

# READING BRUTALISM AS ESTRANGING SPACE: A LEFEBVRIAN ANALYSIS OF HARI KUNZRU'S *RED PILL*

Rakshita <sup>1</sup> & Malik, Sonia <sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

The paper posits Hari Kunzru's *Red Pill* (2020) as a paradigm of brutalist narrative by mapping it through a Lefebvrian spatial lens as presented in his book *The Production of Space* (1991). *Red Pill* uses the raw logic of brutalist architecture – its cold minimalism, rigid form and vast scale – as a literary lens to explore how modern life contributes to alienation through surveillance and ideological control in the post-digital age. Set across two continents, Europe, mostly Germany, and America, *Red Pill*'s narrative has a myriad tipping points based in the contemporary socio-political and cultural context of the Western world. From traversing the literary romantic period of Germany, to revisiting the memories of the Nazi holocaust, to the upsurge of punk culture, then the stasis period, the subsequent refugee crisis in Germany, to the rise of the Alt-right during the US 2016, the narrative is clearly fragmented with a confusing timeline. All this is done amidst emotionally sterile settings, signifying the oppressive nature of the brutalist architecture. The text informs how brutalist structures, constructed according to modernist ideals, can tend to be alienating, both spatially and ideologically. The protagonist's immersion in extremism is ascribed to his psychological and physical entrapment in a cold and impersonal Berlin residency. The study, by bridging architectural and literary discourse on spatial influence, reimagines brutalism as a literary narrative mode, exploring elements like surveillance, control and alienation.

**KEYWORDS:** Brutalism; Hari Kunzru; Estrangement; Control; Surveillance

## INTRODUCTION

Hari Kunzru is a noted diasporic writer of Indian origin, whose corpus engages with perennial questions that trouble the human spirit, especially those related to selfhood, cultural negotiation, and the protean nature of identity in a world which is always in flux. Kunzru's personal background signifies the diasporic condition that he represents so realistically through his writing. Born into an Anglophone milieu in the United Kingdom, he came of age straddling two divergent yet intertwined cultures: that of his Kashmiri-Indian paternal inheritance and his British maternal lineage. This dual axis of belonging and estrangement underlies the thematic architecture of Kunzru's fiction. His narratives are replete with

characters trapped between worlds, struggling to define their identity amidst competing cultural imperatives.

Educated at the University of East Anglia, Kunzru embarked on a literary journey with a keen interest in charting the interior terrain of contemporary existence. Kunzru's literary oeuvre includes meditative essays and thoughtful articles that focus on some of the pressing issues of our time. His contributions have earned him wide critical acclaim. His debut novel, *The Impressionist* (2002), earned him the prestigious Whitbread Prize. The novel offers a deeply empathetic exploration of a young Indian's journey through shifting states of being. Kunzru depicts how individual identity is contingent upon complex

1 Rakshita, Research Scholar, Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana, India.

✉ 0009-0001-3641-442X ✉ rahlawat406@gmail.com

2 Malik, Sonia, Assistant Professor, Hindu College, Sonipat, Haryana, India. ✉ 0000-0003-3366-9563

✉ drsonia.hcsnp@gmail.com

socio-political realities. Another later work, *Transmission* (2004), examines the intersection of technology, anthropology, and global cultural exchange. The 2007 work, *Tower of the Hints*, interrogates the process of historical revolution vis-à-vis the perpetual quest for self-reinvention. His next work, *Gods Without Men* (2011), adopts a polyphonic narrative structure to weave together disparate storylines, where Kunzru illuminates the enduring conflict between good and evil viewed through the prism of modernity.

In *Red Pill* (2020), Kunzru dwells on the contested nature of reality in our current age, amidst surveillance and epistemic anxieties. Today, control no longer looks like force. It often feels quiet, ordinary, comfortable and difficult to discern. The novel exemplifies how power often manifests not as violence but in everyday spaces, technologies, and ideas that shape how we think and behave. The novel shows a shift from open repression to something subtler: systems that win our agreement without needing to raise a hand. These systems operate through architectural designs, media and mood. The narrative suggests how austere, monumental spaces, characterised by material honesty and transparency, function as catalysts to transform latent anxiety into full-blown estrangement.

