

# DESIGN BOOK REVIEW

## mies as text

**JUAN PABLO BONTA:**  
**Mies as Text**

**THOMAS HINES:**  
**Tom Wolfe and his Critics**

**ANDREW SAINT:**  
**Objects of Desire**

**AFTER ARCHITECTURE:**  
**Roche and Dinkeloo's**  
**Ford Foundation Building**

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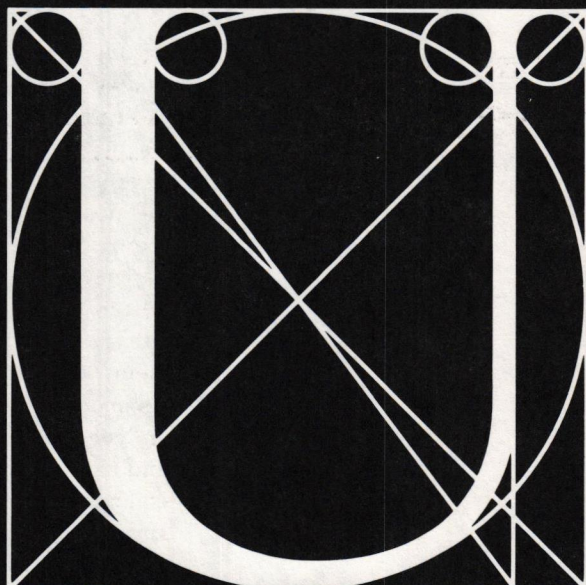
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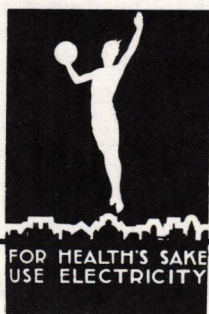
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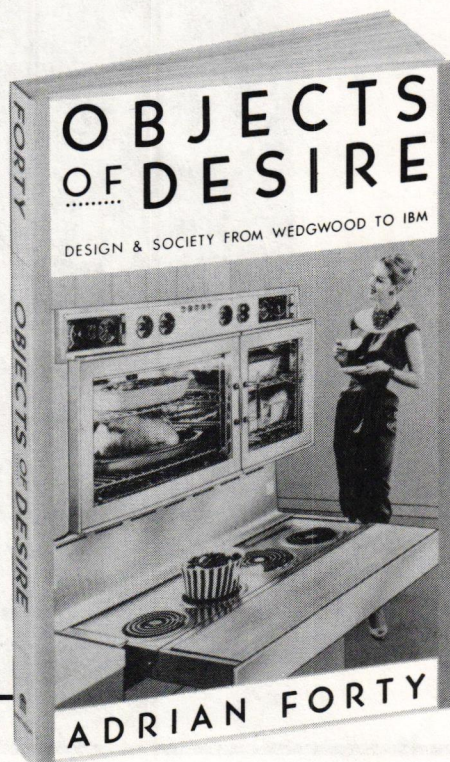
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## YOU ARE WHAT YOU READ

An unidentified reader to whom I am related says she can never understand these editorials. But I can't believe it's just a question of vocabulary or syntax. Design language recapitulates the demands of specialization (oops, there I go again, I mean, designers depend on a professional lingo). This design-patois selects its own lexicon of terms, such as "fenestration," "revetment," or "parti," while appropriating common terms, such as "articulation" or "celebration," for its own purposes, and survives in its own set of a priori concepts. Language cages both object and designer, and our awareness of this incarceration periodically leads us to ask, couldn't all of this exist without words?

In this issue of *DBR* the problems of language and design resurface with unscheduled regularity. Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre's new book on classical architecture, reviewed by Mark Hewitt, presents a complete system of architecture about which precise descriptive terms exist. This is not to insist that architecture works as language, but rather that clear language about a kind of architecture is possible. However, Joseph Rykwert, in his critique of Michael Baxendall's *Patterns of Intention* complains that precision about object and program are not enough to gain access to meaning.

In his investigation of textuality, Juan Pablo Bonta tries to define the verbal boundaries that surround the work of Mies van der Rohe. Just as history and criticism depend on other texts, so the design process is culturally bound to a series of texts or textlike bits of information. Yet won't there always be an incongruity between what is spatial and temporal, and what can be expressed in words? Well, yes, but that still doesn't deny our literary dependency or excuse willful illiteracy. Tom Hines's return to Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House* reminds us of the verbal ammunition that can be summoned to defend

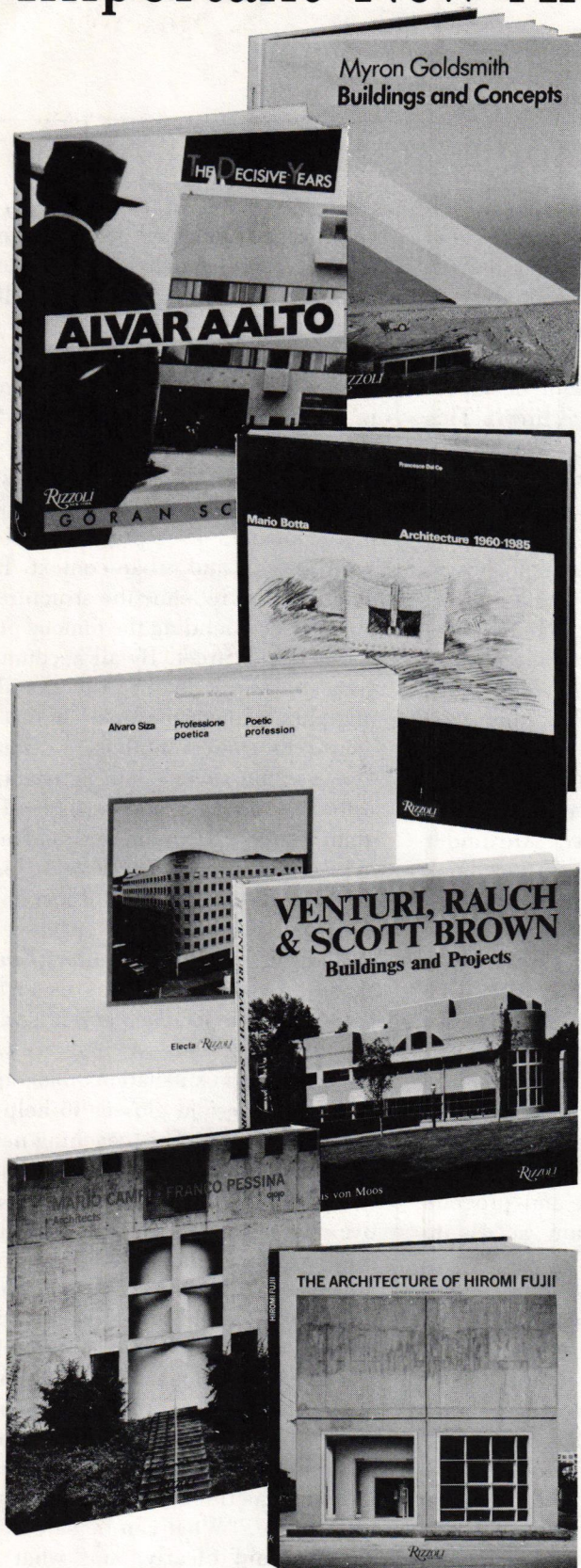
the cage. It is in such flurries of verbiage that language for the sake of language and language for the sake of truth are put to the test. While Wolfe's ignorance as a non-specialist was repeatedly proven, the defensiveness of design critics suggests that their work is often more solidly rooted in the media than on the ground.

Our retrospective critique of Roche and Dinkeloo's Ford Foundation Building, considers its cultural function, composition, and urban context. It is an attempt to redefine the structure of the cage surrounding the famous project on 42nd Street. By all accounts a great building, luxuriously detailed in granite and cor-ten steel, an instant icon in its cubic simplicity, we somehow cannot accept our satisfaction with the building and still need to qualify such discriminating good taste in historical conditions. Dare we leave the story of the artifact and just enjoy it? Dare we break out of our cage?

Hiroshi Teshigahara's film, *Gaudi* (1984), temptingly invites us to try. Presented as a documentary, it is without text or captions. At first, we wait for patronizing explanations, biographical and historical glosses to help us form an opinion. This coaching never materializes, and eventually we adjust to a purely visual presentation: an active camera wanders over Gaudi's buildings, exploring the wealth of unusual joinery, brickwork, ironwork, ceramic decoration, vaulting—elements that are impossible to render in verbal description and narration. It is almost as if the voice of the philosopher-turned-builder Ludwig Wittgenstein could be heard whispering in our ears those enigmatic first and last words of his treatise, "What can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence." While Teshigahara and Wittgenstein have found the answer in silence, others are still asking us to speak more clearly, to speak their language—in effect, to open our cage. Richard Ingersoll



# Important New Architecture Monographs



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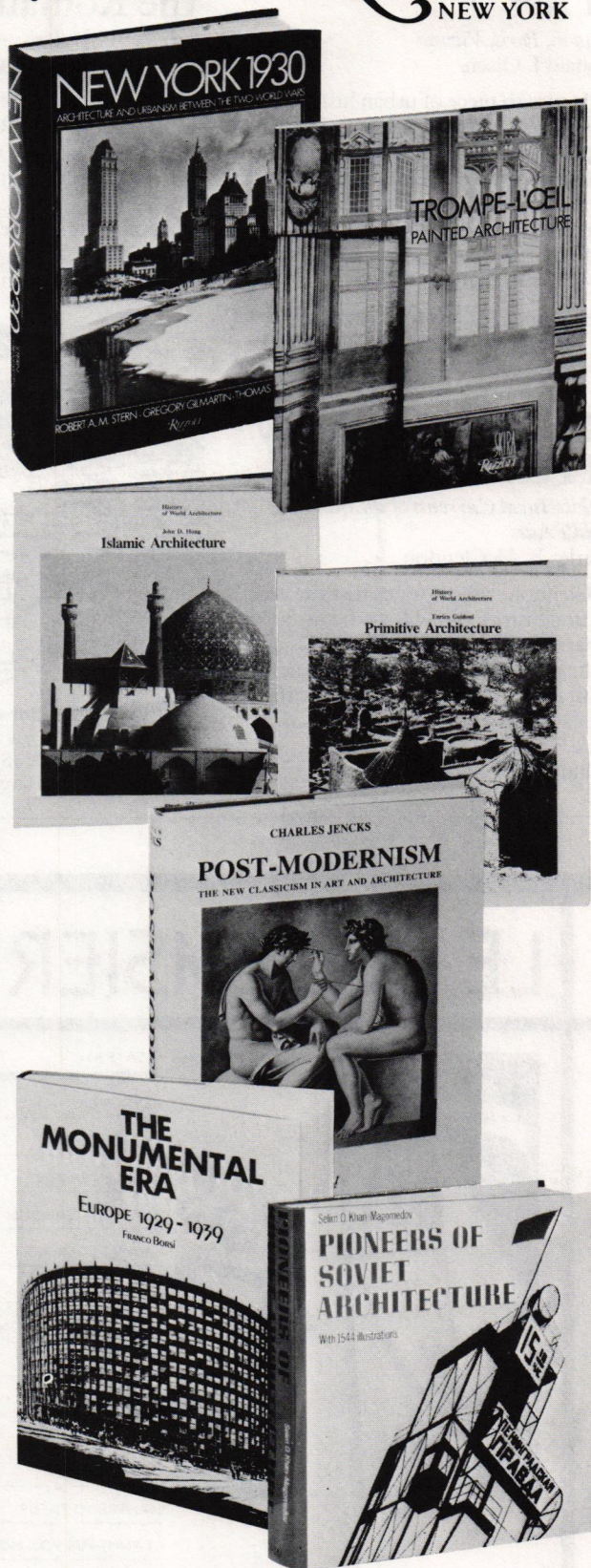
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Thomas Hines

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## MIES AS TEXT

Juan Pablo Bonta

Now that Mies has achieved God-like proportions, his work, like scripture, needs interpretation. In his review of *Mies Reconsidered*, Juan Pablo Bonta interprets the interpreters.

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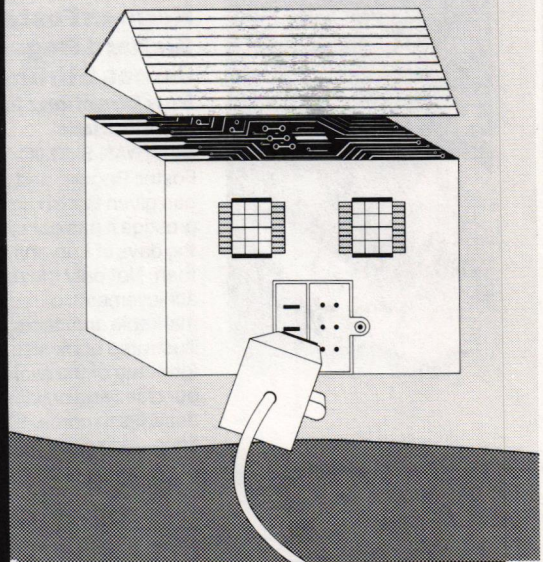
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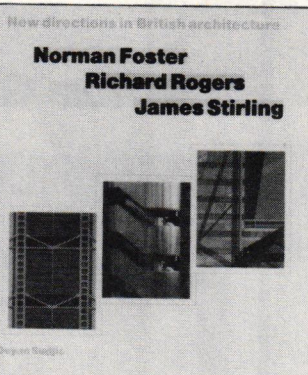
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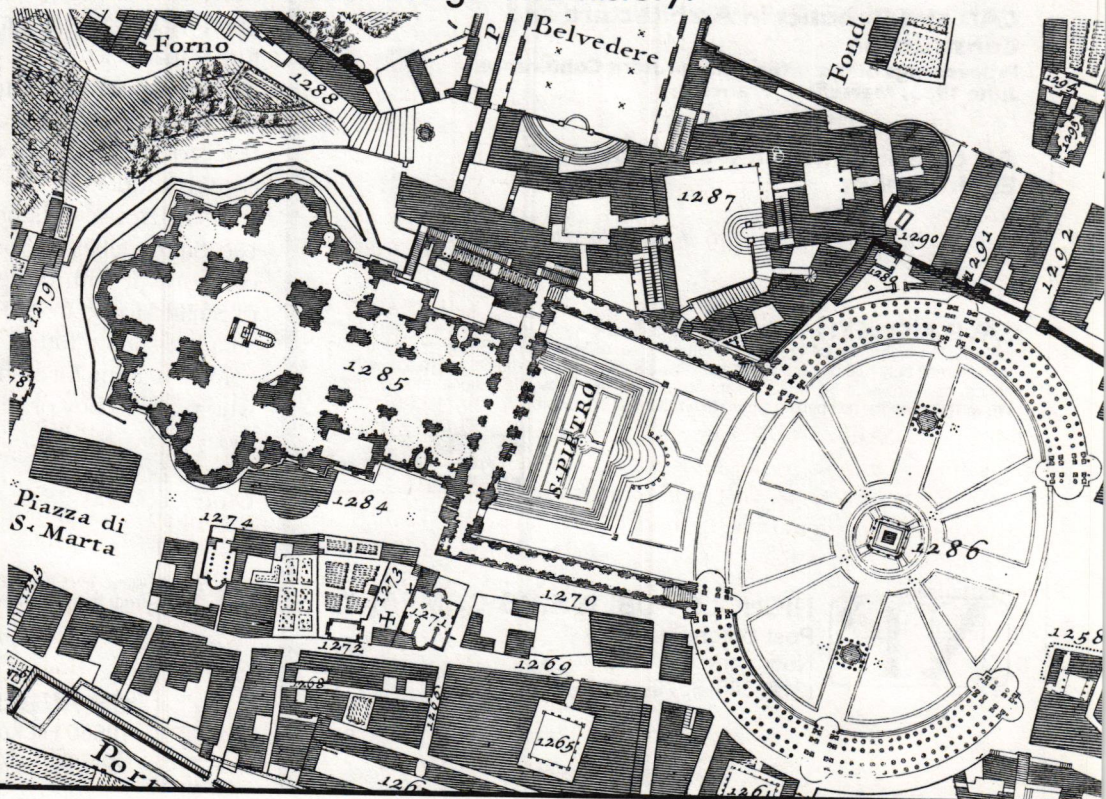
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TO THE EDITORS: It is seriously troubling to find that Herbert Muschamp's article "The Good, the Bad and the Timeless Ada Louise Huxtable" (Spring, 1987), written as overview and judgment of my career as architecture critic of the *New York Times*, was based on my work only through 1976; the last phase of that work, from 1976 to 1982, was surprisingly omitted. The volume that comprises the latest work and final chapter of my journalistic career, *Architecture, Anyone?* was published by Random House in November, 1986, and was available to Mr. Muschamp and the editors of *Design Book Review*.

It would seem obvious that no proper perspective is possible without consideration of the entire body of work, and in particular that dealing with those important later years of significant creative change when major new buildings were carrying architecture dramatically beyond modernism in practice as well as theory. Responses to the architects and developments of those years cannot be found in the two early volumes of *Times* columns, *Will They Ever Finish Bruckner Boulevard?* (1970) and *Kicked a Building Lately?* (1976) that provided the material for the selective anthology of excerpts published last year by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as *Goodbye History, Hello Hamburger*. Curiously, the only volumes cited as sources were the incomplete, preservation-focused *Goodbye History, Hello Hamburger* and *Kicked a Building Lately?*

I realize that Mr. Muschamp's conclusions might well remain the same and that is not my concern; it is simply that one would feel they were arrived at in a more appropriate and credible way. Neither objectivity nor scholarship is served by the omission of material essential to full understanding and fair evaluation. At best, the results will be incomplete; at worst, irresponsible.

Ada Louise Huxtable

Had it been my intention to write an overview of her career, Ada Louise Huxtable would have a valid point. But that was not my intention. As I clearly state in the review, my aim was simply to ask why, in the early 1970s, my own attitude toward Huxtable's writing shifted from strong admiration to disappointment. *Goodbye History, Hello Hamburger*, which includes essays from this period, gives evidence sufficient to persuade me that neither my admiration nor my disappointment had been misplaced. Huxtable kept her sharp eye trained on the skyline at a time when a critical need had developed for a scout on the horizon. The excellence of Huxtable's criticisms had lead me to hope that she would perform this role.

Herbert Muschamp

TO THE EDITORS: I would like to commend *Design Book Review* for the inauguration of the *After Architecture* series in the Winter 1986 issue. The fresh viewpoints expressed on the subject of the Kimbell Art Museum were enlightening and provocative.

Patricia Loud's essay demonstrates the pitfalls of tracing modern architectural influences. The comparison she draws between the Kimbell and the Dallas Museum of Art, while locally popular, says more about the proximity of the two buildings than about the individual approaches of their respective architects. Ms. Loud's comments leave the reader with the unfortunate impression that Edward Larrabee Barnes somehow appropriated his concept for the Dallas Museum from Louis Kahn. Ms. Loud's comparison does not extend, however, to the consideration of the programmatic differences between the two museums, and does not acknowledge Barnes's own career development.

Barnes's Sarah Scaife Gallery and his renovation of the Marlborough Gallery were both in progress prior to the completion of the Kimbell Art Museum. Barnes devised hinged panels in the Marlborough Gallery which could open out into the center gallery space to transform a box-like room into a symmetrical cross plan, thereby suggesting

the later classical division of space in the vaulted gallery of the Dallas Museum. The Scaife Gallery demonstrates Barnes's development of a system of top-lighting which utilizes perimeter scooped skylights to bathe the walls of the gallery in light, and leaves the ceiling and floor dark. Barnes describes this as "classic museum lighting," and he attributes the subdued "chapellike" lighting of the Dallas Museum galleries to the inspiration of Le Corbusier's Ronchamp (*Space Design/SD*, July 1985). Ironically, Barnes's own antecedent for the development of the perimeter skylight and interior courts is found in one of his Fort Worth designs. The partially-roofed exterior courts of the Neiman-Marcus department store (1963) have openings in the roof plane to allow a well of light into the center court, and perimeter light to wash the side walls. . . .

If an acknowledgment is seen in Barnes's great vaulted gallery of the Dallas Museum, it surely relates more to Le Corbusier than to Kahn. The scale, materials, lighting and physical form of the vault itself do not evoke the Kimbell, although many aspects of the Kimbell might well be attributed to Corbu's influence on Kahn's work. Barnes's personal fondness for vaulted forms, stemming from his travels in the Mediterranean, has been manifested in other recent designs—the Asia Society Gallery, the Equitable Tower, and the Georgia Museum of Art project. But one earlier Barnes project should always be cited when parallels are drawn between the Kimbell and the Dallas museums. Barnes's Caribbean House project of 1962 demonstrates his own exploration of a modular vaulted structure. The publication of Barnes's project in *Architectural Record* (November 1964) predates the Kimbell commission by several years. Barnes's description, "The structure—poured concrete columns and vaults—is clearly articulated," could be interchangeable with a summation of the Kimbell's structure. Perhaps this work of Barnes helps to turn the question around.

Barbara Koerble Fort Worth, Texas



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*Wolfe's Bauhaus to Our House: Popular and professional response still reverberates.*

# CONVERSING WITH THE COMPOUND

*Thomas Hines*

Tom Wolfe's critique of modernist and postmodernist architecture, *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981), evoked a furor and a controversy in the early 1980s unequalled in the history of 20th-century architectural publishing. Wolfe's strident, hyperbolic attack was grounded precariously on the shaky foundations of his own, perhaps willful misconstruction of basic facts, relationships, and essences in the history of architecture.

By the time he published *From Bauhaus to Our House*, Wolfe's reputation as an accessible and entertaining writer had reached a point that virtually assured bestseller status for each new book he wrote. The hype that he and his publishers used to promote his writings cunningly exploited the needs and propensities of American consumerist culture to "buy" and be "in" on the hottest trends in both material goods and popular ideas. The pungent significance of the *Bauhaus to Our House* controversy stemmed from the collision between that popular culture, as reified in Wolfe's book, and the frequently insular architectural "compound."

Though many members of the besieged establishment continued to protest that the book was "beneath contempt" and did not deserve the attention it was getting, they never-

theless reviewed and responded to it passionately. The chief surprise in the reaction came not in the early reviews, most of which were largely negative, but in many of the later ones which were completely or partly positive. That some of these positive reactions came from the heart of the compound itself suggested that the architectural establishment was not as monolithic as Wolfe had pictured it, since certain of its members acknowledged unabashedly the aptness of his critique.

Indeed, despite its palpable weaknesses, Wolfe's flawed polemic contained ideas and "truths" whose time apparently had come. Like countless other satirists, Wolfe achieved his intended effects by gross overstatement and oversimplification. Aided by his mordant wit and literary insouciance, the book's central theme of the arrogance of avant-garde architects toward the users of their buildings struck nerves on all sides of the architectural community—from practitioners to clients to historians and critics.

However one evaluated the book's "intrinsic" merits or demerits, the chief importance of *From Bauhaus to Our House* was its role as a catalyst for a stormy, searching, frequently insightful discussion of an intensity unrivaled in the history of late 20th-

century architectural discourse. The conversation permitted considerable venting of emotions and allowed for "corrections" to be inserted into the record. If it was not a perfect dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, at least the rebuttals and counter-rebuttals led to provocative ideological reformulations and to an altered popular and professional consciousness in the 1980s of the state of "modern" and "postmodern" architecture.

Born in 1931, Thomas Kennerly Wolfe, Jr., grew up in an established Southern family in Richmond, Virginia. After graduating *cum laude* from Washington and Lee, he played semi-pro baseball for several years before taking a Ph.D. in the early 1950s in American Studies at Yale. He then worked as a reporter for the *Washington Post* and the *New York Herald Tribune* and in the early 1960s began publishing his first "New Journalism" pieces, of which the most noted was an essay for *Esquire* called "The Kandy-Kolored, Tangerine Flake, Streamline Baby."<sup>1</sup>

This and most of his subsequent work (*The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test*, *The Pump House Gang*, *Radical Chic and Mau Mau-ing the Flak Catchers*) dealt with the highly vulnerable manners and morals of selected subcultures in contemporary America, especially their obsession with status, their craving for and plundering of fashion, and their cultivation of trendy movements, ideas, and "lifestyles." Wolfe's own writing style, with its italics, dashes, and exclamation points, announced that the medium and the message were integrally connected.

In his belief that journalism had become more dynamic and significant than fiction in the 1960s, Wolfe helped to create a vivid and relatively new literary form composed of several elements: the eschewal of a narrative structure for a scene by scene construction; the use of extended, frequently imagined dialogue; and the



heavy evocation of status accoutrements: the clothes, postures, attitudes, mannerisms, and habits of his subjects.

Dwight MacDonald called it "para-journalism . . . a bastard form" trying to have it "both ways, exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction." Yet Wolfe kept insisting that his approach was sociological. "If someone were going to lead me through the world of 'culture,'" he admitted significantly, "I would like for it to be Max Weber and not Bernard Berenson."<sup>2</sup>

Wolfe's book on the American space program, *The Right Stuff* (1978), generally conceded to be his best work, came between two highly controversial and closely related books on the arts, *The Painted Word* (1975) and *From Bauhaus to Our House* (1981). The villain of both books, the ogre responsible for bringing modern art and architecture to America, was the Museum of Modern Art—the apex in the middle third of the century of what Wolfe saw as the controlling elite of modernist taste. "The notion that the public accepts or rejects anything in Modern Art," he wrote, "is merely a romantic fiction. . . . The game is completed and the trophies distributed long before the public knows what has happened." But the real power in the art world, he asserted, belonged to the critics, for modern art had become "completely literary: the painting and other works exist only to illustrate the text"—the texts written by such powerful critics as Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, and Leo Steinberg, the three Beres, the three mountains of modern art talk.<sup>3</sup>

Yet the hostile response to *The Painted Word* and in fact to all of Wolfe's previous books was mild compared to that which followed his attack on modernist and postmodernist architecture. Wolfe's erroneous and greatly oversimplified argument was that "modern" architecture had risen in Europe, *sui generis*, in the 1920s, where it was cooked up in such "compounds" as the Bauhaus School in

Germany, and had found its most typical expression in the Siedlungen or housing projects for workers. When Walter Gropius, whom Wolfe dubbed the "Silver Prince," and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe were driven from Europe to America by the rise of Nazism, they exploited, Wolfe argued, the naive American "colonial complex" to foist upon the United States the ethic and aesthetic of International Style "workers' housing" as the new national style adapted to all architectural programs to suit all purposes and serve all needs.

Wolfe echoed a whole generation's critique of the problems and pitfalls of modernism, but he found surprisingly little comfort in the work of the new, critical postmodern generation of Robert Venturi and Charles Moore, still hanging out, like their modernist predecessors, in the dreaded compounds centered around the leading architecture schools. The alleged improvements of postmodern over modern architecture, Wolfe insisted, were hypocritically superficial. The guiding rule of both persuasions was to avoid anything that might be considered bourgeois. Theory, he argued, was still more important than life, and, as usual, it was the client and user of buildings who suffered the consequences: "Has there ever been another place on earth where so many people of wealth and power have paid for and put up with so much architecture they detested?"<sup>4</sup>

Originally entitled "Under the I-Beams," *From Bauhaus to Our House* appeared in virtually complete form in *Harper's* magazine in June and July, 1981. There had been an earlier preview only in *Via IV*, the publication of the School of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. Condensed versions ran in the *Washington Post*, the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and *Readers Digest*. To hype the sales of the hardcover edition, Wolfe went on a hectic promotional junket—highly exceptional for an author of an architecture book—

appearing on Johnny Carson's "Tonight Show," William Buckley's "Firing Line," CBS's "Sixty Minutes" and ABC's "Good Morning America." He was interviewed in two issues of *Skyline* by Peter Eisenman and in *Geo* by Ron Reagan. Tony Schwartz did a brisk feature story in the *New York Times Magazine*. Personal interviews were published in such major journals as the *Saturday Review*, and *New York Magazine*, as well as in such small-town papers as *The Morning Call* of Allentown, Pennsylvania.<sup>5</sup> The book was also discussed at least 69 reviews, surely a record for a book on architecture. Some were only short critiques a few paragraphs long; others were extended essays. Most were the standard one-page review. Of these, some 26 were largely negative. However, the surprising fact was that 43 reviews were generally positive.

In addition to the reviews, there were strongly worded letters to the editors of the journals in which the book was excerpted and reviewed. That staunch enemy of modernism, Henry Hope Reed, wrote *Harper's* a glowing letter of approval, as did Roger Conover, architecture editor of MIT Press. Venturi's client Carll Tucker attacked the book's portrayal of his architect and wrote a warm defense of Venturi, suggesting that Wolfe should have talked with more of the clients and specific users of the buildings he criticized. All of this amounted to a "major media event."<sup>6</sup>

The hype, with help from Wolfe's reputation, paid off. By the time Pocket Books acquired the paperback rights in 1982, the hardcover sales had passed 130,000. The Pocket Books printing was over 287,000. It was on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 12 consecutive weeks, at that time the longest run for any nonfiction book on architecture.<sup>7</sup>

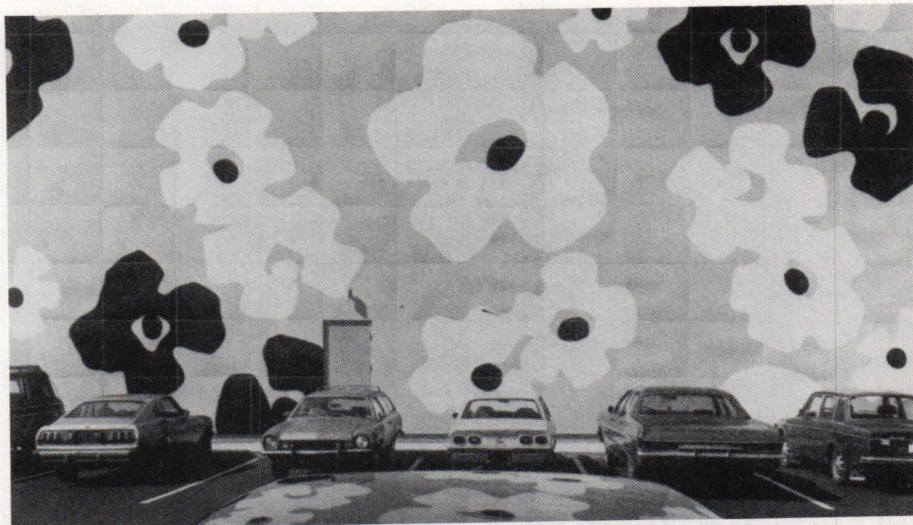
The book got unreservedly negative reviews in such professional publications as *Architecture* and the (British) *Architectural Review*, as well as in *Esquire* and *Newsweek*. Generally neg-



ative reviews, with occasional positive reservations, ran the gamut from *The New Republic* to *Texas Homes*, and from left to right in the political spectrum. There was of course a silent critical snub by *The New Yorker*, which, following Wolfe's savage attack on it in 1965, refused to review any of his books.<sup>8</sup>

Many of Wolfe's reviewers could not resist a comment on, or parody of, his style. Critic James Wolcott observed in *Esquire* that "he is so frightened of hearing a yawn from the back of the auditorium that he can't bring himself to write a poised, restful paragraph—instead he keeps clasp[ing] the reader's hand, a joy buzzer hidden in his palm." Franz Schulze, then working on his subsequently acclaimed biography of Mies van der Rohe, wrote in *Art News* that Wolfe "sticks a thousand pins into both balloons [modernism and postmodernism] but he pricks himself in the process and (well, I mean my God, Tom) ends up with spots on his own beautiful pastel suit." George Nelson, in the *AIA Journal*, quipped that while most good writers worked to create memorable characters, Wolfe's essential gift was character assassination.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the negative reviews assailed Wolfe's inadequate qualifications and were summed up in Michael Sorkin's opening line in *The Nation*: "What Tom Wolfe doesn't know about architecture could fill a book. And so indeed it has." Nelson, responding to Wolfe's claim that he had been inundated by invitations to speak to AIA chapters, insisted that "in a rational world it would be absolutely unthinkable that a literate architect could read this book and actually invite the author to come and say more. . . . The notion that architecture is a game of hemlines is not childish; it is moronic, and while it is almost impossible to believe that Wolfe is that ignorant of what is really Kindergarten stuff, just that seems to be the case. He could never [as the blurbs said] 'rattle the foundations of



VENTURI AND RAUCH, BEST PRODUCTS CATALOG SHOWROOM, OXFORD VALLEY, PENNSYLVANIA, 1977. DESCRIBED BY LOCAL REPORTER AS "THE UGLIEST SHOWER CURTAIN IN BUCKS COUNTY."

architecture.' He wouldn't know where to look for them." Nelson admitted that until he read *Bauhaus* and *The Painted Word*, he had actually been a Tom Wolfe fan. With those books, he concluded, Wolfe "crossed an invisible line and got out of his depth."<sup>10</sup>

