From Eyesore to Icon
Reappraising Sydney’s Sirius Apartments (1975-80)

Dr Russell Rodrigo
Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Built Environment, University of New South Wales
russell.rodrigo@unsw.edu.au

Designed by Tao Gofers in 1975 and completed in 1980, the Sirius apartments located in Sydney’s historic Rocks precinct has, since its opening, attracted significant public criticism, including the National Trust of Australia who bluntly described it as ‘that lump in the Rocks’ (Glascott 1979: 6). Designed to counterpoint the iconic presence of the Sydney Opera House across Circular Quay, the Sirius apartments were conceived towards the end of a period when the Brutalist idiom dominated architectural thinking and practice internationally.

The Sirius apartments were proposed by the NSW government as an alternative to the relocation of public housing tenants in the Rocks, subsequently resulting in the temporary lifting of construction bans. Perennially nominated as one of Sydney’s great architectural eyesores (Purcell 1986: 27), Sirius reflects heroic ambitions, both socially and architecturally. Through its direct and honest aesthetics, Sirius presents a powerful civic image that communicates the potential role played by the built environment in the lives of a society’s inhabitants, a role focused on the culture of the everyday, an iconic image of an egalitarian ideal expressed in architecture.

The paper contextualises and presents a reassessment of the conception and development of the Sirius apartments as an urban icon and is informed by personal communication with the building’s architect, Tao (Theodorus) Gofers. The paper situates the building in the context of the 1970s redevelopment plans for the Rocks, the project’s critical reception as an urban eyesore and its contemporary re-evaluation as an iconic Brutalist artefact.

Keywords: Brutalism; The Rocks redevelopment; Sirius apartments
Introduction

Figure 1: Aerial view of Sirius apartments c1980.
Reproduced with permission of the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority Archives Library.

Sydney’s greatest and famed asset is its harbor with the almost equally famous bridge as the backdrop. Nearby, the Opera House, is one of the modern architectural wonders of the world. And now this encroachment of a collection of ‘human filing cabinets’ with all their ugliness and sterility (Rawson 1979: 4).

The planning and construction of the Sirius apartments occurred at a pivotal point in the urban development of Sydney, coinciding with a period of sustained national economic growth and prosperity that led to a boom in commercial office construction during the 1960s and 70s. Changes in Sydney’s planning laws were critical to the dramatic changes that affected Sydney’s urban fabric during this period.

Prior to 1957, for nearly 50 years, the 1912 Height of Buildings Act had determined the vertical scale of Sydney, limiting buildings to a maximum height of 150 feet (45.72m). In 1957 the Height of Buildings Act was amended and Sydney’s skyline began to be dramatically altered from this time on. After removal of the height limit, approval from the Chef Secretary’s Department was required for buildings taller than 150 feet, with recommendations from a newly created body the Height of Buildings Advisory Committee (HOBAC). The HOBAC, a non-elected body, was created to determine development constraints on a discretionary case by case basis. Until the 1960s, Sydney did not experience any significant office construction. In the period 1960-1976 for example, net office space in the Sydney CBD accounted for more than 50% of the total net office space over the entire period of 1800-1976 (Sydney City Council, 1980). The commercial office boom transformed Sydney during this period however, the retention of the city’s historic urban fabric and the realisation of civic design opportunities were secondary to the maximisation of site potential:

Sydney has been described as a builder’s city because of the tremendous commercial building boom that is currently taking place. The central business area, by Sydney Harbour, is the focal point of this activity, which is no mere co-incidence because it is also the nerve centre of the State of New South
Wales.....old buildings which have outlived their economic usefulness, are being tumbled into oblivion and, in their place, new buildings are rising that give a modern design and contour to the skyline (Sydney’s Skyline 1960: 9).

The conception and development of the Sirius apartments are part of the story of the dramatic economic and cultural shifts taking place in Sydney during the 1960s and 70s and their impact on the urban fabric of the city. The paper contextualises and presents a reassessment of the conception and development of the Sirius apartments as an urban icon and is informed by personal communication with the building’s architect, Tao (Theodorus) Gofers. The paper situates the building in the context of the 1970s redevelopment plans for the Rocks, the project’s critical reception as an urban eyesore and its contemporary re-evaluation as an iconic Brutalist artefact.

