

**The Brutalist Cookbook**

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**Abstract:** *The Brutalist Cookbook* explores radical architectural form in landscape.

Landscape architecture often positions itself at the intersection of ecology, design, and urbanism, yet its disciplinary potency is diluted by a persistent vagueness—both in scope and in form. While it aspires to address urgent issues like climate resilience and social equity, it often lacks the formal rigor and aesthetic ambition that would give it cultural traction. The field’s retreat from composition and spatial articulation in favor of systems-thinking has led to projects that are technically sound but visually and experientially underwhelming. In seeking legitimacy through science and sustainability, landscape architecture has too often abandoned its design imagination—its capacity to propose compelling, provocative forms that reshape how we relate to land, space, and one another.

Brutalism by contrast, embraces a raw, uncompromising aesthetic rooted in the expression of structure and material. It rejects ornament in favor of the intricacy of the structural detail and bold, often monolithic forms. It values a material and tectonic honesty resulting in an architecture that feels visceral, sculptural, and often confrontational. Its aesthetic impact lies not in delicacy or decoration, but in the drama of scale, repetition, and exposed materiality. Brutalism challenges conventional ideas of beauty, favoring intensity over charm, and integrity over polish.

Therefore, if the Modern movement considered architecture as an object, with landscape as an accessory, the Supermodern movement focused on architecture as a field effectively co-opting landscape logics. Landscape Urbanism reversed the relationship—positioning landscape as the primary organizational system for architecture, then this research proposes a body of work that will demonstrate the simultaneity of architecture and landscape architecture. Organized into a series of design vignettes, it envisions the two disciplines not as separate, but concurrent - where their tectonic results operate simultaneously on a conceptual, experiential, and temporal level —toward a more integrated and imaginative spatial future.

**Keywords:** landscape, architecture, brutalism, form, hybrid

**1 Introduction: The Search for Form in Landscape Architecture**

Throughout much of the twentieth century, landscape architecture experienced what many have described as a disciplinary crisis—a prolonged struggle to define its intellectual autonomy and aesthetic purpose within the expanding domains of architecture, ecology, and urbanism. As industrial modernity reshaped cities and environments, the discipline was caught between technical service and artistic ambition. Too often, landscape was reduced to horticulture, maintenance, or environmental mediation, its capacity for conceptual or formal expression overshadowed by the stronger authorship claimed by architecture and planning (Waldheim 2006). The question at the heart of this crisis was not merely what landscape does—its ecological or infrastructural functions—but what landscape means and how it can signify through form. How might ground, terrain, and material assume the same expressive agency that structure and enclosure grant to architecture? This question framed a century-long search for a design language that could articulate landscape as a medium of spatial and cultural production rather than passive ground (Corner 1999).

Part of this disciplinary crisis stemmed from the profession’s uneasy positioning between architecture and gardening—two neighboring yet hierarchically distinct traditions. Since the nineteenth century, landscape architects had sought to distinguish themselves from the decorative and horticultural practices of garden design by aligning more closely with architecture’s formal and theoretical rigor. This alignment brought both opportunity and constraint. On one hand, it provided a language of geometry, construction, and tectonic authorship through which landscape could be treated as a designed artifact rather than a pastoral scene. On the other, it risked subordinating landscape’s unique material and temporal sensibilities to the fixity and compositional dominance of architecture. The pursuit of legitimacy through architectural alignment thus mirrored a deeper anxiety within the field: whether landscape architecture could assert its own formal intelligence without reverting to the ornamental or merely ecological.

This intellectual reorientation was accompanied by a broader disciplinary reflection on identity. Landscape architecture sought alignment with architecture not in order to be absorbed by it, but to assert that both shared a concern for form, order, and spatial structure—concerns long neglected when landscape was confined to the

decorative or the ecological. Rather than tending gardens or remediating environments, designers began to imagine landscapes that constructed space, choreographed experience, and communicated meaning through their material and formal organization. Today, the question of whether the scope of landscape can become spatial enough to encroach into architecture—to operate with the same conceptual and tectonic ambition—remains key.

