade, R. *Paul Rudolph* (Thames and Hudson; London, 1971), 12

<sup>6</sup> Spade, R. *Paul Rudolph* (Thames and Hudson; London, 1971), 12

<sup>7</sup> Monk, T. *The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (Wiley-Academy, 1999), 10

that are important in his architectural designs: “the internal control of light and space in a memorable manner, and the external influence of the surrounding context on a design.<sup>8</sup>”

Following on that note, Paul Rudolph’s release of his “Six Determinants of Architectural Form” in 1956 clearly shows how much he value contextual design.

The third determinant of form is:

*“...the particular region, climate, landscape, and natural lighting conditions with which one is confronted. The great architectural movements of the past have been precisely formulated in a given area, then adapted and spread to other regions, suiting themselves more or less to the particular way of life of the new area.<sup>9</sup>”*

He then continues by saying that:

*“We now face a period of such development. If adaptation, enlargement, and enrichment of basic principles of twentieth-century architecture were carried out, related always to the main stream of architecture and the particular region, the world would again be able to create magnificent cities.<sup>10</sup>”*

And by magnificent cities here he is alluding to the cities he experienced during his travel in Europe. So as we can see through these artifacts, there is no doubt that Paul Rudolph is a huge proponent of contextual design and that he is against the modern architectural theory of universality.

The peak of Rudolph’s contextual movement can be seen in the design for the Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley. The design intentions for this building was highly contextual: “to fit this large new development in with the late-Victorian characteristics of

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<sup>8</sup> Monk, T. *The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (Wiley-Academy, 1999), 10

<sup>9</sup> Rudolph, P. “Six Determinants of Architectural Form”, *Architectural Record* 120 (1956), 185

<sup>10</sup> Rudolph, P. “Six Determinants of Architectural Form”, *Architectural Record* 120 (1956), 185

the rest of the campus buildings and to complete one side of the open quadrangle which was dominated by the tall new-Gothic Wellesley tower.<sup>11</sup>” As a result, this building tries to be contextual both physically and historically. In an attempt to be historically contextual, the Jewett Arts Center ended up being more eclectic. In his article ‘The Dangers of Eclecticism’, Timothy Rohan unravels some of Rudolph’s eclectic inspirations, more specifically the imitated elaborate brick pattern work of the Doge Palace<sup>b</sup> in Venice. Rudolph believed that “the palace and adjoining piazza were historical models that everyone can understand at an almost unconscious level.<sup>12</sup>” Timothy Rohan also reveals that Paul Rudolph’s contextual intentions<sup>c</sup> were prejudicially shut-down by the client because of his sexuality and what the client’s consider to be “fussiness<sup>13</sup>”. As a result,

*“Rudolph finally wiped his facades clean of all ornamental brickwork in favor of the more abstract screens<sup>d</sup>. What emerges here is how Rudolph’s desire to broaden architecture’s scope was channeled or funneled into an acceptable form, in what is really an illustration of how modernism ‘disciplines’ its own and of the tremendous elasticity of the discourse in its ability to absorb and control nonconformist urges.<sup>14</sup>”*

Through this discipline, Rudolph’s individuality (especially his homosexuality) was challenged, and Rohan argued that this ‘discipline’ lead Rudolph into a new direction in his architecture. Or in Rudolph’s own words, “a return to forms and techniques more familiar and easily manageable<sup>14</sup>” where “any “accusation of fussiness” would be forestalled with a brute hypermasculinity<sup>14</sup>.”

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<sup>11</sup> Monk, T. *The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (Wiley-Academy, 1999), 32

<sup>12</sup> Rohan, T. “The Dangers of Eclecticism”, *Anxious Modernism* (The MIT Press; Cambridge, 2000), 204

<sup>13</sup> Rohan, T. “The Dangers of Eclecticism”, *Anxious Modernism* (The MIT Press; Cambridge, 2000), 208

<sup>14</sup> Rohan, T. “The Dangers of Eclecticism”, *Anxious Modernism* (The MIT Press; Cambridge, 2000), 210

In this project, we see a first occasion of Rudolph losing (or in this case compromising) his contextual designs because of pressure from factors that are influenced by his individuality. In the case of the Jewett Arts Center, his agenda was his homosexuality, and Timothy Rohan argued that this element of his individuality led to the “eclectic” design proposal that lost its initial contextual proposal. Moving on from this point, Paul Rudolph’s individuality and character became a prominent factor in his designs and this pursuit of a selfish agenda led his future designs away from his humble, contextual beginnings.