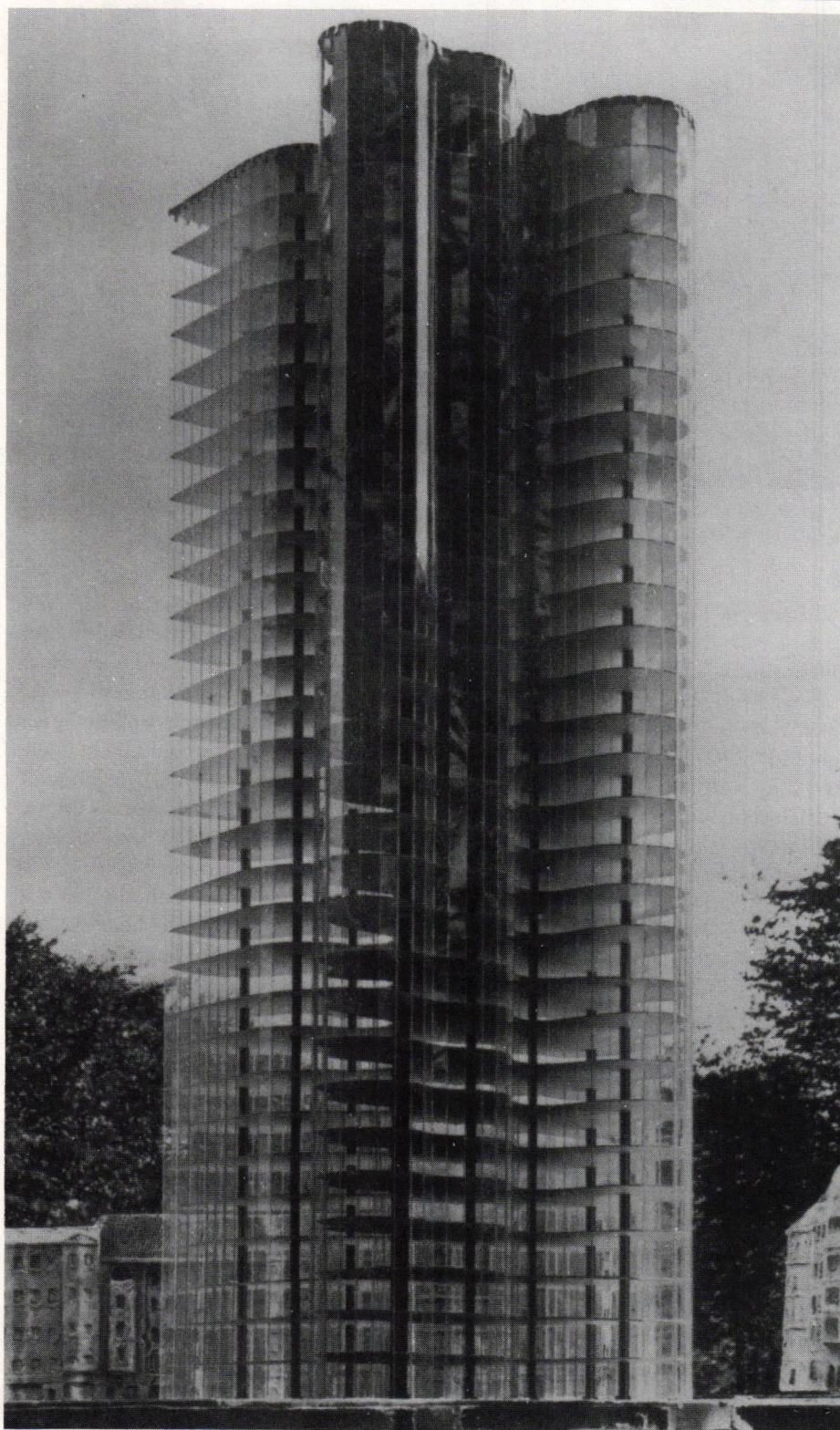
Historian Joseph Rykwert, in *Architectural Review*, also chided Wolfe for his errors and for his tardiness in discovering that modern architecture had its problems. "Why does this brilliant and successful journalist bother to besplatter the modern movement with a slush of misinformation since no one loves the modern movement any more anyway? Why does he put all this animus into hitting a horse which is down?" Rykwert regretted that the political, social, economic, intellectual, and aesthetic issues in the rise and fall of modernism had escaped Wolfe's notice. He had instead "deflected attention from what should concern us and offered an easy scapegoat." In *Art in America*, Rosemarie Haag Bletter scored Wolfe's biases and meticulously catalogued his factual errors, and, in the *Washington Post*, Benjamin Forgey ironically observed that correct data and fair play would have ruined the story and spoiled the fun.<sup>11</sup>

Hilton Kramer in *The Saturday*

*Review*, Paul Goldberger in *The New York Times Book Review* and Robert Hughes in *Time* lamented, like Rykwert, not just the factual errors, but Wolfe's very skewed sense of the larger picture. Much of this could be blamed, they believed, on Wolfe's reluctance to see and his lack of enthusiasm for, and engagement with, his subject. "He is helpless," Kramer wrote, "when it comes to dealing with the artistic issues which lie at the heart of the book. . . . The great appeal of the modern movement in architecture derived from its lofty attempt to integrate the interests of aestheticism, the needs of society, and the methods of industrial production in a coherent and realizable vision of the good life. That it conspicuously failed to achieve this lofty objective has long been recognized."<sup>12</sup>

Robert Hughes observed that nothing piqued Wolfe more "than the sight of Europe influencing America: the white Gods, Gropius and Mies, land among the prostrated natives and colonize them as simply as that. But of course it was not that simple." Hughes then offered one of the most cogent correctives to Wolfe's thesis of the American "colonial complex": "What happened was not invasion, but long reciprocal exchange, intellectual bar-





MIES VAN DER ROHE, MODEL OF GLASS SKYSCRAPER PROJECT, BERLIN, 1922

ter, as it were. From about 1900 on, European modernism in architecture was imbued with American imagery, preoccupied with issues that became central to the International Style. The grid, the load-bearing frame and light skin of the new buildings, came to Europe from the Chicago School, whose leader was Louis Sullivan. The Bauhaus ideal of the open plan was transmitted to Germany by Frank Lloyd Wright. Adolf Loos' rejection of ornament in the early 1900s ... came straight out of his infatuation with American machine culture. Le Corbusier derived a good deal of his architectural syntax from the functional shapes of American grain elevators, docks and airplanes. And when European modernists in the early '20s dreamed up the *Wolkenkratzer*s (cloud scrapers) the nearest the German language could come to the alien Yankee concept of a skyscraper, critics accused the modernists of deserting their native traditions and caving in to transatlantic [American] cultural imperialism."<sup>13</sup>

In his critique in *The New York Times Book Review*, entitled "An Ear for Buildings," Paul Goldberger agreed that the essence of what was wrong with the book was that "Tom Wolfe has no eye. He has a wonderful ear, and he listens hard and long, but he does not seem to see ... that Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building is a lush and extraordinarily beautiful object.... He has judged it in part on the basis of the wretched progeny it has given us and in part on Mies' ... rhetoric. He does precisely what he has warned us against, he has listened to the words, not looked at the architecture." Goldberger felt that "architecture's obligation as a practical art, to embrace certain conventions, to be readable in some fashion by everyone who uses it, in no way means that it must be understood in everyway on every level, by all who come in contact with it. There is such a thing as levels of meaning, but Mr. Wolfe seems not to accept this." In-



deed, such thoughtful reviewers as Goldberger, Hughes, Kramer, and Rykwert predicted—in their sympathetic defense of the maligned Modern Movement—the reappraisal of modernism in the late 1980s when the postmodernist reaction would come increasingly under attack.<sup>14</sup>

Critics also had a field day with the nonconforming architects Wolfe did like: Eero Saarinen, Edward Stone, Bruce Goff, Morris Lapidus, and John Portman, as well as certain later works of Frank Lloyd Wright. Sorkin called them “architectural Liberaces.” And numerous critics were puzzled as to why Wolfe took so hostile a view of the postmodern, post-1960s critics of modernism. “What about Charles Moore?” David Greenspan asked in *Progressive Architecture*. “Moore was not only very American (born and raised in Michigan no less), but his work has certainly embraced the ‘Baroque exuberance of American civilization,’ if not downright wallowed in it. Furthermore, not only has he publicly denounced the International Style, his work has often been attacked ... for representing—white Gods forbid—American popular culture.... Ah, but Charles Moore did something that is even more un-American than practicing the International Style. He joined the compound [at Berkeley, Yale, and UCLA]. Unlike Saarinen or Stone or Wright, he has held positions of power and respect inside the compound. It is not his architecture, nor his philosophy, but his position that Wolfe seems to find loathsome.”<sup>15</sup>

Stephen Mullin, in *The New Statesman*, betrayed a prevailing British loyalty to modernism and suspicion of postmodernist revisionism with his sharp critique of Wolfe’s treatment of the Modern Movement and his delight in his very similar treatment of its critics. “The impenetrable waffle of the Structuralists,” he wrote, “the giggling camp of Charles Moore ... and the paternalist populism of Venturi all get memorable putdowns.”<sup>16</sup>

Yet the critics reacted most harshly to what they believed was Wolfe’s implicitly right-wing political position. Wolfe’s suggestions, for example, that the heavy, even tragic, European ideas of the compounds had no place in a country as sunny and happy and buoyant as America, where the overall prosperity allegedly reached just about everyone. While scoring Wolfe’s perhaps unconscious errors, Joseph Rykwert was even more disturbed by the apparently conscious ones. “Misstatements, especially ‘knowing’ ones,” he argued “are made for a reason, and the cautious reader ... will need to know in whose interest the tissue of falsehood is woven. Not that Wolfe is reticent about it. His constituency is a new xenophobic and philistine right which (as philistine rightist xenophobes usually do) claims a populist sanction.”<sup>17</sup>

Laurence O’Toole wrote in *MacLeans* that “Wolfe’s writing is well suited to the age of Reagan.” Sorkin further observed that “Wolfe’s own values spring from a position slightly to the right of Diana Vreeland. For him politics is fashion, and Wolfe knows what he likes and which side he’s on, never mind that his idea of class struggle is a freshman-varsity scrimmage.” Janet Malcolm summed up this argument in Wolfe’s *bête noir*, the *New York Review of Books*. Wolfe’s book, she concluded, “is not merely preposterous, it’s worrisome. When someone as smart as Wolfe feels that it’s OK to come out publicly with views as retrograde as his ... it’s time to start wondering about what is going on with us. A few years ago, cultural backwardness like Wolfe’s would have been an embarrassment; today, it’s just another manifestation of the New Mood.”<sup>18</sup>

In an interview, Wolfe claimed that the negative reviews delighted him, “If they’d approved, I’d have to reach down to see if my pulse was still operating.” Still, most critics missed the implication of his own admission: “At the heart of every parody is a little

gold ball of tribute.”<sup>19</sup>

Like the negative reactions, the positive reviews covered the spectrum from right to left, from arcane to popular, from *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* and *The American Journal of Sociology* to *Playboy* and the *Kliatt Young Adult Paperback Guide*. The surprising fact was that the positive reactions outnumbered the negative ones.<sup>20</sup>

Some reviewers found no problems with the book. But these rather innocent observers gave themselves away with such gaffes as believing that Mies was the first name of a man named Van der Rohe. More sophisticated authors of the positive reviews, however, believed that the book’s achievements—its major arguments, its stunning wit, and its literary excellence—simply outweighed its shortcomings. Much of its effectiveness derived, they argued, from its exaggerated, Swiftian overstatement.

The architectural historian Alan Gowans asserted in *Inquiry* that the book served as “a fine introduction, a compelling prolegomenon, to the study of popular/commercial arts and culture.” Critic Godfrey Baker in *Connoisseur* observed that “like so many common man’s polemics against art ... what Mr. Wolfe says turns out to be broadly true.” Designer Ralph Caplan in *Industrial Design* believed it to be “one of the few books that start to make sense of the last 60 years of architectural history and attempts to explain why we designers are where we are.” A lead editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* saw the book as giving its readers “a new set of eyes with which to perceive our cityscapes.”<sup>21</sup>

Sociologist Albert Bergesen asked in *The American Journal of Sociology* just what sociologists might learn from Wolfe. “Many things,” he answered. “But at the heart of what Wolfe knows intuitively are the ironies and contradictions of modern life, whether ... in the appearance of members of the Black Panther party at a chic



Manhattan cocktail party or in a socialist dream of proletarian housing becoming the totem of 20th-century capitalism." The positive reviewer in the British *Architectural Review* especially valued Wolfe's American-ness. He belongs, the reviewer asserted "to a great tradition of American writers—Twain, Faulkner, Salinger—who have managed to develop a truly indigenous style. In his finest journalism, Wolfe transfers hot on to the page the wealth of exuberance and barely controlled hysteria of contemporary American Life." In *Bauhaus*, "Wolfe is pleading for nothing less than a built equivalent of his own extravagant prose style."<sup>22</sup>

In both the positive and the negative reviews, special interests did not hesitate to express their social and political biases. *The National Review* relished Wolfe's exposure of the "socialist underpinnings" of the Modern Movement. "Like all his books, it will be delicious reading long after the uproar has died down and its essential rightness has been assimilated." It praised Wolfe's habit of "approaching a subject from without, seeing relationships the specialists are too absorbed [in] to notice." *Business Week* also praised Wolfe's tracing of the International Style from its "vaguely leftist European social theories into a coterie ideology fiercely guarded by cultists. They united to impose their tastes on clients, mostly businessmen, who despite their distaste for the product were too fearful of being bores to resist." Critic Stan Gebler Davis extolled the book in *Punch* and trusted it would be read widely enough in Britain to help defeat the permit for the destruction of listed buildings in Mansion House Square for the proposed Mies skyscraper.<sup>23</sup>

While some observers of the post-modernist persuasion had rather liked Wolfe's attack on the modernists, most negative reviewers had problems with his lumping the two groups together. Yet most positive reviewers felt just the opposite and applauded Wolfe's willingness to take on both groups

and to expose what seemed to be the most common problem of both—namely an age-old arrogance that architects allegedly feel for the public that supports them and for whom they are supposed to be designing. Historian Bradford Perkins in *The Architectural Record* valued Wolfe's book for its warning "of the danger the profession faces in exchanging one too-rigid definition of architectural acceptability for another."<sup>24</sup>

This view was expressed most succinctly by James O'Gorman, professor of architectural history at Wellesley College, in that most "establishment" of media, *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*. O'Gorman acknowledged that the book's flaws had been cited by numerous reviewers. "What has not been reported," he argued, "are the book's virtues, and surprisingly enough its central theme . . . that within the compound, architects strive to outsmart one another," while outside, "clients puzzle over the filtered babble while huddling glassy-eyed in their glazed boxes they have paid for and hate. Oversimplified? Exaggerated? Of course. This is Tom Wolfe writing." The book's importance, O'Gorman believed, lay in "its uncanny recreation of the flavor of the academic architectural community over the past several decades. Forget the errant facts; forget the selective history," he urged. Wolfe "is interested in just one, unchanging attitude. His central theme is arrogance, what he considers to be the contemptuous disregard of contemporary architects for the wants of their clients."<sup>25</sup>

Writing in agreement in the *London Times* was the British architectural historian Andrew Saint, author of *The Image of the Architect*. Wolfe's essay, he believed, was "the frankest, most zestful and readable book on architecture to appear for ages. In putting a well-deserved boot to the backsides of the world's smuggest architectural elite, it deserves a hearty welcome." The Bay Area's *Threepenny Review*

praised the book's synthesis "of social dissatisfaction from many quarters." John Ferguson, in the *New Orleans Times Picayune*, also commended Wolfe, not only for the book's chiding of architects, but for "bringing the matter to the attention of the public who do not receive architectural journals." Indeed, these reviews that applauded Wolfe's castigation of "avant-garde arrogance," pressed the question—not easily resolved—of whether or not avant-garde art had indeed to be "arrogant" for its own survival<sup>26</sup>

British critic Gavin Stamp summed up much of the pro-Wolfe argument in *The American Spectator*. He regretted Wolfe's "sometimes weak and simplistic history" because it let his subjects off the hook and allowed them to dismiss too easily the book's central arguments. "On my last trip from London to America," he confessed, "I soon found that the infallible method of creating a *frisson* of shock and disapproval at dinner" was to say that "Tom Wolfe had largely got it right. My architect and architectural historian friends are all too much part of that avant-garde architectural world whose assumptions Wolfe explores and ruthlessly satirizes. Their hostile reaction to his book merely confirms the accuracy of his most useful definition: the art compound, those self-justifying and self-fulfilling elites of architects . . . confident of their place in . . . the march of history, contemptuous of the uninformed attitudes of clients and others outside the compound walls; those [architects] who have made the public in Wolfe's trenchant words 'willing to accept that glass of ice water in the face, that bracing slap across the mouth, that reprimand for the fat on one's bourgeois soul known as modern architecture.'" Wolfe's "basic point," Stamp argued, "is that, despite all the new isms and the apparent rejection of modernism by many architects, the compound walls are high . . . as ever. . . . Though young architects will find it disconcerting, the book has much



to teach them."<sup>27</sup>

And indeed the book and the controversy it evoked did have much to teach: first, of the pitfalls, in a methodological sense, of thin research and the sometimes reckless writing in architectural history, theory, and criticism; and second, in a substantive sense, of the pitfalls of ignoring or forgetting the possibility of a self-defeating arrogance among historians, critics, and architects toward the public or the publics they are committed to serve.

Because it was a "major media event," setting up a debate on "popular" vs. "elitist" culture, Wolfe's book was a raiser of hackles and consciousness. Seldom before in the history of architectural publishing had there been such a confrontation. The book and the discussion touched a wide variety of nerves, setting off a volley of highly charged and frequently insightful rebuttals and counter-rebuttals. The most beneficent result was a cathartic reappraisal of the issues that underlay modernist and postmodernist ideology. In the process, a new lay public became exercised about architecture. And their frequently innocent but impassioned reactions sent signals to the heart of the compound itself. If the ultimate results were greater public knowledge and awareness of architectural issues and a greater professional sense of responsibility to that public, Tom Wolfe's flawed polemic could not have been all bad. Both the book and the discussion it engendered revealed, on all sides, new "truths" about architecture whose time assuredly had come.

*This paper was first delivered at the symposium: "The Building and the Book: Architectural Publishing in America," on 1 March 1986 at the Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture, Columbia University, New York. Those who heard my paper and/or read the manuscript and made helpful comments include Daniel Gregory, William Jordy, Suzanne Stephens, and Robert A. M. Stern. For help in locating and documenting sources, I am particularly grateful to my research assistant, Marlene Laskey. For aid in my general assessment of Wolfe's career, I am indebted to a research paper of Peter Wrobel, a student in my graduate seminar on American cultural history at the University of California, Los Angeles.*

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*Juan Pablo Bonta explores what may be the last frontier of Mies criticism.*

# MIES AS TEXT

*Juan Pablo Bonta*

A friend from Chicago once told me that it was difficult to go to a party in that city without becoming entangled in a discussion about architecture. The city's architectural pulse accelerated even more—if possible—with the celebration of Mies van der Rohe's centennial in 1986. Among other commemorative events, an exhibition of work by Mies and his disciples was held at the Art Institute of Chicago, and accompanied by a substantial catalogue, *Mies Reconsidered: His Career, Legacy, and Disciples*.

With a series of scholarly papers preceding the curatorial material, the volume falls halfway between a catalogue and an essay collection, two genres with divergent expectations. Catalogues contain factual, succinct, nonpolemical information based on established scholarship, while essays seek new frontiers in interpretation and evaluation. David Spæth's biography of Mies fits this category rather well, and the essays by Frampton, Otto, Dal Co, Eisenman, and Tigerman are refreshing to the verge of impishness; Stanley Tigerman, for example, chastizes Mies's American disciples as intellectually and morally corrupt acolytes and sycophants who subverted the master's architecture for their own convenience. He

illustrates his point with examples of work by David Haid, Joseph Fujikawa, Peter Carter, and Dirk Lohan. This may be a welcome change for architectural criticism in America, where praise or silence are often the only alternatives; but the condemnations are followed, somewhat inconsistently, by laudatory biographical sketches of the architects indicted, listing their honors and accomplishments, and portraits or illustrations of their work. The criticisms erode the PR benefits of the publication for the architects referenced, and the pageant of the exhibit and the formality of the catalogue limit, in turn, the impact of Tigerman's denunciation.

I reluctantly will overstep genre boundaries myself in this article, partly a review of *Mies Reconsidered* and partly an essay on the textual nature of criticism and the textuality of architecture itself. My excuse is that the nature of criticism can best be examined in a corpus of critical texts.

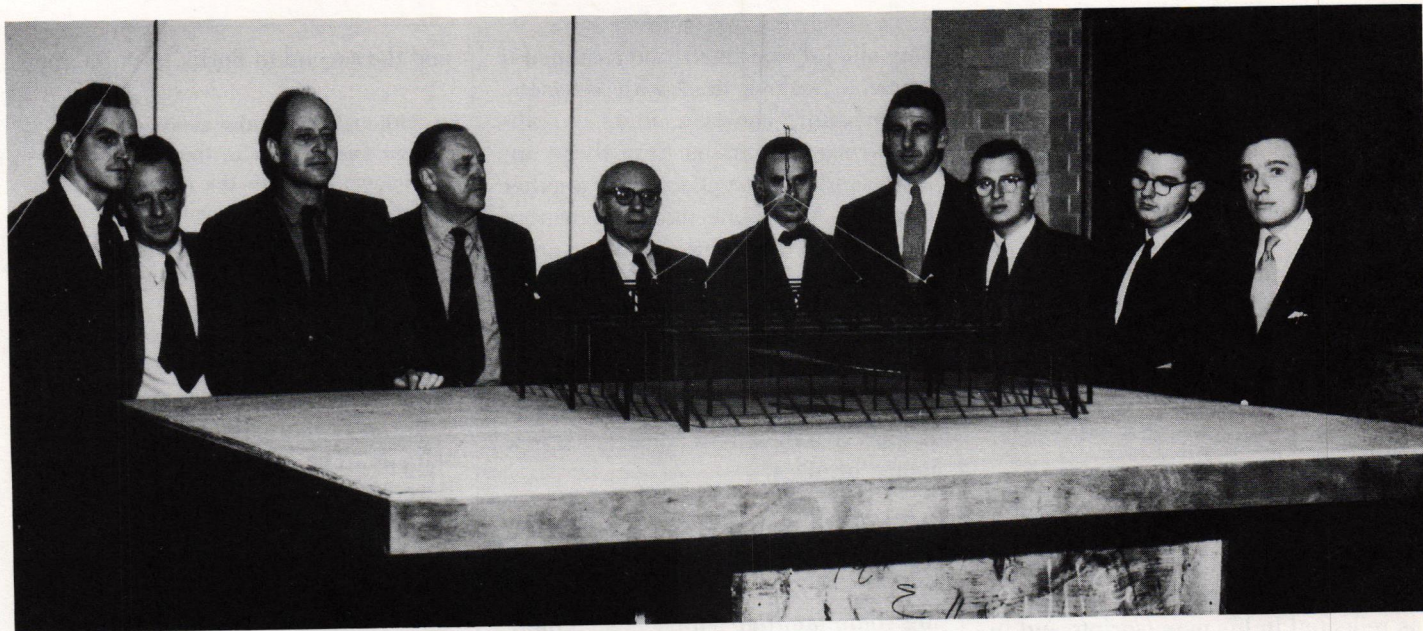
But what exactly is a text? A librarian cataloging his recent acquisitions is likely to look at *Mies Reconsidered* as a relevant textual unit, as will the customer perusing the volume in a bookstore. Each of the papers in the catalogue, however, is also a text in its

own right, with its specific authorship, title, and subject matter. A scholar compiling her references would be more likely to take this view.

Characteristically, texts are hierarchically organized, with larger texts divisible into units that are also texts, albeit of a lower order. Physical embodiment (whether or not the text is sandwiched between a single pair of covers), single authorship, and common subject matter are influential in determining the limits of a text; in another sense, however, the text's identity and boundaries depend on its inner consistency. Conflicts arise when content and form are at odds, as in the case of Tigerman's denunciations and the subsequent inclusion of the works he criticizes.

"Mies and the Highrise: Recent Correspondence on History, Ideology, and Succession," skillfully edited by Christian F. Otto, is an exchange of letters between a Mr. Hyrcanian Woods of Washington, D.C., and Professor Colin Rowe of Cornell University—two men linked by a common interest in architecture but separated by temperament, ideas, and academic position. Professor Rowe, as Woods readily acknowledges, is "one of the most influential voices of the last quarter century" in contemporary architecture and its history. Woods, in contrast, is merely an aficionado, a 9-to-5 government bureaucrat who has read and traveled on his own. Understandably, Rowe's initial response is curt. But Woods persists, finally managing to engage his correspondent. To Rowe's sweeping, formidable, baroque wit, Woods opposes laborious argumentation and abundant detail. "Be forewarned," he admonishes, "that my presentation may become pedantic. I have been an employee of the Bureau of Standards and the prose of governmental reports at times informs even my most casual letters." The tone of the exchange, however, gradually warms up. Rowe does not always reply in detail, but he acknowledges the





MIES AND HIS DISCIPLES, LEFT TO RIGHT: EDWARD DUCKETT, ALFRED CALDWELL, WALTER PETERHANS, MIES VAN DER ROHE, LUDWIG HILBERSEIMER, DANIEL BRENNER, A. JAMES SPEYER, EARL BLUESTEIN, JACQUES BROWNSON, JAMES HOFGESANG, CIRCA 1948

letters with an occasional note or postcard.

The main issue raised by these letters is the proper "grain" for critical discourse. Woods recognizes the compelling nature of the broad generalizations about Mies disseminated by Rowe in his writings. But to such large-scale assessments embracing "all of Mies" Woods opposes a "closer study" project by project. Instead of Rowe's view of Mies as a single phenomenon, Woods proposes an unfolding linear image of Mies traveling along a path of laborious searches, and unveils disjunctions and occasional contradictions in Mies's development.

Each text is consistent within its own limits; but the two cannot be reconciled. Woods attempts an intertextual connection by describing his views and Rowe's from a single vantage point:

In our different enterprises, we appear to have arrived at different understandings of architectural meaning and significance. You generalize about a Miesian product as part of a process leading to observations on contemporary architecture, whereas I examine a specific process with the end result of explaining the Miesian product.

Rowe replies with a flat rejection, and the two remain in separate worlds:

Contemplating your frenetic activity in sorting through all those Miesian words and projects and buildings makes me sweat quite profusely. I am, however, happy for you to do this as long as you do not imply that I am obliged to engage in a similar ritual.

At one point I consulted the editor about what I thought was an inconsistency. Dr. Otto told me that Woods did not exist. "You fabricated his letters?" I demanded. "Yes, and also Rowe's." The revelation struck me like lightning. The elaborate intricacy of the Rowe letters ceased to be the mark of Professor Rowe's witty and unpredictable mind, but signaled instead Professor Otto's even wittier game aimed at showing Rowe's predictability. The disclosure forced me to rearrange the pieces of the puzzle, like a moviegoer who, having suspended disbelief and accepted the plot as real, is suddenly reminded of the conventional nature of the experience. Knowledge of the medium's artificiality is imperative for a proper decoding of the cinematographic message. Likewise, the real nature of the

Woods-Rowe correspondence is an essential component of the text itself. The concept of the text must therefore be extended beyond the narrow limits of the script to include the relevant contextual elements.

Woods is actually Otto himself debating a fabricated Rowe. But Otto is putting the words not only into Woods's mouth, but also into Rowe's, and completely controls the plot. Why did he choose against his (or Woods's) best convictions to let the intertextual bridge collapse? Because Otto knows that architectural discourse is irremediably locked in the limits of its own textuality, regardless of his own or Woods's preferences. Alternative discourses, even on the same subject matter, can seldom be reconciled. An optimistic outcome of the correspondence, although desirable, would have obscured Otto's essential message.

The disjunctions and contradictions in Mies's œuvre, painstakingly traced by Woods, are mirrored at a larger scale by the disjunctions and contradictions between Woods and Rowe, or Otto and Rowe. These in turn model the larger disagreements between the essays of the catalogue, some of which deal with a static image



of Mies, others with an evolving one. Some refer to his life, others to his buildings, and still another to his readings and writing. To encapsulate their divergent interests and focus in a single picture would demand an effort vastly greater than the one required to reconcile Woods and Rowe. Finally, this is but a microcosm of architectural discourse at large, a babel whose contradictory nature can be ignored only at the price of extraordinary gullibility.

"Excellence: The Culture of Mies as Seen in His Notes and Books," by Francesco Dal Co, is a detailed analysis of Mies's intellectual background as reflected in his manuscripts and in the books he is known to have read—either because he kept them in his library or because he referred to them. Dal Co traces connections between the sources used by Mies, especially Nietzsche and Guardini, and he also identifies many oppositions. He concludes, not surprisingly, that "Mies's readings and sources cannot be traced according to any orthodox criteria, and often seem to be the result of intermingling and unexpected overlappings."

If this is the case, why do Mies's ruminations deserve our attention? Should we expect next a study of his diet or his finances? Mies's library seems more suggestive than his pantry because we presume that an architect's output and his intellectual background are necessarily related; but, to my knowledge, this has not yet been convincingly demonstrated. Ultimately, it leads to the concept of *zeitgeist*—an idea dear to Mies himself—which presumes the various cultural dimensions of society to be congruent. By accepting the connection between Miesian thinking and *œuvre* from the outset rather than taking critical distance, Dal Co embraces and perhaps illustrates Mies's ideas, but does not validate them.

If Rowe's and Otto's views of the Miesian *œuvre* cannot be reconciled,

why should that *œuvre* be assumed *a priori*, to be consistent, with Nietzsche or Guardini? However, there is nothing wrong in starting from these authors and constructing still another image of Mies, one that may overlap with Rowe's and Otto's without coinciding with them. This is what Dal Co has done, and most appealingly: each of the photographs in his essay makes an insightful point about Mies's architecture. The analysis of the readings is merely a device to construct a new image of Mies.

Kenneth Frampton's "Modernism and Tradition in the Work of Mies van der Rohe, 1920–1968," although treading some familiar paths, is strikingly fresh. Sorting out the new from the old would be futile, for the distinctive mark of Frampton's writing lies not in its components but in the way he organizes them through polarities.

It is possible to regard the Barcelona Pavilion as a proliferation of a number of complementary opposites: columnar versus planar, tectonic versus atectonic, opaque versus translucent, still versus agitated, open versus closed, and, even, architecture versus building.

His use of oppositions may be, to a certain extent, a linguistic mannerism, useful for someone composing an apocryphal Frampton letter, but unrelated to the substance of his thinking. But there is also a dualism in the narrative structure of his text that would persist in any conceivable rewriting.

The essay starts by juxtaposing two design philosophies. Classicism, or the "traditional design orientation," is based on the assumption that artistic expression arises directly from tectonic values like craftwork and workmanship. The other tradition, manifest in the work of Behrens and in modernism, values artistic speculation, artistic volition, compositional picturesqueness, and atectonicity. Mies learned the first tradition in Aachen

and the second in Berlin from Behrens:

Although his initial classical formation was to remain, the discipline of tectonic form on the one hand and the modern will-to-form on the other would henceforth provide the characteristic tension in his work.

Frampton sees the arc of Mies's lifelong work as a series of increasingly more effective ways of coping with, and eventually overcoming, this schism. The eight columns of the Barcelona Pavilion, regularly spaced and symmetrical with regard to the flat slab they support, refer to the first tradition; the asymmetrical freestanding walls allude to the second. The same distinction holds between the traditionally planned, cellular volumes of the bedroom level of the Tugendhat house and the open, modernist space of the living volumes beneath. The polarity is finally "reconciled" in the New National Gallery of Berlin, Mies's swan song:

While the roof as a whole may be read as an infinite floating plane, it also asserts its tectonic presence through its evident structural substance. In a similar way, the cruciform steel megacolumns that carry the roof are able to convey their pragmatic and mythical character in terms of both technology and classicism. This expressive synthesis attains its apotheosis in the hinged, roller-bearing joint separating the space-frame from the column head. Clearly this hinged-joint is both a bridge-bearing and a metaphorical capital.

Not surprisingly, the resolution of the schism marks the end not only of Mies's life but also of Frampton's essay:

In his last realized work, Mies van der Rohe achieved a highly accomplished architectural integration of two primary aspects of the Western building tradition: structural rationalism on the one hand, and romantic classicism on the other.

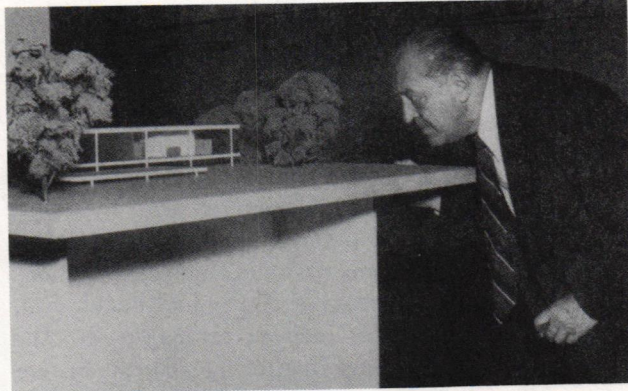


It is irrelevant to ask whether Mies was aware of this view of his work, or whether he would have approved of it. The critique is as much a statement about the critic as it is about the architect. The fresh, noncanonical interpretation of the roller-bearing joints as a synthesis of metaphoric and tectonic elements could not conceivably have stemmed from the examination of an isolated photograph of the columns; it resulted from a new way of looking at Mies's entire career. Concomitantly, the excerpt is understandable only within its context, and paragraphs are rarely an appropriate unit for textual analysis.

But what is the entire text? The essay, or the entire catalogue, or perhaps Frampton's entire *œuvre*, which is permeated by certain features, such as the use of polarities and the choice of the polarities themselves. If "Modernism and Tradition" is part of a larger Framptonian discourse, it should not be looked at in isolation.

The plot of Frampton's essay follows a tripartite organization: presentation of two conflicting architectural themes, their intertwining during the hero's life, and, finally, conflict resolution. This powerful narrative structure underlies a variety of creations in literature and the arts: it can be found, with appropriate adjustments to the nature of the conflict and the identity of the hero, in folktales, children's tales, myth, novels, theater, history, dance, and music. Scalvini and Sandri (1984) demonstrated a similar tripartite narrative pattern in the seminal books on modern architecture by Platz, Hitchcock, Pevsner, Behrendt, and Giedion.

Although widespread, this pattern is not the only conceivable principle for textual organization. I know of no typologies of narrative patterns, and I am not ready to propose one; but in the essays at hand we can point to a few types. The pattern can be simply a chronological sequencing, as in Spæth's biography of Mies, or it can



MIES WITH  
FARNSWORTH  
HOUSE MODEL AT  
THE MUSEUM OF  
MODERN ART  
EXHIBITION

have another dimension, as in the fictional "Woods" analysis of Mies's work, which is also chronological but relies on a conceptual continuity (or occasionally a disjunction) predicated between successive buildings and projects. Dal Co's analysis follows still another pattern, ignoring chronology altogether and seeking, instead, a sequencing of points regulated entirely by the internal logic of the argument.

In "miMISES READING: does not mean A THING," Peter Eisenman advances the crucial notion that not only writings about architecture, but architecture itself has a textual structure that can be subject to analysis. The essay starts with a distinction between three types of architectural analysis—formal analysis, which looks for matters such as order, sequences, closure, or proportions; symbolic analysis, which looks for meaning in a traditional, usually metaphoric sense; and textual analysis, which looks for differentiation between architectural elements.

Comparison of similar elements is the key operation of textual analysis; such comparisons lead to structural relationships of opposition or similarity drawn from purely architectural points of view. The columns of the Barcelona Pavilion and those of the Domino House, for example, are comparable, for they are both detached from the walls, in typically modernist terms; but while Le Corbusier let them be round and placed them behind the wall, Mies made them cruciform and placed them in front of the

wall. Le Corbusier created a free plan and a free façade; Mies, by contrast, intended to define the corners of a sequence of square bays. But the columns of the Barcelona Pavilion are sheathed in reflective stainless steel, which causes the columns to mirror their own images. Mies's intention, according to Eisenman, was ultimately to "signify the absence of corners." In Le Corbusier's work there are no corners; modernism is factually present. In the pavilion, although the corners are materially there, their absence becomes the content of the text: modernism is present textually. In contrast to symbolic analysis, which yields anthropomorphic meanings (the column as a metaphor for the human body), textual analysis yields architectural, "self-referential" meanings.