**Urban Planning & Historical Context**

The Rocks are an iconic Sydney location, a historic precinct located on the western side of Sydney Cove, between Circular Quay and the approaches to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. In the 1960s The Rocks came into the NSW Government’s focus as an opportunity for major redevelopment because it was primarily in public ownership and was located in close proximity to the Sydney CBD. Sydney historian Isadore Brodsky, reflecting the overwhelmingly optimistic pro-development psyche of the time, wrote of the iconic importance of The Rocks as a focus for major redevelopment:

> The prediction that Sydney will come to look like Manhattan finds every support from the number of skyscrapers that have so excitingly pointed the new way for Australia’s pioneer metropolis during the past five years. In keeping with this dynamic trend it was inevitable that The Rocks, especially where it constitutes the western hinge of that great portal, Sydney Cove, should have invited the attention of developers. On the corresponding hinge of Bennelong’s Point where the vaulting of the Opera House has soared to a new height in world architecture, a challenge was trumpeted to the western shore (Brodsky 1965: 139).

In March 1962, the NSW Labor Government issued a call for expressions of interest from developers for the sale or lease of 19 acres of land in The Rocks precinct (Freestone 2010: 225). The successful proposal was submitted by the developer James Wallace Pty Limited in association with architects Edwards, Madigan and Torzillo. The scheme provided for thirteen high-rise residential towers accommodating approximately 3,500 residents and four 32 storey office towers linked by a series of plazas and courts on a terraced podium of up to six storeys (Webber 1988: 129-130).
Following the election of a Liberal-Country party coalition in May 1965 however, the Wallace scheme for The Rocks did not proceed. In 1967, the new government commissioned John Overall, the then Chairman of the National Capital Development Commission to provide a report on the future redevelopment of The Rocks. The Overall scheme had similar features to the previous Wallace scheme and proposed the development of high rise offices and retail outlets, with a workforce of between 19,000, provision for 1,000 residents in apartments, hotels, motels and serviced flats for tourists (Webber 1988: 130). The report led to establishment of the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority (SCRA) by an act of parliament in 1968 and in January 1970, as the statutory body charged with the redevelopment of Crown land in The Rocks, SCRA came into being (Webber 1988: 132). In December of the same year SCRA published the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Scheme. The SCRA scheme proposed approximately two-thirds of The Rocks to be cleared and rebuilt as commercial office space with a population of 1,200 residents (Webber 1988: 130).

As part of the government’s redevelopment plan for The Rocks, all public housing residents were to be relocated to other suburbs. A large majority of the residents however, wished to be rehoused in the Miller Point area, with the aim of retaining the established community of public housing tenants in the area. In response to community opposition to the redevelopment plans, building unions announced a “Green Ban” on the commencement of work until all public housing tenants were satisfactorily rehoused. The NSW Builders Labourers Federation, (BLF) the organisation representing Sydney’s construction workers had by the mid-1960s become increasingly with concerned with issues of urban planning, particularly in relation to protecting open space, existing housing stock and areas of heritage value. The green bans instituted by the BLF were a form of grass roots environmental activism that challenged the pro-development psyche of the time.

Supported by the BLF, planners, academics and architects, the residents of The Rocks developed “The Peoples’ Plan” in April 1973 and argued that the future planning of The Rocks should involve
consultation with its residents as fully as possible. The document communicated the residents’
desire that the area remain predominantly as a residential and historical precinct, distinct from the
CBD. Above all, it recommended that the key to the revitalisation of The Rocks was through retaining
the existing residents and a commitment to the preservation of its historic buildings (The Rocks
Peoples’ Plan Committee 1975). The Sirius apartments were proposed by the government as an
alternative to the relocation of public housing tenants, subsequently resulting in the temporary
lifting of construction bans.

The Sirius Apartments: Development Options

In response to the People’s Plan, the development options proposed by the NSW Housing
Commission were essentially aimed at solving a political problem, the rehousing of the existing
residents of The Rocks in the local area. The building’s architect Tao Gofers notes that the time
frame to identify and develop a range of development options was extremely short, a matter of less
than one week. This short time frame was primarily due to the urgency of finding a political solution
that would result in the lifting of the Green Ban.