The paper explores *Red Pill* as an example of what we could term “literary brutalism.” Brutalist buildings are those austere, concrete structures which are often seen as cold, imposing or oppressive and hence emotionally distant. This brutalism is conveyed not just through the style, but through the message. The story’s plain surface and fragmented structure reflect the cold logic of a world where ideology seeps in through culture and screens, not just chains and prisons.

## THE PLOT

Set in Germany and the USA, the narrative of *Red Pill* alludes to the socio-political milieu of Europe and the USA. From the depiction of literary romanticism in Germany, memories of Nazi holocaust, the upsurge of punk culture and the stasis period, the subsequent refugee crisis, to the rise of the Alt-right during the 2016 election in the USA, the narrative presents a fragmented timeline amidst emotionally cold settings to mirror the oppressive nature of the brutalist architecture.

The novel itself has received a rather mixed response. The Guardian describes the plot of *Red Pill* vividly as a “paratactical blizzard” owing to its fragmented and stormy structure (Docx 2020). Gorra (2020) expresses the frustration that can stem from grappling with its labyrinthine, multi-layered narrative and the persistent paranoia of an unreliable narrator, calling it “exasperating.” Likewise, Sasaki refers to the novel as “quirky” (2023) and points to its unconventional twists and unexpected storytelling choices. Schmitt (2023), on the other hand, reads *Red Pill* as a cultural artefact rich in the ways it mirrors and feeds pessimistic attitudes, indicating that contemporary culture is in decline and that existence itself lacks meaning.

The story opens with an unnamed writer from Brooklyn accepting a fellowship in early 2016, ostensibly at a glamorous creative centre on the outskirts of Berlin, Deuter Centre, where he intends to enjoy some solitude as he embarks on a research project on modern selfhood titled ‘the lyric I’. At the Centre, he is subjected to enforced transparency, group meals, and shared workspaces, all under the Panopticon gaze of the surveillance cameras. Outwardly, everything appears impeccably ordered and sterile, but the writer senses that internally his mind is in constant disarray, with his feeling of unease gradually spiralling down to the edge of a psychological breakdown. This stark contrast between external structure and inner chaos echoes the brutalist paradox, i.e., a façade of rigid control masking profound existential instability. What initially feels like a creative retreat for the anonymous writer quickly becomes a pressure cooker that amplifies his latent insecurities. Afflicted by insomnia, he drowns in loneliness, assailed by self-doubts as history begins to haunt him. The staff at the Deuter Centre adhere to a distinct dress code, marked by black trousers, heavy army boots and clothing emblazoned with metal band logos. The ensemble subtly reflects an ethos of controlled aggression and subcultural allegiance. The narrator walks past the grave of Heinrich von Kleist on the other side of the bay. The waiter at the Centre, a history enthusiast, points to the villa there and informs the narrator, ‘Where the final solution to the Jewish question was planned in 1942’ (Kunzru 26). The narrator says, “I was entering a period when

everything around me seemed to be encrusting in signs" (53).

The writer's mental state gradually begins to fracture. He becomes obsessed with a violent TV series called *Blue Lives*, created by Anton, a magnetic, nihilistic alt-right provocateur. After a chance encounter at a Berlin dinner, Anton begins colonising the narrator's mind, offering red-pill truths that start to dismantle liberal values he had once taken for granted. What began as reading slowly becomes indoctrination, a paranoia about refugees and political correctness, with media beginning to control his every thought.

Later in the novel, in a strange interlude titled *Zersetzung*, the narrator meets Monica, a house cleaner with a troubled past. Once a punk musician in East Germany, Monica was under the influence of the psychological tactics of Stasis. Her story of enforced betrayal and identity mirrors the narrator's own unravelling, drawing an eerie line from Cold War surveillance to modern digital paranoia. As the fellowship develops, the narrator's sense of self shifts irreversibly. Becoming consumed by Anton's ideology, he abandons his family. He refuses to leave Berlin, even when he is accused of wrong intentions, i.e., of trying to "get access" to a young refugee as he attempts to help her with a coat and some money (259). His identity slowly begins to unravel, as he begins to be haunted by thoughts that meaning itself has been algorithmically erased from the world. The novel ends with the narrator's return to Brooklyn, where he is taken care of by his wife. Mentally unmoored, his paranoia resurfaces with Trump's win in 2016. Thus, "...with the Proust-like setting and characters, the novel *Red Pill* lays bare surveillance culture, alt-right extremism, and the fragmentation of personal identity" (Malik 81).