## 2 Postwar Landscape Formalism

The emergence of Postwar Landscape Formalism marked a decisive turn in reclaiming landscape's expressive and cultural agency. Situated between the modernist pursuit of spatial order and the ecological consciousness of the late twentieth century, these projects constructed meaning through form, material, and bodily experience rather than through pictorial or naturalistic effects. Designers such as Lawrence Halprin, M. Paul Friedberg, and Martha Schwartz treated landscape as an active medium of composition—an architecture of the ground—where topography, circulation, and structure choreographed social interaction and sensory experience. Their work fused modernist abstraction with tectonic realism, translating architectural logics of construction and sequence into the language of terrain (Corner 1999; Meyer 1997).

Halprin's *Freeway Park* (Seattle, 1976) exemplified this shift. Its concrete terraces, cascades, and platforms transformed infrastructural void into civic terrain, merging urban hydrology and human movement within a single formal system. Similarly, Friedberg's *Peavey Plaza* (Minneapolis, 1975) used grade changes, stepped terraces, and reflective pools to generate a spatial choreography of gathering and repose. Concrete was not merely material but medium—an instrument of formal and social structure. These works rejected naturalism in favor of constructed experience, asserting that landscape could operate with the same spatial and conceptual rigor as architecture (Treib 2011; Meyer 1997).

Where modernists like Garrett Eckbo, Dan Kiley, and James Rose sought compositional clarity and geometric order, postwar formalists embraced ambiguity, tactility, and contradiction. Their landscapes were civic and sculptural—spaces where mass, surface, and texture expressed both monumentality and flux. Cast concrete, weathered steel, and rough stone articulated terrain as both form and event, engaging the public realm as a site of encounter rather than representation. In this sense, Postwar Landscape Formalism was not a retreat from modernism but an expansion of its possibilities: an exploration of how the ground itself could signify through its material and spatial construction (Eckbo 1950; Rose 1938; Kiley and Amidon 1999).

These sensibilities resonated with parallel developments in postwar art and architecture, from Brutalism's material honesty to land art's embrace of entropy and process. Like Robert Smithson's earthworks or Paul Rudolph's massive geometries, landscape architects reinterpreted industrial debris—concrete, rust, soil—as agents of renewal and meaning (Smithson 1968; Banham 1966). Their work proposed a synthesis between form and process, artifice and ecology, producing a new landscape language that was at once raw, monumental, and deeply human in its experiential intent (Corner 1999; Meyer 2008).

## 3 New Topographics and the Wasteland Aesthetic

Following the mid-century search for formal authorship, the 1970s *New Topographics* movement—epitomized by the exhibition *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (1975), curated by William Jenkins at the George Eastman House—offered a stark counterpoint to the expressive ambitions of postwar designers. Through its detached, documentary lens, the movement reframed the landscape as a byproduct of human systems rather than a site of cultural or aesthetic intention. Photographers such as Robert Adams, Lewis Baltz, and Stephen Shore depicted the suburban periphery, parking lots, and infrastructural edges with clinical precision. Their “anti-picturesque” compositions rendered the landscape as flat, repetitive, and entropic—a field of residues produced by economic and infrastructural processes rather than by design (Jenkins 1975; Galassi 1981).

This redefinition of the landscape's visual field echoed a longer history of the “wasteland” as an aesthetic and moral category. As Vittoria Di Palma (2014) argues, the modern wasteland evolved from Enlightenment anxieties about wilderness and desolation into a complex cultural trope: a site where beauty and repulsion coexist, and where the absence of order becomes a subject of fascination. The *New Topographics* photographers inherited this lineage, translating the moral desolation of the picturesque ruin into the infrastructural emptiness of late capitalism. Their images revealed a new kind of sublime—one rooted not in nature's vastness, but in the mute expanses of industrial debris and suburban repetition.

Within this framework, the landscape architect's role appeared uncertain. The *New Topographics* ethos seemed to confirm that formal authorship was no longer possible: that design had been superseded by systems—ecological, economic, logistical—operating at a scale beyond human composition. As Anne Whiston Spirn (1998) observes, the city's peripheries became “operational landscapes” rather than aesthetic ones, territories governed by flows of material and energy rather than by intentional form. The field risked marginalization, reduced to either maintenance or mitigation.