No development controls for the site were in place at the time the options were being developed,
however, a range of outcomes were sought by the various stakeholders who included the NSW
Premier’s Department, The Rocks Residents Action Group, The Sydney Cove Redevelopment
Authority, the BLF, Sydney City Council and the Maritime Services Board. For the Premier’s
Department, the economics of the development were paramount, allowing for an overall land cost
per unit that was consistent with existing Department of Housing measures. The Rocks Resident
Action Group sought to incorporate the ideas developed in the People’s Plan, primarily for a mix of
residents and a non-standard design. For the Sydney City Council, the key outcome was for a
medium scale development that was similar in scale to the existing 5 storey Bond store on the site.
The Maritime Services Board’s key priority was maintaining views of harbour traffic from its Harbour
Control Tower, located on the western edge of The Rocks. For SCRA, The lifting of the BLF Green Ban
would allow it to begin a process of evicting residential and commercial squatters and renovate
existing buildings so they could be leased profitably and facilitate the development of The Rocks as a
historical tourist precinct. A positive resolution of the Green Ban was a key priority for the BLF and
would demonstrate that industrial action could be effective in changing government policies and a
legitimate method of protecting Australia’s heritage. For the Housing Commission, represented by
the Chairman Jack Bourke, the priority to further develop the Commission’s concept of social
housing by including a mix of units that would allow for an overall tenant mix representative of the
wider community.

According to Gofers, the key design aims of the project were to:

- Incorporate existing Housing Commission standards, particularly in relation to
  appropriate unit floor space and design and construction quality
- Limit the visual impact on the southern approach to the Harbour Bridge through a
  predominant 5-6 storey massing, based on the existing Bond store
- Maximise the views to Circular Quay and the Opera House
- Reduce the impact of train noise from the Harbour Bridge
• Incorporate a mix of 1, 2, 3, and 4 bedroom units and aged pensioner units with appropriate community facilities
• Incorporate off-street parking with access from Cumberland Street
• Provide pedestrian access from Cumberland Street and Gloucester Walk
• Respect the existing site context, i.e., the small scale urban form of the immediate surroundings

Gofers produced four development options for the site, comprising concept drawings (plans, elevations, perspectives) and accommodation/density statistics.

Option 1 (refer Figure 3) proposed a low scale development fourteen 2-storey terraces in a mix of Victorian and Federation styles.

Figure 3: Development Option 1, 1976.
Reproduced with permission of Tao Gofers.

Option 2 (refer Figure 4) proposed a 20-storey high-rise building with two levels of underground parking. The tower provided 160 one and two bedroom units with 8 units per floor.
Figure 4: Development Option 2, 1976. Reproduced with permission of Tao Gofers.

Option 3 (refer Figure 5) proposed a mix of four of the current standard Housing Commission flat designs, ranging in height to 6 storeys. The development provided 82 units including 24 one bedroom, 40 two-bedroom and 22 aged pensioner apartments.
Options 1 and 2 were developed to illustrate the extremes of site development that were possible. Neither option was regarded as an appropriate solution architecturally or politically by the design team who strategically assessed that they would be rejected by the key stakeholders, the NSW Premier’s Department and The Rocks Resident Action Group. The third option was developed as a mid-range solution proposing around 80 units, a number that was seen by the design team as acceptable to both the government and the residents. Like Options 1 & 2 however, Option 3, was also presented with the strategic aim that it would be rejected, in this case on architectural design terms because of its use of conventional Housing Commission aesthetics.

Option 4 (refer Figure 6) was therefore designed strategically as the preferred option by the design team. Several options were developed in-house before the Sirius proposal was finalised. Option 4 was also presented at a higher degree of resolution, including presentation drawings, a scaled model and professionally rendered perspectives. The scheme proposed a building with a relatively long and narrow footprint with a massing of 11 storeys in the middle, tapering to one and two storeys at the north and south ends. Option 4 provided for 79 apartments comprising 5 four bedroom units, 8 three bedroom units, 38 two bedroom units, 11 one bedroom units and 17 one bedroom apartments specifically designed for aged tenants.

The four options were presented to stakeholder meeting on 23 July 1976. After some discussion, all parties agreed that Option 4 was an acceptable solution and, provided that displaced residents would be accommodated in the development, the BLF would remove the Green Ban over The Rocks. Gofers notes that while the Premiers Department sought to increase unit numbers, Jack Mundey of the BLF immediately contacted the print media to state that the BLF had dropped the Green Ban in light of the Housing Commission’s proposal to construct Sirius. According to Gofers, the approval procedure took less than three hours. Following stakeholder approval, Development Application
documentation was prepared by the Housing Commission and on 4 August 1977, the HOBAC recommended that the development be approved (Minutes of the Meeting of the Height of Buildings Advisory Committee 1977: 2).

