



FILM: **THE BRUTALIST**

FDG RATING: 3.6 😊😊😊😊😊

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Brady Corbet: *director*
Adrien Brody: *actor, Laszlo Toth*
Guy Pearce: *actor, Harrison Lee Van Buren*

DATE: February 16, 2025

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **THE BRUTALIST**

The title could be misleading for those unfamiliar with the Brutalist architecture style. Reading that the film is about a Jewish architect, Laszlo Toth, from Hungary who is fleeing post-war Europe in 1947, some thought the film would have a heavy Holocaust theme. Instead, the focus is the immigrant experience as Toth arrives in New York, feeling a wondrous sense of freedom, a freedom that is deceptive as foreshadowed by the lopsided Statue of Liberty flipping on its side cinematographically.

Adrien Brody deservedly won the 2025 best actor Oscar for his performance as Toth. From his joyous exuberance when his cousin Attila meets him at the train station in Philadelphia, to his stubborn artistic pride in his architectural designs, to his reluctant submissiveness to his wealthy employer, his anger at his wife for hiding her illness from him, his addition to drugs, and more as the story touches on what some discussion participants thought were too many layered themes: horrors of the holocaust, holocaust, post distress syndrome, Jewish immigrant struggles so that a well-educated and a successful architect from Hungary is thought of as lower class in America, pervasive prejudice/antisemitism causing immigrants to hide their Jewishness (Toth's cousin has changed his name and calls his business a Family furniture store), all the challenges immigrants face trying to succeed, superior attitudes of the wealthy who feel entitled and those who exploit others to gain more power and control, resistance to change and progress, distaste for new architecture styles: the cold minimal Brutalist style was hard for people in America to appreciate, drug addiction, and even once touching on Zionism: the lure of Jewish immigrants to live in Israel.

For what we agreed was a way too long 215 minutes, the story unfolds as Toth, who has been working in his cousin's furniture store, is hired by the son of a wealthy, prominent industrialist to remodel his father's library while he's away from home. The project falls apart when the father, Harrison, returns home sooner than expected, furious that his house is being torn apart by people he's never met. He refuses to pay even for the cost of materials. But seeing how Toth has remodeled the library is one of our favorite scenes. Beautiful tall panels rotate closed to protect the shelves of precious books on the other side of the panels from exposure to the sun and rotate open to reveal the multiple shelves of books.

After learning that Toth is a famous Hungarian architect and having the media hound him for photos of the library, Harrison apologizes and brings Toth into his world of upper-class snobs and asks him to design a community center that will serve as a tribute to Harrison's recently deceased mother and be a welcoming place for all to gather. From this point on Harrison exerts more and more control over Toth treating him like an object that he owns. Harrison becomes a monster of a human being. We see the conflict of artistic vision versus the control of Harrison who is financing the project and the resistance of the community to a new architectural style. Harrison's self-righteous arrogance explodes in an unexpectedly brutal scene that many thought went too far.

We were fascinated seeing Toth's conceptual process using natural light to complement the cold minimalistic but beautifully contoured shapes of his designs. We wanted to see more examples of brutalist architecture but even at the end when an elderly Toth is being celebrated with a retrospective of his work, we only quickly saw a few buildings/sketches. The reason is probably because the film is entirely fictional inspired by the work of several architects.

The theme of "rebuilding" underscores Toth's struggles to rebuild his life and career as well as his building of structures in a new architectural style. Brutalism can also apply to the way he was treated. Great acting and cinematography for a meaningful story but too ambitious trying to weave in so many important issues, and definitely too long. We scored the film a critical 3.6 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)

Footnote:

The term "brutalism" comes from the French word for "raw concrete"; the style was popular from the 1950s through the 1970s; and was controversial as many considered it to be oppressive, ugly, and hulking although it has a significant influence on modern architecture. The Geisel Library built in 1970 in La Jolla, California is a prime example of brutalism, also Hill of the Buddha, built in 2015, Sapporo, Japan.



See you at the movies! Adriane Dedic, adedic@pacbell.net www.filmdiscussiongroup.com