Peter Collins, a former associate professor of architecture in McGill University offers a different agenda for Paul Rudolph’s tendency to move in this new direction. In his article “Whither Paul Rudolph?” Collins question Rudolph’s sudden rise to fame and even blames it and considered Rudolph unworthy of such a title. He even challenged Rudolph by saying, “On what principles, it is frequently rhetorically asked, are his designs based?<sup>15</sup>” Ever since Rudolph became the Dean of Yale University’s school of architecture,

*“Every project that comes from his office is now widely publicized, minutely examined by architects and students, and prepared for inclusion in any histories of modern architecture that may be currently in the press. He can no longer afford to design anything unsophisticated or subdued. His prestige will not suffer that his projects fail immediately to astound.”<sup>16</sup>*

In other words, Collins is blaming Rudolph’s self-indulging pride and prestige for the lack of evident contextual sensibility in his design intentions. Even in his famous Art and

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<sup>15</sup> Collins, P. “Whither Paul Rudolph?”. *Progressive Architecture* 42 (August 1961), 130

<sup>16</sup> Collins, P. “Whither Paul Rudolph?”. *Progressive Architecture* 42 (August 1961), 131

Architecture Building at Yale, traces of his prestige overshadowing his design intentions can already be seen.

Thomas Beeby, Dean of Yale's School of Architecture from 1985 to 1992, reveals Rudolph's contextual intent for the design of the Art and Architecture Building by saying that,

*"The pinwheel arrangement of the floor "trays" around the central space of the final project emerged in the earliest schemes as a direct response to the building's site: its rotational dynamic "turned the corner" of Chapel and York Streets<sup>17</sup>*

But then the question is, is the design intention for this building really contextual<sup>e</sup>? Or is there another 'agenda' waiting to be revealed? In an interview with John Cook in 1973, Rudolph mentioned that,

*"One characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that nothing is ever completed, nothing is ever fixed. We don't think of things as being complete within themselves. A building can only be thought of in relationship to a changing setting, and at a point of time. Therefore, the design suggests the past and the future . . . I have now lived long enough to know that buildings get torn down, they get burned, they get added on to, their uses get changed, etc.<sup>18</sup>"*

In a different occasion, Rudolph also mentioned that,

*"Buildings have lives of their own. Buildings are like people, they're sometimes honest or sometimes not so honest. Attitudes change. The fact is that the building is in another cycle, opinions oscillate, and it matters little to me whether it's up or down. It's the nature of the beast. It brings up the question, of course, of whether the students set the buildings on fire. I don't know. It's what everybody's pleased to say.<sup>19</sup>"*

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<sup>17</sup> Beeby, T. *Paul Rudolph: Drawings for the Art and Architecture Building at Yale 1959-1963* (Yale University School of Architecture, 1988), 16

<sup>18</sup> Cook, J. *Conversations with Architects* (Praeger Publishers: New York, 1973), 90

<sup>19</sup> Crosbie, M. "Paul Rudolph on Yale's A&A". *Architecture* (1988), 107



For someone who is a proponent of ‘change’ and accepting it, I find it very disappointing to find him not embracing the changes (such as the addition of partition walls in the main atrium space, the mysterious fire, the changes that happen through the renovation from the fire, etc.) that took place over the years to his Art and Architecture Building. In an interview with Michael Crosbie, Rudolph even mentioned, “I almost never talk about it (the Art and Architecture Building). It’s a very painful subject for me. I talk quite freely about many of my buildings when asked, but I never talk about this building.<sup>20</sup>” This conversation took place 15 years after Rudolph made the statement for John Cook’s interview, and already we can see that he is turning back on his own words. Could it be that his prestige and pride was part of the recipe behind the design of the Art and Architecture Building, and as a result he cannot face the changes that this building is going through?