Figure 6: Development Option 4, 1976. Reproduced with permission of Tao Gofers.

The Sirius Apartments as a Brutalist Icon

While the Sirius apartments are commonly described as Brutalist, its architect Tao Gofers concedes that it was never consciously designed as a Brutalist artefact. By the time of its conception in 1975, Brutalism had already reached its peak in terms of global architectural practice. At its worst, Brutalist architecture had by this time become simply gestural, dominated by a focus on monumentality and heroic form making. At its best however, the emphasis on the truthful expression of structure and materials and its memorability as an ideological image, is reflective of Brutalism’s original ethical ambitions.
As in other Brutalist work, in the design of the Sirius apartments there is an appeal to fundamental architectural principles such as the emphasis on repetitive forms and geometries, the parts strongly expressive of individual functions within an overall structural and formal system. The Brutalist concern for the expression of the objectness of a building can be seen in the design of Sirius with the centrality of the building’s image, its ability to be comprehended easily is a function of its formal expression. The modular spaces and forms of Sirius parallel the Brutalist desire for the expression of an egalitarian society. In Sirius, standardisations of forms reflect an aspiration for social cohesion and for the communal good.

The Sirius project was originally planned as two integrated components, a stacked commercial block to the south and a stacked residential block to the north as shown in Figure 6. Only the residential block was built, in accordance with the agreement to house potentially displaced public housing tenants.
Figure 7: Axonometric & unit types – Cumberland Street.
CAD Documentation by Eugene Kirkwood.
Figure 8: Axonometric & unit types – Cumberland Street.
CAD Documentation by Eugene Kirkwood.
The Sirius Apartments were designed to accommodate 200 tenants of different demographics in 79 apartments of various configurations in a stepped profile of repetitive cubic forms. As shown in Figures 7 and 8, this repetitive external appearance is deceptive as it shows no indication of the extraordinary spatial complexity of the interlocking unit types and their fit within the topography of the site and the overall massing of the complex.

The complex comprises 5 four bedroom units, 8 three bedroom units, 38 two bedroom units 11 one bedroom units and 17 one bedroom apartments specifically designed for aged tenants. The apartments range from single storey units to two and three storey walk-ups. Most units located on the eastern side of the building have views of Circular Quay, the Opera House, the Harbour and the City skyline. Some apartments were designed to span east-west with views in both directions. As part of the tenant selection process, potential tenants were interviewed for their suitability for high density apartment living during the design phase. All units in the Sirius complex have access to a communal roof garden which is landscaped with large trees and shrubs potted in striking purple fibreglass planters. Access to outdoor space is a key feature of the overall building design with all units benefitting from connection to a combination of roof gardens, courtyard gardens and balconies. A community space of about 200 square metres, the ‘Phillip Room’ is located on the ground floor and provides space for reception and general activities areas and a supervised area for children’s activities. The seventeen aged units are provided with a special community room, the ‘Heritage Room’ is located on the eighth floor with access to a garden terrace and extensive views of the City and North Sydney. Clothes drying rooms are provided on each floor of the high-rise section and at each stairway in the walk-up sections. Planted areas on the podium, extensive use of private outdoor space, the provision of community spaces and clothes drying rooms contribute to the potential for sociability and a spirit of community within the complex.

The incorporation of standard family units with aged units in the Sirius apartments was not typical of the NSW Housing Commission’s approach to tenant mix at the time. Due to more stringent requirements for security, accessibility and safety, the design of aged accommodation was generally delivered as stand alone developments. The 17 aged units in the Sirius apartments are located in the tower section of the complex with two units per floor for levels two to eight and single units located on level nine, ten and eleven. All aged units are accessible by lifts and incorporate special features such as emergency call buttons that are linked to a distress call panel in the apartment foyer and Building Manager’s office. Electronic locks on aged unit doors were also incorporated in the case of accidents or emergencies. Additionally, lifts were specifically designed so they could accommodate ambulance stretchers.