Yet this same condition provoked a reassertion of formal agency. Postwar Landscape Formalism can be understood, in part, as a critical response to *New Topographics'* visual nihilism. By engaging directly with infrastructural ground, designers such as Lawrence Halprin and M. Paul Friedberg reintroduced composition, tectonic structure, and spatial narrative into the very terrains that the photographers had rendered formless. Where the photographic gaze revealed entropy, the formalist landscape sought to organize it—to construct meaning from the infrastructural debris of the modern city.

In this sense, the wasteland became both the problem and the project of late twentieth-century landscape design. The ethical and aesthetic ambivalence that Di Palma identifies—the tension between ruin and renewal—was not merely represented but reworked through material intervention. Concrete terraces, retaining walls, and sculpted topographies gave civic and experiential structure to spaces otherwise left residual or abandoned. Through such acts of reordering, the wasteland aesthetic was transformed from an image of decay into a site of cultural production—a terrain where the formal and the formless, the monumental and the mundane, could coexist within a single spatial field (Meyer 1997; Waldheim 2006).

#### 4 Radical Formalism and the Contemporary Turn: Clément versus Tschumi

By the 1980s, the intellectual climate of landscape architecture had fractured into two distinct trajectories. One lineage, represented by Gilles Clément, pursued an ecological and process-based understanding of landscape, emphasizing spontaneity, growth, and the agency of living systems. The other, epitomized by Bernard Tschumi, reasserted the autonomy of form through abstraction, repetition, and spatial syntax. This divergence marked a critical turning point in the disciplinary dialogue between ecology and composition—between landscape as a self-organizing field and landscape as an authored, constructed form.

Gilles Clément's *Jardin en mouvement* (1991) and *Manifeste du Tiers Paysage* (2004) reframed design as an act of negotiation rather than imposition. Rejecting the rigid geometries of modernism, Clément proposed the garden as a dynamic, evolving ecosystem where the designer's role was to curate rather than control. His landscapes—such as the Parc André Citroën (Paris, 1986–1992, with Patrick Berger and Jean-Paul Viguier)—introduced a language of ecological contingency: meadows, ruderal vegetation, and spontaneous growth were not signs of neglect but manifestations of vitality. The *Third Landscape* became a political and aesthetic proposition, identifying residual or abandoned lands as sites of biodiversity and cultural significance (Clément, 2004). Through this lens, the wasteland was revalued—not as a failure of design, but as a space of ecological potential.

In contrast, Bernard Tschumi's *Parc de la Villette* (Paris, 1983–1998) reasserted the agency of form at an urban scale. His red follies, organized through a Cartesian grid, functioned as both architectural objects and spatial markers—a system of points through which movement, event, and program could unfold. Rather than dissolve into ecological indeterminacy, Tschumi's landscape celebrated contradiction and multiplicity: a space where architecture, landscape, and infrastructure coexist without synthesis. His design was not a pastoral retreat but an “urban park for the twenty-first century,” one that replaced nature's organic order with an abstract syntax of repetition, frame, and superposition (Tschumi, 1994).

The tension between Clément and Tschumi thus exemplifies the broader dialectic of the late twentieth century: the negotiation between formal authorship and ecological autonomy. While Clément's approach aligned with emergent theories of self-organization and landscape ecology, Tschumi's project drew from deconstructivism and linguistic theory, foregrounding the operations of form and event. Both sought to redefine the landscape's cultural role after modernism, but through opposite means—one by relinquishing control, the other by intensifying it.

This duality reflected evolving notions of authorship in landscape and architecture. In some approaches, the designer acts as a facilitator of ecological processes that exceed human intention, while in others, the architect

constructs systems designed to accommodate unpredictable occupation. Both strategies rejected the static, pictorial paradigms of earlier eras, instead prioritising frameworks that engage time, movement, and contingency. The tension between ecological facilitation and formal composition laid the conceptual groundwork for hybrid practices in the 1990s and 2000s, in which designers sought to reconcile compositional rigor with the dynamism of ecological and perceptual processes, anticipating landscapes that are simultaneously structured, adaptive, and experientially rich (Waldheim, 2006; Czerniak & Hargreaves, 2007).