## NARRATIVE ALIENATION AND ARCHITECTURAL BRUTALISM

Scholars have long been interested in the spatial politics of literature, from Foucault's concept of "heterotopias" to Fredric Jameson's analysis of the "postmodern spatial logic" of late capitalism. The aspect of 'architectural brutalism', once celebrated for its radical honesty and socialist promise, is now receiving renewed critical attention for its role in aestheticising control and emotional detachment (Banham 40).

In the context of *Red Pill*, though critics have noted how Kunzru engages with notions of power and control vis-à-vis themes of surveillance and digital disconnection, little has been written on the novel's architectural framing and its alignment with brutalist aesthetics. Brutalism, no doubt, has been explored in architectural history and political theory, but its adoption in literary texts suggesting affective and ideological control remains largely under-theorised. The paper addresses this critical gap by drawing from architectural and literary theory to develop a conceptual framework for analysing narrative brutalism. Kunzru deploys the visual grammar of brutalism to critique neoliberal rationality, where freedom is illusory and coercion always subtle. This intersection of alienating surveillance and brutalist aesthetics can be understood by applying the Lefebvrian concept of spatial triad in *Red Pill*.

Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1991) revises the traditional notion of space as an inert backdrop, arguing instead that space is actively produced, which in turn reproduces social relations, ideology, and power. Lefebvre elaborates a triad of spatial types: *conceived space*, signified by mental abstractions by architects, planners, and institutions; *perceived space* by material routines and embodied interactions; and *lived space* informed by symbolic and experiential dimensions. Lefebvre contends, "In their pre-eminence, buildings, the homogeneous matrix of capitalistic space, successfully combine the object of control by power with the object of commercial exchange. The building effects a brutal condensation of social relationships" (227).

Lefebvre's triadic concept of space applied to Hari Kunzru's *Red Pill* offers an insightful lens for interpreting the brutalist aesthetic in the novel. The paper will discuss how the setting of the novel in stark, monolithic architecture and rigid layouts reflects the *conceived space*. It embodies institutional logic and surveillance structures. These oppressive corridors and workspaces map onto Lefebvre's *perceived space*, which reveals how everyday movement is governed by architectural control. Finally, the narrator's internal experience, marked by paranoia, alienation, and loss of agency, comes to constitute a *lived space* where brutalist spatiality

becomes a metaphor for psychological entrapment. Thus, *Red Pill* stages a Lefebvrian drama: how the interplay of designed space, embodied practice, and subjective experience converges to critique modern spaces, both material and ideological, which ultimately control and dehumanise the individual.

Kunzru crafts the architectural setting of the Deuter Centre as a symbolic and psychological agent that reflects the narrator's steady mental deterioration. The centre becomes a concrete citadel enforcing order. Within its rigid walls, the unnamed narrator finds himself being constantly monitored. Even his productivity is being tracked to the point where cameras are seemingly in his bedroom. Thus, the private and institutional spaces merge. The so-called workstation "room was a glass box supported by a metal frame, an unornamented yet somehow fussy space . . ." (Kunzru 18). The narrator goes on:

Other 'workstations' were located nearby in positions where I'd be able to see their occupants' screens. My own screen would be visible to others, perhaps not close enough to read a piece of text, but certainly enough to judge whether it displayed a document or a video playing on a social media site. I would be visible from every angle. My body, my posture. . . The feeling of being watched induces an intolerable self-consciousness. (19)

In such a space, the protagonist's creative aspirations soon turn to anxiety. The text emphasises his growing uncertainty and confusion. The "Alienating Surveillance" (20) of transparent enclosures, coupled with the constant monitoring of his computer activity, turns his quiet writing retreat into a site of psychological exposure. This architectural stripping away of his privacy mirrors the principles of brutalism, a style known for laying bare its raw concrete, pipes, and support systems. Similar to how brutalism exposes the skeleton of a building, the protagonist feels that his internal anxieties and fragile sense of self are exposed and manipulated in the public sphere. The Deuter Centre thus becomes more than a backdrop. It actively participates in the narrator's unravelling, enacting a kind of spatial violence that reveals the novel's broader themes of control, surveillance, and ideological rigidity.

