The early to mid-century central station, identified today as a power station or power plant, has intrigued communities, architectural historians and preservation organizations alike, with chimneys soaring to the height of neighboring church domes and imposing classical facades conspicuously distinguishing themselves among a landscape of low-scale, rather austere industrial buildings. Sited in historic industrial zones once discrete from city’s downtowns, power stations are now a part of the metropolitan core, as expanding urban borders have engulfed these zones. This inclusion in the downtown landscape has created increased development pressure that frequently results in plans for the stations’ demolition. Their historical and architectural significance has been well-established and recognized; however, whilst the equally-obsolete and significant industrial buildings that surround them find new uses in the form of residences or commercial spaces as post-industrial zones in downtowns redevelop, the historic power station frequently rests vacant and deteriorating; a brown field site whose potential for reuse is often overshadowed by its intimidating colossal size.

Using five case studies from throughout the United States and Western Europe, this thesis will examine the lucrative adaptive reuse potential of the early to mid-twentieth century central stations, utilizing an approach that allows for the preservation of the building’s provenance through the conservation of its exterior and interior architectural character. Additionally, the thesis analyzes the regenerative effects the reuse of these power stations have on their environs, and how their conversion are integral to the reinvigoration of the world’s rapidly disappearing post-industrial waterfronts. Drawing from the case studies’ analysis, a set of ‘best use’ practices in the conversion and preservation of power stations is presented, intended to serve as instructive guidelines for communities, city agencies, and developers confronted with the challenge of finding a contemporary use for early-mid century central stations.

NOTE:

This is an outstanding thesis in that it defines a very worthwhile topic well and explores it in a fluent and thorough manner. Aliza looks at the reuse of power stations, presenting succinct histories and insightful analyses of the varying success of reuse schemes. For the 4-15 review, she brought in a reader from London who is an architect very involved in the Battersea power station reuse there, as well as an architectural historian currently teaching at the University of Virginia who is particularly conversant in this building type. They gave terrific feedback to her, and she has been working diligently in the ensuing weeks in consultation with them and me to revise and update her draft.

During the week of 4-28, I will be reading the revised thesis drafts from 3 students that have potential to be the one that I would recommend for honors in preservation planning. I will tell Janet Foster my recommendation when I am back in the office May 6.

--Carol Clark