According to Eisenman's narrative, Mies's projects from 1923 to 1935 fall into three consecutive phases—the formalist, the modernist, and the textual. Classical aesthetic concerns dominate the formalist phase (Brick and Concrete Country House); both the architectural object and the subject of classicism are "broken up" during the modernist period (Barcelona Pavilion and Tugendhat House); finally, the textual phase is characterized by a modernist discourse imbedded in the object, independent of its formal and symbolic structure (Hubbe and Lange Houses).

Frampton's and Eisenman's narratives are both tripartite. Could they be rendering the same facts in different verbal trappings? The buildings



reviewed are the same, but the central issues are different, and so are the emerging chronological classifications. Neither coincident nor opposed, the narratives seem to unfold in different universes:

Unlike the columns of the Barcelona Pavilion which run with the grain, these [the columns of the Hubbe House] run counter to it. At Barcelona, they signal a modernist ground; at Hubbe, a classical intrusion.

This clashes head on with Frampton's view of the pavilion on two counts: for Frampton, the columns reflect the classical tradition, not the modernist, and run *counter* to the grain of the pavilion—the freestanding walls. Frampton's interpretation, as we have seen, is “locked” into his narrative plot; and so is Eisenman's. This might be our opportunity to nail down the writers and force them to come to terms with facts. If the columns are modernist, Eisenman is right and Frampton must recant, or the other way around if they turn out to be classical. Likewise, if the columns run with the grain of the pavilion, Eisenman scores, whereas Frampton is correct if they run against it. The columns, however, are neither modernist nor classical in themselves, but only within the framework of a larger set of ideas—Frampton's, Eisenman's, or somebody else's. Ultimately, an interpretation is useful not because it is consistent with reality, but because it illustrates the larger thesis of the text. Just because they are contradictory, one of the interpretations is not necessarily wrong.

The most rewarding parts of “MIESes READING” are the analyses of individual buildings: although intricate, they are insightful and occasionally brilliant. The gluing of the various segments—the proposed sequence from a formalist to a textual phase in Mies's European career—is not as convincing. Eisenman is forced to concede: “Although the concrete Country House is chronologically prior

to the Brick Country House, it is not the first in the textual sequence.” And again: “Although the Ulrich Lange House was done after the Hubbe House, it is in some ways its precursor.”

The least appealing section of the essay is the opening, with the theoretical underpinnings of textual analysis. Frampton's and Otto's contributions have sturdier conceptual backbones, but less incisive critical teeth. The differences may be traced to the writers' backgrounds—architectural historians in one case, a practicing architect in the other. This is, of course, trivial, but it has another, more provocative dimension. As one of the leading American architects of his generation, Eisenman deserves to have his thinking scrutinized on his own behalf. It may lead to a better understanding of his architecture, if not of Mies's. Textual analysis as described by Eisenman, although applicable to other examples, is ideally suited to decoding his own architectural work. The essay will provide important clues if and when some follower of Dal Co decides to study the relationship between Eisenman's architecture and his reading and writing.

An architect's work and his culture are generally assumed to be linked, whether the links are readily apparent or not; strangely, the same assumption is not extended to critics. In Frampton's view of Mies there may be more of Frampton and his culture than of Mies, as we have noted; but Frampton's schooling and readings are not considered to be pertinent. Criticism usually emerges in response to three factors: the works of architecture themselves, previous criticisms, and cultural forces. The last two are consistently ignored, especially in this country; in doing so we are denying the historicity of criticism and suppressing an entire dimension of cultural awareness.

In “Mies van der Rohe and His Disciples, or the American Architectural Text and its Reading,” Stanley

Tigerman, in his turn, deals with the textuality of architecture. He argues that architecture, as a text, can be “believed” or “interpreted.” Faith and interpretation are relationships between God and man, which introduces a religious dimension into architectural textuality. Mies's figure has reached God-like proportions, and his work, like the Scriptures, calls for interpretation. Because of their un-godly pettiness, the architects most closely associated with Mies are not his true followers. Who the genuine continuator of the Miesian legacy is, Tigerman is too clever to say; but for anyone familiar with the Chicago architectural scene, the political overtones of his argument are unmistakable. His digression about Mies's lack of following among post-World War II German architects confirms that Tigerman's narrative is primarily about legitimacy and lineage.

Tigerman's view of textuality in architecture differs from Eisenman's; whereas Eisenman considers textual architecture to be a particular type of architecture (distinct from formalist and modernist architecture), and textual analysis a particular type of analysis (distinct from formal and symbolic analysis), while Tigerman postulates that all architecture and all criticism are essentially textual in nature. To dispute which view is correct is as futile as to argue that the Barcelona Pavilion columns are modernist or classical. Consistency and functionality within the narrative structure of the text are what matters. Tigerman's view of textuality is functional within his narration, and so is Eisenman's.

Such laxity must not be attributed to textuality's relatively recent arrival to the vocabulary of architects; theorists have been grappling for years for a universal definition of “space,” “environment,” or “meaning” (not to mention “beauty,” “equilibrium,” or “form”) without faring much better. Ambiguity is inherent in architectural theory and criticism.



In spite of the lack of a commonly accepted definition—or perhaps precisely because of it—the concept of textuality as I have presented it can shed light upon certain aspects of architecture. The architectural environment, like architectural criticism, is intrinsically disjointed; it is composed of relatively autonomous individual texts—isolated works of architecture standing side by side, with limited intertextual consistency.

Works of architecture, like written texts, have textual limits, and the problems of identifying them are similar in both fields. If physical form were the guiding criterion, texts would coincide with articles or volumes, in the case of writings, and with detached buildings or constructions on single lots or city blocks, in the case of architecture. Some such segmentations may be helpful, but morphology alone will never reveal the relevant cut-off points.

Authorship also plays a role: a common signature leads to the presumption of textual unity, especially if there is also physical contiguity. But what happens when the work of an architect is scattered in different locations? It would be regarded as a single text only if there is consistency in the work, or, more precisely, if there is a socially shared expectation of consistency. Had Mies van der Rohe been a lesser architect, few would have expected his early houses in Germany to be consistent with the Seagram Building. But Mies is a hero, like Marx or Freud, and the level of expectations is consequently higher.

Changing expectations are an important, seldom acknowledged factor in the evolution of architectural styles and philosophies. Modern architects often ignored the physical context of their buildings, especially if they were located in supposedly uninteresting urban settings, because, to a certain extent, they were expected to do so. In the same vein, postmodern architects may have recovered our physical and cultural heritage not because

they wanted to, but because they had to, to comply with a new set of societal expectations.

Perplexing as it may be, Tigerman's claim that the luminaries of Chicago's architectural establishment are not the legitimate followers of Mies does not stand alone; another voice in the rich polyphony of *Mies Reconsidered* points in the same direction:

To me it is as though our heritage has ended up among the gears of some monstrous machine that makes a hash of everything. We are becoming poor, utterly poor.

These are the words of Romano Guardini, one of Mies's intellectual guiding lights. According to Dal Co, who quotes them, Mies himself would have agreed with the indictment. Dal Co depicts a somber Mies, at the dawn of his career, faced with

the progressive impoverishment of life, the rapid decay of the spirit, the madness of things overwhelmed by their own usefulness. . . . When noting that the shadows of the sunset are beginning to extend over the entire world, no longer covering just the West, he does not cast the complacent gaze of someone witnessing a distant shipwreck. . . . Mies's thought, like Guardini's, is not nostalgic but lucidly disillusioned. But while in Guardini there is a shadow of doubt surrounding this end, the same is not true for Mies, since his architecture unveils this essentiality for "a second world where the gods are no longer possible and where at best technology produces a confused numinosity.

Tigerman's pessimistic, moralizing, quasi-religious discourse is consistent with this image of the aging master. In his wisdom, Mies may have seen what was to come; from this perspective, Tigerman is merely trumpeting that the revelation has come true.

In the final analysis, what is at stake is permanency. Permanency through the endurance of the physical fabric, as sought by the builders of

the pyramids, is no longer possible. Permanency through followers who would apply the master's ideas to successive generations of buildings, was, until recently, the recognized alternative. The transient nature of design ideas makes this, too, increasingly difficult. Only one way is left—vaporous, but capable for that very reason of filling in the remaining interstices: permanency at the level of discourse. Well after their buildings have been demolished and their design philosophies abandoned, architects can still play a role in the theater of culture by staying alive in lectures, articles, or books. Even if the Miesian design principles have exhausted their fertility, the Miesian phenomenon still remains, to use Padovan's terms, a "machine à méditer." It still demands our attention, provides food for our thoughts. The Art Institute's exhibition, the contributions to the catalogue, and in a wider sense, the conversations at the cocktail parties in Chicago, testify to Mies's permanence in the only dimension in which endurance is still real and legitimate.

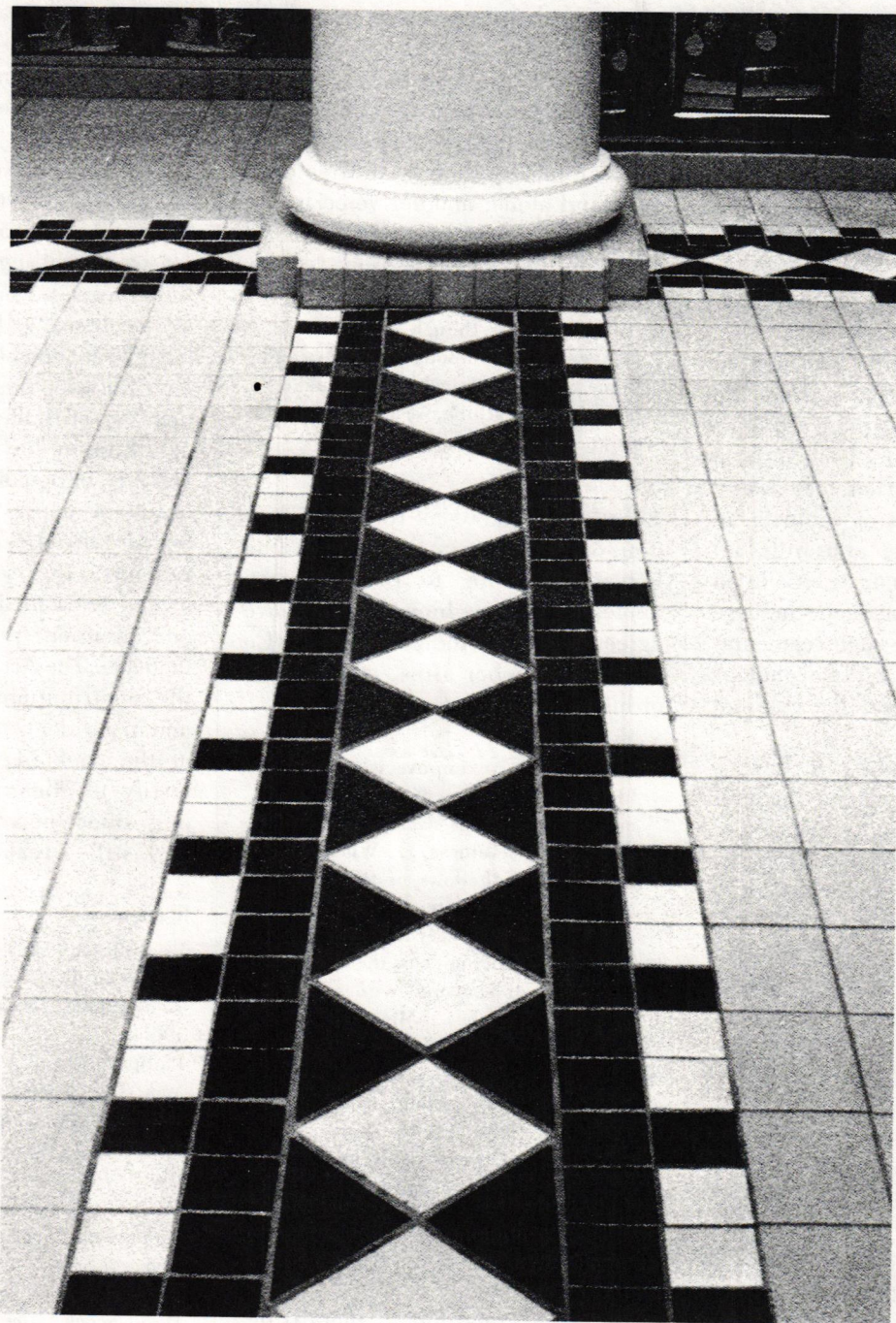
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# COLLABORATION



Heath Ceramics in collaboration with RTKL Associates, Architects, created this tile especially for St. Louis Centre, St. Louis, Missouri

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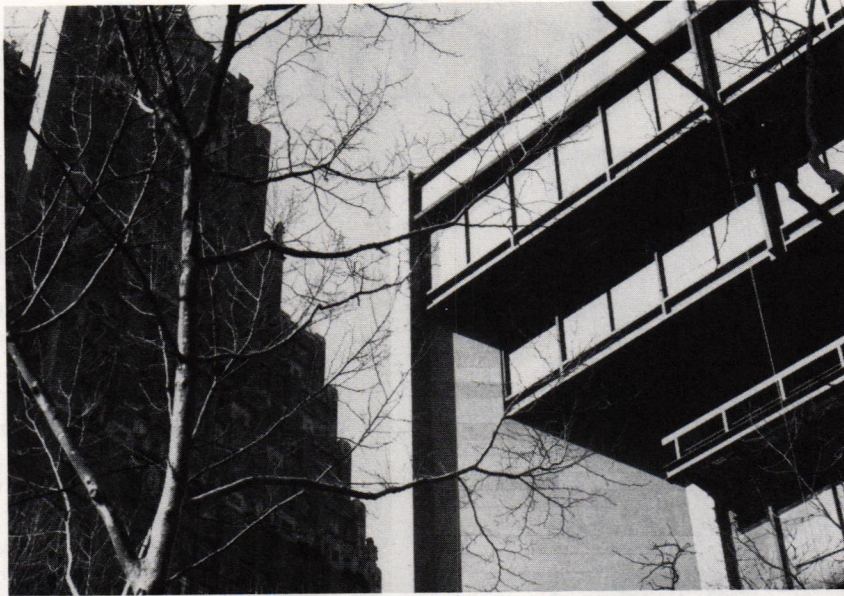
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# After Architecture:



All photographs © Jeff Howard

## The Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation Building (1965–1967) was one of the first independent commissions for the office of Roche and Dinkeloo after the untimely death of Eero Saarinen in 1961. Instantly recognized as a building of great quality and as an urban exemplar for New York, Roche and Dinkeloo's atrium office complex was easily the most published project of its time and is still much in print, warranting a monograph by *GA Detail* (1977) and a significant place in Francesco Dal Co's recent monograph *Kevin Roche* (Rizzoli, 1986). Among the trustees of the foundation was J. Irwin Miller, the mastermind of architectural patronage in Columbus, Indiana, and a staunch supporter of Saarinen's, who heavily influenced the choice of architect. The program for a twelve-story atrium office building reflected the concerns of the foundation's president, McGeorge Bundy, fresh from the Kennedy administration, and its openness was a direct reaction to the previously cramped and scattered office space in a midtown spec

office building.

After twenty years, the building is in remarkably good condition. Perhaps the only true *gesamtkunstwerk* of the 1960s, the coordinated palette of the interiors, its brass fittings, mahogany desks, leather upholstery, and brown/gold drapes and carpets have been beautifully maintained, while the exterior granite veneer and cor-ten struts have not only aged well, but are perhaps the finest application ever made of this combination. The original ambitions for 100-foot-high trees in the atrium garden have been scuttled due to their inability to grow under such artificial conditions; more passive flora have since been planted.

The building is arranged in tiers. Below grade is a 150-seat auditorium (with leather Eames armchairs), the board room, and the mechanicals room. On the first floor is the reception area and the library. The next ten floors contain offices, arranged on an "L"-shaped footprint. Unique in office design, each office has

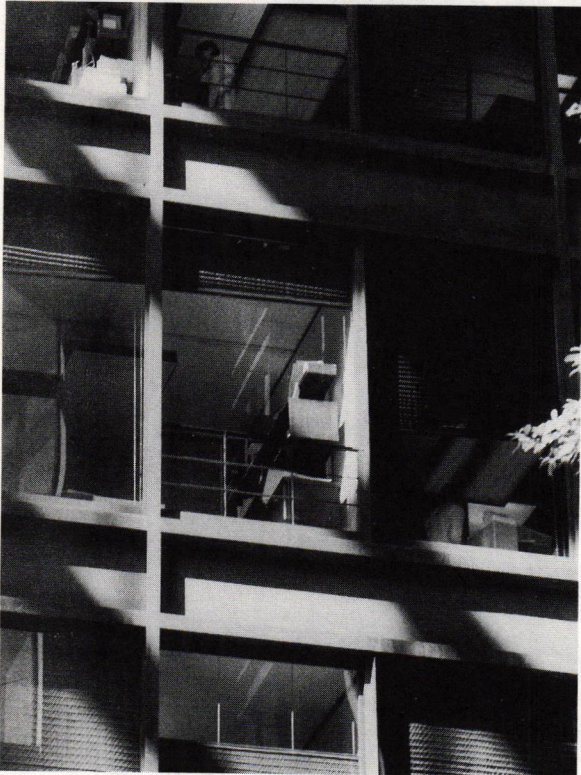
access to a window that either looks onto the interior garden or 43rd street. Each floor provides a succession of single offices and open activity areas. The buildings' most famous feature is the visibility across the garden into all of the offices, including the chairman's. The top two floors have a perimeter plan—the eleventh for the chairman and president's offices, the twelfth for the executive dining room and the cafeteria.

In the following critiques, the Ford Foundation will be reassessed by Michael Sorkin, a practicing architect and critic, who probes the cultural role of the building; Michael Mostoller, an architect working in New York, who considers the contradictions of its monumentality; and Christine Boyer, an urban historian, who examines the implications for the city contained in such a project. All photographs, unless indicated otherwise, are by Jeff Howard. Thanks are due both to the Ford Foundation and the office of Roche and Dinkeloo for their cooperation.



# The Garden in the Machine

by Michael Sorkin



Most of the offices, including the chairman's, look onto hermetically enclosed atrium-garden.



The Ford Foundation, "union of greenhouse and panopticon."

Beautiful Ford sits in the history of the captivating void, straddling a tradition of interiority whose shifting metaphors have long served to situate architecture in the world. Ford is the union of greenhouse and panopticon, a synthetic regulatory paradise, the concatenation of Mies and the Crystal Palace, an eleemosynary hothouse, a frame for the cultivation of charity's bureaucracy. Ford's garden stands for the foundation's product and Ford's building represents its idea. What qualities, then, are Job One?

Just as the greenhouse embodies the dream of nature under regulation, Ford's program is no less ambitious. Its mandate lists among its enterprises "the establishment of peace; the strengthening of democracy; the strengthening of the economy; education in democratic society; and improved scientific knowledge of individual behavior and human relations." This is a virtual recipe for the state of nature: the garden is its microcosmic recapitulation. At Ford, paradise is always foregrounded. Sitting in an office, preparing to unlimber sums in service of some civilizing enterprise, a Ford staffer gazes out not simply at verdure in captivity, but through the glass curtain to 42nd Street and the city beyond. The sight, then, is a superposition, the city placed, from this vantage, in Eden. Ford's garden is Central Park in miniature, redemptive greenery, sylvan viewing armature.

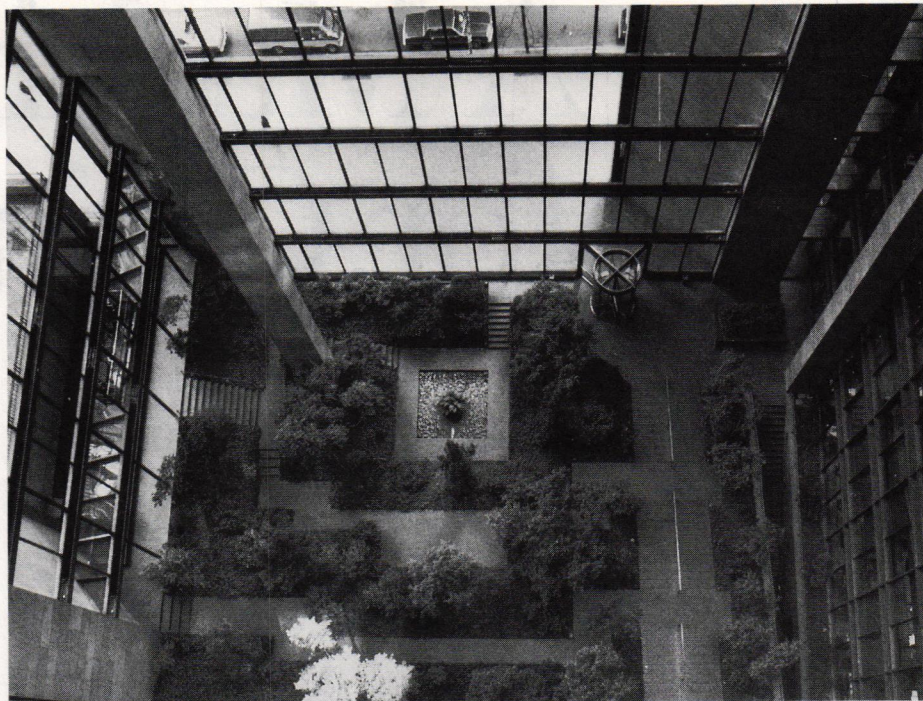
In the garden sits a small pool, just about the only thing able to sit there given the calculated lack of benches. Instinctively, passersby have chucked miscellaneous coins into the water. A sign reassures that the paltry collection is destined for UNICEF and not local coffers. Nevertheless, this act culminates a tripartite charitableness that the place represents, configuring a circle. To begin, Ford's megacharity, dispensing gigabucks *ad majoram gloriam*...? Then there's the building, which "gives" a city ravenous for amenity this charitable boon. And finally, those nickels and coppers—if paltry and dulled next to the shining brass behind—stand in for the source of



this largesse, the willingness of generations to shell out for a Ford, the democracy of consumption's desire, the waters of the source.

If Ford has had an effect in New York, it's as a contribution to the specification of amenity. Ford's a key initiatory event in the benighted rewriting of the zoning laws into the bonus system, the "let's make a deal" operation whereby bulk is exchanged for benefit, that zero-sum game in which clear deleteriousness is swapped for some allegedly mitigating contribution to the commonweal. The zoning law—like tax deductibility—is a legislated incitement to charity, a recognition that good works are seldom selfless, especially when big bucks figure. Ford makes a fine conceptual initiator because their garden is a charitable act *without* a quantifiable consequence. The open space is pure benefit, entailing no sacrifice of urbanist good behavior: we're talking twelve stories and street lines held, fine materials and genuine design. Quality Is Job One.

But if the motives for Ford's garden appear beyond reproach, its effects have further significance. Concurrent with Ford was its commercial doppelganger, the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta, Portman's first great atriumized hotel. The agenda for both places was not simply the valorization of the void, the reassertion of vastness as a totem of architectural worth, it was the invention of a new mode of colonizing space. During the late sixties, America was having a certain amount of difficulty with the containment of the Other. In Vietnam, the defense of Ford's five points had driven official America to the point of genocide. It is scant coincidence that the first Ford president to occupy the new building was McGeorge Bundy, one of the "architects" of that policy in his role as our first National Security Advisor. The policy was not without an urbanism. One of its centerpieces was the so-called "strategic hamlet" plan. Across the countryside, a set of defensible walled villages was created, little model cities functioning with Foucauldian rationality, safe from the darkening influences of the surrounding Otherness, their order offering both security and influence, gardens for the cultivation of "our" Vietnamese. This is certainly recapitulated in the Portman oeuvre, the global inscription of the homogenizing void. While Portman's



The lushly planted garden with no place to sit.

scope is vast, however, his ambition is circumscribed. Those hotels directly colonize little more than their own territory, uniform environments in differing contexts, the certainty of finding the identical martini anywhere. Ford's ambition is a little grander. Its missionary motive is affirmed not merely by secure interiority, but by the visibility of the city beyond. Here's the departure from Central Park. The landscape there, if disciplined, is nonetheless indigenous, hemmed by the exigencies of the local climate. Chez Ford, the planting is not. The Ford atrium simulates the climatology of another, more temperate latitude, a place where magnolias, japonicas, bougainvillea, and jacarandas flourish, lush, if just short of the jungle. Like the paradises housed under 19th-century glass, this is a thoroughly dependent landscape, a forest in captivity, a zoo. And, its two backdrops—the hierarchic bureaucratic rationality of Ford's and the intemperate order of Manhattan—affirm the centrality and potency of this landscape. Like the Ford Foundation's ideological agenda, the garden is a representation of exemplary change. The deformation of the natural landscape, its artificial shift in latitude, complements the putatively superior social relations of the bureaucratic paradise that surrounds it, also the product of a slight shift. Nominally, unalienated citizens performing nominally good works in

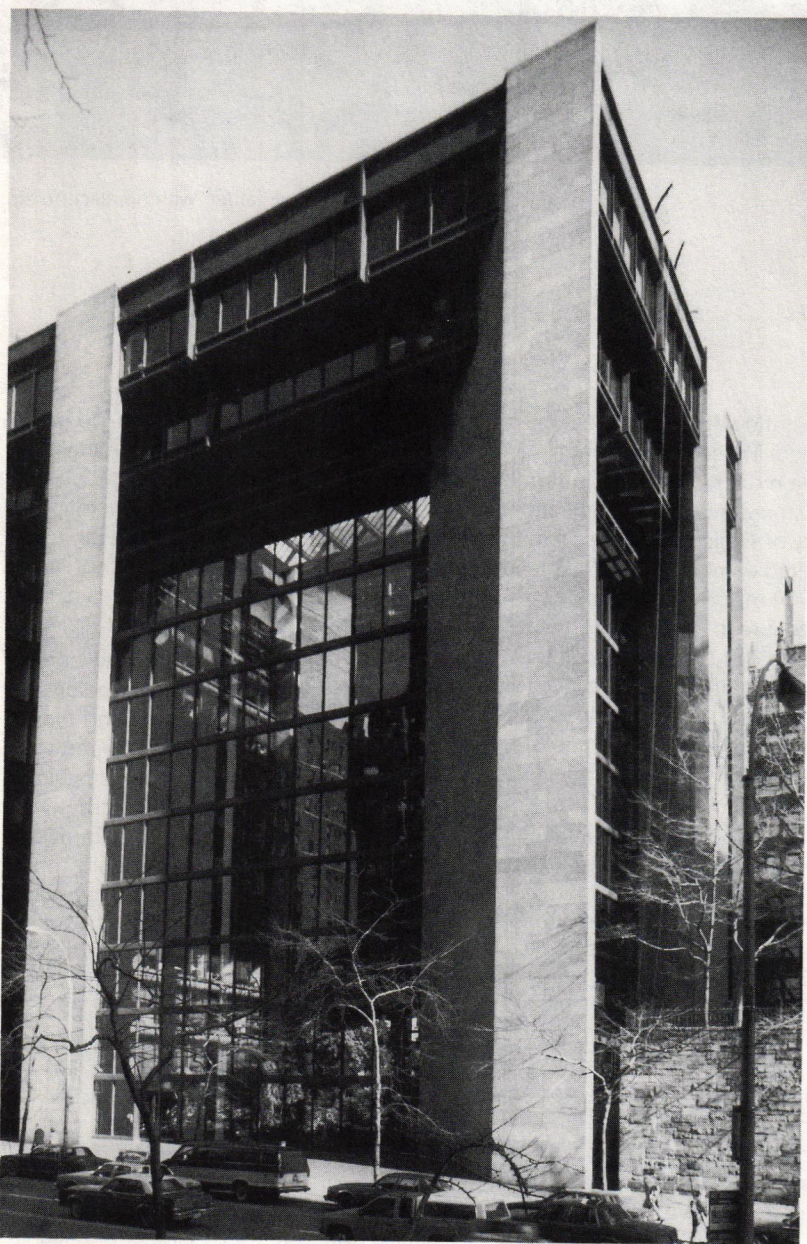
clear sight stand in contrast to the greed-fueled and compartmentalized activities native to the town (never mind that the building deploys the full bureaucratic apparatus, from the president's big room on top to separate dining areas for large and lesser cheeses).

The Ford Foundation, as both social and architectural enterprise, is neatly isomorphic with its world view. Happy colonizers overlook literal fruits, symbolizing their labors. Unseen, a labyrinth of pipes and ducts, fans and fertilizer pipes sustain the enterprise, pumping transformative stimulus like money from Ford. In this symbolic array, the workers finally represent the product of the garden, standing themselves for charity's harvest, for a world of capitalist orderliness in which citizens will toil in contented uniformity and in which all will know their place. The payback will be a view of that garden—the great Rousseauian suburb of the mind—and a raft of luxus durables, those shining brass typewriter podiums and Kleenex covers standing in for the T-Birds and Lincolns that will surely sit in every driveway when this terrestrial nirvana is finally effected. It's an almost irresistible vision of happy order, a containment vessel for the invention of a very particular paradise, a model of what America can make of the world.



# A Machine for Giving

by Michael Mostoller



Huge, diagonally cut pylons, two of which contain service stairs

Forty-second Street is one of New York's canonical avenues of architectural theatrics. Starting on the east, with the apotheosis of a world bureaucracy in the UN Secretariat, we can next visit Tudor City, the Ford Foundation, the Daily News Building (with its own "world" in the lobby), the Bowery Savings banking hall, the Chrysler Building, 500 Fifth Avenue, Grand Central's vaulted sky, the New York Public Library, and, looking through Bryant Park, the American Radiator building on 41st, Times Square, and, on the western extremity, the McGraw-Hill, Raymond Hood's third masterpiece on the route. Of these, the Ford Foundation building is an icon of 1960s architecture. With resounding bravado, it closed an era that one might call "monumental modern," and opened another that might be dubbed "easy-eclectic."

Approached from the west on 42nd Street, a seemingly impregnable series of blank stone walls twelve stories high elides the perception of the building until you are almost past it. Yet, turning at midpoint, one senses a great green interior, seen "through a glass darkly." A single pylon on the right projects mightily upward to support a "roofing floor" of glass and steel. One enters a "garden," spacious (in vertical amplitude), but domestic (in landscape scale). This first contradiction is subtly but powerfully disorienting and produces a lasting unease about the meaning of the project: only a spectacularly mythic flora could match the striving toward monumentality of the architecture and the space itself.

At the 43rd Street entry, an automobile porte-cochère utilizes approximately one-sixth of the available ground-floor area. Whether one enters through the twelve-story atrium or through the four-story porte-cochère, the next transition is to a one-story, flat-ceilinged "reception area," large enough for a receptionist at a



desk on one side and chairs and couches around a coffee table on the other. We have been led from the architecture of Olympus into a boudoir—and a public one at that.

Has this structure, striving so hard in its materials, detailing, and size to be a monument, created a place? Is this building with its particular vocabulary a part of the project of the "machine for living" in 20th-century architecture? Its purpose, first of all, is the creation of a great interior space, so it must be judged in relation to other historical efforts in this regard. Considering that it is 160 feet from "pool" to skylight, 40 feet higher than the vault of Chartres, 10 feet higher than St. Peter's dome, and 90 feet higher than the Crystal Palace, it had better be good. Second, it expresses structure in dimensions that can only be described as "heroic": the giant interior columns rising from floor to roof—the cor-ten steel girders spanning sixty feet, detailed out in four-inch-wide stiffeners, the cross-trussed skylight-frame that clear-spans the space (about the same dimension as the Crystal Palace, one-third wider than Chartres and 10 feet less than St. Peter's). In addition, two stair towers and one "services" tower are expressed as megalithic pylons that would dwarf Stonehenge. In plan these towers align on the west and on the center east-west axis to form a rough approximation of a tartan plan that expresses a servant-served concept of plan order. The L-shaped lower floors and C-shaped upper levels of the plan express the wrapping of inhabited areas around the "garden"—Roche's "living room"—revealing the implicit contradiction of monumental and domestic intentions. (Imagine Michelangelo conceiving of the space formed by the dome of St. Peter's as a "living room.")

The detailing of the Ford Foundation has been often noticed and widely admired, if only for its sheer tenacity in getting everything to look like a butt joint. The joining of materials and surfaces seems everywhere immaculate. The work stations, the typewriter stands, the concealed lights in the garden stair handrail, all strive for a simplification of form that would only be bettered if the joins were not merely immaculate, but invisible. But what is the merit in this concept of detailing? How unlike the work of Carlo Scarpa, for example, who delights in the

elaboration of the necessities and possibilities of the detail. Here a costly effort has been made to purge the complexities, and the finishes maintain an austerity of texture, material, and color. STB and CRS in *Progressive Architecture* (February 1968) describe the "democratic" color scheme thus:

Rusty, weathering steel members frame elegant copper-bronze doors and hardware; rustic plum-brown pavers sprout crisp, gleamingly polished handrails; rough weathering steel balcony rails have immaculate leather insets; glossy glass on all sides sets up unending conversation between the elements outside, the garden inside, and the people and materials that make up the building.

Today, the brown theme seems melancholy at best, and at worst, reduces the potential power of the visual field

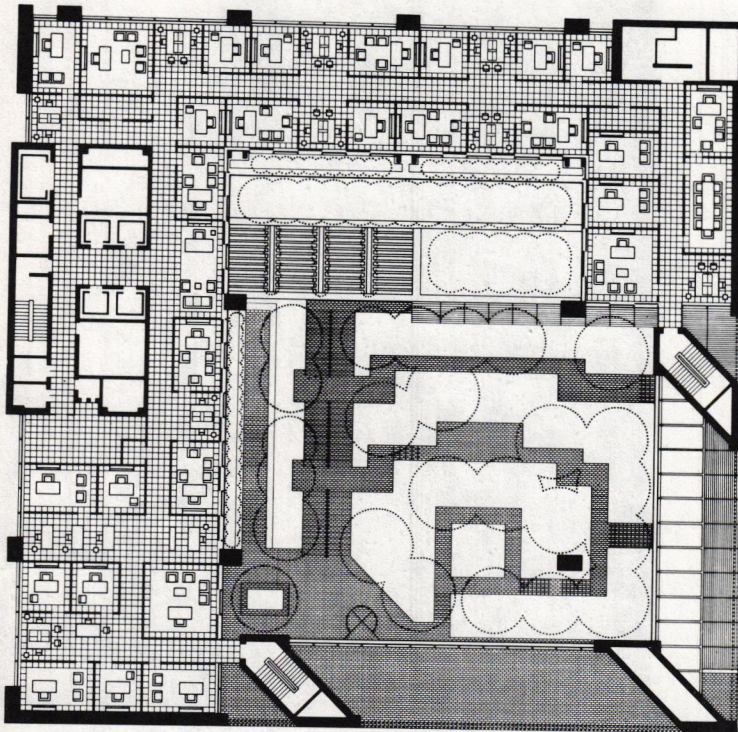
to indifference. This muted visual environment, coupled with the purged detail, contrasts with the scale of the structure and creates a strong sense of uncertainty about the truth of this "machine" in architectural terms. Each one of these attitudes toward space, structure, plan form, scale, finish, and detail verges on "spectacle." To what extent does this "spectacle" make sense, and what prevents it from being bombastic rather than monumental?