### 5 Negotiating Scale, Process, and Perception in Contemporary Landscape

The Leça Swimming Pools (Siza, 1961–1966) exemplify an approach in which architecture mediates landscape through experience rather than imposing formal composition. Álvaro Siza orchestrates topography, materiality, and movement to create a sequence of encounters—descending terraces, shifting edges, and the interplay of water and rock—where perception becomes the central medium of design (Balters, 2011). Landscape functions as a framework for inhabitation, temporality, and sensory engagement.

At an urban-landscape scale, projects such as Madrid Río Park and the MFO Park in Zürich extend this logic into infrastructural landscapes. Similarly, Field Operations' entry at Downsview Park foregrounds ecology and succession, treating the site as a field of processes—remediation, colonisation, and growth—rather than a fixed visual composition (GSD lecture, 2011). These landscapes operate as dynamic systems, integrating ecological processes, circulation, and social programs while anticipating temporal change and emergent use patterns (Waldheim, 2006; Stesney, 2018). Large-scale interventions thus emphasise process, contingency, and multi-functionality, structuring human activity and ecological succession simultaneously.

Junya Ishigami's *How Small? How Big? / Growing Architecture* addresses similar concerns at an intimate scale, investigating how architecture mediates perception, scale, and environmental context (Ishigami, 2010). His work emphasises contingency, material sensitivity, and the interplay of interior and exterior, reflecting a deep awareness of the preciousness of nature. Delicate, temporally responsive interventions frame natural elements as integral, experiential parts of architecture, highlighting ecological fragility and value. By privileging the perceptual and experiential dimensions of space, Ishigami establishes a framework in which architecture and landscape function as inhabitable, dynamic systems responsive to both human and ecological presence.

Ishigami's focus on perception, contingency, and ecological integration forms a conceptual bridge to the hybrid landscapes of Miralles & Pinós. Their work translates these intimate, process-oriented strategies to larger scales, combining attentiveness to temporality and perception with formal frameworks capable of accommodating complex programs, topography, and social interaction. In doing so, Miralles & Pinós operationalize the sensitivities of small-scale, experiential design within expansive, infrastructural landscapes, demonstrating a continuous dialogue between scale, process, and perception.

Miralles & Pinós synthesise large-scale organisational frameworks with nuanced, perceptual strategies. Projects such as the Igualada Cemetery and the Igualada Archery Range choreograph circulation, frame views, and orchestrate social encounter while responding to topography, ecology, and material memory (Czerniak & Hargreaves, 2007). They extend ecological facilitation and event-oriented design into a hybrid methodology, showing that landscapes can be simultaneously narrative, infrastructural, and ecological. Their work demonstrates how scale, process, and perception are interdependent, enabling landscapes to be monumental without sacrificing intimacy or experimental without losing compositional rigour.

This trajectory—from experiential mediation of topography, through landscapes structured around ecological processes and succession, to perceptually and ecologically attentive interventions at an intimate scale—establishes a theoretical framework for understanding hybrid approaches in contemporary landscape design. It foregrounds the interplay of scale, perception, and ecological responsiveness, showing how landscapes can be simultaneously structured, adaptive, and experientially rich. Building on these principles, *The Brutalist Cookbook* operationalizes this dialogue between form, process, and materiality, proposing a research framework in which architecture and landscape co-constitute spatial experience through formal intensity, tectonics, and performative experimentation.