The material palette of Sirius is dominated by the conspicuous use of raw off-form concrete. Contrary to the Brutalist aspiration of truth in material expression, Sirius was originally designed to be off white in appearance, using a lighter cement mix (Sydney Morning Herald 2014). Gofers notes that the monumentality and external white appearance of Sirius was conceptualised as a counterpoint to the iconic presence of the Sydney Opera House across the Quay. Due to budget constraints, however, the building’s concrete finish utilized a standard concrete mix, resulting in a darker appearance than was originally intended.
Critical Reception & Re-evaluation of the Sirius Apartments

At its official opening in 19 March 1980, the Sydney Morning Herald reported that the Sirius apartments attracted strong public criticism from several commentators, including the National Trust:

The staggered-level building Sirius, in Cumberland Street, with its central tower rising above the southern Harbour Bridge approach, has drawn strong public criticism. The National Trust has called it ‘the lump on The Rocks.’ The former Minister for Planning and Environment, Mr Landa has described it as ‘damned awful’. Some architects have criticized the design, motorists have complained that it cuts off Harbour views and some members of the public have suggested that the central tower be demolished (Glascott 1980: 3).

Brutalist architecture is often characterised by its disregard for its context. Architectural historian Reyner Banham, the key chronicler of the Brutalist movement, referred to this as a form of urban ‘bloody-mindedness’ (Banham 2011: 23). Designed with an emphasis on rigorous planning, context was generally a secondary concern in Brutalist projects. Negative public reaction is often related to the way in which Brutalist works imposed themselves on the environment. In the case of the Sirius apartments, the setting is as dramatic as the formal aesthetics of the building. Sirius is located on a prominent site and rises dramatically from the low scale cottages, warehouse and bond stores of The Rocks with extensive views of the Harbour, the City and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Sited on Cumberland Street, the complex is located with its eastern façade facing the southern approaches of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and its western façade facing Circular Quay and the Sydney Opera House. Negative criticism of Sirius, like much brutalist architecture of the time was also often motivated by a sense of outrage at what these buildings had replaced. In the case of the Sirius apartments this involved the demolition of an early nineteenth century 5-storey bond store.

Sirius was the first structure to be constructed above the Sydney Harbour Bridge approaches other than the 61 metre high chimney of the Mining Museum (1902-1909) located between George Street and Hickson Road. Tao Gofers however argued at the time of its completion that the development was in harmony with its context:

The building, of reinforced concrete with precast window panels, is finished in a sandstock brick colour to reflect the historic origins and materials of the area. The project is of variable height and reflects the irregular roof shapes of the buildings and the resultant sculptural quality is in harmony with the dominant forms of the Bridge and the Opera House (Gofers 1979: 6).

While Gofers argues that the massing of the Sirius apartments was in keeping with its context, criticism at the time however, saw this as a key failure of the project. Melbourne-based architect and Sydney Morning Herald architectural critic Norman Day addresses this in a strongly worded critique published shortly after its opening, commenting that it appeared ‘...as if designed by a group of droogs from Clockwork Orange...’(Day 1979: 7). What is significant in this commentary is the association of the project with the urban imagery of Stanley Kubrick’s film “A Clockwork Orange”. The predominant use of precast concrete technologies and modular construction processes and their uncompromising, stark architectural expression in the Sirius apartments, it could be argued, is a key reason for the negative commentary of the project at the time of its completion. The repetitive
housing modules are confronting in their sameness and suggest a dehumanizing of its occupants. Kubrick’s 1971 film presents a dystopian vision of the future employing the Brutalist architecture of London’s Thamesmead housing development to convey a powerful sense of urban decay and disenfranchisement. As architectural critic Shene Neufeld has noted, the association of Brutalism with societal violence and oppression has persisted in the social imaginary, partly as a result of the legacy of Kubrick’s compelling visual expression (Neufeld 2013: 115).

Not all commentary at the time of its opening however was critical, particularly when the focus was not on its visual appearance but on its spatial planning and interior finishes. The Sirius apartments were truly egalitarian, built on prime real estate and providing spectacular views of the city to those who could never afford such amenity. The Sydney Morning Herald’s society columnist Leslie Walford for example, praised the amenity of the building while deftly avoiding criticism of its external appearance:

Sirius is a building to admire, sturdy outside, unusual even, but inside it is positively luxurious, spacious, well planned, with excellent safety devices such as emergency call buttons for the aged tenants.....I was really astonished at the thoughtful planning and quality of this large building, with its public areas, gardens, little private courtyards and a garage per unit (Walford 1980: 130).