The "colors" and finishes, to take a simple example, turn the building into a curiously domestic work through its muted softness and its "drapes and blinds." The contrast with rusting steel and tremendous structural members is concisely contradictory and totally unresolved, destroying the building's

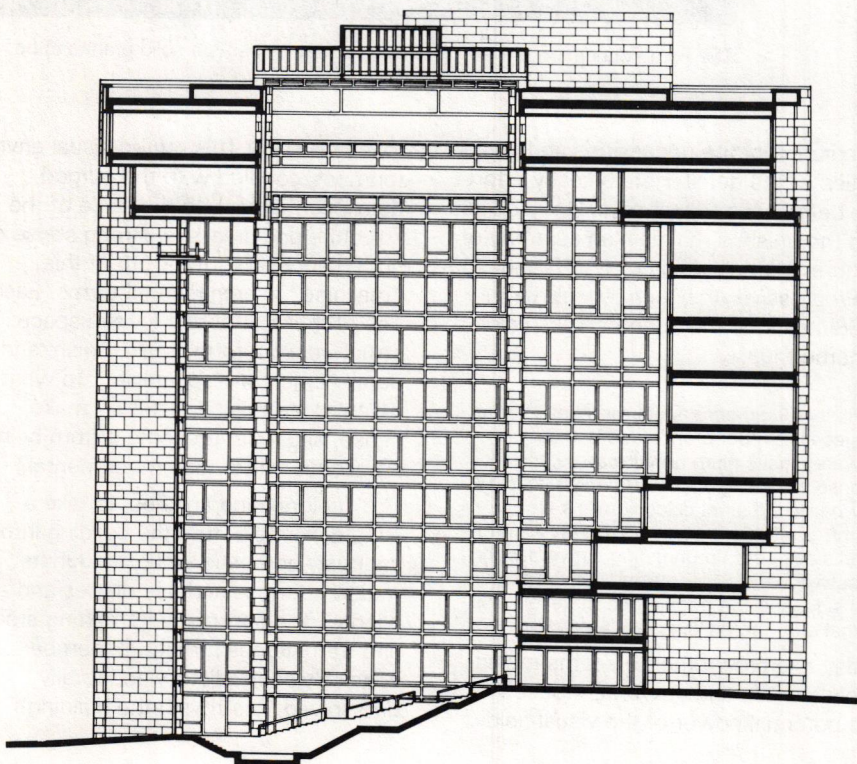


The Ford Foundation elevation on 42nd street presents a solid granite cube.





Plan of typical office floor, showing offices alternating with open activity areas along the west and north perimeter. Section shows the C-shaped figure surrounding the atrium.



integrity as a monument. At the same time, the detailing conflicts with the extravagant structure, for no attempt has been made to exalt construction into myth, wherein (according to Dimitri Porphyrios) lies the source of architecture. Instead the "seamless joint" concept of detailing wants to eliminate from perception the fact that this building has been built. Even though the "structure" is everywhere visible, the building has the quality of a giant graphic. We do not feel that it is about "stuff," the making of a "pile," which we so readily admire in the work of those earlier cargo-cult architects, McKim, Mead and White (I borrow the expression from Alison and Peter Smithson). In fact, the entire Ford Foundation building seems "designed," rather than built, like a "color scheme" concept in fashion circles. In its masking of itself, construction has become decor, which trivializes the building immeasurably.

The extent and amplitude of the space itself, coupled with the sense of "un-builtness," and its "coordinated dressing" finishes, textures, and materials, give rise to a deep disquiet. Its elegance of detail and finish, while hollow, also fails to involve us in "modernism" (as Lukacs defines it) "as a new kind of sensibility—disenchanted" (with the past), "introspective, irreverent" (in the present), "which when translated into a work of art, becomes 'the utopian reality it posits.'"

On the contrary, the Ford Foundation is a congratulatory pat on the back of its corporate sponsor. Interestingly, its modern "style" also refuses to provide the "consolation" offered by postmodern advocates—in the solace of history or in the conservative ideal of wholeness revealed in classical architecture and composition. It is very much a fragmented building, in both its idea and its composition.

It never presents a "figure" in the sense of a classical building—i.e., in symmetry, body analogies, the use of an order and/or architectural elements (there are no "windows," for example). The work is abstract and also fragmentary—a quadrant of a



square, rather than a square, and with a strong diagonal inflection. Both moves destabilize and dematerialize this "monument," and again destroy the attempt to unify everything visually through muting and removal of detailing.

Both procedures—the partial plane and the diagonal—as well as the use of "free-standing" service and stair towers, seem to be Roche's meditation on Kahn's themes, particularly the Goldenberg house of 1959, with its central courtyard and diagonal inflections at the *four* corners, and of the Richards Laboratory of 1957–1961. However, in the Goldenberg house, Kahn's use of the courtyard-diagonal theme is vastly different than Roche's. The Goldenberg project is a figural whole and all distortions of actual symmetry are due to Kahn's accommodation of the circumstantial, as are the inflected diagonals. This small house also developed the primary structural framing on this diagonal, giving it additional meaning. While Roche has "monumentalized" Kahn's project, the Kahn project is actually more monumental in its unity and symmetry as a figure (albeit made complex by contradiction and need), in its wholeness as a centered composition and as a house with a center—having a real outdoor place at its core.

The inflection in Kahn's project is a device that subtly refines a consistent idea. In the Roche transformation it becomes a stupendous, megalithic "feature," unclear in intention. The giant stair towers are a much more obvious borrowing from the thoughts of Kahn, but combined with other elements do not add up to a great work of architecture, but rather to an enormous building, domestic in its ambience, and toylike in its unbilderliness. The Ford Foundation avoids both the modernist engagement in the utopian rupture and the current architecture of consolation. By offering us neither engagement nor consolation, and by distorting its sources rather than developing them, it is the work of an eclectic designer, a spectacle building in its prime, but somewhat pompous and banal in retrospect.

\*Istvan Deak, "The Convert," *New York Review of Books* (12 March 1987): 42, 43.



Porte-cochère entry on 43rd street



# Reflections on a Glass

by M. Christine Boyer



Pedestrian entry of the Ford Foundation is on 42nd street, while vehicles cross an overpass and enter the porte-cochère.

There is always a high road and a low road by which to approach the city, although byroads never pretend to offer direct communication. We might arrive at the Ford Foundation by the elevated highway, ceremoniously following the bridge over 42nd Street in a spiralling approach that recalls parking garage ramps; we cast a fleeting glance at the foundation building before driving down 43rd Street into the portico which frames our formal arrival. There is of course a lower route, on foot amid the clamor of 42nd Street. From this lower vantage point we approach a shimmering prism, entering to find ourselves immersed in an interior garden, sheltered from the din of the outside city. Pausing to explore this picturesque scene, we climb the stair through the park to a higher perspective.

Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo's elegantly mannered and urbane Ford Foundation building was praised in the 1960s

as a civic gesture that offered the city a lavishly planted, one-third-acre, year-round park. In scale, its interior court could only be compared to a cathedral nave, or a huge luminous greenhouse. This architectural spectacular was a custom-made conservatory, so luxurious that it blended with its neighbors without making them appear underdressed or outmoded. It showed by example how an aesthetic gesture in the place of profitable greed could contribute to the city's style. Reminiscent of the late 19th-century gallery office buildings which were being demolished throughout the city, as well as the New York tradition of Renaissance palazzos, the conservatory even more strongly recalls that great pavilion of sunlight, that greenhouse larger than ever a greenhouse had been, the Crystal Palace of 1851.

John Ruskin blasted out in 1854, when the Crystal Palace was being reassembled in Sydenham, that the building obstructed his view. And so, I might add, the Ford

Foundation, in its formal and manneristic attire, its ambiguous and paradoxical position, obstructs my view of the city. Ruskin's sensibilities were troubled because the Crystal Palace was neither a palace nor of crystal—it neither evoked palatial structures of the past, nor contained natural crystalline angles which invited reflection. Instead, its rounded structure was produced by machine labor, an engineering feat extending downward from the railway corporations that managed the show, to the engineer Paxton who refined and enlarged upon the designs of glass and iron roofing already applied to railroad sheds, to the railway engineers awarded the construction contracts, and finally to the industrial products that cluttered its interior.

Since glass surfaces could not age, Ruskin claimed they offered only pure white forgetfulness, and engendered mass amnesia in the erasures of novelty. The linearity of the Crystal Palace was symbolic of the fragmentation which separated architectural technique from aesthetic expression, fracturing the powers of contemplation. In the case of the Ford Foundation we can likewise expect no mirror image inversion, only white opacity deflecting our subject—architecture and the city.<sup>1</sup>

The analogy is clear: the Ford Foundation, a product of 20th-century technology, and reflective of the automobile, the highway, and the overpass, eliminates the city from our view. No one actually planned the assault of the automobile on the city, nor foresaw that the inner city would be devastated by traffic congestion and abandoned for the suburbs. Though many blame this blatant disrespect for the historic city center and its praise for the elevated highway on Le Corbusier, we could just as easily blame Henry Ford.

Sweeping along the high road of architecture, one's view is kept concentrically on the reflections of the Ford Foundation, but a shift of perspective quickly opens a larger panorama. Le Corbusier found New York to be the city of modern architecture, its skyscrapers magnificent, albeit of hedgehog appearance, too small and ill-mannered, yet portentous of the future. Kevin Roche would breathe the same air: fresh from IIT, he found employment in 1949 on the UN project. On a site running from 42nd to 48th Streets,



along the East River Drive, where slaughterhouses, cattle pens, and packing plants had stood for nearly a hundred years, Robert Moses, William Zechendorf, and the Rockefeller Family, in a last minute real-estate deal, were suddenly able to offer this cheap land to the United Nations and seize the prize of its headquarters location away from Boston, Philadelphia, and San Francisco.<sup>2</sup> Although Wallace K. Harrison presided as project architect, Le Corbusier, as the French delegate to the International Board of Design, was coauthor of an earlier scheme: three units supposedly relating to the city and the East River—a tall Secretariat block, a fan-shaped auditorium, and, across an open green space, a Delegates' Building. Here, Le Corbusier hoped the Radiant City, with its prisms of glass, its free-standing slabs in wide open space, would begin the modular resurrection of the hedgehog city—an ideal never attained.

Twenty-five years later—shortly after the completion of the Ford Foundation—Kevin Roche would return to this Corbusian vision of sun, space, and greenery in the initial proposal for the UN Plaza complex; his renderings even seem quoted from the Radiant City. On a site linked visually and conceptually to the Ford Foundation, which actually commissioned the initial study, Roche's plan for the area between 42nd and 45th Streets, from the UN to 2nd Avenue, called for the suppression of urban space, its block and lot morphology, as well as its local building types. The elaborate plan (1968–1983) contained a series of glass towers tied together by a five-hundred-foot-high glass atrium. Intended to rival Rockefeller Center, this complex of office buildings, hotels, visitor center, parking structures, and commercial spaces was only partially realized in Roche's UN Plaza One (1969–1975) and its neighboring tower (1979–1983). The original plan shows the linkage following one axis. A bridge across First Avenue would have connected the glass complex to the UN headquarters, while the cross axis would have united the 43rd Street entrance of the Ford Foundation with the Atrium's center. Such a glassed-in international community would have paradoxically brought the cycle of automobile destruction to a close. If the machine for circulation had killed urban space, then interior landscapes and private streets



On the east the Ford Foundation overlooks one of Tudor City's parks.

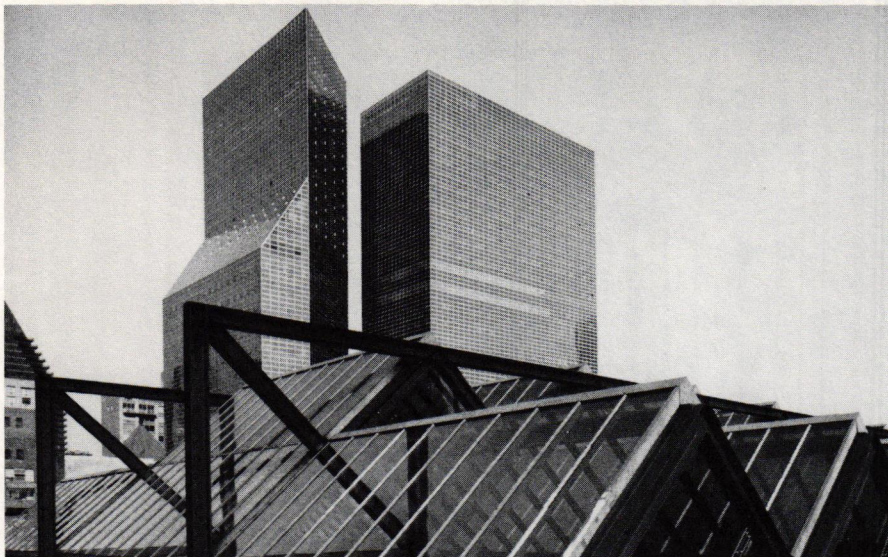
would now mediate between architecture and the city, producing new self-contained spaces in which communities would live and work. In Roche's words, "the architecture that architects will be dealing with in the next generation will be the architecture of cities, not cities of commerce but cities of life." And so returns the Radiant City, under the masterful government of Sun, Space, and Greenery. But the Ford Foundation and Roche's goal of returning community life to the city was not the first such attempt in this neighborhood. In 1925 Fred F. French announced plans for Tudor City, New York's first self-contained residential enclave, a vast community settlement. Five acres of apartments, hotels, gardens, and garages were planned for Prospect Hill, a ledge at the end of 42nd Street rising seventy feet above the slaughterhouses on the future site of the UN. The entire project of 12 towers, organized on its own private street and raised above the surrounding streets, faced westward from the East River toward two private parks. French believed that automobile traffic stifled the city and commuters wasted time in endless journeys to and from the suburbs. By locating white-collar residential enclaves near employment

centers, he could eliminate these problems. The luxury of Tudor City was more than New Yorkers had previously known: an inner garden court in the English style, a swimming pool, tennis courts, children's playgrounds, club rooms and shops, and even a short-lived 18-hole miniature golf course.<sup>3</sup>

The program for a self-contained community was also present in the Ford Foundation building. Roche has said that he wanted to instill the feeling of community among the employees, underlining a sense of their common purpose. His strategy was to move the office space as far into the interior of the structure as possible, away from the noise of 42nd Street, while enhancing this inward retreat with views outward over the garden court, past the Tudor City Towers, and out to the East River. The choice of materials and colors, the 12-story height, the lines and planes of the building, even the location of the garden, were meant to blend with and offset its Tudor City neighbors.

Moving along the highway is distracting; similarly, Ruskin believed that railroad travel was too fast, enabling us to see so much that we soon became weary, our





Roofscape looking onto UN Plaza One and Two

imaginings overtaken. The railway was an abominable device for making the world smaller, a killer of time and space. Cars and highways added their speed, fragmenting our view of the city, killing the concept of nodal civic space and commanding a new architecture to be seen from the road. As Roche and others were aware, the automobile and its possibilities for escape diminished Manhattan's role as a residential city in the 1960s. A few years later, corporate offices followed the path to the bucolic countryside. Architecture made to be seen from the road demands an image which is immediately understandable to a public concentrating more on traffic than on a building's details or structure. This architecture must offer a spontaneous theatrical spectacle manipulating images in simple combinations and patterns that are part of our collective recall, so that we can recognize ourselves and our position in their reflections and reiterations. Dal Co has suggested that the Ford Foundation building speaks to us through codes of conflict: a full against an empty space, the chaotic flow of the street versus the quiet order of the offices, the formal geometry of the exterior glazing juxtaposed against the communal space of the garden court. Roche's buildings are full of suggestive appearances that are easily read.

When the Ford Foundation was being planned and built, civil-rights protests were legion in the South, anti-Vietnam demonstrations were beginning to spread out, the ghettos were rioting and burning. Losing control of the street was a threatening possibility. Since the end of World War II, education had been the Ford Foundation's chief mode of intervention around the world; a cultural cold war that

maintained stability in the post-colonial era. The policy of carefully training selected elites to encourage consent to American ideals worked equally well at home and abroad. The foundation's interest in training indigenous city planning elites ranged from sending technical experts for the planning of Calcutta in the mid-1960s, to establishing a mid-career retraining program for foreign students in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT, to sponsoring historic preservation activities in India and Southeast Asia in the early 1970s. In the mid-1970s it sponsored various American community development programs, including a local development corporation in Baltimore to discourage speculation, and with it a program for preventive maintenance service on a yearly contract basis for the elderly and disabled homeowners. The foundation's intentions were to improve property values and make the neighborhood more attractive to the real-estate market at a time when red-lining, disinvestment, and abandonment seemed to be the rules of the real-estate game. Market interests subsequently shifted, however, and this restabilization, upgrading, and rehabilitation work sparked avid outside interest in city neighborhoods, and, inadvertently, spawned gentrification.

So the Ford Foundation stands today, a visual reminder of the political, aesthetic, and planning strategies formed decades ago. The Crystal Palace, as a metonymic image, travels far beyond the Ford Foundation. Ruskin knew that men of his day desired no cathedrals, and yet the Crystal Palace was an enormous and costly edifice claimed to instill an educational influence over the whole London popu-

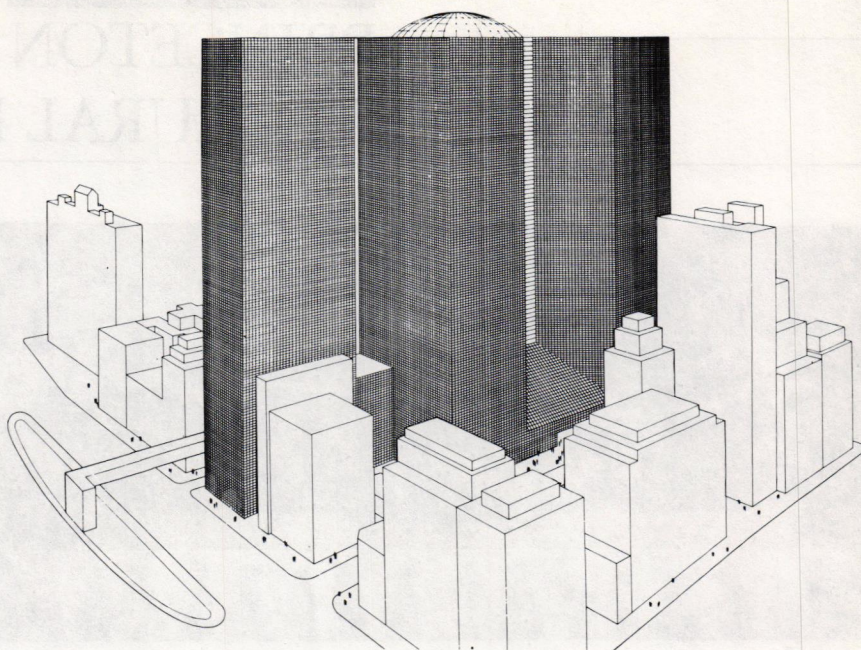
lace, and hence serve as a truly metropolitan cathedral for the 19th century. The Crystal Palace, Ruskin noted, was like a map to the distant viewer: each country placed on an axis, with England and her colonies on one side, Europe and America on the other.

We the public hold the center stage. In the Edenic landscape of the Ford Foundation, as an inverted and infolded panopticon structure, the logic of the image governs the way that we see. This natural order on the periphery of all nations is to be disciplined through exemplary acts and gestures of civility. On the balconies above, uncontaminated by the public below who is invited only as far as the garden, the well-formed examples of bureaucratic elites can be observed and followed. Indeed, democratic elitism pervades the Ford Foundation, for its decorum and luxurious detailing throughout proclaim that the best is good enough for all. Patriarchal authority stems downward from the United Nations and from the top of the Ford Foundation, where the offices of the president and chairman of the board are located, to the bureaucratic well-governed community which is housed below on shelves that are open to our view, to the family of man in the living room garden. The entire structure becomes a metaphor for the internalization of order and discipline. As Edward Berman has pointed out, "The foundation programs in Africa, Asia, and Latin America [after World War II], in short, were designed to improve conditions there, mainly through the aegis of an enculturated stratum of local nationals, whose subsequent modes of behavior would be supportive of the national-security and economic interests of the United States."<sup>4</sup>

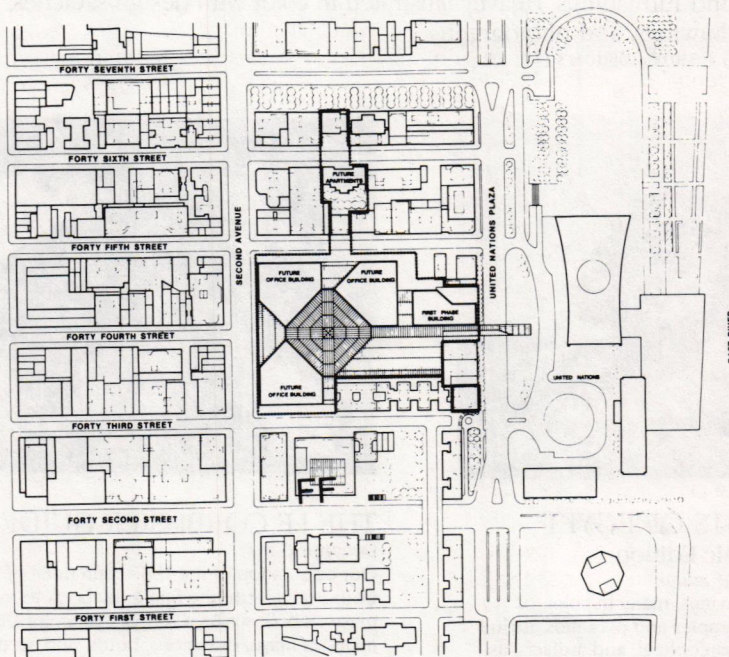
As Ruskin promised that 1851 would be remembered less for what it produced than for what it withdrew from sight, so the Ford Foundation obliterates from view many paradoxes currently found in the city. Its elegance and high style set up formal and abstract distinctions meant to educate an elite. But New York in the 1980s is an entirely different city, utterly lacking in such paternalistic gestures. For almost two decades development in New York has proceeded without a structural plan or sense of direction, making the city a real-estate battleground. The



If we take the high road to art, the ideal straight passage with no diversions, then architecture is pulled into our central focus while the city is almost pushed out of the frame. Such a formally determined dialogue preempts our understanding of how urban space is produced, how real-estate capital moves, and how class distinctions are established. The new pattern language of urban design of the 1980s, contextual zoning and historic preservation, may attempt to restore traditional urban forms and nodal public places to a city brutally fragmented by modernist ideals, but it only succeeds by covering up the realities of urban existence.<sup>5</sup> A kind of double-talk has erupted in the city, that speaks of good architecture and bad planning as if the two were separate. For every traveler on the low road, the ordinary street, who knows the city has a less perfect look, this is a privileged vision. It marks the disarray of everyday life as the threatening other, the difference that gnaws at one's purist illusions. The refined, urbane place, dressed in formal attire, is the city of the museum, of architectural decorum and luxurious ornamentation. Observed from a window, this city of high art is cool, detached, and mannerly, never immediate, melodramatic, or awesome. This is



1969 plan for UN Plaza scheme by Roche Dinkeloo, the cross-axis aligned to the entry of the Ford Foundation. Perspective of proposed towers, which vaguely resemble the "Cartesian skyscrapers" of Le Corbusier's Radiant City.



1. On Ruskin, see Gary Wihl, *Ruskin and the Rhetoric of Infallibility* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
2. On the U.N. site see Robert Caro, *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1975).

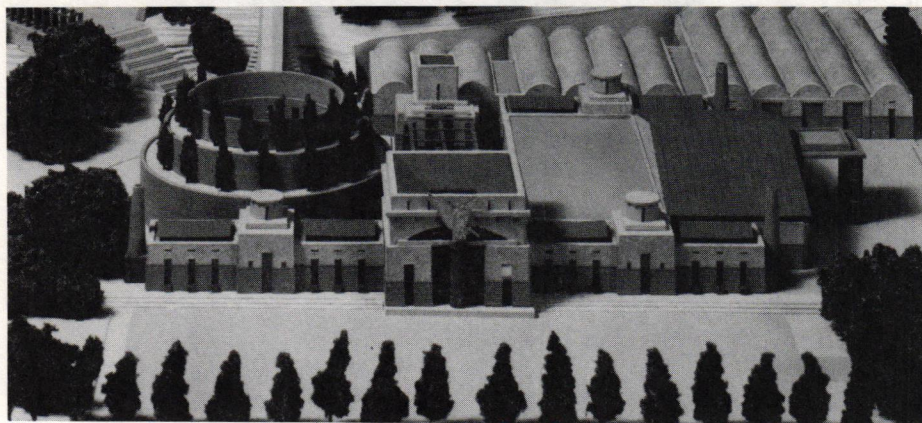
5. On current effects of gentrification, see Rosalyn Deutsch, "Krzysztof Wodiczko's Homeless Projection and the Site of Urban Revitalization," in *October* 38 (Fall 1986).



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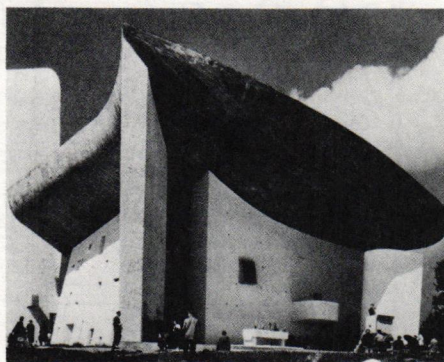
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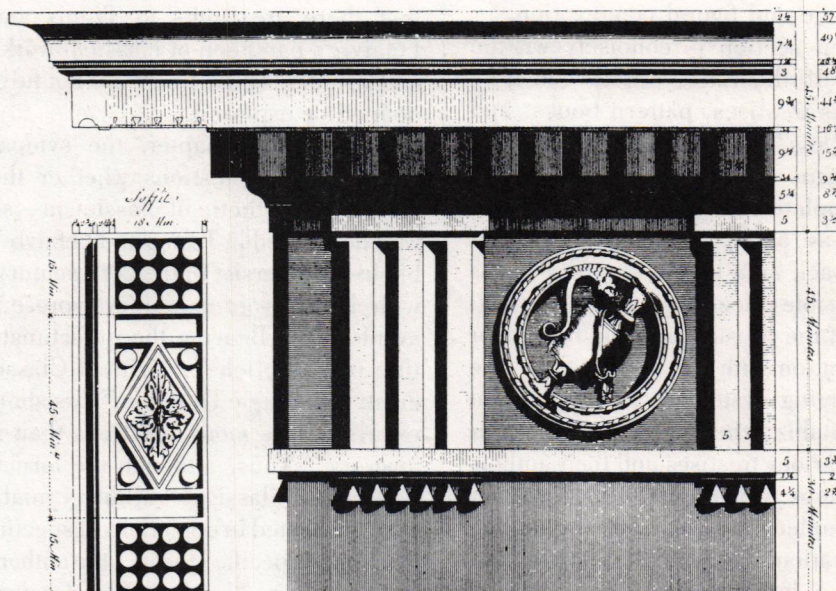
*Thomas Schumacher*

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## CLASSICAL ABC's

*Classical Architecture*, a short but ambitious study, applies some of the most potent theories of modern criticism and social science to architecture's most ancient, most written about, yet still most opaque subject. From structuralism and deconstruction, the Prague School of literary criticism, various works of recent music theory and musicology, philosophy and aesthetics, the authors draw terms and bits of analytical rubric to form a new description of the ordering strategies and aesthetic precepts behind the classical language. In an attempt to



DORIC ENTABLATURES

This book begins with a strong, logical schema and a premise that has been missed by many modern observers of classical architecture: that the basic structure of classical poetics is

The book is initially organized into three sections, each corresponding roughly to a Vitruvian concept. *Taxis* deals with larger systems of order, primarily in plan, relating part to whole. *Genera* offers a remarkably clear exposition of the system of the orders and their ornamental components; it nevertheless stays clear of the specific and complex proportional variations that have often occupied architectural pedagogues and theorists. (The authors' reasons for dispensing with the time-honored term, "the orders," are, however, rather weak.) *Symmetria* takes up the relations between elements according to



rhythmic and figural composition.

Each section is concisely written and well illustrated with linecuts from various treatises, pattern books, and "parallels" of the orders. Though by no means exhaustive, the exposition is complete enough for the book to be used as a teaching text. Its major drawback as a textbook (offset by its reasonable price) is the relatively small size of the illustrations and their poor integration with the written text. The captioning system is also somewhat inscrutable; the reader not familiar with various treatises and their authors must look to the back of the book for a complete citation for any given illustration. The publisher might consider a larger format for a revised edition.

After a strong beginning, the later chapters of *Classical Architecture* fail to exploit the book's analytical framework and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Part of the reason may be the sheer paucity of text in chapters four through seven—the reader is given nearly one hundred pages of illustrations to "read" as an "anthology," with few guideposts along the way. The authors need more than rhetorical questions and admonitions to "search for conflicts, exceptions, ambiguities.... Does the system explain them?" Indeed, the questions posed by works illustrated—most from 17th- and 18th-century books—are profound and difficult. How has the classical system fared in dealing with modern building types? Does the square and cross "mother *taxis* formula" from Cesariano really hold up as an ordering grid in most classical buildings? Was Durand really a classical architect? These questions might receive treatment in an expanded version of the book, or in another volume. Do the works of Schinkel, Garnier, Labrouste, Robert Adam, Soane, Lutyens, Wagner, and Plecnik rank with the model classical projects of Palladio, Alberti, and Ictinus? Since none of these important modern architects receive treatment, one suspects

that there are limits to Tzonis and Lefaivre's pantheon of classical works and authors. Those limits are not fully defined or explored.

In the final chapter, the sympathetic reader questions whether the ethos and aesthetic of classicism—so well delineated in Tzonis and Lefaivre's book—can persist in the 20th century, with its anti-order and ever-present avant-garde. Bearing the unfortunate title (now a cliché), "Critical Classicism: The Tragic Function," this short excursus asks more questions than it answers. "Thus, although the formal patterns of classical buildings might have originated in depictions of specific events and specific objects," the authors rightly argue, "in the end, classical buildings through formal patterns embody abstract relations of quantity and space, out of which one can infer by analogy statements about many other facets of reality." Perhaps classicism is indeed one lingering manifestation of the structure of the mind and its need to order the world. That premise taken, various kinds of abstractly classical buildings with modern qualities of "foregrounding" and "strangemaking" can be analyzed. But, in the strict sense, the sense embodied in the terms of ancient rhetoric, with its emphasis on wholeness, clear hierarchy, complex tripartition, and other concepts almost alien to the modern artist, there are no "modernist" classical buildings. Terragni, Mies, and Corbusier selected parts of the classical system as foils, never adopting a unified approach. In discussing these architects and the possibility for a continuation of classicism in a 20th-century climate, the authors tread on very thin ice, threatening some of the solid definitions put forward in their earlier work. It is not at all clear whether a "critical classicism" can exist, or whether such a strategy posits a contradiction in terms. At the conclusion of *Classical Architecture: The Poetics of Order*, the reader is disappointed that the authors stop short of applying their persuasive analysis of classical poetics to the

more challenging buildings of the post-Enlightenment period.

No such sticky contradictions exist in Robert Chitham's updated "parallel" of the orders. This book presents its material in a solid, no-questions-asked manner befitting a handbook for preservation architects and builders, which was its original purpose. Chitham, now English Heritage's chief conservation architect, found numerous on-the-job situations in which a new "Builder's Jewel" might be useful, especially one geared to the modern restoration specialist and his digital calculators and high-tech probe equipment. Thus the gimmick in this book—and recall that both Vignola and Gibbs had theirs when trying to improve on Vitruvius—is its decimalization of the orders. What could be more in tune with the age of digital recordings and personal computing?

The virtue of Chitham's book is its clarity of exposition; each plate is laid out to be quickly understood. It is a better 20th-century Vignola than the recent reissue of William R. Ware's handbook (*American Vignola*, Norton). It more comprehensively explains and compares various proportional and ornamental interpretations of the canon of the orders. In fact, each order is illustrated in half a dozen variations, showing just how malleable the system was. All of the basic problems and elements in the system are treated in the plates—intercolumniation, entasis, fluting, moldings, pediments, arcuation, superimposition, and so forth. However, the drawings, often done freehand in rapidograph line, are rather inelegant. We expect a classical pattern book to be beautifully made and illustrated, and this one comes up short in that department.

When Mr. Chitham ventures out of the realm of graphic analysis and into aesthetics, he oversimplifies. "All classical buildings exhibit symmetry in both elevation and plan," he maintains, perhaps forgetting the Erechtheum. His historical explanations



and definitions of classicism are too cursory and incomplete to be useful. *The Classical Orders of Architecture* depends on the formula of the graphic handbook, and should be used for its clear visual information, not for its written justifications. The book fills a clear need for an updated comparative treatment of the orders, and preservation specialists, students, and professional offices will find it useful.

For about \$40.00, an architecture student who wants to learn more about the classical elements being tossed about in his postmodern environment can purchase copies of Summerson, Tzonis and Lefaivre, and Chitham. Educated through television, nurtured on a university intellectual diet of Foucault, Baudrillard, and Derrida, and taught to draw on a CAD system, he or she will relate well to all three books. Each in its own way demonstrates the extraordinary power, attraction, and flexibility of the classical system. Each offers an interpretation in tune with 20th-century sensibilities. And each succeeds in illuminating a crucial aspect of the classical canon—Summerson's book provides elegant definitions, Tzonis and Lefaivre's a rubric of poetics, Chitham's a compendium of rules. Which book will have the longest life? The answer, I think, is the one published in 1963, at the time of the space race, the Beatles, and brutalist modernism. Summerson's structure, language, and tone are in harmony with the classical rationality that infuses the great buildings he discusses. Tzonis and Lefaivre's "critical" tone is at odds with it. Chitham's drawings are likewise slightly out of sync. Nevertheless, the mere existence of such a trilogy bodes well for the survival of classical architecture in the modern world.

*Classical Architecture: The Poetics of Order*, Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, MIT, 1986, 306 pp., illus., \$9.95 pb.

*The Classical Orders of Architecture*, Robert Chitham, Rizzoli, 1985, 160 pp., illus., \$17.50 pb.