The Deuter Centre is no longer a personal space; it is a shared, highly opinionated one. It is the emblem of that fact that "systems, however metaphysical or abstract, are never innocent. They do the dirty work of knowledge, clearing the ground for action, for taking control" (78).

The narrator navigates cold corridors, sterile workstations, and cameras, actions which constitute his everyday perceived space. Here embodied movement under surveillance reflects bureaucratic domination. He draws on Sartre's ideas from *Being and Nothingness*, showing how being watched turns you into an object and the "other." He avoids using the workstation as much as he can, preferring to withdraw into his room where he streams *Blue Lives*. As he binges on its violent episodes, he becomes convinced that he is under surveillance. This belief takes a toll on his mental state. He says, "Not only was I being watched, but I was being gamified" (60). In this manner, *Red Pill* depicts how cold, rationalist environments tend to erase emotional resonance. These are not spaces of memory or comfort; they are spaces of monitoring and control.

Surveillance in the novel is ambient. The protagonist is monitored not by visible agents but through cultural norms and the omnipresence of the algorithmic media. It induces self-policing behaviour (Foucault 1977). Here, Byung-Chul Han's concept of "psychopolitics" is crucial. The concept suggests that the subject internalises control, believing in autonomy while conforming to invisible demands. Systems and structures use smart power that "works through pleasing and fulfilling. Instead of making people compliant, it seeks to make them dependent" (Han 14). In the case of the narrator too, despite his feeling of being surveyed, controlled and manipulated, he finds it hard to leave the centre as the centre provides him with amenities and luxuries he has become accustomed to, where his food, clothing, upkeep of the room and internet access are all taken care of. The narrator tells: "I always experience low-level panic when I am denied internet access, even if I have no immediate need for it" (87). In this way, the narrator's confinement seems a choice. He is the embodiment of a modern subject, where "Confession obtained by force has been replaced by voluntary disclosure. Smartphones have been substituted for torture

chambers . . . Big Brother now wear a friendly face” (Han 38-39).

Besides, the narrative structure of the novel compounds this sense of control by layering different temporalities. A nested narrative recounts Monica’s (a sweeper in the Deuter centre) childhood in East Berlin under secret police surveillance. It soon becomes evident that behind the austere panel buildings and sterile courtyards lies another older system of authoritarian control. These past structures now coexist with the city’s present sprawl, making Berlin feel like a palimpsest of ideologies. The narrator’s confusion is amplified by the bone-chilling weather, the bleak, colourless architecture, and the overly formal conversations outside the building. He learns that across the Deuter Centre lies “the grey villa next to the tall white building, the one half-hidden by trees, is the venue of the Wannsee Conference. . . . Where the final solution to the Jewish Question was planned in 1942” (Kunzru 26). This is an unmistakable reference to the Nazis’ decision to exterminate the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Installed with surveillance appurtenances, the facility demonstrates “how digital technologies shape the experience of urban space, producing an experience that is both local and global” (Anderson 18).

## ENGAGEMENT WITH HISTORICAL TRAUMA

*Red Pill* also engages with historical trauma through its spatial settings. The proximity of the Künstlerhaus to sites of Nazi terror, such as Wannsee and Sachsenhausen, creates a layered spatial palimpsest that ties present alienation to historical atrocities. Marianne Hirsch’s concept of post memory, i.e., the transmission of trauma to those who did not experience it first-hand, illuminates how these spaces haunt the protagonist. The architecture carries unresolved grief and ideological contamination. “Post memory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 103). Brutalism, in this context, becomes the aesthetic of repression. It conceals

trauma under concrete slabs and suppresses affect under visual uniformity. The narrator’s emotional detachment and paranoia are not only products of contemporary psychopolitics but also of a haunted European landscape whose histories remain unprocessed. In effect, *Red Pill* treats certain sections of the city as heterotopic zones where conflicting histories collide. Such a juxtaposition of spaces, contemporary and historical as well as public and private, highlights the novel’s theme that even familiar architecture can carry the legacy of coercion.