Sirius can be understood is a legacy of a moment when governments believed that all citizens were deserving of quality urban housing. The design of the Sirius apartments represents a proposition for an urban habitat, an interest in urban living. Some of the critical reaction to the project, can be traced to the fact that its prestigious location with extensive city views were provided to low income residents:

Perhaps there is some merit in his criticism that the block spoils the line of the Sydney Harbour Bridge but, I cannot help detecting hints of a more general resentment which is perhaps leveled at those people who might win a place in this unique setting – people who ordinarily would never be able to afford harbourside accommodation....At The Rocks the Housing Commission has endeavoured to harmonise the 'stepped' building with the environment and bring back people to the city already vandalized by massive office developments (Christie 1979: 6).

Since its completion in 1980, the Sirius apartments have been perennially nominated as one of Sydney’s great architectural eyesores (Purcell 1986: 27). In recent years, however, an undercurrent of respect for the project has emerged, heightened by the potential demolition of the project as a result of the NSW government’s decision to sell off the Sirius apartments as well as 214 other government owned properties in Millers Point (Hasham 2014). Adding to this new critical appreciation, in 2015, reflecting a growing re-evaluation and appreciation of Brutalist architecture internationally, the NSW Heritage Office proposed that the Sirius apartments be recognized for its architectural and social significance and listed on the State’s heritage register. The draft listing proposes that the building is ‘a rare, representative and fine example of the Brutalist architectural style’ (NSW Department of Environment and Heritage 2015) and of state significance in terms of its aesthetic, historical and social values.
Conclusion

The Sirius apartments were conceived towards the end of a period when the Brutalist idiom dominated architectural thinking and practice internationally. In his 1966 retrospective account of the Brutalist movement in “The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic”, Banham concedes that the meaning of the term had devolved from the Smithson’s aspirations for an architecture based on a socially progressive ideology to an descriptor of an aesthetic approach marked by monumentality, bold geometric forms and the dominant use of concrete. Brutalism satisfied a need for monumental architecture, to be seen to reflect the democratic attributes of a civil society. The aesthetics of Brutalism were informed by its political motivations and aspirations of a postwar utopia based on a progressive social ideology and a commitment to social outcomes. Despite the intention to foreground ethics over aesthetics, a distinct aesthetic emerged from the Brutalist movement marked by a focus on the tectonic essence and material presence of architecture.

Brutalism was an uncompromising architectural aesthetic that continues to polarise the public, raising recurring questions in terms of historic preservation. In this context, the growing international rehabilitation of Brutalism has seen a number of significant exhibitions and scholarly work aimed at reassessing its value and significance. In 2012 the World Monuments Fund listed British Brutalism on its threatened architecture list with a number of significant buildings put forward as worthy exemplars (World Monuments Fund 2012). More recently, the British Pavilion at the 2014 Venice Biennale of Architecture, presented the large scale urban renewal projects of the 1950-70s as the maturing of British Modernism, reflecting an ambitious social, architectural and political agenda that has been unrivalled since (British Council 2014).

This re-evaluation of Brutalist architecture highlights how critical interpretation in architecture is a function of the passing of both time and fashion. As a much maligned architectural style, Brutalism has been seen as an unfashionable historical anachronism, a wilful architecture associated with urban and social decay. Debates over the aesthetic merits of Brutalist architecture are problematic because often current attitudes to brutalist buildings often echo the widespread criticism these buildings received when first constructed. By the time of its conception in 1975, Brutalism had already reached its peak in terms of global architectural practice. At its worst, Brutalist architecture had by this time become simply gestural, dominated by a focus on monumentality and heroic form making. At its best however, the emphasis on the truthful expression of structure and materials and its memorability as an ideological image, is reflective of Brutalism’s original ethical ambitions.

Architectural critics Michael Kubo et al argue that, given the contingencies associated with the term Brutalism, its architecture may better conceptualized as ‘heroic’, ‘...a cultural project meant to reveal the messy realities of its time and forge a new honesty about architecture’s role within the broader social and urban transformations of the post-war area.’ (Kubo, Grimley & Pasnik 201: 167). In this context Sirius reflects heroic ambitions, both socially and architecturally.

The Sirius apartments can be understood as a legacy of a moment when governments believed that all citizens were deserving of quality urban housing. Through its direct and honest aesthetics, Sirius presents a powerful civic image that communicates the potential role played by the built environment in the lives of a society’s inhabitants, a powerful image of an egalitarian ideal expressed in architecture.
References


Minutes of the Meeting of the Height of Buildings Advisory Committee, 4 August 1977, 2.