*Joseph Rykwert:*

## PATTERNS OF INTENTION

MICHAEL BAXENDALL

Michael Baxendall's new book has all the virtues his constant readers have come to expect: it is witty, spare, learned. And it has some of the corresponding vices: a coyness before the object, a hesitation before any engagement with enthusiasm. Running through both this text and through some of his other writings is a sense of the inadequacy of words to describe things. It is a justified worry, but not a particular problem of art historians, since the unique system of sounds that passes for language (in common parlance at any rate) is all we have to record our vast complex of visual, emotional, and intellectual acts. In T. S. Eliot's immortal phrase, "I gotta use words when I talk to you." But Baxendall has considered this particular worry in relation to the specific theoretical disputes of art historians, who are desperately concerned about the nature of their activity. He has little sympathy with their agonizing.

Art historians, he maintains, are merely people who, like tourist guides, point out to others the things which they can already see, and say a little more about them than they already know. Any pretension on the part of art historians to a "high" theoretical purpose is quite out of place. Baxendall has some understanding for those colleagues who feel threatened by the academic growth of the subject and seek demarcation lines to contain it. He has none for those who, perhaps less articulately, see the expansion of their discipline linked to larger social or philosophical events; those, for instance, who contemplate the growth of museums and museum attendance with great concern, since it makes them the worried and unwitting theologians (or even clergy) of a new religious practice.

In *Patterns of Intention* Baxendall has undertaken to consider four objects, devoting a chapter to each. The first is the Forth Bridge, while the other three are paintings: Picasso's portrait of his dealer, Kahnweiler; Chardin's *Lady Drinking Tea* and Piero's *Baptism*. Because the primary interest of the book is the matching of explanation with object, the first artifact is deliberately chosen to make the well-worn point that verbal descriptions are not "of objects" but "of experiences of objects," and that a description cannot stand in for the object or explain it away. Baxendall is too shrewd an observer to engage explicitly with any such reductive notion; nevertheless, what he does offer (and why he chooses to begin his essay with an "aesthetically neutral" artifact) is the general suggestion that the use of verbal explanation is paralleled by the concerns of a maker "who is addressing a problem of which his product is a finished and concrete solution." And it is the concrete solution with which the critic has to deal. He has therefore only to address himself to formulating the maker's problem, for which words have to suffice, and describe the circumstances from which the problem was being addressed. The description of the object itself may then turn out to be redundant, since it will either be implicit in what has already been said, banal, or nugatory.

Seeing that danger, Baxendall confesses to relief as he turns from abstract considerations to the account of his first "real" object, the Forth Bridge. It was commissioned from Fowler and Baker after the Tay Bridge, which had been designed by another engineer, Thomas Pouch, had collapsed in a gale, incidentally provoking William MacGonagall's immortal couplet:

... As every sensible man confesses  
it would have been much stronger  
had it been supported by buttresses.

The Fowler and Baker bridge depended on a formal separation of the



tensile from the compressive steel members, and a novel application of the cantilever principle. Baxendall has reduced the narrative of how the peculiar Forth solution was reached to 24 "cause-suggesting" points. By permutation he arrives at the kind of analytical description which he considers the only true work of the critic. And yet a worthwhile critic should be able to set the bridge among other objects of its class (bridges) and show how it is better or worse than the others, and how a judgment about it could be formulated. Baxendall quotes a lecture which Baker gave in Edinburgh in which he attempted to answer such criticism—particularly that of William Morris, who called the Forth Bridge "the supremest specimen of all ugliness." Baker defended his bridge by the then-current argument from fitness, saying that every form should be fit for its purpose, and that however beautiful the Parthenon column might be, were you to bore a hole through one "and use it as a funnel of an Atlantic liner, it would cease to be beautiful," which Baxendall curiously enough reads "like a neo-classic statement, an argument from decorum that might have come from Leon Battista Alberti."

A critic should, I suggest, be able in the case of any particular bridge not only to say why it is better or worse than others, but what effect, good or bad, the bridge in question may have on the economy and landscape around it. He should also be able to answer or even rebut Morris's charge more convincingly than Baker had done. Yet I cannot myself see how that sort of discourse can be extrapolated from the narrative account of the Forth Bridge, which Baxendall is proposing as a model. Nor can I see any strong, convincing links between the thought processes of the Forth Bridge engineers and the three painters whose works are discussed in the rest of the book. They are in fact very different. Of the three, Picasso is the only one who could be credibly described as

having a problem to solve. The cubist method as worked out in portrait painting implied that a decomposition of the subject's head would follow the new and as yet unformulated rules of planar analysis, while still retaining some resemblance. However fragmented the image on the picture plane, it could still recognizably be that of the dapper, darkly handsome Daniel-Henri Kahnweiler. Baxendall does not discuss that specific point, but treats the portrait as if it were a typical cubist picture. What he has to say about the cubist problem is an informed but familiar rehearsal of Golding and Fry; however, taking the Kahnweiler portrait as his specimen does allow him the pretext of contrasting Kahnweiler's careful and articulated statement of cubist aims with one of Picasso's rather gnomonic pronouncements. In the course of this chapter he manages to dismiss Apollinaire, one of the greatest poets of the century, as a minor and insensitive art critic, rather like dismissing Ezra Pound as an incompetent economist.

The Chardin essay is, in my opinion, by far the best in the book. Perhaps this is true because he is writing about a picture to which he responds personally, or because the work he has done on 18th-century optical theory has allowed him to look afresh at Chardin's procedure, and even at the well-worn theme of his "borrowing" from the Bolognese and Venetian masters. At any rate, the quickening in the text is very heartening to the reader and even the account of the *Salons*, another well-worn theme, can be taken in very digestibly.

But it leads to the blandest and least satisfactory of the chapters, that on Piero's *Baptism of Christ*. This painting has been the subject of careful exegetic essays in what Baxendall calls "high iconography," mentioned in the footnotes merely as representing the sort of intellectual endeavor of which the author disapproves: "not the kind of explanation a stance in the three self-critical moods leads the

inferential critic towards." Perhaps his distaste for his colleagues' procedures betrayed Baxendall into this untypically clumsy syntax.

The "inferential critic," as Baxendall circumscribes him, has only three modes: first, he must be conscious that he is "thinking about having seen the picture"; that allows him to consider "the relationship between picture and concepts." This is relatively low-key. The more powerful (and therefore less precise and more value-laden) critical terms, in the second instance, tell us not about the picture but "about the effect the picture has on us." He concedes that even the "inferential critic" is tempted to give some causal explanation of these reactions, in terms of the explanatory, first mode account—that is, in terms of the design, whatever that may be, of the picture. Finally, his business is ostensory, and depends entirely on "a sharpening to and fro between itself" (the verbal description) and the picture.

The critic must therefore consider the object of his attention, the picture, as an opaque barrier between himself and the artist: the picture is there as a datum, beyond which there is no appeal. To return to the *Piero Baptism*: his account of the design of the picture is given entirely in terms of its (rather obvious) surface divisions, yet even a casual inspection of these divisions may reveal subtleties which Baxendall will not take into consideration. As far as he is concerned, all that is worth noting about its geometry is that the picture plane is divided into four along the horizontal line, and three in the vertical. His declared lack of interest in what may have preoccupied the painter leads him to neglect the rather staring fact that the height of the whole panel is exactly twice the height of the Christ figure. Another matter is glossed over when he considers (but only very briefly) the triple articulation of the art of painting into *disegno*, *commensuratio*, and *colorare* (quoted from the beginning



of Piero's treatise on perspective). Baxendall equates *commensuratio* with proportion, quoting a parallel text by Piero's disciple and friend, the Franciscan Fra Luca Pacioli. Now Piero had used the word *commensuratio*, not *proportio*. The Latin word *proportio* was coined by Cicero to translate Plato's Greek word *analogia* in the *Timaeus* (as was well known in the 15th century). Piero, on the other hand, presumably was using *commensuratio* here as an Italo/Latin word corresponding to the Greek *symmetria*, a little terminological conundrum which would have been familiar to him from Vitruvius. In the very passage which Baxendall quotes from Fra Luca's book, the word *proportio*, whose excellence is being pointed out to the reader, is discussed not in terms of geometry at all, but in terms of color quantities. Of course Pacioli would have understood *commensuratio* as the modular ordering of the parts of the picture, which elsewhere in the book he identifies as part of *prospectiva*.

There are other matters: Piero was not only interested in the divisions of the picture plane, but also in geometry "in perspective," the mathematical articulation of represented space. In his treatise *De Prospectiva Pingendi*, he has left a complex, elaborate account of how he went about constructing it. No one who considers the picture, even in Baxendall's own terms, can ignore Piero's concern. But then he would have to take an active interest in the way the picture is made, and attempt to relate the concepts held by the artist (insofar as they are known to the historian/critic) to the picture he sees. This would at once make it a much more extraordinary picture than the one Baxendall describes; and that is after all what he himself maintains is the primary duty of the critic. It would do so even without any recourse to the "high iconography" he despises. What little I know of Piero and his friends leads me to think that high iconography is exactly what would have interested him, at least as much

as *commensuratio*.

My terminological point is not a superficial one, I think, but indicates a kind of deliberate obtuseness on the part of one of the most learned and sensitive historians of art of my generation. And since his mind is so sharp and so finely tuned, and his prose so dryly distilled, it is melancholy to see this fine instrument directed at three of the world's greatest masterpieces to such meager effect.

Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures, Michael Baxendall, Yale, 1985, 167 pp., illus., \$18.95.

*Andrew Rabeneck:*

## PIERRE CHAREAU

MARC VELLAY and  
KENNETH FRAMPTON

Twenty-five years ago in Paris I bought a copy of René Herbst's monograph on his friend Pierre Chareau, published in 1954. Three things about Chareau's work captivated me: the stunning constructivist perfection of the Dalsace house (the *Maison de Verre*), the strangely rich yet architectural furniture which seemed to belong to a different tradition than the house, and the curious sensibility of his interiors, quite different from those of other *ensembliers* whose work I admired.

Since the early 1960s, with historian Kenneth Frampton as his principal champion, Chareau's importance has come to be recognized. Frampton's key articles appeared in *Arena* (April 1966) and *Perspecta* 12 (1969). Finally, Editions du Regard (Rizzoli in America) has issued a large and sumptuously illustrated book about his work, with text by Marc Vellay (grandson of Dr. Dalsace) and a brilliant but tendentious essay by Frampton in which he compares the *Maison de Verre* with Duchamp's *Le Grand Verre*. The book also contains an illustrated catalogue raisonné of the furniture, light fixtures,

and rug designs done between 1920 and 1939 (complete with recent sale-room prices). The catalogue is marred by several inconsistencies with Herbst's monograph, apparent because many of Herbst's uncropped photographs carry Chareau's workshop model numbers. The new catalogue uses many of the same photographs but crops them to serve the aesthetic of page layout, unforgivably trimming part of the design in a few cases.

Why should we be interested in Chareau today? Peter Blake, in *Interior Design* magazine, recently mocked the growing propensity to feed an insatiable media with "rediscovered" talents. He acknowledges Frampton as the champion rediscoverer of Chareau "for the past twenty years or so," but accounts for his merely modest success by averring that "Chareau had done precisely half a house of some interest in the 1920s, in Paris."

Actually, Chareau is just another victim of the general absence of a coherent history of modern French architecture. Like Eileen Gray he has drifted onto our screens as part of an interest in the decorative arts of the 1920s and 1930s. The recent talented crop of French historians is more interested in the 18th and 19th centuries than in the 20th. Anglo-Saxon architectural scholars occasionally pick over the French experience to bring us glimpses of someone other than Le Corbusier, for example Peter Collins's book *Concrete*. Nevertheless the sensibility brought to these efforts is generally selective, when not hostile. Perret serves Collins's general revisionist perspective, and we are invited to enthuse about Eileen Gray's "modernist" pieces (to the point that they are now reproduced for sale), but not about her exotic lacquered furniture, which is disparaged as eccentric, or gratuitously luxe.

It is true that the astonishing fecundity of French talent in the twenties and thirties most often served the aristocratic model of taste diffusion, from the top down. Furniture and



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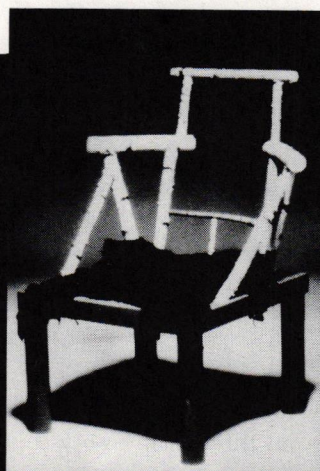
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interiors, particularly, in their materials and painstaking methods of production, offend modernist mythology in almost every respect. Their apparent frivolity, their dissimulation, and their often casual attitude to function, continue to irritate those who overvalue the sincere and authentic. Yet today's yearning for richness and complexity places high value on those whose work shows evidence of a plural vision. Chareau's provocative self-description as "architect-decorator" fits the bill nicely.

There are, alas, too few figures in the history of 20th-century architecture whose work can challenge with effect the neat discourse of critics and historians. Pierre Chareau is such a person, a great artist whose limited output thwarts attempts at categorization. Christian Zervos, in a 1925 article on trends in French decorative arts, characterizes Chareau as "in the avant garde of the modern design movement . . . trying to extricate himself from the influence of a tradition that he holds in deep respect." Zervos saw the death of Art Nouveau and the struggle of designers like Groult and Ruhlmann to overcome the repro-Louis excesses of *vieux neuf*. He also

admired the vigorous modernist abstractions of Chareau's friend and champion, Francis Jourdain. When Jourdain wrote of Chareau's architectural conception of furniture, the *Maison de Verre*, his best-known work, was still three years from conception.

The traditions Chareau respected were those of construction, proportion, and the use of wrought metal in furniture making. His reluctance to mock or repudiate his antecedents, combined with a reluctance to seek inspiration in mechanical or industrial forms, place him outside the mainstream of conventional modernism. The *Maison de Verre* only seems to be an exemplar of modernist doctrine.

Chareau is a hero, but a tragic hero, because his sensitivity to precedent and to the consequences of his work stemmed from a profound diffidence. He became a decorator only after flirting with music, painting, and architecture at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* from 1900 to 1908. His career petered out in America, where he went at the start of World War II. In New England he built a house for Robert Motherwell, and one for himself, examples of what Frampton calls *degré zero* design. It remains for some

Ph.D. candidate to claim that this late work prefigures Frank Gehry. Pierre Chareau died in New York in 1950.

As Frampton points out in his essay, it is the paradoxical lot of certain gifted people that they never find their real profession, so that all through their lives they seem haunted by the thought of other careers that they could have chosen. Whatever Chareau did, he did as a poet, with exceptional refinement. This quality suffuses his work. Thus, the exquisite constructed metalwork fixtures in the *Maison de Verre* form a literal *cadre de vie* for Dr. and Madame Dalsace, Chareau's clients and close friends. Handmade by his collaborator, the metalworker Louis Dalbet, these doors, stairs, shelves, closets, and mechanical systems form a matrix of benevolent technology to facilitate the professional and private lives of the occupants. The house remains the most perfect and total machine object, exemplar of a dream as yet unrealized elsewhere.

But the furniture and decoration which lend the exquisitely lit volumes their sense of comfort and harmony are what give many of Chareau's architect admirers pause. Although the product of the same talent as the house, the furniture seems to belong to a different sensibility, to be less "modern." It is not, of course; for Chareau it was just as modern as the house. In this apparent anomaly lies the essence of why Chareau is an important subject for aesthetic analysis. This work, by one man, holds an important key to the aesthetic distinction between modern and moderne, between modern art and art deco.

Chareau's work for me evinces Edmund Burke's useful duality of the sublime and the beautiful. Burke challenged the notion that beauty alone is the aim of art. He defined the sublime as an attribute of an art that challenges, provokes, and even terrorizes its audience, that stimulates energy. "The sublime does not please," said Burke. The sublime conception of art is the aesthetic locomotive of



modern art and architecture. It fuels the sensibility of aesthetic theory from Schiller to Sontag, that of the artist's sincere quest for the authentic, obedient only to some transcendent force, which in architecture is usually defined as the spirit of the age, or *zeitgeist*. The Maison de Verre appears to be a very good example of sublime art, but there's a problem because Chareau's furniture is clearly beautiful art that does aim to please. This beauty is indulgent, and beautiful furniture indulges its owners. Indulgence is the mark of Schiller's "melting beauty" which relaxes our physical and moral nature. Both René Herbst and Francis Jourdain seem to have had a problem with the "beauty" side of Chareau's output. Jourdain even creates a little syllogism to help himself out in his introduction to Herbst's monograph (I paraphrase): Chareau is a poet, poets are inventors, so Chareau must be an inventor. Herbst's subtitle backs his view: *Un inventeur, L'Architecte P. C.* But the capacity to invent is not the only trait of Chareau's apparent in the Maison de Verre. It is, precisely, the coexistence of the sublime and the beautiful in a single work that gives his art its special allure and sets it apart from Ruhlmann on one hand and Mallet-Stevens on another.

This duality, although recognized in the essays by Vellay and Frampton, is not explored at a theoretical level in the book. "Eclectic" is the portmanteau term used by Vellay to characterize Chareau, while Frampton's historiographical perspective allows his elegant analogy to be drawn only with unequivocally sublime Duchamp. In my view, a failure of this book is that it does not properly engage the aesthetic issues raised by the furniture (chapter 2, "Between Furniture and Architecture" takes us no further than the insights of Zervos and other critics). The house is embraced as remarkable within the canons of modernism, while the furniture, albeit beautifully illustrated, remains as little more than fashionable saleroom fodder.



DRAWING BY JEAN LURÇAT, ARMCHAIR MF 172

The reason for this in part is that Chareau himself never took a theoretical position about his work. He was part of the *Union des Artistes Modernes* because his friends were, but like most great artists his work was the product of a personal vision, an imperative that only sometimes coincided with the avant-garde.

If this book disappoints in terms of content, it also exhibits lapses of form. Many of the valuable early interior photographs of the Maison de Verre from Herbst's monograph have been omitted in favor of more professional yet less informative shots. The plan of *La Colline*, Chareau's East Hampton house, is omitted, as are several pieces of furniture for which photographs exist. The book lacks a comprehensive chronology of Chareau's life, although it includes a chronology of his submissions to various salons. The artist's death is recorded only as a date on the title page. In general, the editing of the text is too casual for

a production of this price and quality. It lacks a sense of development and, despite the valuable insights of Vellay and Frampton, it remains a collection of loosely linked articles and reminiscences. The new photographs of both the Maison de Verre and the furniture, most by Fabrice Boissière, remain as the best accomplishment of the book, as do Ludwig Czarach's excellent line drawings of the house and its details done for Frampton's earlier articles (uncharitably not credited). At best the book will provide food for thought about Chareau's contribution, now that among collectors, Herbst's little monograph fetches more than the book costs. The man deserves our continuing attention who who said that "the creative designer is a dangerous man. The craftsman is an obstacle and not versatile enough."

Pierre Chareau, Marc Vellay and Kenneth Frampton, Rizzoli, 1986, 232 pp., illus., \$65.00.



## Nancy Princenthal:

### NEW YORK, NEW YORK

The triumph of avaricious developers over architectural principles ... no possibility of enlightened urban planning ... flight of the middle class, and abandonment of the city to the rich and the poor ... epidemic of wildly eclectic and mostly spurious historicizing façades ... the theatricalization of social activity and the transformation of private life into a spectacle: this litany lamenting the fate of the contemporary urban environment is all too familiar. But these same features also characterized the creation and the use of buildings at the turn of the century in New York City, a period now consulted by preservationists and postmodern stylists alike for its lessons of comprehensive planning and aesthetic vigor.

Familiar as these features might seem, radical differences do exist between early 20th-century New York and the present city. Only in 1898 were Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island incorporated into the city. Population had increased eightfold between 1825 and 1875; between 1870 and 1900, the city grew from 1.5 to 3.5 million inhabitants, half of whom were foreign born. As late as 1890, at least 40 percent of the land above 59th Street on Manhattan's East Side remained undeveloped. The Upper West Side was developed even more slowly; in 1886, only 16 percent of the lots between 59th and 116th Streets west of Central Park had been improved. The drama of turn-of-the-century New York is both one of ruthless demolition of monuments barely a generation old, and of the construction of the first buildings in Manhattan.

This period in New York is the subject of three recent books. Robert A. M. Stern has compiled, with Gregory Gilmartin and John Massengale, *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890–1915*, the second



FLATIRON BUILDING, TWENTY-THIRD STREET, 1903. (PHOTO: NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY)

installment in a three-part effort to analyze architecture and planning in New York between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War II. Stern labels this era "Metropolitan" and subdivides it into three parts: "Cosmopolitan"; "Composite" (the subject of the book in question); and the age of "Convenience." Selected as if to deliberately defy memory, these terms, defined stylistically and chronologically, do not withstand the pressure of the copious examples chosen to illustrate them. Between 1890 and 1915, the Cosmopolitan and Composite aspects of Metropolitanism crop up with almost equal frequency.

Still, Stern makes some categorical statements, claiming that the Compo-

site era was the "grandest manifestation of Metropolitanism in New York." Its "social idea," he writes, "received its architectural expression in the revival of Classicism known as the American Renaissance. . . . The call for a uniform Classicism was fueled by nostalgia for the social and architectural decorum of the nation's colonial and early Republican past, and by a growing conception that America was the heir to Western civilization." But the Composite city, as the name suggests, was also shaped by its characteristic heterogeneity, or "scientific eclecticism." Stern writes, "While individual buildings were designed during the Cosmopolitan Era in a synthetic combination of styles, the Scientific Eclecticism of



the Composite Era insisted on stylistic accuracy within a given work." Moreover, architecture in the Composite era included two major alternatives to scientific eclectic classicism: "Modern French" (now called Beaux Arts), and "the search for a non-historicizing language exclusively expressive of contemporary conditions—a modernist architecture." The word modernist will be heard again only once more.

Despite its welter of descriptive terminology, Stern's book does not set out to present a stylistically structured analysis. Nor does it provide, though it promises to do so, the coherent voices of the period's own (and the nation's first) architectural critics; the opinions of Montgomery Schuyler, Russell Sturgis, Marianna Griswold von Rensselaer and Herbert Croly are heard only intermittently.

This book is instead an exhaustive list of expensive private, corporate, and civic building projects. An early chapter on mostly unrealized city plans undertaken as part of the City Beautiful Movement, and a final "Neighborhoods" chapter on early residential developments in the outer boroughs both suggest a comprehensive outlook missing in the rest of Stern's book. And he does occasionally introduce some elements from which broad comparisons with later patterns can be drawn. He mentions the short-lived phenomenon of the Big Store, with its quasi-civic amenities and recreational/cultural facilities, which seems to have anticipated the contemporary shopping mall. Discussing the birth of the Great White Way, he observes that socializing at this time became diversified, and more public, largely due to the pressure of the upper middle class. At the same time, he quotes E. T. Littell's eerily prophetic remarks of 1876 on the flight of the middle class: "In all great centers of populations there comes a certain period of growth when, by reason of the increasing value of real estate and the weight of taxation, the rental of a domicile becomes so great that the

[middle] class is forced by gradual process into the suburbs and into the country, leaving the rich and poor together to form the city population. . . . Notably this is the case in New York."

But Stern's heart is in his discussions of the single-family homes, apartment houses, and hotels built for the very rich, as well as their theaters, resorts, churches, monuments, and—in great detail—their private clubs. This fixation is somewhat obscured by chapter headings: "Palaces for the People" might lead one to expect an essay on workers' housing, not luxury hotels and 17-room apartments. The "people" are not much in evidence, except as in a description of Henry Janeway Hardenbergh's 1897 Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (now demolished), "Every night people who couldn't afford the tariffs would loiter in front of the windows along Fifth Avenue, watching the guests down oysters and champagne amid the pomp and glamour inside." A cursory discussion of tenements appears at the end of this chapter—we are told that such structures were "mean affairs" and that "only those who couldn't afford any better" lived in them.

Stern's attitude is also well expressed in his description of Henry Atterbury Smith's extant 1909 East River Houses, an exemplary working-class housing unit distinguished mainly by a "fine sense of detail [that] rivaled (and in some ways exceeded) that of contemporary luxury apartments." Not a word about the adequacy of interior spaces, circulation, or shared amenities. To be fair, Stern is no more interested in how the homes of the rich accommodated or affected their needs. What we are given in the pages on the Billionaire District and the Park Avenue apartment buildings are endless descriptions of façades and decorative interior features.

Few of these imbalances appear in M. Christine Boyer's *Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style 1850–1900*, which addresses a slightly earlier and

broader period, and draws a fairly inclusive social portrait of late 19th-century New York. While Stern in his afterword claims that it was the "Era of Convenience" between the two world wars that transformed architecture into a commercial art, Boyer sees this change as having taken place much earlier. She quotes the proceedings of the 1893 AIA convention, where it was boldly proclaimed that "current American architecture is not a matter of art, but of business." The nature of the metropolitan commercial community in the second half of the 19th century is, accordingly, treated with interest in Boyer's book. Retail business receives particular attention. A long and fascinating chapter is devoted to Ladies Mile, the section of Broadway between Union Square and 23rd Street where clothing and houseware stores, hotels, theaters, artists' galleries, private clubs, and restaurants were concentrated. Boyer's discussion of Ladies Mile offers a view of 19th-century urbanism that is uniquely, among these three books, aware of the economic power of women, primarily as consumers, but also, increasingly, as wage earners.

Like Stern, Boyer notes the new dramatization of metropolitan life, but her discussion is slightly more pointed. "The Composite Era brought a new sense of civic life as grand, popular theater," Stern writes in his serenely class-blind way. In Boyer's more nuanced description, "The well-to-do and the emergent middle class were surrounded by a sea of poverty and a cohort of new arrivals. Urban life, heroically celebrated in public spaces, was itself a new adventure. The bourgeoisie faced an unknown and uncertain future, its status unclear and its collective desires increasingly fragmented." To be sure, this less sanguine observation doesn't reach the level of analysis that, for instance, T. J. Clark achieves in his review of parallel developments in late 19th-century Paris.<sup>1</sup> The "situationist" criticism, which Clark cites, of modern urban capital-



ism's "attempt to regulate or supplant the sphere of the personal, private, and everyday," and Guy Debord's definition of the "spectacle" as "*capital* accumulated until it becomes an image,"<sup>2</sup> have clear bearings on turn-of-the-century New York architecture that Stern avoids completely and Boyer approaches only briefly. She also arrives at some dubious conclusions. For example, the flight of the middle class to the suburbs contributed to the city's moral debasement, and the entry of married, wage-earning women into prostitution resulted in part from their "insane desire for costumed display."

But Boyer's overall picture of Manhattan's development is commendably balanced. In her chapters on the structural constraints to the city's physical growth ("The Inheritance of the Grid") and economic basis for that growth, including the related fortunes of commerce and virulent real estate speculation in the post-Civil War period, she offers a sound foundation for the descriptions of private and civic building projects that follow. Her conclusion is especially cogent, and suggests how she might have treated Stern's main subject, the early 20th century. Boyer claims that the classicism of McKim, Mead and White, Carrère and Hastings, et al., popularized by the 1893 Chicago World's Fair as a way to rationalize and elevate the hodgepodge of 19th-century design, represented an "illusory synthesis" of the forces of reaction and urban improvement. While pointing toward a modern era of coherent and socially responsible urban planning, as first manifested in the City Beautiful Movement, this "imperial" style was also expressed in "the new tendency within American capitalism toward organization, centralization, and intense commercialism." This dynamic would give the new classicism its greatest historical fulfillment: "In the guise of a rational city plan and regulatory controls, [it] held out an architectural and urban significance that in time would reorder the twentieth-century space



TEA ROOM, PLAZA HOTEL, BETWEEN 58TH AND 59TH STREETS, 1907

of Manhattan."

John Tauranac's *Elegant New York: The Builders and the Buildings 1885–1915* is hardly an ideological treatise, but its outlook is not incompatible with Boyer's. In a discussion of McKim, Mead and White's 1906 library for J. Pierpont Morgan, Tauranac writes, "This period in American design is often called the American Renaissance. Money created this rebirth of classical antiquity, just as money had created the Renaissance in Italy, France, and England." Tauranac's appreciation of the power of Mammon, less solemn and more overt than Stern's, is also less distasteful. In an unsparingly matter-of-fact approach, Tauranac discusses, for instance, rent costs relative to wages and, even less politely, gives precedence throughout the book (as in its title) to builders rather than to architects.

Still, no pretense of an encompassing social focus is made. Tauranac's purpose is an uncomplicated celebration of the era's surviving monuments. In a series of breezy vignettes, he discusses such prominent extant Beaux-Arts structures as the Yacht Club and Grand Central Station, taking the inescapable dominance of great turn-of-the-century clans as an organizing principle. Several chapters bear family names, as in "The Murray's Hill" or "The Vanderbilt's Fifth Avenue." For information on the residences of less well-known clients—the De Lamar

Mansion on Madison Avenue at 37th Street, the W. E. Stokes House at 54th Street and Madison—Tauranac has interviewed descendants of the original owners. Their reminiscences are, inevitably, a little melancholy: house styles are no longer associated with patrons but with architects. This phenomenon is also described by Stern in his discussion of the French Gothic or Chateau model conceived by Richard Morris Hunt and later identified as the Vanderbilts' own. The status of contemporary celebrities can be gauged by their success in securing their privacy, rather than by the public profile of their homes.

Tauranac's picture of expensive dwellings is, of course, incomplete; Boyer writes that in 1876 only 25 percent of such housing was constructed by private owners and architects; the remainder was erected by speculative builders. Tauranac does acknowledge that at least the West Side was in large part a speculative enterprise. But what he is seeking—and achieves quite successfully—is a paean to the surviving physical emblems of New York's most visually prominent aristocracy. In this quest he profits immeasurably by having Christopher Little's triumphant photographs to illustrate his text.

If the evidence these three authors present proves anything, it is that New York City, even at the end of the 19th century, was not a series of finite, tangible structures, but a spirit, a remarkable velocity, of change. Although development of Fifth Avenue above 59th Street did not begin in earnest until the 1890s, many of the enormous homes built there were destroyed by the late 1920s. But even these palaces were, in some cases, usurpers. The Frick mansion is a notable example. It was completed by Carrère and Hastings in 1914 on the site of Richard Morris Hunt's Lenox Library, itself a monument of universally recognized significance. The library had opened in 1875 and was barely thirty years old when Frick



bought the lot for his mansion.

The West Side grew and changed with similar rapidity. Pointing out that by 1911 Broadway and West End Avenue were almost completely given over to apartment houses, which had replaced substantial single-family homes only twenty-five years old, Stern writes, "the redevelopment of the West End was in many ways the most dramatic example of the city's capacity to rebuild itself." The city's rate of change is demonstrated vividly in Boyer's well-chosen photographs, including one in which the Majestic Hotel on Central Park West towers over a mostly undeveloped lot containing what looks like a modest wood-framed homestead. It is an image of the 19th and 20th centuries in collision. In her introduction, Boyer claims that the latter part of the 19th century saw the rupture of public space and a loss of the coherent relationship among buildings. Following Sigfried Giedion, she says that architecture in this era began to be treated like furniture: it became movable, interchangeable, replaceable. In other words, as early as one hundred years ago, this city already disdained to preserve its landmarks or respect its communities. It may be this wanton disrespect for tradition, and not the thwarted ambitions of the City Beautiful Movement, that is present-day New York's most telling legacy from the period these books examine.

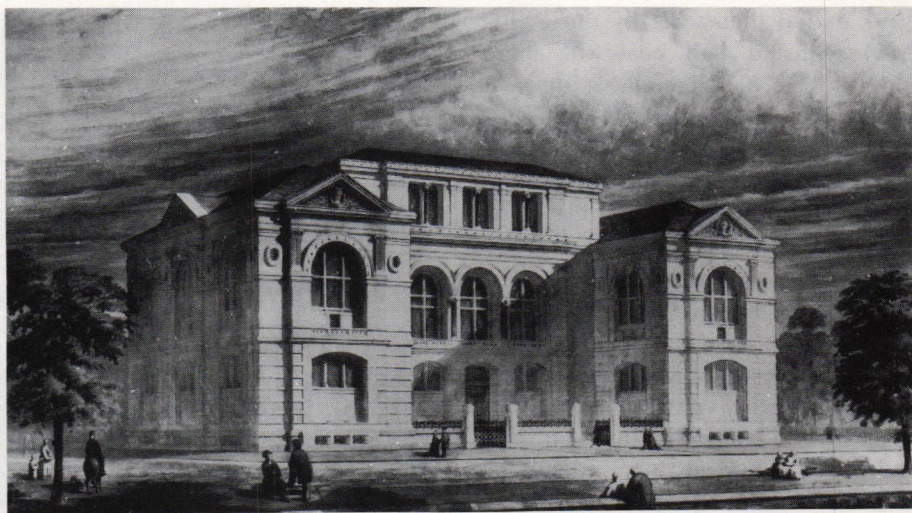
1. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

2. Ibid, 9.

**New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism 1890–1915**, Robert A. M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and John Montague Massengale, Rizzoli, 1983, 502 pp., illus., \$65.00.

**Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style 1850–1900**, M. Christine Boyer, Rizzoli, 1985, 258 pp., illus., \$30.00.

**Elegant New York: The Builders and the Buildings 1885–1915**, John Tauranac, Abbeville, 1985, 286 pp., illus., \$49.95.



RICHARD MORRIS HUNT, ELEVATION OF THE LENOX LIBRARY, 1871

*Jay Wickersham:*

## THREE AMERICAN BEAUX-ARTS ARCHITECTS

In 1837, Emerson, in his address on "The American Scholar," announced the close of "our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands." Ever since, Americans have been quick to make similar declarations of cultural independence. Revolutions need villains, and in architecture the role of George III has most often been played by the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, whose graduates dominated the profession in America between 1870 and 1930. "Bozarts" architects, as they were called, were accused of pursuing an empty monumentality, ignoring both America's technological inventiveness and its democratic ideals.

Today, of course, the Beaux Arts is viewed far more favorably, particularly since the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition in 1975. Scholarship initially focused on the workings of the school itself, but now we have books on three Americans who studied there—Richard Morris Hunt, Ernest Flag, and Charles A. Platt. In each case we discover an architect who, far from simply propagating foreign ideas, adapted himself

in a distinctive way to the demands of practicing architecture in America.

Richard Morris Hunt was the first American to study at the Ecole des Beaux Arts between 1846 and 1854. When Hunt returned to America, this training helped propel his long and successful career—at the time of his death in 1895, he was known as "the dean of American architects."

*The Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt*, a collection of essays which accompanied a traveling show of his drawings, is a solid introduction to his work. The essays cover the gamut from Hunt's student work to his final commission, the entrance wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, which was completed after his death. The editor, Susan R. Stein, has coordinated the different essays to give a thorough overview of Hunt's career, and the illustrations, many of Hunt's own drawings, are superb.