## 6 *The Brutalist Cookbook: A Design Research Proposition*

*The Brutalist Cookbook* emerges as a speculative design–research framework that translates the compositional and tectonic legacies of Postwar Landscape Formalism and Radical Formalism into a contemporary methodology. It aims to demonstrate the simultaneity of architecture and landscape architecture—how both can operate as interdependent, co-constitutive disciplines—where form, structure, and material expression generate spatial experiences that are experiential, ecological, and performative. Rather than treating historical precedents as static references or stylistic templates, the project reimagines them as operational systems, capable of generating new configurations of terrain, program, and matter. In doing so, it reclaims formal authorship as an ecological and cultural act: landscape form is not a passive backdrop to environmental process but an active generator of spatial and social meaning.

At its conceptual core, the Cookbook proposes a method of inquiry that fuses analytical rigor with formal invention. It proceeds through two complementary components—the Morphological Catalogue and the Experimental Recipes—which together enact a cyclical process of analysis and synthesis. The first deconstructs architectural and landscape precedents into their operative geometries and tectonic logics; the second recombines them to speculate on new hybrid configurations. This process transforms analytical drawing into a projective instrument, bridging historical precedent and speculative design, theory and praxis.

### 6.1 Morphological Catalogue

The Morphological Catalogue forms the empirical and conceptual foundation of the Cookbook. Each Brutalist or formalist precedent is treated as a formal “ingredient,” diagrammed through serial analytical drawings that codify its geometry, scale, material logic, and spatial organization. These diagrams extract the latent “operational grammar” of each project—the set of tectonic and spatial relationships that generate its expressive potency (Treib 2011). Typical morphologies—star, circle, box, disc, sac, mushroom—are not catalogued as static shapes but as performative systems: geometries that mediate between ground, gravity, and human occupation.

For instance, Moshe Safdie’s Habitat 67 (Montreal Expo, 1967) deploys modular concrete units as a living infrastructure that merges architecture and landscape. Each prefabricated volume operates simultaneously as dwelling, terrace, and garden. When diagrammed through the Cookbook’s morphological lens, Habitat 67 reads as a stacked terrain: a topographic system where structural repetition produces variation in light, view, and occupation. Its modular grammar transforms the act of aggregation into a spatial ecology—an early example of how tectonic order can become environmental infrastructure.

In contrast, Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos’ Casar de Cáceres Bus Station (Extremadura, Spain, 2003) demonstrates how Brutalist material honesty and landscape integration can converge within a contemporary formal idiom. The structure—part building, part terrain—folds concrete surfaces into a continuous topography that blurs distinctions between wall, roof, and ground. Its faceted concrete envelope, perforated with light wells, evokes both geological formation and infrastructural artifact. When analyzed diagrammatically, the station reveals a morphology of incision and folding: the ground itself becomes the generator of structure. This gesture exemplifies the Cookbook’s central ambition—to reconceive tectonics as landscape, and landscape as tectonic form.

Through such analyses, the Morphological Catalogue transforms architectural precedent into a generative instrument. Echoing Stan Allen’s (1999) notion of field conditions, it privileges systems of relation over compositional hierarchy. Yet, unlike Allen’s primarily infrastructural readings, the Cookbook reasserts the expressive and material dimension of form. The catalogue’s diagrams function not only as analytical tools but as recipes-in-waiting: visual grammars that anticipate recombination, mutation, and experimentation.

### 6.2 Experimental Recipes

The Experimental Recipes constitute the speculative core of the Cookbook. Here, the morphological ingredients are recombined to generate new landscapes and hybrid architectures that operate across ecological, social, and aesthetic registers. Each “recipe” begins with a performative provocation—questions such as: How can a bench filter water? Can a wall emit light? Can a mountain be geometrically dazzling while sustaining vegetation? These prompts transform the act of design into an open-ended experiment, where tectonic and ecological thinking interweave.

Each recipe is structured along three intersecting axes:

**Ingredient Morphology** – the geometric archetype (star, circle, box, disc, etc.);

**Typological Role** – the functional or infrastructural role (wall, bench, planter, channel, enclosure);

**Technique** – the operative process of transformation (laminating, puncturing, aerating), analogous to culinary processes such as marinating or emulsifying.

Through iterative recombination, the Cookbook reactivates the tectonic vocabulary of Brutalism—once associated with permanence and monumentality—as a flexible system of environmental invention. A “laminated box” might serve as a terraced filtration device; a “punctured disc” could form a canopy that modulates water, light, and temperature. The recipes are both speculative and operational, merging aesthetic formalism with performative intent.