An idea that might help answer that question is this notion of dominance. In his interview with John Cook, Rudolph also mentioned that he is “fascinated with the idea of how to make a building dominant in the city scale. I used to think that it could best be accomplished by making it relatively heavy and solid.<sup>21</sup>” Here we can see that Paul Rudolph is fascinated with the idea of creating dominant buildings, again going back to his affinity towards monumentality. The Art and Architecture Building is definitely an example of a “relatively heavy and solid<sup>e</sup>” building that is clearly expressed through its materiality. This selfish desire to make buildings that are dominant is an agenda that hindered Rudolph’s contextual sensibility in his design. Therefore, we can consider the Art and Architecture Building as lacking the

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<sup>20</sup> Crosbie, M. “Paul Rudolph on Yale’s A&A”. *Architecture* (1988), 102

<sup>21</sup> Cook, J. *Conversations with Architects* (Praeger Publishers: New York, 1973), 120

complete, humble, contextual sensibility that Rudolph had in his earlier works (the Florida Houses, and the Jewett Arts Center) because he is pre-occupied with the idea of creating dominant architecture.

This idea of dominance is not something new in Rudolph's career. From very early on in his career, Joseph King mentioned that "the notion of the heroic modern architect (le Corbusier, Mies, Wright) pursuing his own particular vision had a great appeal for Rudolph, and he positioned himself to be such a figure.<sup>22</sup>" In the "Six Determinants of Architectural Form", Rudolph himself mentioned, "monumentality, symbolism, decoration and so on – age-old human needs – are among the architectural challenges that modern theory has brushed aside.<sup>23</sup>", implying that he is pursuing an architecture of monumentality, symbolism, and decoration himself. Vincent Scully also pointed out that, "Rudolph himself has continued to pursue his lonely compulsions, a solitary performer, whose buildings always tend to look better than most of those around them, the work of a man with remarkable optical gifts... <sup>24</sup>" There is definitely a strong realization that Paul Rudolph strikes as an individual, a 'hero'. Or Scully puts it, Rudolph "represents that side of the American consciousness which is always trying to find and to identify the self<sup>25</sup>". With this understanding in mind, we can further see how Rudolph's affinity towards

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<sup>22</sup> King, J. *The Florida Houses* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2005), 25

<sup>23</sup> Rudolph, P. "Six Determinants of Architectural Form", *Architectural Record* 120 (1956), 185

<sup>24</sup> Scully, V. *American Architecture and Urbanism* (Praeger Publishers; New York, 1969), 207

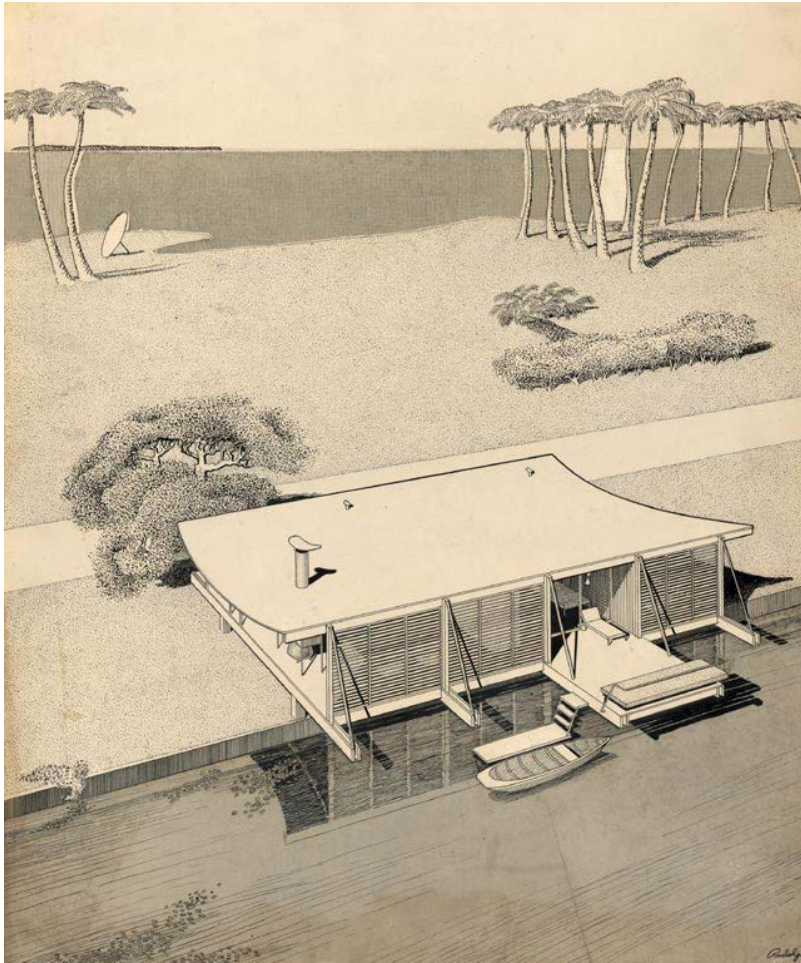
<sup>25</sup> Scully, V. *American Architecture and Urbanism* (Praeger Publishers; New York, 1969), 205