Hunt's influence on the tastes of architects and clients alike was unquestionably enormous and based largely on his scholarly knowledge of his sources from late Gothic palaces to the Petit Trianon. Early in his career, he designed a series of elaborate gateways to New York's Central Park which were rejected by the park's creators, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, as being inappropriately grand: "Napoleon III in disguise,"



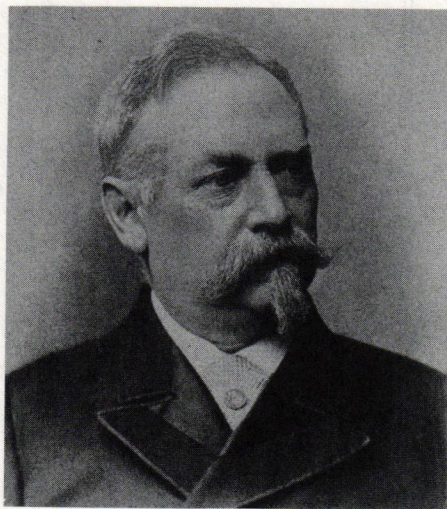
Vaux called them. Yet by the 1890s even Olmsted had come to share Hunt's taste for monumentality. At Biltmore, the enormous Vanderbilt estate in the mountains of North Carolina, Olmsted and Hunt worked happily together, setting an Old World palace amid the heightened drama of the New World's wilderness.

In artistic terms, Hunt remained a capable but uninspired architect—despite the exaggerated claims made by some of the contributors to this book. Hunt once told his son: "It's your clients' money you're spending. Your business is to get the best results you can, following their wishes." This lack of conviction may be what kept his work from being first-rate.

David Van Zanten is the only contributor who really looks at Hunt's architecture, in an essay subtitled "What Hunt Did and Did Not Learn in France." Van Zanten asks why Hunt's work was so eclectic. Why in the 1860s, for example, he alternated between the lush French Renaissance manner he had learned from Lefuel, to Neo-Grec townhouses, stick-style chalets, and even Gothic hospitals and schools.

Van Zanten believes that Hunt's studies at the Ecole des Beaux Arts left him unprepared for the rapid pace and enormous scale of American construction. He suggests that, during two later trips to Paris in the 1860s, Hunt began to see possibilities in the work of architects other than his teachers—rationalists like Labrouste, and even Goths like Viollet-le-Duc, whose ideas were anathema at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. But, as Van Zanten also points out, it was Hunt's former pupil Frank Furness who pursued the fusion of classic and Gothic elements with far greater originality and vigor.

Unlike Hunt, who appears in every survey of American architecture, Ernest Flaggs and Charles A. Platt are neglected figures both deserving to be included in the current series of monographs put out by the Architec-



RICHARD MORRIS HUNT

tural History Foundation. The only problem with this series is the predominance of text over illustrations. This is less of a problem with Platt, for interested readers can refer to the illustrated 1913 monograph, which can be found in many libraries. But most of Flaggs's work has never appeared in a book before, and the pictures are too small and too few in number to adequately represent his buildings.

Flaggs was among the flood of Americans who studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in the 1880s and 1890s. After returning to New York, he quickly won a number of major commissions through a combination of personal connections and professional brilliance: the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, the entire campus of the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, and a series of buildings for the Singer Company, culminating in the world's tallest building, the 47-story Singer Tower, completed in 1908.

The breadth of Flaggs's interests refutes any notion that Beaux-Arts architects ignored social and technological questions. Flaggs was active in the movement for housing reform in New York City; he made one of the first proposals for zoning limits on building densities and heights, and patented a series of inventions, from window shades to designs for railway

sleeping cars. In the case of the Singer Tower, his organizational skills even led him to offer what we would now call design-build services, providing in-house engineering along with his architectural design, and then acting as the construction manager during the building process.

For all his abilities and successes, Flaggs's career had virtually ended by 1914. Mardges Bacon's monograph never really explains how Flaggs lost all his clients, or why, instead of finding new ones, he retreated to his estate on Staten Island, living in happy seclusion with his much younger wife and their children, writing books, and getting rich through real-estate investments.

Certainly changes in architectural taste did not trouble him, for Flaggs's work was always supremely stylish. Despite some vaguely expressed sympathies for Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School, he remained faithful to turn-of-the-century trends at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, in which sensuous decoration overlaid a stylized expression of the structural frame. Flaggs criticized the architecture of the 1893 Columbian Exposition because it was not up-to-date and French enough. Nor does his personality appear to be the cause, though Flaggs was a caustic, opinionated man. Perhaps the truth is that Flaggs simply got bored with architecture, seeing it less as a calling than as an amusing way to make a living.

Unfortunately, Bacon's monograph gives only a muted sense of Flaggs's character and achievements. Because the chapters deal with different building types, the reader has to piece together the story of Flaggs's career. This organization also gives a misleading sense of consistency and order to Flaggs's work. Flaggs's strength lay in his willingness to step beyond the boundaries of conventional architectural practice; it is telling that his heroes were not other architects, but rather inventors and entrepreneurs like Thomas Edison and Henry Ford.

Flaggs's wayward nature comes through in his own book, *Small Houses: Their*



*Economic Design and Construction* (1922), where he mingles detailed advice on modular systems of construction with speculations about the proportioning of Greek temples. And the illustrations of Flagg's own house designs are equally odd, rendered in the charming pen-and-ink style of Edwardian illustrators. They show weird, Ledoux-like cylinders and pyramids erupting through the roofs of modest country cottages, under the incurious gaze of girls rolling hoops and boys playing with jacks.

Charles A. Platt studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts between 1884 and 1886 as an etcher and painter, not as an architect. He drifted into architecture largely by accident; during his summers at the colony of well-to-do artists in Cornish, New Hampshire, he laid out several gardens for his friends, drawing on his knowledge of Italian villas and their settings, and on his own considerable artistic gifts. These garden commissions eventually led to houses as well. By 1913, when a monograph of Platt's work was published, he was referred to as the American Lutyens, and his monograph, with its luscious photographs and large-scale drawings of details, was known in some architectural offices as "the Bible."

Despite his lack of formal training, Platt shared with Beaux-Arts architects a belief in the enduring value of European classicism and he is best remembered today as a representative of that tradition. In 1908 Mr. and Mrs. Harold McCormick, heirs to the great reaping machine fortune, chose Platt over Frank Lloyd Wright to design their mansion on the shore of Lake Michigan, outside of Chicago.\* Ever since, Platt has stood as a convenient symbol for the ascendancy of foreign influences over the native Prairie Style. Wright himself saw Platt as a worthy adversary, calling him "a very dangerous man—he did the wrong thing so well."

Platt is a challenging architect to write about; his life was uneventful, and he almost never articulated his

ideas, either in lectures or in writing. Wisely, Keith Morgan doesn't try to manufacture drama in his monograph, or draw unduly broad conclusions; he places Platt's career firmly in its artistic and social context, and then leads us through his built work, showing how it relies on a skilled and subtle reworking of traditional themes.

After 1913, when the introduction of the federal income tax greatly reduced the building of large private houses, much of Platt's practice consisted of large apartment and office buildings, well executed, but dull. Platt did better work for museums and universities, and his late masterpiece is the campus of the Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, done in the 1930s. Platt shaped this New England boarding school with a gardener's hand, transplanting or pruning several old buildings, including one by Charles Bulfinch, demolishing others, and erecting a series of new ones. Today, a calm inner quadrangle opens outward to a series of cross-axial vistas, defined by terraces, trees, and buildings. At Andover, architecture and landscape share the same confident equilibrium that Jefferson achieved at the University of Virginia. Ironically, just as the Museum of Modern Art was about to import a new style of architecture to America, Platt was demonstrating how thoroughly naturalized the spirit of European classicism had become.

\*The original Frank Lloyd Wright design (modified) was built by Thomas Monaghan, President of Domino's Pizza, in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

**The Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt**, Susan R. Stein, editor, University of Chicago Press, 1986, 192 pp., illus., \$39.95 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

**Ernest Flagg: Beaux-Arts Architect and Urban Reformer**, Mardges Bacon, Architectural History Foundation and MIT Press, 1986, 405 pp., illus., \$40.00.

**Charles A. Platt: The Artist as Architect**, Keith N. Morgan, Architectural History Foundation and MIT Press, 1985, 272 pp., illus., \$35.00.

**John Maass:**

## DRAWINGS FROM PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia was the largest city in America until 1810, the second largest until the late 1880s; it now ranks fifth. Money and power gravitate to population, and the refinements of architecture and art, education and publishing once flourished only in large and affluent communities. Among American cities, Philadelphia best exemplifies the development of architecture over the whole span of three hundred years. About a thousand brick houses and a few public buildings from the 18th century are still occupied here. Architectural plans and drawings were ephemera for temporary use, but in Philadelphia the oldest surviving examples date back to the 1730s. (Survival is no longer a problem; we are now overwhelmed by millions of records on paper.)

Philadelphia also teems with parochial historians, preservationists, and architecture buffs, providing a public for a historical exhibition of architectural graphics at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Few American communities could—or would care to—mount such a local show. (A well-remembered exhibition on the architectural theme, *Penn's Great Town*, was held in 1961, its catalogue so artfully written by George B. Tatum that it reads like a first-rate history of architecture in Philadelphia.)

The catalogue for *Drawing Toward Building* is also intended as a book of permanent value. The volume is certainly professional. James F. O'Gorman, a markedly assured scholar, wrote the introduction. Jeffrey Cohen, George Thomas, and G. Holmes Perkins are local specialists on the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. All the 154 graphics in the show are thoroughly discussed. Exhibit number one is a good example: Cohen's bit of detective work establishes that the well-known 1732 drawing



of the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall) was done by an amateur. There is a concise biography for the architect of every design. Most of the illustrations have not been published before, and some were only recently discovered. Many presentation drawings are usefully printed next to photographs of the completed buildings. The reproductions in the book are adequate for reference but do not approach the impact of the large and colorful originals that were in the exhibition.

For over two centuries, mainstream architectural drawings of the same period were of similar style. In the 1970s, architectural drawing emerged as an art for its own sake, and the drawings even became fashionable as collector's items. They range widely from op art and pop art to computer-generated models. As a result of such variety almost every reader will either love or loathe some of these modern graphics. This reviewer, for instance, admires the unpredictable whimsy of Venturi (118, 153), the sparkling vigor of Todd (130), and the spare design of Romanach (147); but dislikes the smudges by the Emperor Louis without clothes on (113, 114, 116, 121). At the end of the book are 36 recent drawings chosen by a jury. Most of them strain hard for some mannered effect.

In the past, architects of national reputation, like Latrobe, Strickland, Walter, Cope and Stewardson, Cret, Trumbauer and Howe, practiced in Philadelphia. In recent years Philadelphia firms have built on all five continents. The book includes drawings for large projects in the cities of Abuja, Baghdad, Cairo, Canberra, Caracas, Dacca, Islamabad, Sadat City, Tehran, and Vienna.

This book may be compared with Gebhard and Nevins, *200 Years of American Architectural Drawings* (1977) and with Nevins and Stern, *The Architect's Eye: American Architectural Drawings from 1799-1978* (1979). It is more down-to-earth than the somewhat esoteric Allen and Oliver, *Architectural*

*Drawings: The Art and the Process* (1981). A European counterpart is the handsome *Die Architekturzeichnung* by Nerding (1986).

Harold Cooledge wrote his doctoral dissertation in the 1950s on the Philadelphia architect Samuel Sloan. No publisher would even consider such a book at that time: Sloan was not famous, and his Victorian buildings were out of favor. Three decades later the expanded study has been published because the topic is now seen as significant. Sloan was, in turn, a country carpenter, urban builder, versatile designer, active entrepreneur, effective writer, and pioneering editor. He personified the "American Dream" and was, in fact, a major architect in the context of his place and time. He designed numerous houses, churches, schools, colleges, courthouses, hospitals, and mercantile buildings, large and small. Cooledge limits himself to documenting the commissions of Sloan's own firm, and by this excessively pedantic decision, misses the point of Sloan's life and work. Countless buildings throughout the United States were erected after the precise plans, elevations, perspectives, and specifications in Sloan's successful books. This alone made Sloan an important figure in the building of America. He wrote five books which were published in many editions from 1851 to 1870. *The Model Architect* and *Sloan's Homestead Architecture* were especially popular. They were handsomely designed and illustrated by crisp wood engravings or rich lithographs. These excellent illustrations have here been degraded to fuzzy halftones. Bouquets to Cooledge for his tenacious historical research. Brickbats to the University of Pennsylvania Press for the insultingly shabby format.

*Drawing Toward Building: Philadelphia Architectural Graphics, 1732-1986*, James F. O'Gorman, Jeffrey A. Cohen, George E. Thomas, G. Holmes Perkins, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, 295 pp., illus., \$25.00.

*Samuel Sloan: Architect of Philadelphia, 1815-1884*, Harold N. Cooledge, Jr., University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, 262 pp., illus., \$25.00.

### *Kenneth Hafertepe:*

## ARCHITECTURE, MEN, WOMEN AND MONEY IN AMERICA 1600-1860

ROGER G. KENNEDY

Before reading *Architecture, Men, Women and Money*, this reviewer suspected its author of aspiring to become the new Wayne Andrews. Andrews's *Architecture, Ambition, and Americans* was a chatty, well-illustrated survey of American architecture based on the premise that great architecture requires wealthy clients. Kennedy's volume is based on a similar assumption, but he explores in greater detail how architectural patrons acquired their wealth. Unfortunately, the architectural analysis never rises above the level of superficiality.

Kennedy's book, attractive and reasonably priced, is obviously aimed at a large audience. The publisher, Random House, offers it as a survey of American residential architecture—thus not too specialized—but it is really a study of architecture and money.

The emphasis on economics results in a decidedly unbalanced survey. The book ends with the Civil War, and its coverage of the preceding 260 years is full of strange gaps. Incredibly, no work of Charles Bulfinch is mentioned, there is no extended discussion of Monticello, and such important residential architects as William Buckland, Benjamin Henry Latrobe, and Alexander Jackson Davis receive only minor consideration. Obviously these architects had well-to-do clients, but apparently they did not make their money in a manner that interests the author. Kennedy treats the reader to long explanations of the economics of

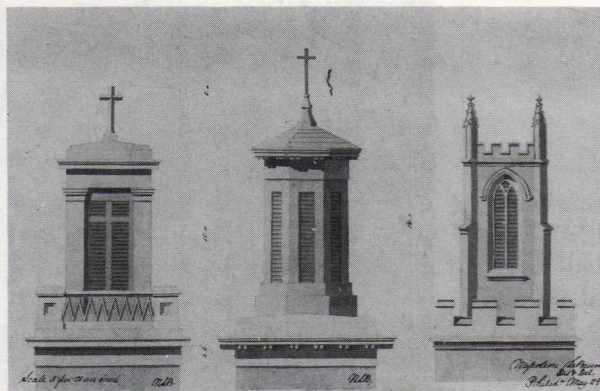


trade, agriculture, and finance, and to a wealth of anecdotal material about architectural patrons and their fortunes. This need not inevitably become “architectural styles of the rich and famous”: an examination of the client’s role in architectural history could be extremely valuable. Kennedy, however, never demonstrates how these economic factors affected the design of houses.

This problem is evident from the earliest chapters. Kennedy contends that “Palladio’s architecture is ineradicably associated with the plantation system,” and through that system with the trade of sugar and slaves. So obsessed is Kennedy with the sugar trade that he coins words for its entrepreneurs, such as “sucrigarchs” and “sucritots.” However, the connection between plantations and Palladianism is extremely weak. Kennedy himself observes that the architecture of the West Indies was long based on fear—that is, heavily fortified—and that Palladianism was a late arrival in the West Indies. Indeed, his own survey shows that West Indians adopted Palladianism well after Britain and even after Britain’s other colonies, which suggests that the connection to Italy was, at best, indirect.

Kennedy is convinced of the profound influence of what he calls the “Caribbean cottage” on American architecture. He therefore claims Caribbean influence whenever he finds a house with a verandah, be it in South Carolina, Louisiana, or New York. A much more likely explanation is that northern Europeans in the New World sought to cool themselves by maximizing shade and breeze, whether they had been to the West Indies or not.

When Kennedy does get around to dealing with architects and their buildings, the treatment is heavily biographical, with minimal discussion of the actual buildings. As a result, little is new—Kennedy does not transform the way we look at these architects’ buildings.



NAPOLÉON LE BRUN,  
ALTERNATIVE TO  
CHURCH TOWERS,  
PHILADELPHIA,  
1840. FROM  
DRAWING TOWARD  
BUILDING.

Kennedy admits quite frankly that he is not an architectural historian, and there are many amateurish mistakes. He misdates the death of Latrobe by three years, and Thomas U. Walter’s appointment as Supervising Architect of the Treasury by ten years. Such slip-ups are trivial, but others are more serious. Kennedy writes that William Salmon’s *Palladio Londinensis* was published “about 1700, and provided designs for many Colonial houses in the next fifty years.” Actually, Salmon was *born* about 1700, and his book was published in 1734, which makes its influence on the previous three decades somewhat problematic.

Then there are the dubious suggestions of stylistic influence. Kennedy characterizes J. J. Ramée’s plan for Union College in Schenectady, New York, as “Palladian,” which would probably surprise both Ramée and his clients. Kennedy also claims that the portico at the Hermitage in Nashville is based on Mount Vernon, when the only things they have in common is that posts hold up both roofs. Doesn’t Kennedy recognize the order of the Hermitage as based on the Tower of the Winds in Athens? Andrew Jackson and his architect, Robert Mills, were attempting to seize custody of the Greek style from Nicholas Biddle.

A more fundamental difficulty is Kennedy’s persistent association of the Greek style with the Federalists. He contends that George Washington

Parke Curtis’s Arlington was a monument to George Washington and explicitly anti-Jeffersonian. His reasoning is that Arlington uses a Greek order, and that Jefferson “abominated” Greek architecture. But while Jefferson never used a Greek order on one of his own buildings, he never criticized Greek architecture in writing, and Kennedy’s only evidence of “abomination” is secondhand from Benjamin Henry Latrobe. The political symbolism must not have been too apparent to Latrobe, who was very close to Jefferson politically, and who frequently used the Greek orders. Indeed, Latrobe associated Greek architecture with “republican simplicity,” and thus with Jeffersonian politics. Kennedy’s argument is simplistic in the extreme and fails to recognize that architectural styles can symbolize different things to different people.

But such mistakes and misinterpretations pale beside the book’s major omission—significant discussion of the houses themselves, either their form or functions. The portrait on the front of the dust jacket tells more about the book than Kennedy intended. It is Samuel F. B. Morse’s portrait of George Hyde Clarke, in which the patron is the center of attention, well lit and lovingly detailed, while his house remains in the background, distant and depicted only sketchily.

*Architecture, Men, Women and Money in America, 1600–1860*, Roger G. Kennedy, Random House, 1985, 526 pp., illus., \$35.00.



V. K. Tarikhu Farrar

## HATUMERE

LABELLE PRUSSIN

*Hatumere* is a very disappointing book. It continues a tradition of African historiography that has failed to go beyond widely accepted and deeply entrenched stereotypes of African culture, while claiming to go beyond these stereotypes. In its attempts to place West African arts and architectures into a historical framework, to present them in their origins and growth, and to identify and describe the impact of Islam on the indigenous forms, *Hatumere* has created historical outlines and narratives that are largely fictitious. Since much of Professor Prussin's specifically architectural history is grounded in these more general historical reconstructions, we must question the soundness and viability of many of her conclusions.

Were it simply a matter of disagreeing with Professor Prussin's interpretations of African history, it would be infinitely easier to discuss the book. But the accuracy of much that is offered as historical (and/or archaeological, ethnographic, and linguistic) evidence is often questionable due to problems in Professor Prussin's methodology.

Firstly, Prussin makes no distinction between historical reconstruction based on real evidence, and that based on pure speculation and "logical" or "common sense" deduction. The idea that, prior to the emergence of the trans-Saharan trade, West Africa was characterized by "egalitarian, acephalous societies"—a notion expressed occasionally in *Hatumere* in various historical outlines—is an example of conjectural history. No evidence, historical or otherwise, can be mustered in its support, yet it is stated as an axiom.

Secondly, Professor Prussin's competence in the handling of various types of data is very uneven. For



THE MINARET OF THE MOSQUE AT KATSINA, NIGERIA, BUILT CIRCA 1520

example, one of the principal reasons given for rejecting the archaeological site of Niani-en-Sankarani as the site of ancient Mali's capital is that "the artifactual yield from the site has been scanty and inconclusive, particularly in the realm of luxury goods." We must conclude that Professor Prussin has not considered, or is unfamiliar with, the processes by which a settlement is abandoned and becomes an archaeological site—processes of site disturbance, in this case particularly by looters.

Thirdly, the geographical breadth and historical depth of the subject matter covered requires a formidable knowledge of African history and culture. Professor Prussin unfolds largely erroneous historical narratives and her discussion of cultural and linguistic groupings is often confused.

For instance, the early Akan people of Ghana and the Ivory Coast are divided into "Akan-speaking peoples" and "Twi-speaking peoples." Separate migrations are postulated for each grouping, and the conclusion reached that "these two demographic movements resulted in a meeting of diverse cultural traditions." This Akan-Twi dichotomy, however, is pure fiction: *Twi* is the language spoken by the Akan peoples. The business of "two

demographic movements" is nonsense historically, and cannot be used to explain the origins of the Asante architectural style.

Finally, Professor Prussin's historical, archaeological, and ethnographical data are reformed or dismissed to suit the hypotheses. One case is the rejection of the Niani site as the old Mali capital (it is too far south to fit neatly into the proposed scheme for the origins of West African urbanism). Another example is the claim that "the traditions of origin of most of the Akan-speaking peoples suggest that they migrated from the north into the periphery of the forest zone early in this millennium." In fact, most Akan traditions of origin speak of people having emerged from holes in the ground or from caves, or descending from the sky on an iron chain or in a brass pan, in the Akan region. Where migrations are mentioned, they are mostly proposed to have occurred within the Akan region, rather than from without. The most notable exception is the Denkyira tradition, which identifies Egypt as the original homeland of the ancestors of the Denkyira people.

Similarly, the statements that "wherever discrete skills were culturally recognized, the oral traditions imply



that they emerged within the context of a nascent Islamized urban setting," and "Tradition also associates the emergence of [Manding] kingship with the southern expansion of the Wangara or Dyula traders" are fallacious. No references are given for the first of these two contentions, but for the second, D. T. Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* is cited. The epic of Sundiata, however, says no such thing.

If the historical reconstructions and narratives were peripheral to the central purpose of the book, we could just wince at them. But this is impossible because the historical thread runs through both sections of the book.

At the outset of the first section, "Space," Professor Prussin, in an attempt to impress upon us the importance of Islam to the growth of West African civilization, declares that "It [Islam] has been instrumental in the process of political centralization, urbanization, and sedentarization." Later, social stratification and the development of craft specialization are also attributed to Islam. This view of the growth of West African civilization has, of course, long characterized thinking in European and Euro-American academic circles. What is surprising is its persistence in the face of contradictory evidence.

The very Arabic documents cited by Professor Prussin and other adherents of this view indicate that when the Islamic world first made contact with the Western Sudan, it encountered societies organized into monarchies. We do not know how old centralized political organization in West Africa is. The origins are lost in prehistory. The first written documents, whether those of the Arabs for the Western Sudan, or those of the Europeans for Lower Guinea, refer to the existence of centralized political systems.

As for urbanism, the recent and extremely important archaeological work of Susan and Roderick McIntosh

in the Inland Niger Delta has shown that the beginnings of urbanism in the Western Sudan date to as early as the 5th century AD, before there was any Islamic presence in Africa (or anywhere else). Professor Prussin is apparently unaware of the work at Jenne-Jeno and elsewhere in the Inland Niger Delta, since she makes no reference to it either in the text, the notes, or the bibliography. No discussion of the growth of cities in West Africa can be seriously considered in its absence. The presence of cult and utilitarian objects of iron, copper, and stone imply some level of craft specialization and the existence of commercial networks. None of these materials are found in the Inland Niger Delta region. The nearest copper sources are in the southern Sahara; hence, long-distance trade in the pre-Islamic period is implied.

Also expressed early on is the notion that Africa has historically been technologically backward compared to the Western World. Professor Prussin suggests, for example, that the reason why hardwoods "have rarely been exploited as a building material in Africa" is because "they are diffi-

cult to exploit effectively with a limited tool-kit." In fact, hardwoods are commonly employed, at least for certain parts of the framework in timber and earth (so-called wattle and daub) construction in the West African forest region. The main structural elements of the roof framework—wall-plates, end girts, kingposts, and ridge-beam—must be made from termite-resistant hardwoods. Among those woods most preferred is that of the *Borassus* palm.

While conducting research into indigenous building technology in two parts of southern Ghana (the Akan and Dangme regions) last year, I was told by local builders in both regions that hardwoods are preferable for the posts and studs of the wall framework and essential for the roof. When asked why hardwoods were not exclusively used all the time, the builders in both areas replied that the proper trees were hard to come by. Anyone familiar with tropical forests understands this problem. Temperate forests are characterized by large stands of limited number of species; tropical forests are the reverse—limited stands (a "stand" is often one tree) of a large number of species. One can, and

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often does, search for days for a single tree of a particular species.

Furthermore, how extensive a "tool-kit" is necessary to make effective use of hardwoods? Professor Prussin appears to be confusing technology with tools. While tools may be "limited," skills and techniques can be extensive. Joseph Needham has pointed out that during the Middle Ages no part of the Old World was any more technologically "backward" than western Europe, and leading the pack in backwardness was England. Yet English woodworkers, often equipped with little more than axes, but possessing considerable skill, made very effective use of oak and other hardwoods. Certainly the traditional woodworking tools of the West African forest region were more than sufficient for the purpose.

In her discussion of West African artistic expression, Professor Prussin makes much of the alleged "geometrizing" and symmetricizing influences of Islam on "traditional" African modes. Wherever "more precise geometry" of form is encountered, Islamic influence is invoked, whether in the context of Islamization or not, which creates a sort of circular argument. "More precise geometry" and symmetry allegedly is not characteristic of "traditional" West African art and architectural modes. When such features are discovered in apparently non-Islamic cultural contexts, they are offered as "proof" of the pervasiveness of Islamization in West Africa. Thus, according to *Hatumere*, even decidedly non-Islamized societies like those of the Dogon or the Asante can be shown to have really undergone something of a process of Islamization, because these features exist in their arts and architectures.

Although "more precise geometry," as well as an eye for symmetry, are not alien to the arts and architectures of many societies deep within tropical Africa (notably in Central Africa), and in locations that are beyond the boundaries of the old trans-Saharan

trade network, they seem to be irrelevant to Professor Prussin. In any case, she ignores all other parts of Africa besides North and West Africa. Most unforgivable is her almost total silence on southern Nigeria—certainly a part of West Africa, and an important one, whose artistic tradition exhibits some of the characteristics Professor Prussin associates with Islamization. However, archaeology has shown tradition to have its origins and development in the pre-Islamic period.

Despite the persistent and very basic problems of methodology and interpretation of evidence, *Hatumere* does have its bright spots. Professor Prussin's coverage of tents, or mobile housing, is informative and interesting. Of particular interest is the discussion concerning the transfer of the imagery of the tent to that of more permanent architecture when nomadic groups become sedentary. Here, the sections on Fulbe and Tuareg architecture are most pertinent. Attempts to sort out the stages and periods of construction of the historically most important mosques of the Western Sudan are also admirable. The illustrations and photographs are excellent, and a very useful bibliography is provided at the back of the book.

Many of the societies of the Western Sudan have undergone Islamization, but in many cases, even among some Manding and Fulbe peoples, it has been more or less superficial. The Islamization of some peoples in West Africa (including some of the pastoral Fulbe) is a product of the 19th-century Islamic revolutions that swept across the region from Senegambia to northern Cameroon. Among other peoples, notably the Mossi and the northern Yoruba, the spread of Islam was greater in the colonial era than in any other previous period. Yet both the Mossi and northern Yoruba cultures remain fundamentally non-Islamized. That Islam has been catalytic in the rise of West African civilization and essential to its evolution is a dubious assumption. At best, Islam, in many

areas, joined several other factors of cultural growth and elaboration, but always after the roots of civilization had been deeply set from an indigenous seed.

To further claim that clearly non-Islamized societies like the Asante are within the cultural fold of West African Islam because of the presence of traits borrowed from Islamized societies of the Western Sudan is untenable. Following the logic and methodology so often exhibited in *Hatumere*, we can argue an equally "strong" case for calling Asante (and Dahomey, Benin, and other kingdoms of Lower Guinea) "Europeanized" cultures.

As a historical treatise concerned with the origins and development of the architectures of West Africa, even "Islamized West Africa," *Hatumere* fails. Stereotypes of "traditional" African culture permeate the book. To free the study of the African past from the colonialist outlook we must learn to see and think of African culture in an entirely different way.

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*Hatumere: Islamic Design in West Africa*, Labelle Prussin, University of California Press, 1986, xxiii + 306 pp., illus., \$75.00.



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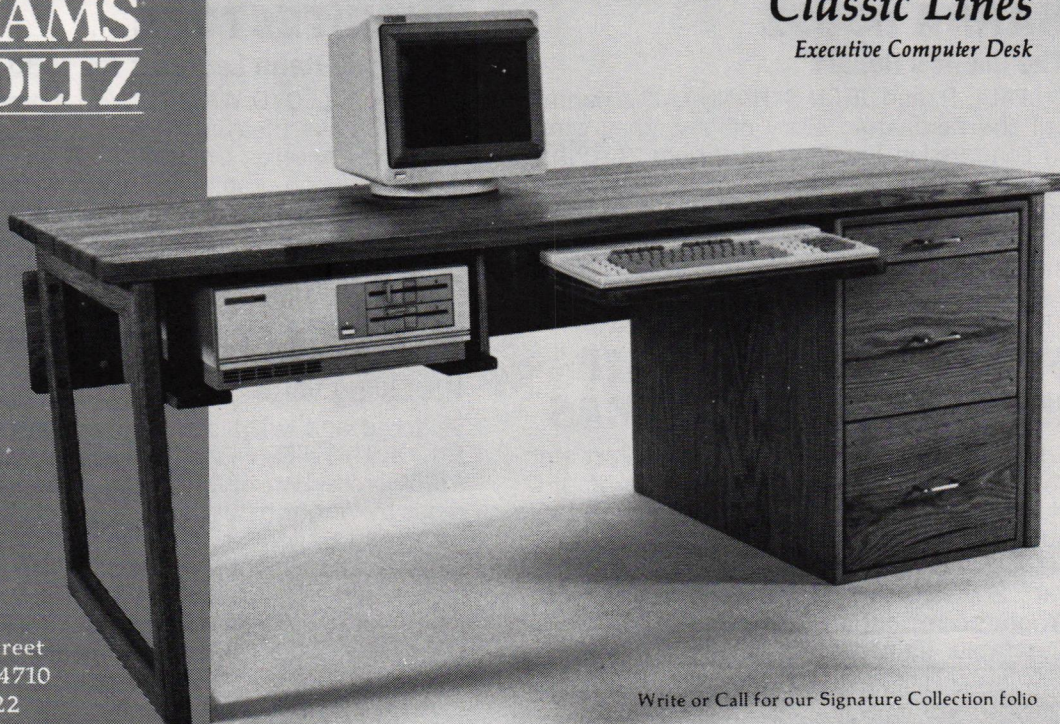
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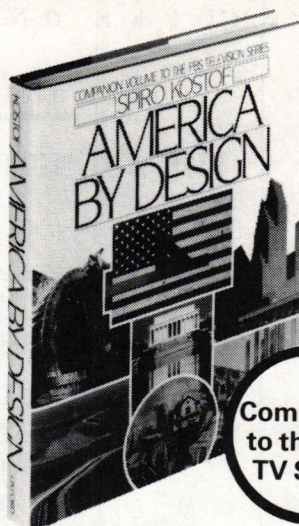
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Andrew Saint:

## OBJECTS OF DESIRE

ADRIAN FORTY

In a fleeting slip of immodesty midway through this book, Adrian Forty alludes to Sigfried Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* as "the only attempt to relate design to the history of society in a comprehensive way." This encapsulates the purpose of Forty's inquiry. It is only a pity that he and his publishers could not think up some snappier, Giedion-like title to entice the reader in and watch the author grapple with this slippery subject. For this is an unusually important work, certainly the most considered English-language contribution to the history of design since Pevsner and Giedion. It is not a book for the lazy-minded; it makes you think. For that alone it deserves a wide readership among design professionals.

Not that the book is altogether reasonable or will command wide acceptance. Forty has a certain quiet, austere, ruthless, and sometimes perverse way of arguing that will deter some and intimidate others. A desire to demote the designer from center-stage will earn him few friends in the orthodox world of industrial design, while an indifference to craftsmanship and the process of problem-solving narrows his view excessively. At points the book reads like a hatchet job on designers and design history alike; sometimes Forty's reductionism is extreme. Yet the author's tunnel vision leads him to protract his arguments with a rigor which leaves us in his debt.

Forty epitomizes thoughts and concerns which have been bothering certain European historians of architecture and design for the past twenty years. His merit is to set these out forcefully in relation to the design of manufactured, marketable objects, a subject on which the superficiality of much previous criticism has often



PUBLICITY PHOTOGRAPH, AMERICAN ELECTRIC COOKER, 1961

bordered on the ludicrous. What is meant, ask Forty and his friends, by the history of design? It cannot be merely the changing sequence of admired or characteristic shapes, profiles, and materials over the decades and centuries, as museums and exhibitions of the applied arts tend to suggest. Nor can it be just an account of the talents and methods of the Raymond Loewys, Gordon Russells and Ettore Sottsass of this world. Investigating the genesis of almost any object of industrial manufacture, striking or banal, one finds a maze of processes, influences, and ideas which often leave the designer (if indeed such a person can be identified) subordinate and peripheral, if not downright irrelevant, to an understanding of the object's value and significance.

"Value" and "significance" are the

key words here. For the modern collector or museum-goer, these qualities depend upon what a "design" product looks like and how much it may fetch in the auction room. Its longer history, whether it be an analysis of how well it fulfilled its purpose, what made it sell, or what ideas were embodied in its shape and manufacture, has limited bearing on its selling price today. Despite a strong vein of economic curiosity, Adrian Forty scorns the evaluation of industrial design products as postindustrial commodities. For him, the value and significance of such objects are historical. He wants to know what a Wedgwood plate tells us about early industrial society and organization, and why the dishwasher took the shape it did at the time that it did. He does not care about the unexamined aesthetic pleasure or in-



vestment potential which these objects may now provide. Put thus, Forty's quest for a deeper design history looks a bit esoteric. The dismissive treatment he metes out to old-style design history should have been tempered by acknowledgment of how accurately that history has served a large, ever-growing market in applied and industrial art objects.