In this way, the Cookbook reframes the “brutal” not as an aesthetic of mass or heaviness, but as a methodology of intensification: an engagement with the raw capacities of matter—its texture, porosity, and plasticity—as instruments for ecological and spatial transformation. Concrete, steel, and earth are treated not as inert materials but as agents within a system of formal and environmental relationships.

### 6.3 Operational Form and Design Theory

*The Brutalist Cookbook* synthesizes two critical frameworks within contemporary design theory: Stan Allen’s field conditions and Kulper’s operative formalism (Allen 1999; Kulper 2008). Together, these allow form to be understood as both analytical and generative—as an operative field rather than a static composition. While Allen emphasized relational logics in urban and infrastructural design, Kulper expanded drawing into a performative tool of thinking and making. The Cookbook integrates these approaches, using diagrammatic analysis as a design engine that connects historical morphology with speculative invention.

This theoretical synthesis also challenges the disciplinary divide between architecture and landscape architecture. Traditionally, architecture has been defined by enclosure and tectonic expression, while landscape privileges process, continuity, and ecological transformation. The Cookbook collapses this binary, asserting a hybrid practice where both disciplines operate through shared formal and material logics. Each recipe is thus both architectural and landscape in nature—simultaneously constructed and grown, composed and evolving.

The project also resonates with phenomenological theories of material experience, notably Pallasmaa’s argument that architecture’s sensory and tactile dimensions are inseparable from its meaning (Pallasmaa 2005). By emphasizing material expressivity and embodied perception, the Cookbook reasserts the human experience of form within an age dominated by parametric and data-driven design. Against the dematerialized tendencies of digital culture, it proposes a return to the haptic, to a sensibility where weight, texture, and atmosphere become generators of form.

### 6.4 Toward a Radical Hybrid Practice

Aligning with a broader resurgence of Radical Formalism, *The Brutalist Cookbook* provides a renewed interest in the generative capacities of form as both critical and ecological apparatus. Like the work of Miralles and Pinós, which choreographs movement and terrain into layered tectonic systems, or Claude Cormier’s chromatic landscapes that fuse ornament and ecology, the Cookbook posits that formal invention remains essential to spatial and environmental meaning.

In this hybrid practice, composition is not an aesthetic indulgence but an ecological strategy: the articulation of relationships among matter, process, and perception. The Cookbook therefore functions simultaneously as manifesto and manual. It proposes a mode of design that is procedural and open-ended—an evolving system of operations in which architecture and landscape, material and ecology, converge.

Through its analytical and speculative framework, *The Brutalist Cookbook* extends the discourse of Postwar Landscape Formalism into the present. It demonstrates how the compositional and tectonic intelligence of Brutalist architecture can be reimaged as a medium for ecological adaptation and experiential depth. Brutalism,

in this sense, is not a historical style but a method: an ethos of clarity, directness, and engagement with the material and spatial realities of the world.

## 7 Conclusion

*The Brutalist Cookbook* concludes as both a design-research methodology and a disciplinary provocation. By operationalizing the formal, tectonic, and material intelligence of mid- and late-twentieth-century architecture and landscape, it repositions *form* as an active mediator between ecological process and spatial experience. Rather than viewing Brutalism as a historical artifact of postwar modernity, the *Cookbook* reframes it as a *living system*—an ethos of construction and transformation through which landscape and architecture may again converge.

In this sense, the project advances an expanded field of landscape architectural practice, one grounded not in stylistic revival but in operational reconfiguration. The morphological catalogue and experimental recipes together constitute a methodological loop—moving from observation to translation, from analysis to synthesis—where precedent becomes generative rather than prescriptive. This reanimation of Brutalist form produces a language of surfaces, folds, and masses that mediate between the human body, the ground, and the infrastructural scale of the city.