monumentality, heroism, help support the idea that he had these self centered agendas all along and that they hinder from his earlier humble, contextual designs.

Paul Rudolph's selfish agenda of pursuing monumentality (in both his architecture and his self-image) shadowed his humble origins of pursuing contextual design, thus making his later works (after the Jewett Arts Center) less contextual. We have seen interpretations of that agenda by different writers such as homosexuality (by Timothy Rohan), prestige (by Peter Collins), and dominance (by John Cook). There is no single agenda, but one can say that these agendas that have been discovered (so far) all points out to Paul Rudolph's self-glorification. And in the end, this move that is influenced by the agendas ultimately hindered Rudolph's contextual intentions because his own agenda overshadows them.

**IMAGE GALLERY:**

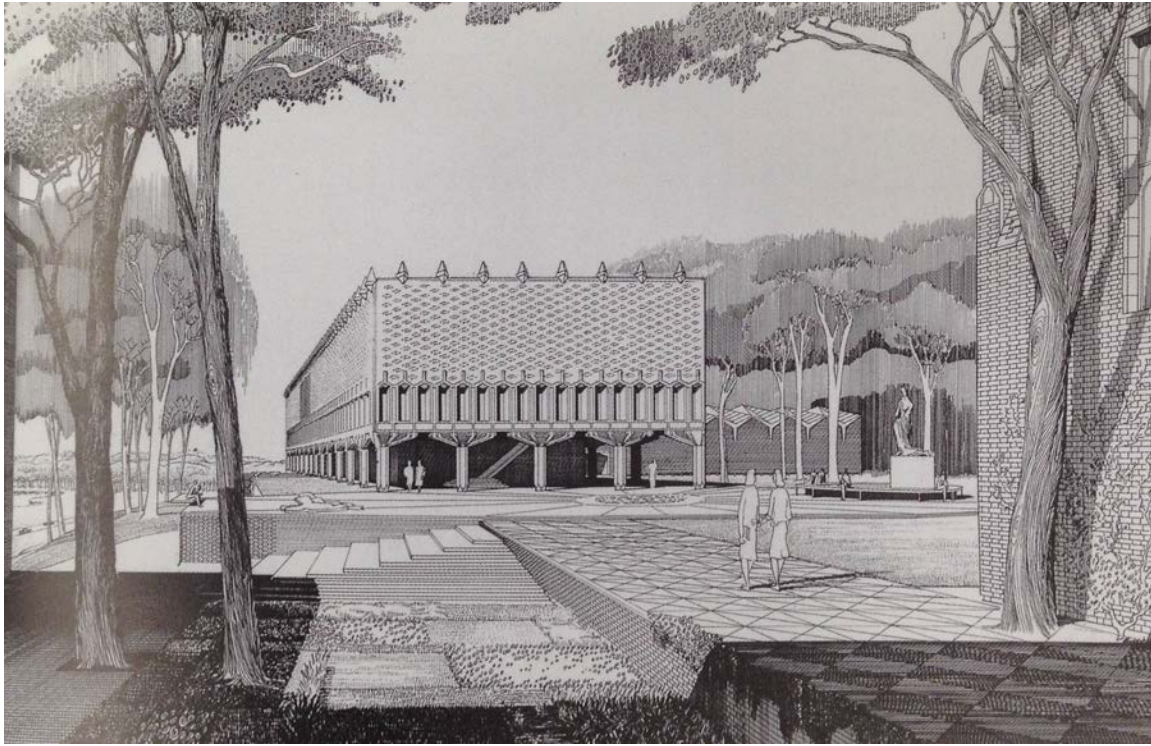
**a. drawing of the Healy Guest House showing its context**