Besides, the narrator’s repeated walks along the lake past the grave of Heinrich von Kleist serve as more than meditative interludes. They constitute a symbolic counter-narrative to the rationalist, impersonal architecture of the Deuter Centre. Kleist’s grave, situated in a serene yet sombre landscape and associated with both romantic idealism and tragic self-destruction, introduces a gothic counterpoint to the brutalist villa, a juxtaposition that is central to the narrator’s evolving sense of dislocation. He narrates:

I set off the villa’s long driveway and out into the street, crunching along an icy path, iron gates and high fences, behind which I caught glimpses of imposing houses in various styles: a white modernist villa, a fantastical gothic castle, just as tasteless as it must have been when it was built, security cameras poked over hedges, watching me as I loitered. Many of these old family summer houses were now institutions (a security consultancy, a think tank) or belonged to diplomatic missions. (Kunzru 30)

This gravesite, replete with historical meaning, evokes mixed emotions in the narrator, of an unresolved past marked by philosophical torment and fatal rebellion. Each walk thus becomes a ritual of quiet confrontation with a cultural memory of existential despair, contrasting sharply with the oppressive spatial rationality of Deuter Centre with its cold, surveillance-driven ethos. As the narrator traverses this liminal terrain, between the memory-laden stillness of the lake and the stark modernist structure that houses his writer’s block, he becomes increasingly estranged from the self he thought he inhabited. The brutalist setting, with its hard geometries and institutional

transparency, appears to flatten affect and stifle inner life, while the gothic site of Kleist's grave resurrects emotional and philosophical depth, reintroducing mortality, irrationality, and the weight of historical violence into the narrative. Together, these two landscapes produce a complex affective field: one that reveals how modernist severity and historical trauma coalesce to estrange the subject not only from their environment but from their own mental coherence. In this interplay of spatial aesthetics, raw concrete versus poetic ruin, Kunzru stages a deeply political meditation on how both history and architecture collaborate in the alienation of the individual consciousness, especially in times when ideological systems and aesthetic forms attempt to silence uncertainty, ambiguity, and dissent.

Another instance of institutional hegemony is evident in the narrator's detainment in a mental hospital. It epitomises Lefebvre's concept of *lived space*. The narrator tells: "I spent the next two weeks on a locked ward in a hospital in Glasgow, a Victorian building of reddish-black stone . . . an old-fashioned institution that for the most part no longer existed" (244). While describing the narrator confined in the hospital, the narrative voice becomes passive, suggesting that he is no longer a questioning voice, but a controlled subject under observation. Others diagnose and classify him, leaving him voiceless. He realises that, "It is shameful to be a broken mechanism, to have to sit obediently while someone else goes about putting you right" (265). In effect, the hospital becomes a mini-version of the ideological and psychological systems the narrator has spent the novel criticising: institutions that claim to care but actually dismantle personal agency. "Just as violence is intrinsic to tools in general (since tools cut, slice, assail, and brutalise natural materials), and to signs..., it is also of necessity immanent to instrumental space no matter how rational and straightforward this space may appear" (Lefebvre 306). The narrator's prolonged stay in the hospital symbolises the novel's core message, i.e., in a world shaped by both visible and invisible systems of control, whether authoritarian or liberal, the individual can be quietly broken down, watched, and rewritten, often in the name of "sanity. The narrator tells:

As a patient in a mental health facility, it was objectively true that I was under surveillance, but I developed an exaggerated sense of its intensity. I believed that my captors had implanted sensors under my skin, so tiny that although I examined myself thoroughly, running my fingertips over each scratch and blemish, I couldn't detect them...The people watching me were analysing this data and using it to predict and control my behaviour. (Kunzru 247)

The protagonist's breakdown is not just personal; it is political. His mind collapses under the pressure of systems that appear neutral but are deeply controlling.