More broadly, *The Brutalist Cookbook* argues that the future of spatial design depends on reconciling two forces long held in tension: the formal and the ecological. By uniting the compositional rigor of postwar formalisms with the performative sensibility of contemporary landscape practice, it proposes a model of design that is at once precise and adaptive, structured yet porous. The “brutal” becomes not an aesthetic of aggression, but a mode of honesty—an engagement with the world’s material and environmental realities through direct, expressive, and often raw means.

Ultimately, the *Cookbook* calls for a reassertion of *authorship* within a landscape discourse too often defined by reaction and remediation. Authorship here is not singular or heroic but *procedural*: a choreography of operations, materials, and ecologies that produce form as a collective and temporal event. Through this lens, landscape and architecture are no longer parallel or competing disciplines but mutual instruments of thought and construction—each capable of amplifying the other’s capacity for cultural and environmental expression.

By drawing together the legacies of Postwar Landscape Formalism, Radical Formalism, and the contemporary search for hybrid spatial practices, *The Brutalist Cookbook* demonstrates that the generative power of design lies not in its separation from process, but in its orchestration. It offers a manifesto for future spatial invention: one that sees in the heavy, the rough, and the unfinished not an end, but a beginning—a raw foundation from which new terrains of form, ecology, and imagination may emerge.



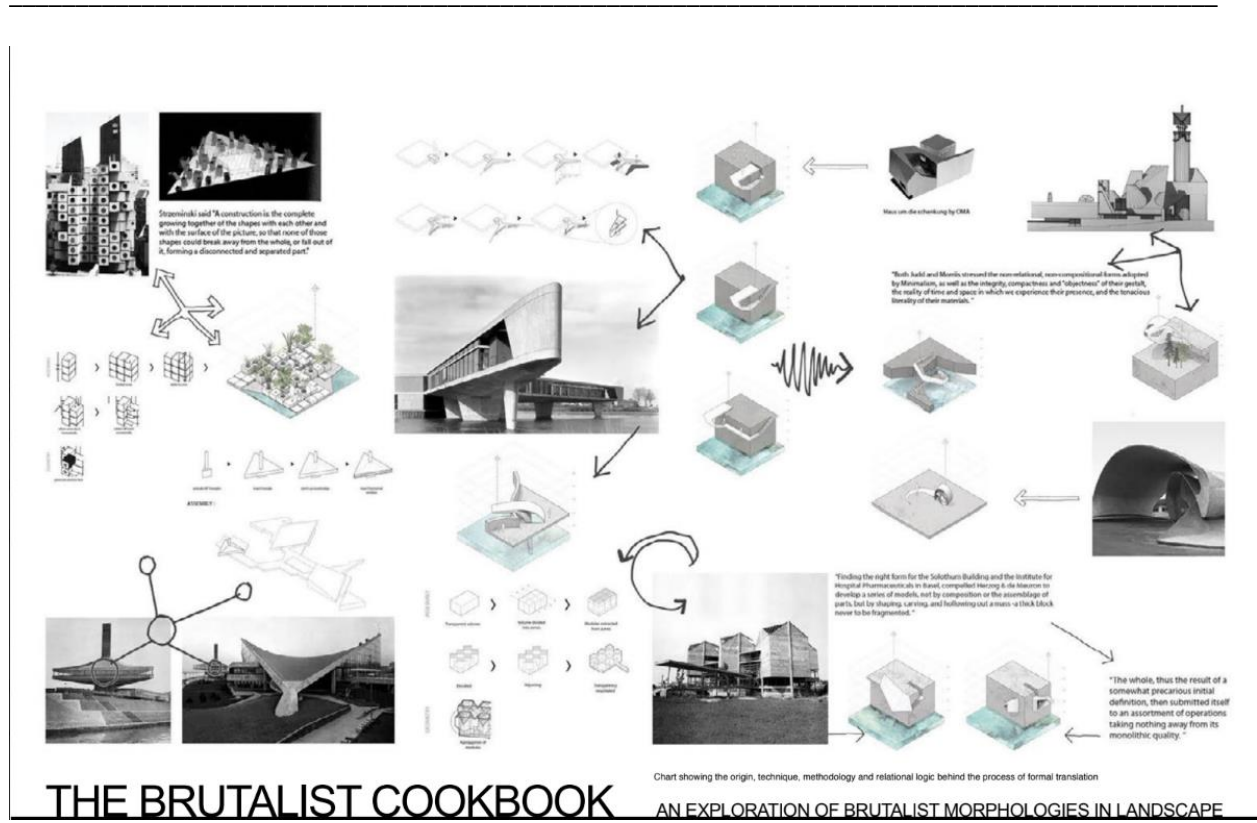


Figure 3 The Brutalist Cookbook (Zorić 2025)