**b. the brickwork pattern of the Doge Palace in Venice**



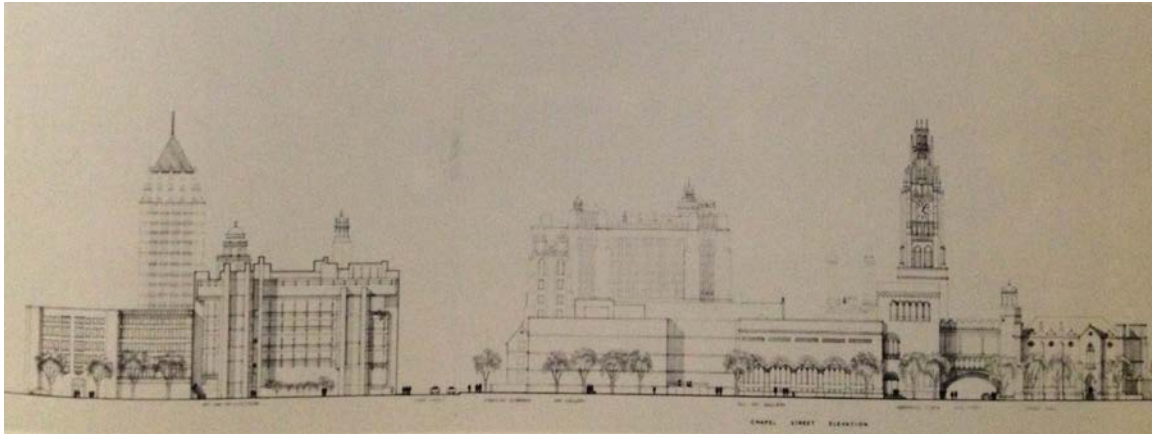
c. Jewett Arts Center with the Doge Palace brickwork pattern



d. Jewett Arts Center with the abstracted sun screen



e. elevation of the Art and Architecture Building. Is it contextual or dominating?



#### ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Banham, Reyner. The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic (London, Architectural Press, 1966)  
As it is the first book that coined the term ‘Brutalism’, I think it is helpful to read through this literature and understand what their thoughts were about brutalism during that period of time. The main thesis of this writing is that brutalism is a building ethic, not aesthetic.
- Beeby, T. Paul Rudolph: drawings for the Art and Architecture Building at Yale 1959-1963 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)  
This source provides a complete set of drawings (plans, sections, sketches, design intentions) that can be useful when trying to compare its design to the design patterns outlined in “The Timeless Way of Building”. It can also be a good source for analyzing the architecture through its drawings.
- Collins, Peter. “Whither Paul Rudolph?”. Progressive Architecture 42 (August 1961)  
A very skeptical article that challenges Paul Rudolph’s validity as a prestigious architect. Offers a good counter-argument to the many flattering articles on Paul Rudolph’s genius.
- Cook, John. Conversations With Architects (Praeger Publishers: New York, 1973)  
A very helpful dialogue between Paul Rudolph and John Cook that offers a comprehensive look at his career so far. Touches on important topics such as dominant buildings, contingency, and specific project developments.
- Crosbie, Michael J. “Paul Rudolph on Yale’s A&A”. Architecture, 1988, 102-107  
An interview with Paul Rudolph almost 30 years after the building was completed. It outlines several post occupancy account that relates to Paul Rudolph’s intentions and the reality of the design. Could be a useful reference in terms of testing how this building faced the test of time.
- Curcic, Slobodan. “The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic Book Review”. Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1969): 171-173  
A book review written as a critique to Reynard Banham’s rather pretentious impositions on the value of brutalism. This article provides a counterview on Brutalism as the new, timeless style, and says that it may not exactly be true.
- Davern, Jeanne M. “Conversations with Paul Rudolph”. Architectural Record 170 (March, 1982):90-97.  
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- Frampton, K. Modern Architecture: A Critical History (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007)  
Source for the quote of the De Stijl manifesto.
- Moholy-Nagy, Sibyl. The Architecture of Paul Rudolph. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970)