In *Red Pill*, the spatial ideology of brutalism is not limited to physical structures. It extends into the digital sphere, where interfaces, media environments and algorithmic architectures simulate the emotional coldness and formal rigidity of brutalist buildings, resonating with Lefebvre's idea of *conceived space*. Social media platforms and streaming services enforce the same rationalist, data-driven ideologies through which modernist architecture once promised social order. Kunzru's mention of the *Blue Lives*, a fictional crime drama that entrances and disturbs the narrator, functions as a digital brutalist artefact. It is aesthetically minimal yet emotionally charged with fear, authority and moral certainty. The show's ideological simplicity, paired with its formal stylisation, reflects how media in the digital age contribute to constructing simplified moral universes in which complexity is eliminated for the sake of control. The aesthetic minimalism and narrative brutality of *Blue Lives* reflect the affective economy of late capitalism. *Blue Lives* valorises the control of authorities through violence, both insidious and overt:

The show's cops were all members of a special unit, and they'd lost their moral compass. They were now as bad as the criminals they were pursuing. Everyone – criminals and police – was in high-stakes competition with everyone else, committing acts of appalling violence. (70)

Just as brutalist architecture exposes the skeleton of buildings, this violent, hyper-masculine police

force exposes the raw, ugly underside of systems meant to protect. Both architectural and institutional brutalism here serve as metaphors for the stripping away of humanity under the guise of structure and order. The narrator anticipates a dystopian future where technology grows so powerful that it takes over everything. He writes:

As the old world of words gives way to the world of code. . . every technical advance will make human institutions less reliable . . . we will find that arrayed against us is an inexorable and inhuman power, manic and all-devouring, a power thirsty for the total annihilation of its object, that object being the earth and everything on it, all that exists. (227)

This vision of a cold, inhuman force rising over humanity fits closely with how brutalist architecture is used in the novel, not just as a physical setting, but as a symbol of this very kind of power. The narrator's fear of an "inhuman" force reflects his growing belief that modern society is becoming less about human connection and more about efficiency, surveillance, and control. Brutalism in the novel expresses this shift physically: the space looks strong and ordered, but it drains emotion, comfort, and individuality. We are heading toward a future where cold systems, whether built from concrete or code, might erase the things that make us human. "It is the brutality of political power, of the means of constraint: police, army, bureaucracy" (Lefebvre 287).

Apart from a brutalist setting, Kunzru integrates brutalism in his literary aesthetics as well. By choosing to narrate alienation instead of resolution, Kunzru practices what could be termed as brutalist ethics of literature. The refusal of narrative comforts, the absence of redemption, clarity, or psychological healing, parallels the architectural refusal of embellishment and human scale. Through formal fragmentation and emotional detachment, *Red Pill* demands that the reader experience the narrator's alienation without catharsis. This is not a failure of narrative, but a technique. Like brutalist buildings that impose awareness through discomfort, the novel enacts an aesthetic politics: a mode of being-in-crisis that asks its readers to feel what the protagonist experiences, to recognise the invisible

walls of ideology. By embedding brutalist logic into his prose, through pacing, repetition, and structure, Kunzru references architecture and reanimates it in text. His work expands the scope of brutalist aesthetics from the built environment into narrative space, signalling literature's continuing power to interrogate how we live, what shapes us, and why certain forms return at moments of political and existential crisis.

## CONCLUSION

The study thus analyses how in *Red Pill*, Kunzru uses brutalist architecture to dramatise a deeper ontological crisis: the loss of interiority and agency in a world where even the design of spaces participates in the erosion of the self. Through the application of Lefebvrian concept of trialectic of spatial types: *conceived space* (mental abstractions by architects, planners, institutions), *perceived space* (material routines and embodied interactions), and *lived space* (symbolic, experiential dimensions), the paper argues that *Red Pill's* setting suggests, both literally and metaphorically, that architecture is never neutral: it carries with it the weight of politics and history. In the concrete geometry of its world, *Red Pill* finds a language for ideological control that moves from the barracks and bunkers of the past into the glassy, virtual spaces of the present.