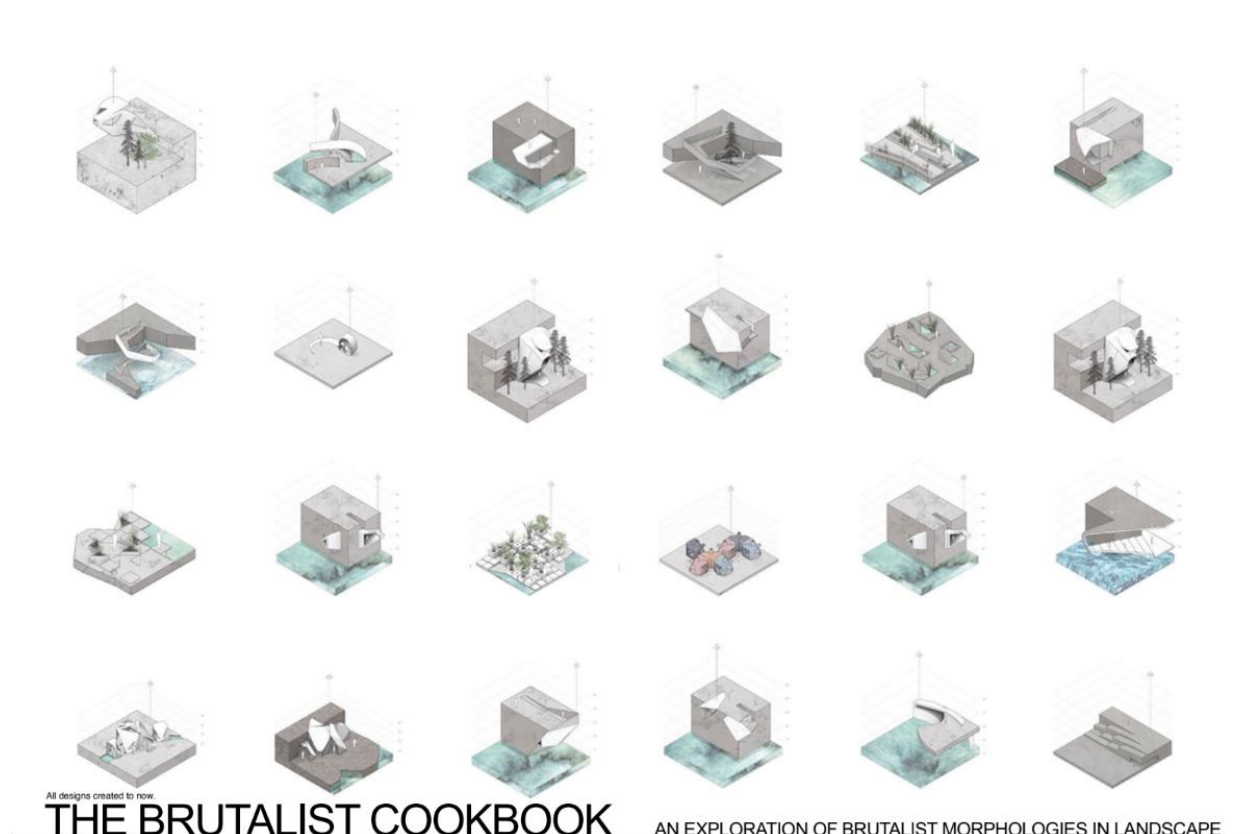


Figure 4 The Brutalist Cookbook (Zorić 2025)

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