- A monograph on the works of Paul Rudolph. It provides a good summary of his work and also provide explanations and personal recounts by Paul Rudolph on the Art and Architecture Building.
- Monk, Tony. The Art and Architecture of Paul Rudolph. (Wiley-Academy, 1999)  
A monograph that highlighted several of Paul Rudolph's more well known buildings. It has a pretty informative introduction that talks about Paul Rudolph's upbringing, design, style, contextualism, and decline.
  - Pavodan, R. Towards Universality: Le Corbusier, Mies, De Stijl (Routledge, 2002)  
Background info for the introduction on pre-war ideas of timeless and universality and how one informs the other and vice versa.
  - Ranalli, G. "Paul Rudolph and the Twentieth Century Monument". Paul Rudolph: drawings for the Art and Architecture Building at Yale 1959-1963 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)  
A personal testimony and response to the 1969 fire and ongoing renovations that occurred at the Art and Architecture Building.
  - Rohan, Timothy. "The Dangers of Eclecticism: Paul Rudolph's Jewett Arts Center in Wellesley". Anxious Modernism (the MIT press: Cambridge, 2000)  
A critical article that explores the issue of post-war eclecticism, symbolism, and ornament through the lens of Paul Rudolph's Jewett Arts Center. Offers an interesting insight (by introducing Paul Rudolph's sexuality as a factor in the turn of events).
  - Rudolph, Paul. "Changing Philosophy of Architecture". Architectural Forum, July 1954, 111.  
Paul Rudolph's critique against pre-war modernism and how its abstract approaches towards design lend itself to an inhumane architecture. He propose an architecture that pays a closer attention to context and buildings that surround it instead of thinking about them as freestanding structures.
  - Rudolph, Paul. "Six Determinants of Architectural Form". Architectural Record 120 (1956): 183-190.  
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  - Rudolph, Paul. "Yale Art and Architecture Building". Architectural Design, April 1964, 161.  
A written excerpt on Paul Rudolph's intentions behind the design for the Art and Architecture Building. The explanations are more technical in nature (construction, materiality) and how that relates to the overall idea for the building. This writing will supplement the drawings for the building.
  - Schumacher, T. The Art and Architecture Building at Yale: A Memory. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)  
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- Scully, Vincent. American Architecture and Urbanism (Praeger Publisher: New York, 1969)  
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- Spade, Rupert. Paul Rudolph (Thames and Hudson: London, 1971)  
A monograph that consists of mostly pictures/plates of Paul Rudolph's building. A very helpful resource when it comes to visualizing his works.

**IMAGE SOURCES:**

- a. Paul Rudolph, *Healy Guest House I*. Unknown. Wikimedia Commons. [http://fr.wikiarquitectura.com/index.php/Fichier:Healy\\_guest\\_house\\_1.jpg](http://fr.wikiarquitectura.com/index.php/Fichier:Healy_guest_house_1.jpg)
- b. Krzysztof Gapys. <http://gapys.photoshelter.com/image/I0000R2fY3Ey1To>
- c. Paul Rudolph, *The Jewett Arts Center; preliminary scheme resembling the Doge's Palace, Venice*. 1955-56. Source: Rohan, T. "The Dangers of Eclecticism: Paul Rudolph and the Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley". (the MIT Press: Cambridge, 2000)
- d. Paul Rudolph, *The Jewett Arts Center; final scheme with sun-screens*. 1956. Source: Rohan, T. "The Dangers of Eclecticism: Paul Rudolph and the Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley". (the MIT Press: Cambridge, 2000)
- e. Paul Rudolph, *Elevation: Chapel Street*. 1962. Ink on vellum, 21in x 55in. Yale School of Architecture. Source: Beeby, T. "Paul Rudolph: drawings for the Art and Architecture Building at Yale 1959-1963". (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988)