For the few, then, who like their design as a means to a deeper historical understanding, Forty offers enlightenment. But you still have to take him on his own terms. The book opens with a robust distinction between art and design. Art, claims Forty, is usually conceived and made under the direction of a single person. Design (in the modern sense) is the lavishing of art skills upon objects already conceived or manufactured, in order to make them more salable. This is an interesting working definition that merits scrutiny before we see where Forty takes it. Though he wishes to distinguish art from design, Forty allows an element of art as integral to design, so there is a certain circularity here. What is that element? The commonest answer is what the Greeks called *techné*, usually rendered "skill" or "craftsmanship." Throughout the book, Forty shows scant concern for the technical and problem-solving skills essential to design. Art, he implies, has to do with creativity, design with commodities. This is a large and often misleading assumption. The dividing line between, for instance, a portrait by Joshua Reynolds and a hand painted china service from Wedgwood is not so great as Forty would have us believe. Both can be represented as salable commodities to which customized touches were added. We think of the Reynolds as a work of art, not of design; we could, and sometimes do, think of a Wedgwood vase in the same terms. The distinction is more pragmatic than conceptual. In this case, Forty would argue that the difference is in the means of production and the degree of control exercised by the

creator. But in many other examples, preeminently architectural ones, a lack or loss of control over production on the part of the original designer does not prevent us from defining the result as a work of art. Only by defining design in relation to a special application of that process, the manufactured, salable product, is Forty able to impose his own reductionist views on the subject.

A further example may be worth adding to make this important point clearer. Boeing has recently commissioned a new passenger seat for its jumbo jets. This seat, like almost everything else on a modern aircraft, is the focus of an intensive collaboration in design, manufacture, and testing, and involves distinguished designers. It will be supplied only within a strictly closed market, and whether it will ever have art value as a post-industrial commodity is doubtful. Yet the seat is obviously an object of design, if not an "object of desire." The nature of that design surely resides more in the technical, material, problem-solving aspect of the activity involved, in other words, craftsmanship or *techné*, than in the "packaging" of the seat to make it salable or in its embodiment of specific cultural "ideas," the other set of preoccupations which Forty investigates.

These protests must be registered early, because within the field Forty concedes to design, his perceptions so often convince once he gets his stride. The book is broken down into a series of essays running, as the subtitle says, from Wedgwood to IBM. Some take themes, like the great issue of the relation between design and mechanization; others illuminate historical episodes such as the rise of modern office arrangements or the spread of labor-saving devices within the home. There is a British bias to the subject matter, but it is not overwhelming; the essay on office planning and equipment, for instance, centers upon Taylorization and the American experience. In each essay the argu-

ment is carefully and individually constructed. A flavor may suffice. In the first essay Forty demonstrates, as no one else has done, that Josiah Wedgwood's great strength in 18th-century art pottery depended not on mechanization as such, but on his organization of production according to the principles of the division of labor, and on his ensuring that his designers were strictly subordinate within that organization. The mature Wedgwood relied for the appearance of choice and variety in his wares not on numbers of patterns, but on a set of simple, applied decorations added at a late stage in manufacture. The role of the well-known outside designers whom Wedgwood employed was quite marginal. He was obliged to employ some "creative" people within his workforce. But increasingly he looked for "good and humble modelers at Etruria," rather than designers with ideas of their own that could threaten efficient production. The kind of marginalized, style-mongering role played by Wedgwood's designers, argues Forty, was the same as that of figures like Loewy and Dreyfuss, sometimes claimed as the first industrial designers. The emergence of the modern designer, Forty is saying here in Marxian spirit, follows directly from the process of the division of labor.

Though this line of economic argument is rigorously applied throughout the book, Forty appreciates its insufficiency. He therefore supplements it with another, more flexible means of analysis, whereby design objects are seen in terms of the historical and cultural "ideas" which they represent. "Ideas," of course, can mean almost anything. Forty himself criticizes authors like Mark Girouard, who lazily invoke the easy notion of "social context" when they are discussing architecture and design. His own preference is for the view that design objects embody "ideas," not in any loose Hegelian way, but in the structuralist sense that they utilize "myths . . . necessary to commercial success.



Every product, to be successful, must incorporate the ideas that will make it marketable, and the particular task of design is to bring about the conjunction between such ideas and the available means of production."

One of the achievements of the book is that Forty never uses this potentially facile idea sloppily. In an essay on differentiation in design, for example, he tackles a question awkward for the economic approach to design history: why were there and are there still so many different types of penknives, hairbrushes, soaps, and so on, when a single type would be so much more efficient to produce. Giedion saw the answer in terms of the proliferation of specialized functions. Forty disagrees, and shows by minute, unerring analysis how the differentiation of designs having a common function serves to reinforce extra-economic factors like social class and grouping. In the end, the "ideas" and "myths" of this kind and their interaction with the economics of production are what most fascinate Forty. As a result, many of the chapters, like the one on the evolution of the design of household appliances and its counterpart for the office, become ingenious, wide-ranging excursions on the history of home and work, taking design merely as a point of departure.

Nevertheless, the brutal economic austerity of the Forty methodology is generally maintained to the end. A late chapter tackles the slow spread of electricity and electrical appliances in the British home, offering a wholly "supply-side" view of domestic electrical development. Forty suggests that the electricity companies were compelled to offer better-designed cookers and other appliances for the home because of their need to spread the "load factor" more evenly through the day and thus get on terms with the gas industry, which had hitherto dominated cooking. Rightly or wrongly the demand side of the equation, the possibility that consumers really wanted electrical appliances because they were

truly cleaner and easier to maintain than gas ones, brooks no consideration. Likewise, in a further discussion of household appliances, Forty dismisses the propaganda of "laborsaving" as without foundation because inquiry discovered that housework done with the help of these appliances took as much time as before. This is to equate time with labor. The possibility that the clamorously marketed dishwashers and vacuum cleaners of the mid-20th century did actually save women physical effort, if not time, is one which Forty seems unwilling to contemplate. His view is always the harsh one.

But the tone of *Objects of Desire* is not harsh, nor is the writing. A clever, amusing, and original choice of illustrations helps to lull the reader into an easy sense of absorption as he is drawn along Forty's bold and controversial path. If this hooks more readers in, well and good. We shall not get another such stimulating book on design for a very long time.

*Objects of Desire: Design and Society from Wedgwood to IBM*, Adrian Forty, Pantheon Books, 1986, 256 pp., illus., \$24.95.

**Thomas L. Schumacher:**

## CARLO SCARPA

Carlo Scarpa (1906–1978) was a Venetian cultural hero. His was an overtly modern style, but one that recalled the methods and characteristics of traditional arts and crafts. Since his death from injuries suffered in a fall in Japan at age 72, Scarpa has undergone something close to canonization, as is lovingly demonstrated by the critical neutrality of recent books written about him.

During the 1930s, Scarpa, like the Venetian MIAR group, was oriented more toward the Viennese modernism of the secession than the International Style; after World War II he emerged as an important figure for Italian modern architecture and design, in part because he did not abandon the stylistic

mainstream of the Modern Movement, as did many other architects of his generation, such as Gardella and Luigi Moretti. Scarpa was not part of the Neo-Liberty group, and he was not politically suspect, as was Moretti. Yet he was never part of the more socially concerned arm of the Modern Movement in Italy (which makes one wonder why the Italians cared about his work, political animals that they are). As Maria Antonietta Crippa, in her offering on Scarpa, remarks, "He worked on the margin of social commitment, but his activity was fueled by an unusual moral rigor."

A great admirer of Frank Lloyd Wright (he once prostrated himself in front of the American master, it is said), and influenced by the Venetian decorative tradition typified by glassblowing and *marmorino*, Scarpa created one of the most original decorative styles of this century. He fostered regionalism against the internationalism of the Modern Movement, and a number of his buildings, like the Castelvechio Museum in Verona and the Brion Cemetery near Asolo, will certainly remain in the repertoire of noteworthy architectural monuments of the 20th century.

These three books on Carlo Scarpa tip the scale at just over ten pounds, perfect ballast for the most ambitious coffee table. They are lavishly illustrated with brilliant color photographs; we have here a myriad of images—most of them details, since Scarpa was a master of the detail—and many of the master's drawings, some published for the first time. Also, their descriptive texts taken together give the uninitiated reader a good overview of Scarpa's life and work.

Maria Antonietta Crippa's *Carlo Scarpa: Theory, Design, Projects* concentrates on the museums in order to "distinguish between genesis and stylistic development." Unfortunately, nowhere in the text does the author make this distinction, nor does she explain, to my satisfaction, how concentrating on the museums might allow



her to do so.

Crippa explains that Scarpa rebelled against the "precision of Florence," preferring Venice, "where elaboration and the inevitable ravages of sea and time condemn every precisely made object to become a ruin within a very short time." While this conceit may explain the enigmatic incompleteness of Scarpa's work, similar statements strewn throughout the text are less successful, and descriptions hang in the air with no visual proof to verify the passages. For example (concerning the Veritti house), "the positioning of the openings in the sitting room all carefully guide the eye." Searching for confirmation, I could not find an image, only a plan of the house in question. Crippa's evaluation must be true, but I would like to see for myself, and I should be able to do so in a book so lavishly illustrated.

The copious illustrations pose the same problem. Some of the text is keyed to pictures, while other parts elaborately describe details not illustrated and illustration numbers are not keyed into the text (a deficiency in other recent MIT Press books). Architecture is, after all, a visual art, and Scarpa was a consummately visual architect. (The location of the footnotes in this book is also very frustrating, hidden as they are between pages of illustrations.) The book has no index, the mark of a true picture book. At \$50, we deserve better.

On the positive side, Crippa's work is the only book of the three to adequately present plans and sections of Scarpa's work. This is particularly important in the Castelvecchio in Verona, where Scarpa's delicate intervention is confirmed by the plans, here beautifully drawn and easy enough to read.

The *A + U* "extra edition" on Scarpa is a typical Japanese picture book of the *GA* variety, with an essay by Francesco Dal Co added for intellectual credibility. (A similar full-length essay by Dal Co appears in the Rizzoli *Scarpa*.) Italian photographer Antonio Martinelli took the photographs, and

as one might expect from the Japanese, the color reproduction is dazzling. Martinelli's photographs are the best visual documentation of Scarpa's realized *oeuvre*. Very much in the vein of Scarpa's work, they are vignettes that add up to a totality without the formal cohesion of Terragni's classic modernism. This makes Scarpa's work a difficult brew to understand. A taste for his work comes easily, but understanding comes only with great difficulty, if at all, and the essays in this book are limited. Aside from Dal Co's essay, we are simply given a vast array of images, finished off by a few commemorative words from some famous Japanese architects, and none of it adds much to our understanding of Scarpa.

If you can afford only one book on Scarpa, buy *Carlo Scarpa: The Complete Works*, from Rizzoli, edited by Francesco Dal Co and Giuseppe Mazzariol, the most comprehensive and the least pretentious of the three. It contains long essays by Dal Co, Mazzariol and Giuseppe Barbieri, and Manfredo Tafuri, along with shorter pieces by 16 architects and historians, including George Ranalli, Vincent Scully, Rafael Moneo, and Arata Isozaki. It also contains a bibliography, a biography, some short pieces by Scarpa himself, and—a rarity in architectural books—an article on Scarpa's library. In typical Electa/Rizzoli fashion, the book is impeccably and clearly designed. It is indeed monumental.

Is this the last word on Scarpa? I think not. Few of these essays succeed in unraveling Scarpa, in explaining why and how he was more than a detail man (if indeed he was). Closest to the mark is Dal Co, who does provide a philosophical and intellectual underpinning for Scarpa's work, but avoids attacking the architecture frontally (typical of the Venetian school). Tafuri, in his usual brilliant and stinging prose, places Scarpa in historical context, and nearly outside the realm of interest (also typical). Mazzariol

and Barbieri, on the other hand, seem intent on setting international records for pretentiousness and opacity. Buried beneath their text is a story about Scarpa's life that reads like a movie script, with elaborate passages describing what it must have been like to be the young Scarpa, the adolescent Scarpa, the middle-aged Scarpa. I, for one, got more out of the chronology in the appendix.

The other writers are content to admire the genius.

The "problem" of Scarpa is possibly best summarized in Tafuri's essay: "Perhaps no other contemporary Italian architect is so near to becoming a 'myth'—and hence impervious to analysis, like every authentic myth, and attracting all the anecdotes and gossip designed to foster a mythology." So much of what has been written about Scarpa resembles an extended after-dinner speech or a long epitaph, and these three books are no exception. The problem is partly one of style and content and partly one of translation. Italian texts often sound stilted when translated into English because Italian is a more florid language. We need more translators who can retain the essence of these Italian texts without translating them so literally.

This problem is chronic in recent publications, from early translations of Tafuri to the present three texts. Most of the time, essays on architecture are not great literature, and they would be improved if the authors did not aspire to something beyond themselves. One hopes that some truly substantive analysis that approaches Scarpa's work head-on will appear soon. Meanwhile, these books will at least entice architects, scholars, and coffee-table owners to visit his buildings.

**Carlo Scarpa: Theory, Design, Projects**, Maria Antonietta Crippa, MIT, 1986, 300 pp., illus., \$50.00.

**Carlo Scarpa**, Toshio Nakamura, editor, *A + U* extra, 1985, 264 pp., illus., \$26.95.

**Carlo Scarpa: The Complete Works**, Francesco Dal Co and Giuseppe Mazzariol, editors, Rizzoli, 1986, 319 pp., illus., \$45.00 cloth; \$29.95 pb.



Martin Pawley:

## MODEST UTOPIANS

Some years ago, at a symposium at the New York Museum of Modern Art, the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre spoke on the subject of planning the university of the future. As is invariably the case on such occasions, discussion rapidly diffused to encompass the future of the world and what to do about it, and Lefebvre's contribution was memorably cynical. "There is nothing wrong with the world at all," he said. "It is like a ship sailing across the ocean of the universe: the only problem is that the ship is on fire and there is no communication between the bridge and the engine room."

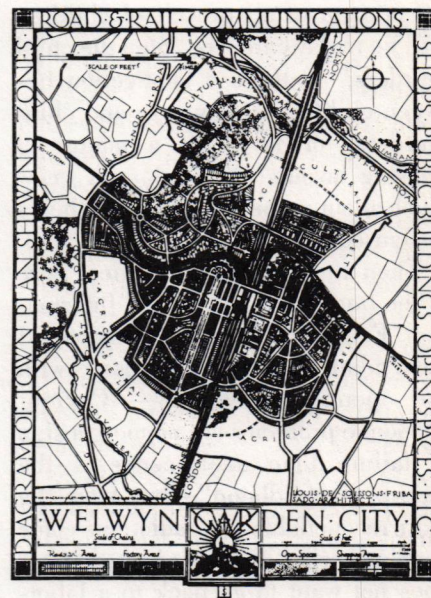
When these words were translated into English there was some nervous laughter but little direct response. After all, planners always behave as though they are on the bridge with the captain while the engine-room workers down below patiently wait for orders. Any suggestion that they might only be passengers—and worse still, that there might be maniacs in the engine room who leave the phone off the hook when the boiler temperature goes into the red—tends to affect them the way a hand with four aces affects players at a poker game. Thus it is with *Sustainable Communities*, not a book with a beginning, a middle, and an end, but a seamless collection of didactic essays in the modern manner, bound up like a proper book because otherwise it would lack credibility.

In reality, of course, everything is worse even than Lefebvre described it. Not only is the captain a powerless figurehead who only appears to direct the ship, but the planners are psychopathic passengers who impersonate ship's officers for reasons of their own. Worse still, the advice they give to the captain consists of nothing more than what they read in *Scientific American* last week or saw on TV the night before. Even the engineers who really make

things go have no idea what they did yesterday or what they will do tomorrow because they keep no records and never go on deck. Periodically they find to their amazement that they have been carrying out some master plan—*Cité Industrielle*, Radiant City, Garden City, Broadacre City, Milton Keynes—when all the time they thought they were just bending the rules and making the ship go faster. That is what we call history. Most planners of repute have enjoyed the flush of pride that comes with being consulted by the U.N. or invited to join the governor's housing task force. Nothing much ever comes of it, but it looks good on the *curriculum vitae*. That is when they tell the engineers what they have been doing: it is the part they play in history.

*Sustainable Communities* dates from the big energy scare that followed the 1973 oil embargo. For the first time since 1942, the engineers finally got worried about the direction of the ship because there was (temporarily) no gas for their cars. Lots of planners got invited to join the governor's task force at that time. They made the most of it, because it was then that the notion of the harmonious coexistence of high technology and the natural world via earth berms, solar cells, and bicycles finally reached the engine room agenda. You may recall Jimmy Carter and his White House solar water heaters, the ones they removed earlier this year. In *Sustainable Communities*, Sim Van der Ryn and Peter Calthorpe have put the entire theory together; the result is like a five-year-old chart laid before the captain as the ship approaches an area of tricky shoals.

The sustainable economy is perhaps the only idea from that heady time of turned-down thermostats and million-dollar solar houses to have survived intact into the folklore of late 20th-century government. Each of the essays in the book (except for an admirable illustrated primer on 20th-century New Towns thinking by Peter Calthorpe,



WELWYN GARDEN CITY

and a more than usually restrained piece on the golden future of alternative transportation systems by Fred A. Reid) is steeped in the fulsome optimism of the postindustrial, pre-AIDS era. David Katz's evocation of a "sustainable city" sums it up best:

Imagine a New York or Los Angeles, the city a patchwork of fields intermixed with garden-roofed office towers and apartment buildings, bisected by tree-lined corridors. The sun glistens on the varied panes of the greenhouses and growing frames that are part of the buildings and malls of the city. A business executive, refreshed by the scented, cooling breeze coming from the quilted fields, pauses for a moment beneath a fruit tree before entering her workplace.

"Sounds good, doesn't it?" continues Katz. Well yes, I suppose it does, but the tone, borrowed from the world of advertising, bodes ill. There is more of it in "Design as if People Mattered," by Clare Cooper Marcus (a replicant of the similarly named book, though no reference to it is made). Clare has a way with simple ideas; for example, "I mean by family anything that considers itself a family" (does this include Charles Manson?); "By 1990,



80 percent of all preschool children will be in day care"; or "Stop the child murders." Is there a connection between children in day care and child murders, or is it all a matter of housing layouts? Clare doesn't know much about property values: she thinks design counts.

Then there is the theoretical core of the book, "The Mass and Information Economy," by Paul Hawken. I must admit I was very impressed with the opening paragraphs—"Current economic problems are no more a sign of failure than adolescence is the failure of childhood"—but later the old irreconcilable contradictions come flooding back. "While the United States does not want to go back to a labor-intensive agriculture to save energy," intones Hawken threateningly, "our only hope of supplying sufficient amounts of food for ourselves and others is to have more people on the land working ever more productively." Why invoke the example of the Chinese peasant unless that is what you mean?

When you get down to it, even the case studies in the book where the whole thing appears to have been done already turn out to be fakes. A compact Chino Hills development claims a one-third energy saving over nearby "sprawl" suburbs by minimal auto trips, energy-conserving design, and rigorous site planning and building standards. In the last paragraph it is revealed that *half* the claimed energy saving is derived from the *theoretical* reduction in auto trips alone. I wonder what the direct energy cost of the rest was.

The problem with *Sustainable Communities* is encapsulated in Hawken's essay. He builds a watertight case for the collapse of Western civilization through pollution and resource exhaustion, then abandons it in favor of a happy ending. Or maybe that was the captain's idea.

*Sustainable Communities: A New Design Synthesis for Cities, Suburbs and Towns*, Sim Van der Ryn and Peter Calthorpe, Sierra Club, 1986, 238 pp., illus., \$25.00.

*Paul Rabinow:*

## THE REMAKING OF ISTANBUL

ZEYNEP CELIK

Zeynep Celik adroitly recounts the remaking of Istanbul as a complex and at times curious story of the interrelation of style, technology, and power. Displaying a respectful and restrained command of the history of a city she clearly knows and loves, Celik presents, in a straightforward and illuminating manner, the literal archaeology of Istanbul's layering of cultures, styles, and world movements.

The twin forces of change in the 19th-century Ottoman capital—fallen from its days of architectural and political glory—were the periodic fires that swept across its massed wooden buildings and the waves of European influence, in particular Haussmannian street widening and Beaux-Arts monuments. The fires solved a problem which had bedeviled Haussmann: how to clear land for new construction. The new schemes were meant to bring order to the irregular street pattern for the practical purposes of fire prevention and police control.

The recurrent architectural dream of order through spatial arrangement was here, as in so many other cities, quickly overrun by older social patterns of movement, commerce, and use of public space. Only in the fashionable new residential areas of Galata, where the residents embraced modernity through elements of Paris urbanism, did European techniques and styles take full hold. Galata's quarters were filled with the symbols of modern living: office buildings, banks, theaters, hotels, department stores, and multistory apartment buildings.

This aping of French styles culminated at the turn of the century in the commission given to Joseph Antoine Bouvard, Alphand's successor as inspector-general of the Architec-

tural Department of the City of Paris. Bouvard was too busy to visit Istanbul, but not too busy to draw up an elegant schema employing Beaux-Arts principles of regularization, symmetry, isolation of monuments, and creation of vistas. He ignored the local culture and urban patterns, and as no preliminary program was drawn, the Parisian-looking boulevards and dazzling avenues led nowhere.

At exactly this moment, a group of Prix de Rome-winning architects who had clustered around Tony Garnier, were inventing the principles of urban planning based on modern social and hygienic sciences. Among this renegade group was an architect with a special passion for Istanbul, Henri Prost. He became chief urban planner in Morocco, where the largest urban planning experiment in the French world prior to World War II was being conducted. After his experience drawing up the first comprehensive regional plans for the Parisian region, Prost was named chief planner of Istanbul, where he worked from 1936 to 1951. Although he falls outside her period of study, it would have been interesting to see what Celik's careful archival research has revealed about Prost's work.

With disarming clarity, as the book is the product of a great deal of original work, Zeynep Celik offers us a well-turned case study of a worldwide process of modernization through technical and aesthetic colonization or, better, self-colonization. Turkey was not invaded by Europe's armies, but when its aspiring classes eagerly invited France's technicians and stylists, another form of power relationship was set in place, one perhaps more effective than force. Its ambiguities remain alive across the globe today.

*The Remaking of Istanbul: Portrait of an Ottoman City in the Nineteenth Century*, Zeynep Celik, University of Washington Press, 1986, 200 pp., illus., \$25.00.



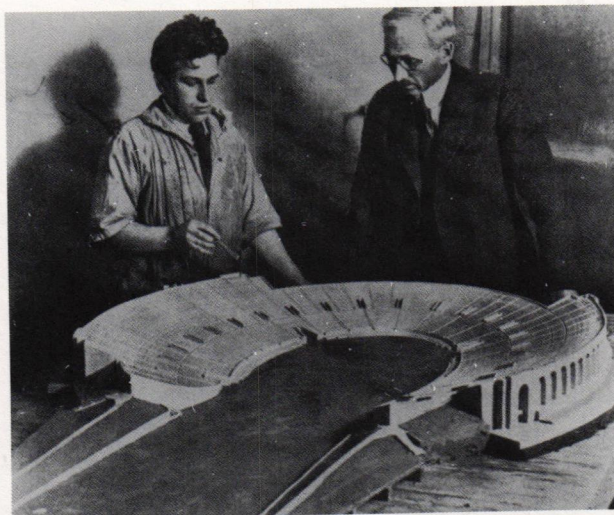
**Albert Pope:**

## SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA URBANISM

The Spanish Colonial Revival, which dominated the architectural scene in Southern California from 1915 to 1930, has for many years been analyzed and understood as a stylistic phenomenon. From this vantage the work seemed arbitrary and eccentric, a curiosity for the historian passing on to more significant watersheds. Several recent books and exhibitions have succeeded in shifting the focus from stylistic issues toward an understanding of the revival as a regional adaptation of a complete architectural culture.

In response to the California Panama Exposition of 1915 in San Diego, a small group of architects initiated an autonomous architectural landscape and urban language. It is becoming apparent that the scope of their work exceeds what stylistic analysis has been able to reveal.

This point was finally driven home in *Courtyard Housing in Los Angeles*, published by a group of USC faculty members in 1982 (reviewed in *DBR* 1), and has more recently been expanded in two exhibitions curated by Stephanos Polyzoides and Peter de Bretteville. The first exhibit, "Cal Tech 1910-1915, An Urban Architecture for Southern California," traces the development of the campus until World War I, focusing on the Master Plan of 1917 by Bertram Goodhue. The second exhibit, "Myron Hunt 1868-1952, The Search for A Regional Architecture," traces the development of the most influential and prolific revival architect. Elaborate catalogues accompanied each show. Both have the same format: a series of short, mostly descriptive essays, ending with theoretical statements by the curators expounding upon the urban lessons found in the work. As much as a series



B. V. GEROW, MODEL MAKER, AND MYRON HUNT WITH MODEL OF THE ROSE BOWL, 1921

monograph would be in order, these books are valuable as catalogues to introduce the work and also to encourage us to reread Spanish Colonial Revival as the implantation of a complete building culture into the circumstances of an early 20th-century "frontier."

Together with the courtyard book, these publications have the potential for breaking the bounds of regional interest in the revival. The bibliography and good descriptive essays by Alson Clark and Richard Oliver form a historical base for the general speculation in the curators' essays. These essays, while significantly broadening the reading of the material, finally fall short of breaking this regional barrier, begging more questions than they answer. They are essentially remedial lessons in both urbanism and the relationship of architecture to public institutions; lessons desperately needed in Los Angeles where the present "scene" remains uncritically self-absorbed in an avant-garde milieu. (Frank Gehry trickle-down threatens to reach flood stage all over the city.) Firmly didactic in tone, the essays by de Bretteville and Polyzoides cannot confront the broader and more troubling issues: How does one assess the commitment of an architect who, armed only by the autonomous urban traditions of his discipline, would fight for urban values in a city that, above all else, refuses to become a city? This question

can be asked of Goodhue and Hunt as well as Polyzoides and de Bretteville, and one would hope historical speculation about the architect could shed light on the dilemma of the city. How might this very early confrontation between a nascent urbanism and a pervasive suburbanization parallel current urbanizing efforts? Without such speculation we are left with only more questions and the rather sad irony that the patron of the "Public Realm," Henry Huntington, was, in his development of the Southland, responsible for the radical deurbanization that precluded from the start an urban architecture for Southern California.

In spite of the distracting presence of such unanswered questions, Polyzoides and de Bretteville have described the successful implantation of the seeds of an urban order (real streets to walk on, real public spaces to be in) and have made us feel its continuing potency and thus weather its dormancy. If Los Angeles should ever decide to grow up into a real city, its urban legacy in the Spanish Colonial Revival will have been well served.

**Cal Tech 1910-1915: An Urban Art for Southern California**, Peter de Bretteville, Stephanos Polyzoides, Baxter Art Gallery and California Institute of Technology, 1983, 64 pp., illus., \$15.95 pb.

**Myron Hunt 1868-1952: The Search for A Regional Architecture**, Hennessey & Ingalls, 1984, 120 pp., illus., \$22.50 pb.



**Margaretta J. Darnall:**

## GARDEN AND GROVE

JOHN DIXON HUNT

*Garden and Grove* is a series of essays about the English response to the Italian Renaissance garden in the 17th and 18th centuries and is the revised and expanded text of the Franklin Jasper Walls lectures delivered by John Dixon Hunt at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York in 1981. Part 1 is set in Italy and discusses English travelers' reactions to Italian gardens; part 2 is set in England and demonstrates how important the Italian gardens were to the development of the English garden in the 17th and 18th centuries. This is not an introduction to the glories of the English garden for the general reader, but a specialized, scholarly study which requires considerable familiarity with both English and Italian gardens.

The first part of the book is the most original piece of scholarship. In a previous book, *The Genius of the Place*, prepared with Peter Willis, Hunt put together an anthology of literary descriptions of English gardens. Here, he has gone further and collected published and unpublished descriptions of Italian gardens and woven them together thematically. An introductory chapter discusses the importance of the garden on the Grand Tour in the 17th and 18th centuries. He then describes the English response to the rustic retreats, the garden as theater, the "cabinets of curiosity," variety as an aesthetic goal, and the relationship between art and nature in the Italian garden. There is a particularly good essay on Ovid in the garden, and the material on the antique sources of Renaissance garden motifs is outstanding.

Part 2, "England: The World of the Garden," covers material that has been written about many times before, although from different perspectives. Literary references demonstrate that



THE SATIRIC SCENE, FROM SERLIO, *TUTTO L'OPERE DELL'ARCHITETTURA*, BOOK II

the garden was not an isolated element in English culture. Hunt puts "those who wished to translate Italy into England" into three time frames, the first extending from the Elizabethans to the Civil War, the second taking us from Charles II to the early 18th century, and the third dealing with the so-called Palladian gardens in England up to about 1750. The connection between the English Renaissance garden and the Italian Renaissance garden is straightforward. Much of this material has already been covered in Sir Roy Strong's excellent book, *The Renaissance Garden in England*, which chronicles the royal gardens, but Hunt has discovered smaller gardens that also alluded to Italy. After the Civil War, English gardens were much larger and grander, and whether they derive from Italian, French, or Dutch precedents remains problematic.

The final chapter, dealing with the English garden up to 1750, is potentially the most interesting, but, in *Garden and Grove*, the most disappointing. The contention that the English landscape garden was Italian in origin, while not widely understood or accepted, has been discussed in scholarly literature more extensively and convincingly than Hunt suggests. He spends far too many words challenging those authors who emphasize

the originality of the English garden without noting its Italian antecedents and not enough crediting those who have for many years understood the English garden as a re-creation of Italian scenes. For example, Elizabeth Manwaring's pioneering 1925 study, *Italian Landscape in 18th Century England*, has a chapter on the creation of Italian landscape in England. Although she emphasizes the landscape painters Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa rather than the specific garden influences which Hunt traces, the two works overlap, and it is surprising that Hunt fails to cite Manwaring.

*Garden and Grove* is, for the most part, well illustrated. In the first part Hunt has pulled together pictures, including paintings with garden backgrounds, which are rarely seen in connection with the Renaissance garden. In the last chapter, however, the reader is expected to recall from memory such important 18th-century images as Alexander Pope's grotto at Twickenham, the overall schemes for Stowe and Rousham, as well as the gardens and monuments at Stourhead, the Leasowes, and Hagley.

All in all, *Garden and Grove* is a provocative series of essays. Its strengths are the collection of English travelers' observations on Italian gardens (in the first part) and the literary references (in the second part). The travel descriptions also help the reader to visualize those Italian gardens which have either disappeared or changed significantly since the 17th and 18th centuries. The book's weakness is the last chapter, which does not suggest the breadth of the Italian imagery in the English landscape garden. Nevertheless, Hunt does make his point that the Italian Renaissance garden was a primary source for the English garden throughout the 17th and into the 18th century.

*Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination, 1600-1750*, John Dixon Hunt, Princeton University Press, 1986, 267 pp., illus., \$32.50.



**Christopher Arnold:**

## BUILDING SYSTEMS INTEGRATION HANDBOOK

RICHARD RUSH, editor

The systems approach to building was a favorite child of the sixties. Although the child did not live up to expectations, and the building industry was not transformed into a clone of General Motors or Lockheed, the systems movement was surprisingly effective in contributing to a reorientation of our thinking.

The attempt to industrialize the building industry (using models of industry now clearly seen as outdated and inappropriate) resulted in much analysis of the industry itself—the process—and an anatomical analysis of the building—the product—that focused on how the parts were designed and how effectively they acted together.

This anatomical approach led to the definition of the building as a set of systems (or more accurately, subsystems), a concept borrowed from human biology and the then-fashionable aerospace industry. Part of its appeal was that it glamorized an industry seen as inarticulate, pragmatic, and hopelessly anachronistic. While the appearance of buildings and their plans had been the stuff of fine writing and fine art for generations, how they got built had never attracted much academic interest.

A further very practical reason for studying the building and its systems in a more careful way was that, by the sixties, the utility systems had assumed much more functional importance and accounted for a significant percentage of the cost. Some designers, ever on the lookout for new images, realized that these systems were inherently interesting and could provide a new visual order that, while decorative in one sense, did not violate any of the then-current taboos against the appli-

cation of nonfunctional decoration. Where in traditional design the utility systems were added to the architectural concept, in the new approach the utility systems were considered from the outset and were recognized as a design modifier, if not as a design determinant.

While many architects developed systems concepts for individual buildings, the ideas were developed formally in a series of systems programs for institutional buildings in the late sixties and early seventies. With the exception of the first—Ezra Ehrenkrantz's school systems program in California—none of these programs produced much that was interesting in building—or much building at all: their flowering coincided with a general downturn in the construction of the building types toward which they were directed. But the idea of systems, the need for their design compatibility, some definitions, and ways of controlling their initial and long-term economics had entered the language of design and construction. Ways of thinking had changed, though the revolution appeared to have failed. So the term "building system" passed into everyday language and with it the idea that all building systems have discrete functions and defined disciplines and contribute to the complete system, the building itself.

The time seems ripe for a book that can lay out all that we know about systems, from concept to application. Is the *Building Systems Integration Handbook* such a book? In spite of its self-professed objective, "to do for building systems what *Architectural Graphic Standards* has done for architectural detailing and component design," the answer must be a reluctant "no." Reluctant because the book seemed to have everything going for it: massive support from the AIA and the publisher, a clear market window, and an editor with a track record of knowledgeable and interesting journalistic attention to the technology of building. Though the book does some

things very well, it does many important things inadequately, and it misses the special strengths of *Graphic Standards* by a mile.

The problem here lies not with the committee that wrote the book, but with the editor, who was evidently not content to organize a descriptive, quantitative, value-free handbook. His thesis is stated early on: "the general subject of this book is creativity . . . without creativity in the system aspects of building, however, the building literally cannot exist. . . . What is needed is a vocabulary for discussing the creativity involved in the less obvious aspects of building design."

Putting aside our natural desire to reach for a revolver when we hear the word "creativity," we should recognize that the editor is up to something. He wants to persuade us that, while system design is predominantly based on logic, with some creative involvement, systems integration is dominated by creativity, which causes "something to occur without precedent." This is a reasonable but still very personal view of systems integration which, in common understanding, simply means the ability of building subsystems to coexist and perform their functions without getting in each others way (not nearly creative enough for Rush).

The building is the system, and it is made up of subsystems. Surely the relation between these subsystems is the essence of integration: if they support one another, provide space for one another, and even, on occasion, share roles, then they are (well) integrated. If they are thrown together without thought, and are not conceived as a working entity, they are not integrated. The question is how to integrate them?

Rush counsels us that "the most daring type of integration occurs when the link is chosen before either of the two systems it is destined to join. It is a bridge between two roads that do not yet exist." He continues: "If you can't see the integration then it's probably not a building that we're



going to choose for this book, because it can't be discussed easily." This draws a protest from John Pile, one of the members of a panel that holds an excellent conversation on integration in practice. "You could take the opposite point of view, that's the very reason why it needs to be talked about and studied." Rush does not.