Through *Red Pill's* narrative, Kunzru reframes brutalism as more than an architectural style. In the text, it becomes a narrative condition, a psychological state and a cultural critique. By aligning literary form with architectural and ideological critique, *Red Pill* offers a compelling examination of the aesthetics of power. The novel suggests that in our post-digital age, brutality is no longer visible in jackboots or prisons but in sterile environments, controlled affect, and internalised obedience. This study contributes to both literary and architectural theory by demonstrating how ideological structures can co-opt space, aesthetics, and narrative. *Red Pill* warns us that the new brutalism is built not just of concrete, but of culture, language, and code. Throughout the novel, it emphasises how space shapes affect. Brutalist walls and corridors set a tone of detachment: characters feel listless and exposed in concrete rooms. Memorials from the Hitler-era and socialist blocks evoke guilt and solemnity.

Even in intimate settings like a Berlin apartment or the narrator's bedside, the architecture imposes emotional distance. The reader senses that these environments train the mind to paranoia or resignation. In the end, *Red Pill* uses architecture as a barometer of ideology: the solidity of concrete brutalism recalls the brute force of old regimes, while the polished glass and empty public zones of the new world camouflage an internalised dominance. In both cases, physical space becomes a narrative symbol of control. Through immersion of characters in these constructed worlds, the novel shows how walls and streets can make us compliant, detached, or fearful. It thus captures the shift from outward tyranny to insidious social engineering without ever naming the theories behind it.

## WORKS CITED

- Anderson, David. "Berlin in English: The German Capital in Recent Anglophone Fiction." *Journal of European Studies*, vol. 54, 2024, 1–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00472441241264777>.
- Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Beacon Press, 1958.
- Banham, Reyner. *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic?* Karl Kramer, 1966.
- Docx, Edward. "Red Pill by Hari Kunzru: A Timely Take on Reality." Review of *Red Pill*, by Hari Kunzru. *The Guardian*, 2 Oct. 2020,  
[www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/02/red-pill-by-hari-kunzru-review-timely-and-intelligent](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/oct/02/red-pill-by-hari-kunzru-review-timely-and-intelligent).
- Forty, Adrian. *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*. Vol. 268, Thames & Hudson, 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Pantheon, 1977.
- Gorra, Michael. "Afraid of a Lurking Evil, a Writer Goes down the Rabbit Hole." Review of *Red Pill*, by Hari Kunzru. *The New York Times*, 1 Sept. 2020,  
[www.nytimes.com/2020/09/01/books/review/hari-kunzru-red-pill.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/01/books/review/hari-kunzru-red-pill.html).
- Han, Byung-Chul. *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*. Verso Books, 2017.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*. vol. 29, no. 1, 2008, 103–128.  
<https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019>
- Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke UP, 1991.
- Kunzru, Hari. *Red Pill*. Scribner, 2020.
- Lefebvre, Henry. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell Publishing, 1991.
- Malik, Sonia. "The Shifting Sands of Reality: Power, Subjectivity and the Mechanisms of Control in Hari Kunzru's *Red Pill*." *International Journal of Research - Granthaalayah*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2025, 79–88.  
<https://www.granthaalayahpublication.org/journals/granthaalayah/article/view/6162>.
- Rendell, Jane. *Site-Writing: The Art of Architecture Criticism*. I.B. Tauris. 2010.
- Sasaki, David. "More than a Midlife Crisis: Hari Kunzru's *Red Pill*" *Medium*, 7 Feb. 2023,  
[oso.medium.com/more-than-a-midlife-crisis-hari-kunzru-red-pill-3d53d30f6a4b](https://www.oso.medium.com/more-than-a-midlife-crisis-hari-kunzru-red-pill-3d53d30f6a4b).
- Schmitt, Mark. "Introduction: Being for Being Against: Pessimism and the Cultural Moment." *Spectres of Pessimism: A Cultural Logic of the Worst*, Ed. Mark Schmitt, Springer International Publishing, 2023, 1–26.
- Shaw, Bernard. *Everybody's Political What's What?* 1950.