His view of systems is personal and nonhistorical, one ignoring much of the previous thinking that has gone into defining and describing systems, much of it in contract documents such as the work done by Michael Brill and others for the GSA. Rush defines his systems, as many before him have done, as Structure, Envelope, Mechanical, and Interior. He then defines five levels of integration, on a spectrum between independent but coordinated parts, to a building whose components perform multiple tasks that are inseparable. His levels of integration relate to physical relationships and are defined as remote, touching, connected, meshed, and unified.

These relationships are further defined in a number of molecular-type diagrams that show the four systems, and in bubble-type diagrams that define each building component (roofing, ceiling, lighting) as part of the four systems and show their relationship to each other. Almost one hundred pages is devoted to explaining this "integration theory" in a rather pedantic way that, for me, undermines the laudable intent to get us to systematize the way we think about how buildings go together. For example, the BSIH matrix, which represents "the most probable levels of interaction between two systems," allows one to deduce that there are 17 common relationships among all of the two-system combinations, that the most common relationship between systems is the connected one, and that the least common relationship between systems is the remote. Seven other deductions of like abstraction are shown. All this is the stuff of academic research, not a handbook, and exposition of a per-

sonal thought process makes for neither interesting reading nor illumination.

A conversation in the second Chapter between four design professionals and the editor is lively and intelligent, but reads rather like a good magazine article in which professionals express in an entertaining way a few opinions and a little quiet selling of their favorite projects. One feels that a few months later they might have a different set of projects on their minds.

The next section comprises nineteen case-studies—descriptions of buildings emphasizing systems and systems integration. The descriptions include photographs and perspective line drawings illustrating systems aspects of particular interest. Here, the editor's agenda surfaces in a conscious bias toward interesting, or "creative" examples, and toward those where the integration exercise is highly visible. With few exceptions, the buildings tend to be magazine-type examples, rather consciously imaginative, or exploiting experimental technologies such as trombe walls, solar belts, or unusual museum daylighting.

These case studies are followed by fifteen generic examples of building technologies. These are three-dimensional drawings, with portions cut away to expose otherwise invisible construction. This "cutaway" technique has been a feature of British automotive and aeronautical journalism since the 1930s; here it is well used and well executed. These examples focus primarily on structure, but envelope, mechanical, and some interior systems are also shown. This section is excellent, but the information in the beautiful drawings is not developed satisfactorily. What follows is a seemingly random selection of products, derived from the examples shown previously—"heat pumps, plastic domed skylights, protected membrane roofing, EPDM, wood trusses, structural fabric, radiant heat panels"—neither a dictionary nor a system categorization.

The descriptions suffer from the attempt to be qualitative without pro-

viding a real basis for choice, admittedly a hard nut to crack. But to tell us that for wood trusses "spans of 16 to 200 feet can be accommodated. A 200 foot span is attainable with a bowstring truss" is to tell us a useless truth.

Building performance in relation to systems integration is the next topic. It gives a useful discussion of current thinking on performance, which is categorized into six performance "mandates." This section, together with that on generic systems, begins to meet the objectives of the book, but again it is an introduction to an exposition which is not developed. Rather generalized discussion substitutes for systematic summaries of performance requirements, which are matched to the systems that can provide them.

By the final section, the hundred-odd pages on integration theory already referred to, we realize another very limiting decision of the book. All the illustrations and examples that refer to real buildings are drawn from the nineteen case-study buildings. As a result, many common systems and subsystems never get described and illustrated. Instead of the inclusivity of *Graphic Standards*—sometimes a subject for criticism—we have a quixotic exclusivity which to me is much more damaging.

This book leaves me feeling the same way as one of those movies, which, despite bright players, a serious and talented director, and a proven producer, ends up a dog. How could all those good people not realize that something was going terribly wrong?

**The Building Systems Integration Handbook**, Richard D. Rush, editor, Wiley, 1986, 445 pp., illus., \$75.00.



**Jean-Louis Bourgeois:**

## CERAMIC HOUSES

NADER KHALILI

About one third of the world's population (generally the poorest third) lives in houses built with sun-dried mud. Nader Khalili, an Iranian architect now living in California, has proposed a radically new technique—baking entire adobe buildings in place—to make millions of these homes more permanent.

Khalili calls his method *geltaftan*, a term he coined from Persian words meaning "clay" and "firing." He believes the technique to be cheap, simple, and effective. "My main concern," Khalili writes, "is architecture and the people who cannot afford an architect, cannot afford manufactured building materials, cannot afford anything but their own hands and the earth beneath their feet." The timing of his new technique seems fortunate. The United Nations has declared 1987 the "International Year of Shelter for the Homeless," and Khalili dedicates his new book "in the spirit of support" for the goal, "that all the poor and disadvantaged of the world will be able to obtain a home by the year 2000."

Khalili's reputation is considerable. His work has been exhibited and published by the Centre Georges Pompidou in France. The *Los Angeles Times* and *Architecture* have lauded his efforts. He has received awards from the California Council of the American Institute of Architects and from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The National Endowment for the Arts gave him a \$40,000 grant to study the application of *geltaftan* in the United States. Khalili's two books have been published by Harper and Row. Unfortunately, however, his claims for *geltaftan* raise false hopes—at least as housing for the world's poor.

Khalili's first book, part memoir and

highly readable, reached a wider audience than most architectural books. Published in 1983, *Racing Alone: A Visionary Architect's Quest for Houses Made with Earth and Fire*, was praised in the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Architecture*, *Ceramics Monthly*, and this journal (*DBR* 4). It describes Khalili's years of struggle to develop technical details and preliminary acceptance for his vision. Rejecting a lucrative architectural practice to work on a social problem, he identifies technological quest with spiritual growth. He is, in the old sense, an enthusiast, a man who lives for rapture. His intensity is attractive, as is his often poetic writing style and his respect—as a city-bred professional—for isolated Iranian villagers and their vernacular skills. We want Khalili to succeed.

Khalili's second book, *Ceramic Houses: How to Build Your Own*, begins on a note of breathless enthusiasm, with the author leading a contingent representing seven countries and eight religions into Navajo country to proselytize for *geltaftan*. The mission's promises spark deep Navajo interest, even passion: "Kisses and hugs and tearful eyes radiate joy." The technique is thus blessed by those who, by their ancient traditions, poverty, and low level of industrialization represent millions around the world.

Khalili is no dry technician. He presents himself with considerable flair as a modern alchemist, a fire-master at once mystical and technical. "The difference," he writes, "between a piece of sun-dried adobe (three elements) and a fired adobe (four elements) is that the 'missing link,' fire (heat) moves earth architecture towards its perfection." The epigraph to *Ceramic Houses* is striking. In elegant Arabic calligraphy and English translation is a quote from the Sufi mystic poet Rumi: "Earth, air, fire, and water are obedient creatures. They are dead to you and me, but alive at God's presence."

An actual house-firing is awesome. For up to two full days, large kerosene

burners spout flames at interior walls, turning the inside of the building into an enormous kiln. At first the fire is kept low, hot enough only to steam away the water which forms more than 15 percent of even the oldest adobe. Then the temperature climbs to 1000 degrees centigrade. This inferno turns the earthen bricks and mortar molten, forming walls and curved ceiling. Upon cooling, a thick layer coalesces into pottery.

*Geltaftan* has, or may have, a number of problems. Despite Khalili's claim of "permanence," most baked roofs require the same maintenance as unbaked ones—replastering every year or so. In addition, the structure expands during *geltaftan*, and, when it cools again, it often cracks. If these cracks are large enough to need repair, mud must be used, and the unfired and the fired mud may not bond properly.

Further, *geltaftan* may severely reduce insulation, one of the greatest advantages of traditional mud construction. Traditional adobe transmits heat very poorly, keeping occupants cool during broiling desert days and warm during cold nights, as the absorbed heat radiates into the house. It seems that *geltaftan* may curtail this thermal lag, perhaps because so much of the adobe's moisture—and consequently weight—is dispersed during firing. These last two issues have reportedly been raised by Hassan Fathy, the eminent Egyptian architect whose *Architecture for the Poor* triggered much of the current Western interest in vernacular construction. These criticisms would be consistent with Khalili's account of his Cairo meeting with Fathy when the senior architect failed to endorse *geltaftan*.

But these problems seem picayune compared to the larger problems. *Geltaftan* cannot be applied to the vast majority of adobe buildings now standing. To begin with, only a fraction of these traditional buildings have roofs suitable for the process. In many parts of the world, including our



own Southwest, adobe roofs are supported by beams and other wooden members which *geltaftan* would incinerate. (In this connection, one cannot help but wonder about the technique's reception by the Navajos, whose traditional roofs include wood. *Ceramic Houses* narrates a warm Navajo welcome for Khalili, but omits any update of his work in the Southwest.) In other areas, notably almost all of black Africa and much of India, traditional buildings with adobe walls have roofs of thatch. Only in the Middle East, with its traditional woodless domes and vaults, could Khalili's method be applied.

An even broader objection, which Khalili himself admits, eliminates virtually all existing buildings as candidates for firing. Khalili writes that his process requires:

a clean mixture of clay-sand without rocks and organic material. Adobe mixture for *geltaftan* . . . differs from a common adobe mixture in its higher clay content and the purity of the mix. Rocks and lime and organic materials in typical adobes are not suitable for high fire, since they break and disintegrate.

If *geltaftan* is inappropriate for existing buildings, how useful is it for the typical third world farmer about to construct a new home? To begin with, the construction of adobe domes is a regionally limited skill: the non-literate villager unfamiliar with the technique would respond with that resistance to the new which Khalili himself describes as so pervasive in Iran.

The biggest problem with applying *geltaftan*, whether on existing or new structures, involves fuels. Khalili claims that local fuels work, but he has never used any himself. In *Ceramic Houses* he airily recommends the use of animal dung, forgetting that five pages earlier he had characterized it as providing only "low heat firing," insufficient in Mexico to produce satisfactory kiln-fired bricks. In many parts of the world, the deforestation disaster already brought about by the

use of wood for cooking fuel and traditional construction makes wood a scarce and costly resource.

This leaves kerosene the *geltaftan* fuel of choice which poses an immediate safety risk. Khalili's kerosene burner, he writes, "must be used only by an experienced operator. An emergency shut-off system must be developed for it before its public use." Khalili's figures indicate that the firing of a room about ten feet square requires roughly 1000 liters of kerosene or about 250 gallons. Based on the regrettably few figures he provides, tentative calculations suggest that the price of kerosene in Iran at the time Khalili worked there was approximately 20 cents a gallon. It is significant that even in Iran, a major oil-producing country, Khalili illustrates his process as applied only in government-subsidized projects. Eventually, in postwar Iran, *geltaftan* may have limited value as a method for building schools and other publicly funded structures. But certainly no poor Iranian villager can afford it.

In most of sub-Saharan Africa, the kerosene used in lamps costs more than two dollars a gallon, or roughly ten times its price in Iran. Since the annual per capita income of the majority of these countries is under \$250, the cost of *geltaftan* for private construction would be exorbitant. India's per capita income is even less. Counseling rural third world families to use *geltaftan* is like urging the breadless to eat not just cake, but caviar.

Khalili is careful to hedge his grand claims for the widespread applicability of his technique, cautioning that "the use of imported fuels such as oil is questionable, since it may be a strain on the economy." But this pro forma qualification, mentioned in passing, does little to mute the repeated, soaring song of great expectations—the anticipation of firing "millions of earth structures in the world, especially those from China to Africa."

Fire is *not* "missing," as Khalili claims, in traditional adobe construc-

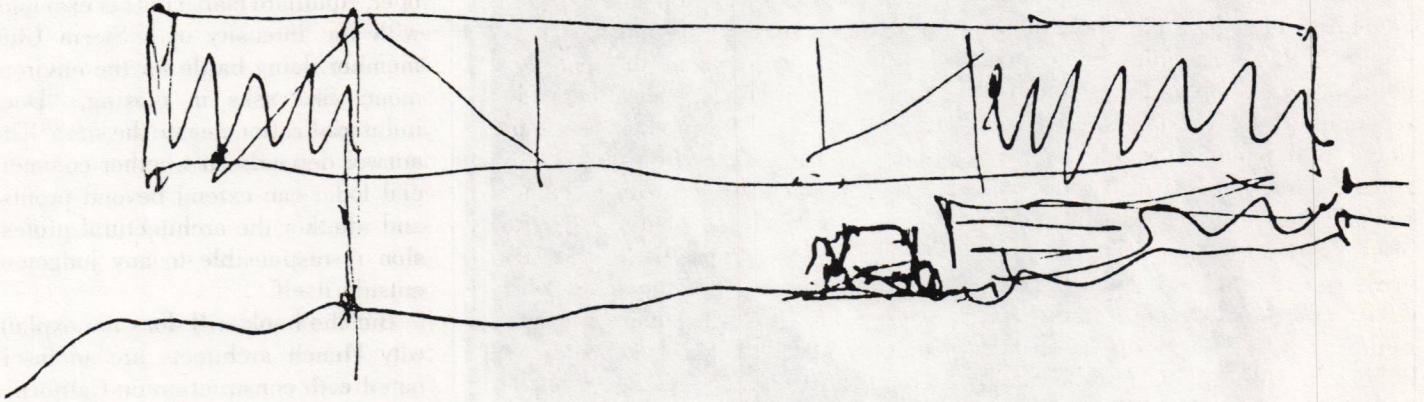
tion. It is present as the heat of the sun, adequate for millennia. Indeed, the "fire" which Khalili claims to be introducing as a building technique has been applied to virtually all architectural materials (adobe, baked brick, cast iron, cement, steel, and glass) except wood, thatch, and stone. True, in most industrial examples fire is minimally present on the site during actual construction—it has been largely applied beforehand, in the factory. There, fire has hardened (or, as in the case of concrete, prepared for eventually hardening) a soft or even viscous material into a durable solid. Though he applies it on the site, Khalili's fire is crucially linked to the factory. Kerosene is an industrial product.

Khalili's avidity recalls other apostles who championed congealed liquids for construction. James Bogardus, for example, proselytized for cast iron in New York in the 1840s, and Paul Scheerbart for glass in Germany in the 1910s. These evangelists crusaded for the use of building materials whose manufacture requires the application of high heat. In the industrialized world such campaigns were not out of place. But Khalili is at least ostensibly anti-modernist. Much as he would dislike hearing it, he falls squarely in a modernist tradition of architectural prophets, rhapsodic visionaries with faith in industrial power.

In several senses, Khalili's process is fireworks—impressive but insubstantial. Physically, the actual baking is undoubtedly very beautiful. Personally, Khalili presents himself as a powerful, poetic spirit. Mystically the technique is backed by seductive argument. But once the show is over, *geltaftan* proves of little use. Arousing high expectations, Khalili proclaims that his technique can revolutionize housing for the poor worldwide. Fooling himself, the prophet has begun to fool others. May the rest of us remain more wary.

*Ceramic Houses: How to Build Your Own*, Nader Khalili, Harper and Row, 1985, 288 pp. illus., \$16.95 pb.





MIES VAN DER ROHE, GLASS HOUSE ON A HILL PROJECT, 1934

**Esther McCoy:**

## BUILDING THE SLOPE

DOMINIQUE ROUILLARD

How does one explain the fascination French architects have for hillside building in Southern California? While shepherding architects through canyons during the fifties and sixties, I noted how frequently the attention of the French fixed on the way a house met the earth. But it has taken *Building the Slope* to recognize Southern California as a vein rich in types.

Dominique Rouillard, an architect with a doctorate in art history, and a professor at the University of Lille, has brought a scholar's attention to comparing and appraising building on the upslope and downslope. She calls the book "a comparative study not only of architectural forms but the reasoning that produced them," and appears to conclude that "the architecture is not determined by the site but the architecture creates it."

She sets the subject in historical perspective, asserting that, until the middle of the 19th century, the general rule was to "avoid slopes, not chal-

lenge them," and that the 19th-century fortress fulfilled the same function as the 20th-century cantilever. In more recent history she compares Frank Lloyd Wright's hillside houses with R. M. Schindler's.

Wright was after an architecture which was drawn from or projected out of the ground, as if he were "trying to construct a geological event brought on by movement of the ground," while Schindler treated the slope more as an abstraction "to be conserved in its geometric purity rather than as a natural phenomenon." The lot, she added, kept its original shape, with Schindler "deciding only at what instant on the slope he would place the structure."

The book is crammed with simplified diagrams of hillside building, with examples of the categories. The captions are revealing: "Rotating and Falling"; "Lateral Dislocation"; "Convulsive Dislocation"; "Plunge"; "Gone Overboard." In true Gallic spirit, the book manages to be at once witty and instructive. Its appeal to architects is not surprising, for sketches work with floor plans and photographs to set a scene, with text explaining what the visual material does not. The author

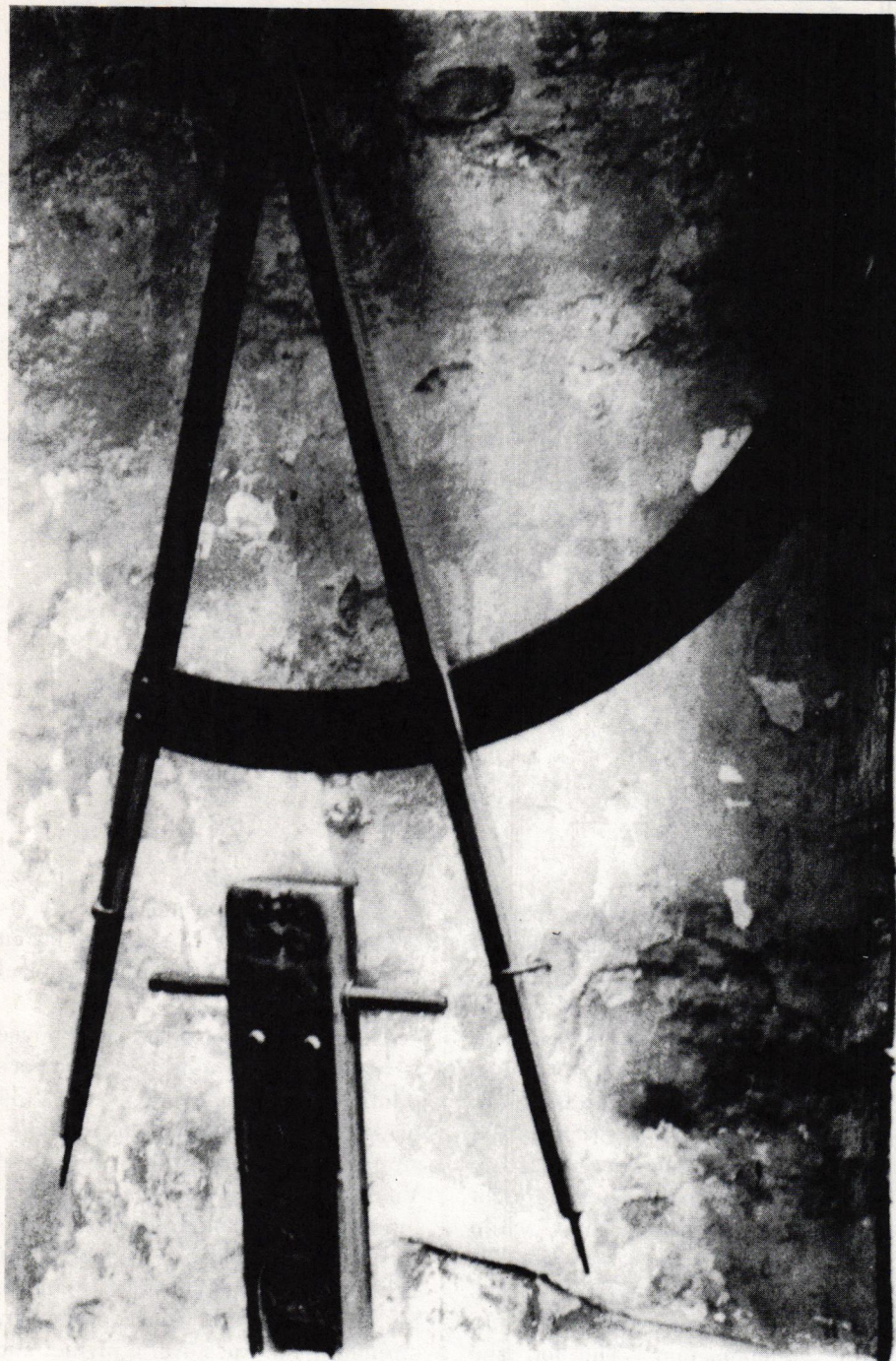
takes the trouble to make her points briefly but clearly, and the layout of the book keeps related material together.

The way she traces the bridge house is typical. She credits Le Corbusier's pilotis as the source of Mies's 1934 bridge house project, saying that Mies stretched the house within a kind of Vierendeel truss with diagonal wind braces, and, although the truss spans the slope, it ends in space. Craig Ellwood then completed the figure in his 1967 Weekend House project by stretching the truss over a ravine, and in his 1976 building for Art Center School, the truss is anchored to abutments on flat land.

Pausing with John Lautner, Quincy Jones, Pierre Koenig, Raymond Kappe, among others, she brings the quest to a grand finale in Kisho Kurokawa's Capsule Village, which spans a slope and connects top to bottom, in the process resembling nothing so much as boxcars sliding down a hill. In the Kurokawa houses she sees Ellwood's Bridge House tilted 45 degrees, which gives it in profile "the aesthetic dynamics of a bridge."

Between leaving the slope as it is or bulldozing it, the first embraced by





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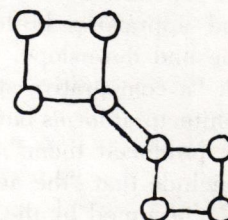
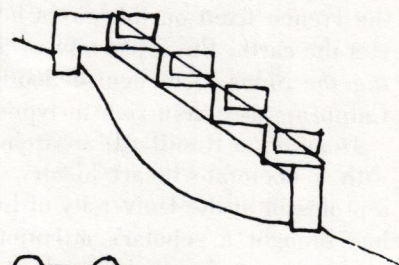
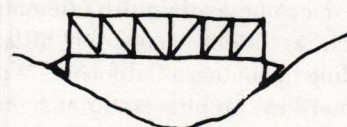
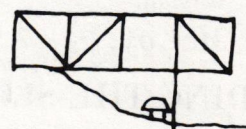
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the architect, the second by the developer, Rouillard marshalls her examples with the intensity of a Sierra Club member doing battle for the environment. She asks in closing, "Does industrialization negate the site?" The answer depends on whether commercial logic can extend beyond profits, and whether the architectural profession is responsible to any judgment outside itself.

But the book still does not explain why French architects are so fascinated with construction on California slopes.

**Building the Slope: Hillside Houses 1920-1960**, Dominique Rouillard, Arts + Architecture Press, 169 pp., illus., 1987, \$14.95.



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**Elizabeth Douthitt Byrne:**

## PLANNING ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH LIBRARY BUILDINGS

PHILIP D. LEIGHTON and  
DAVID C. WEBER

For the past 21 years, Keyes Metcalf's *Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings* has been the bible for anyone involved in the planning or design of library buildings. Now Philip D. Leighton, Building Projects Manager of Stanford University Libraries, and David C. Weber, director of the Stanford University Libraries, have rewritten this classic into an up-to-date, more thorough, and even weightier version.

One of the foremost library building consultants of his time, Metcalf wrote in 1965 the first encyclopedic handbook on academic libraries in non-technical terms for "practitioners in the field." This new edition addresses the same audience—the architect designing a library for the first time, the librarian planning a new facility, the administrator confronting a request for a new facility, and the faculty member on the library planning committee. Careful planning is essential. Because building an academic library is a complex, time-consuming, and expensive proposition with a long-term impact on a library's operations and finances, its parent institution, and its staff and patrons.

While the emphasis of the 1965 edition, appropriate in the booming economy of that time, was on new buildings, the 1986 edition stresses that renovations or additions, and even "more exhaustive" use of existing buildings, also be considered. Other new features include atmospheric and environmental conditions for the conservation of library collections; access for the handicapped; energy efficiency; photocopy services; planning for natural disasters, such as earthquakes

and floods; and of course, computer technology. Security and signage, neither sufficiently discussed in the previous edition, are briefly, but adequately covered. Information is also provided on other recent developments in the library world, such as wet carrels, conservation labs, off-site storage, compact shelving, loading docks, nonbook materials, and even such mundane but often overlooked design problems as where to place handouts and finding aids.

The authors readily acknowledge that they are speaking in generalities, and are not attempting to replace the architect or consultant; rather they emphasize the role of specialists and recognize the unique needs of individual institutions. From basics such as the planning process itself (and the politics involved), to the roles of the architect, the consultant, and the planning team; budgets, financing, and fundraising; siting and master plans; to design development, construction documents, and the construction process, most aspects of planning a research library are covered. There is even advice on naming the library building.

Special features which make it a sort of *Time-Saver Standards* for library buildings are a 22-page glossary of library and architecture terms; an extensive bibliography of general works on academic libraries, libraries by subject, and special topics related to library planning and building, such as acoustics and bookstacks; a chapter with important formulas and tables; a list of equipment that might be overlooked, (e.g., bells or gongs for announcing closing time); a concise statement of environmental conditions needed for book preservation; and a sampling of successful academic library building programs.

Although one could disagree with certain recommendations, it is difficult to find fault with the book's overall approach. The technique for identifying the right questions to ask about each phase or feature of the project

is one of its most valuable characteristics, and one which assures the book's usefulness to every academic or research institution.

The only omissions this librarian-reviewer could spot were parking spaces for book trucks, a necessary feature lacking in most libraries, and staging areas for special projects, such as sorting and processing large gifts—minor flaws in view of the comprehensiveness and thoroughness with which all of the important issues confronting library planning are treated. Aside from the book's major contribution to the understanding of the politics and processes of library planning, its chief value may be in debunking the myth propagated by librarian Charles A. Cutter (of Cutter number fame) that architects and librarians are natural enemies when it comes to library buildings.

*Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings*, Philip D. Leighton and David C. Weber, American Library Association, 2nd ed., 1986, 630 pp., illus., \$60.00.





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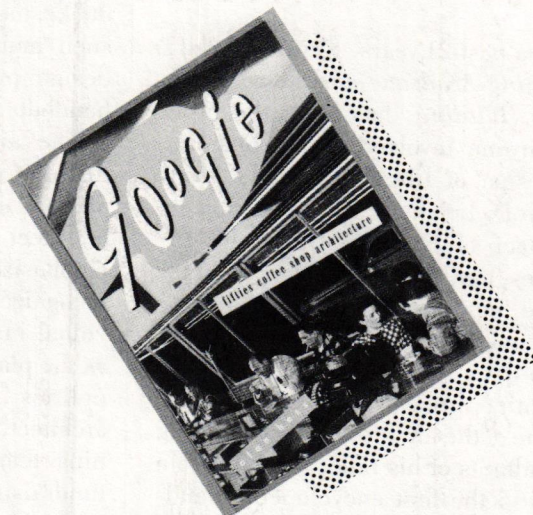
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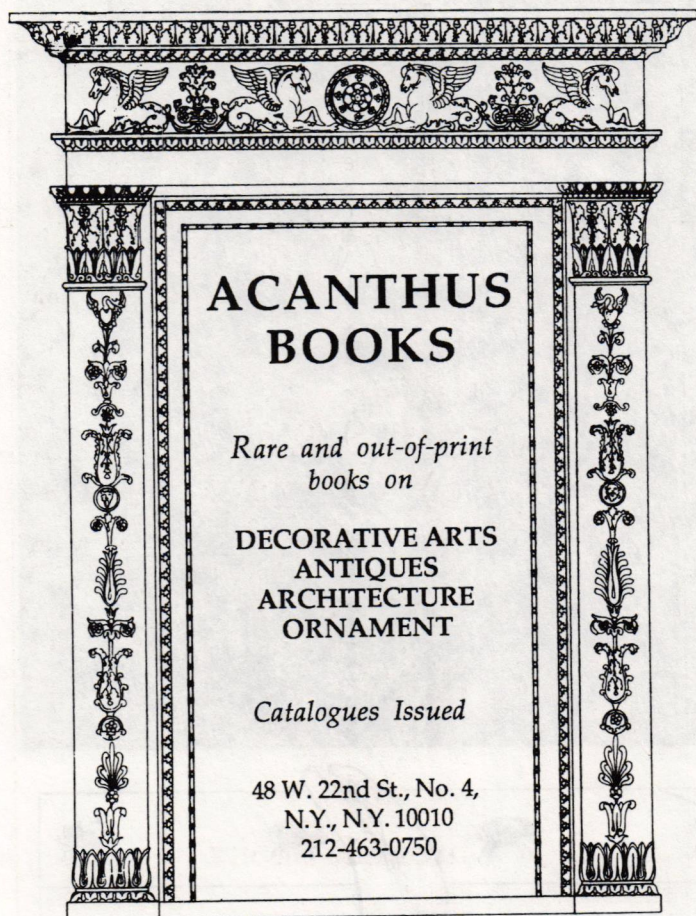
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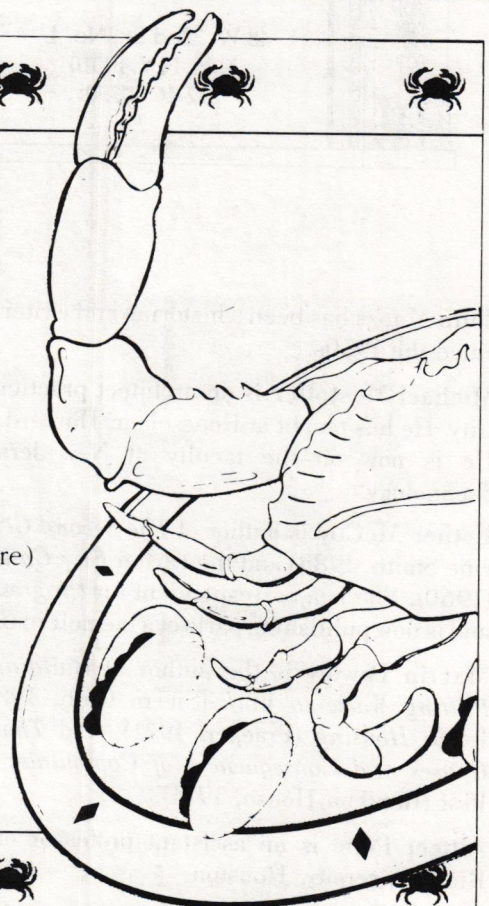
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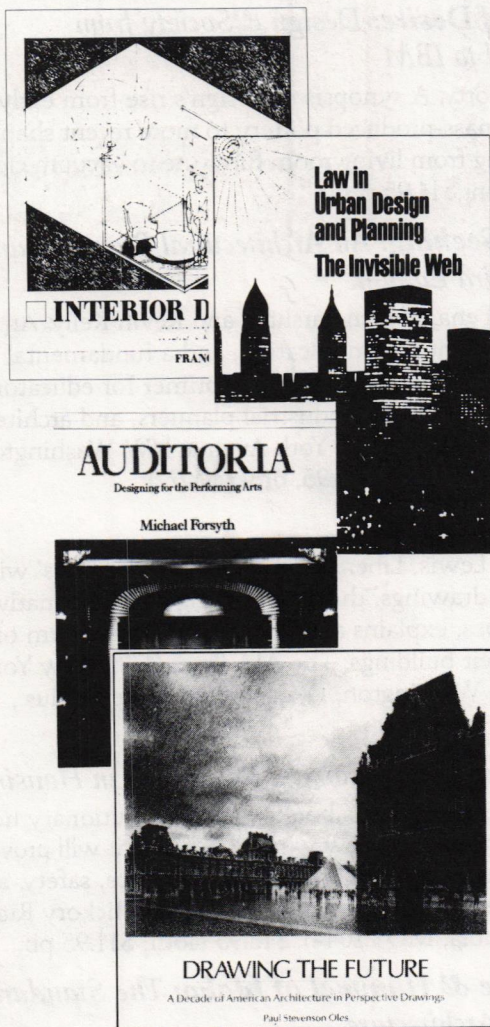
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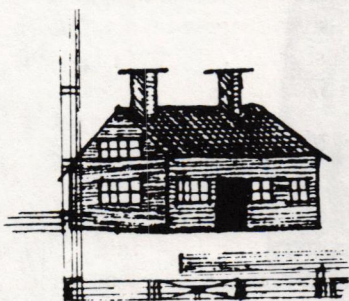
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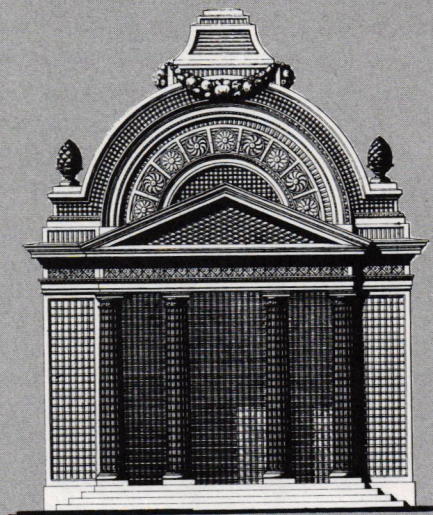
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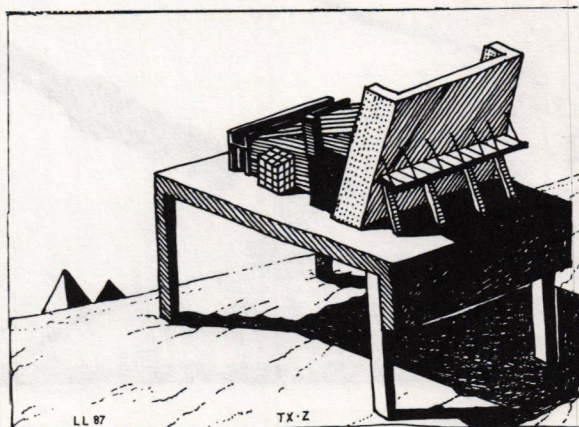
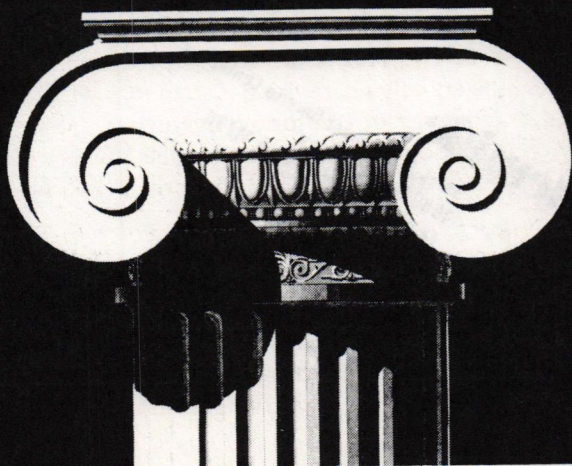
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