

Architecture
Design
Urbanism
Landscape

Design Book Review

43

Swati Chattopadhyay
examines nationalism in
recent Indian architecture

Juliet Flower MacCannell
explores American tourism

Andrew Blauvelt
traces the career
of Tibor Kalman

Jill Pearlman
explains why Peter Eisenman and
Philip Johnson became famous



“ While the Vietnam War was the seminal catastrophe for literary critical theory of the 1970s, architecture critical theory has continued to look back in wistful anguish to World War I,

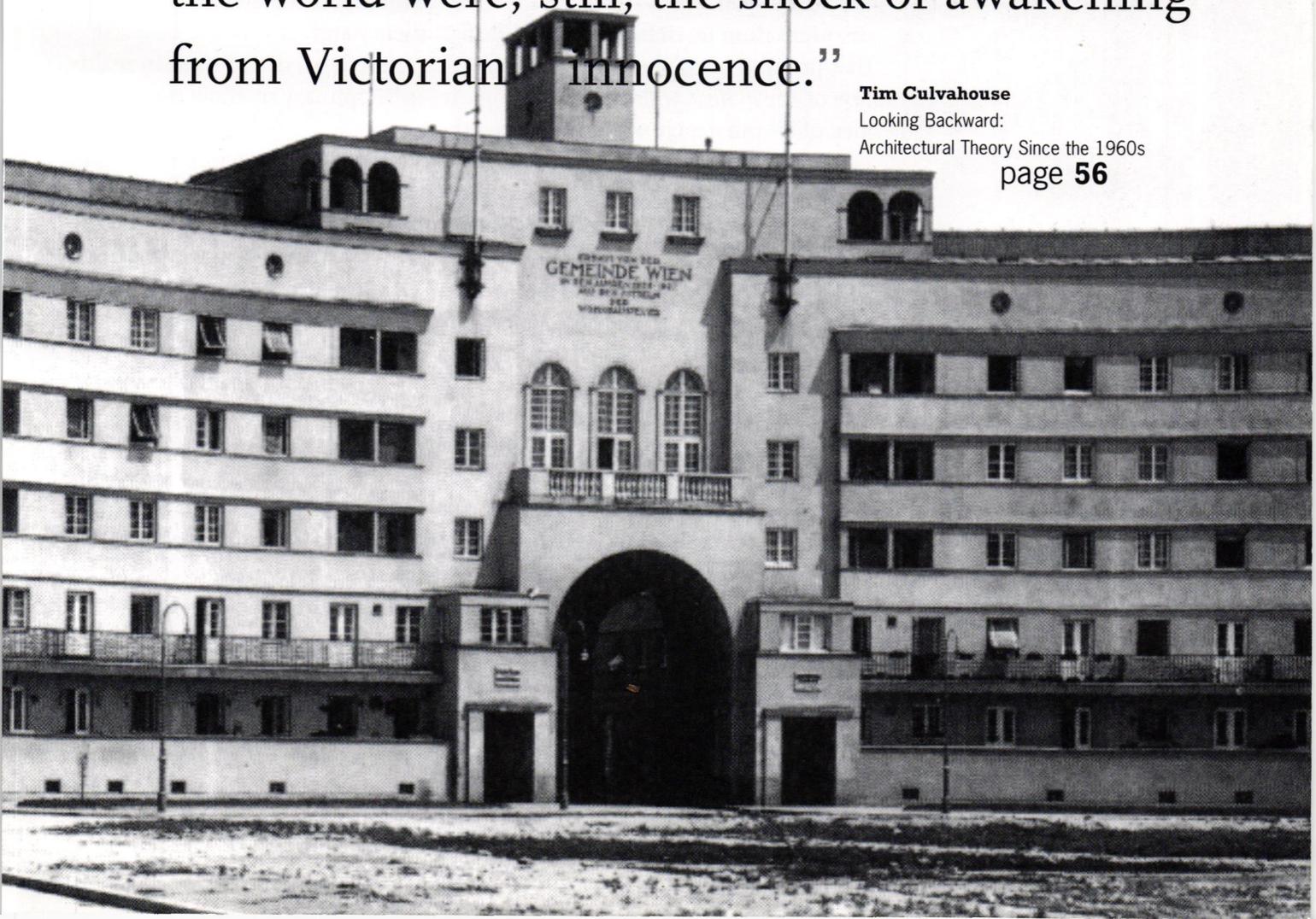
as if the most important thing in the world were, still, the shock of awakening from Victorian innocence.”

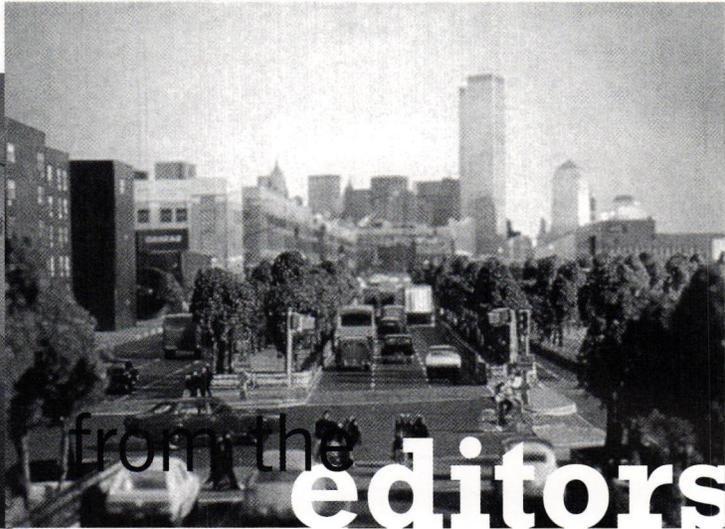
Tim Culvahouse

Looking Backward:

Architectural Theory Since the 1960s

page 56



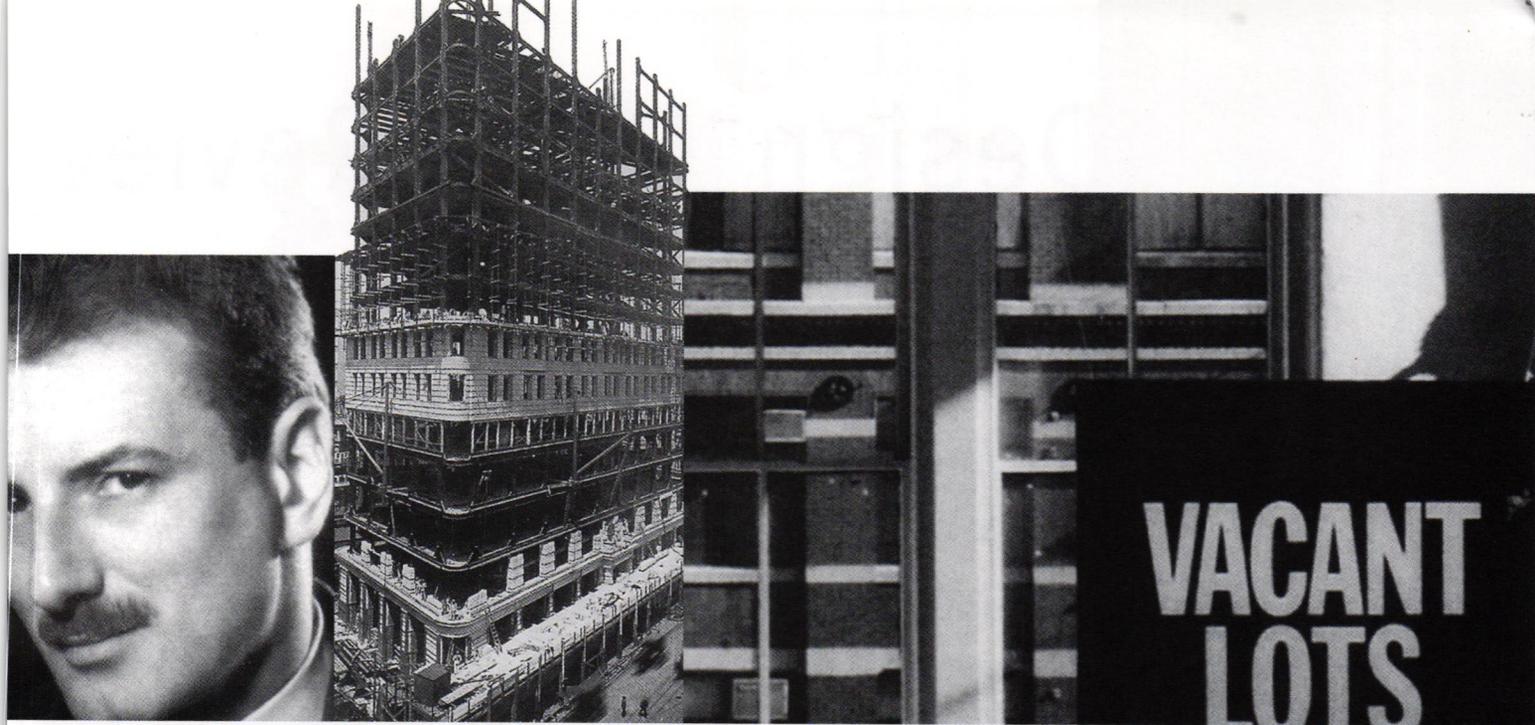


Every year terms and methods for the study of architecture and design burst onto the scene.

Each of these approaches promises to dislodge disciplinary boundaries and offer new vistas. Many of these terms and methods—including visual criticism, material culture, cultural studies, cyberspace, and the “everyday”—have been examined in the pages of **Design Book Review** during the last fifteen years. These new modes of interpretation have not brought clarity to the study of the material world. They have, in fact, created a sense of disorientation in architecture and design theory and, at times, a backlash that promotes order and segregation within individual disciplines. In reality, few of these new approaches are truly interdisciplinary or allow the energies of all the design arts to flow together.

Thus, it would be brazen to argue that most reviews in **Design Book Review** have taken a truly interdisciplinary approach. In fact, reviewers have rarely strayed from the central concerns of their fields. As we conclude the first year of the California College of Arts and Crafts’ involvement with **Design Book Review**, we must now ask how we can better foster in the pages of this magazine an openness to the differences of the design arts—architecture, graphic arts, urbanism, and industrial design. We believe the design arts do not have fixed boundaries. Creativity flourishes at the borderlands between fields. Real interdisciplinary study allows space for new ideas to break through and old ideas to receive new impetus.

Earlier attempts to set boundaries for the study of the fine arts in the 1960s offer a lesson for the study of the design arts. Leading art critics Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried once tried to establish disciplinary codes for painting and sculpture. Greenberg, for instance, advocated abstract painting over all other modes of representation and thus excluded a panoply of art forms. But as the vital histories of minimalism, pop, performance, and conceptual art have shown, the efforts of Greenberg and Fried—overloaded with definitions and restrictions—ran counter to the infectious and inventive nature of contemporary art.



We believe that the essays and reviews in this, the forty-third issue of **Design Book Review**, strive toward developing creative and interdisciplinary methods for examining the material world. While this issue does not revolve around a particular theme, many of the contributions touch on similar subjects. For example, reviewers Jill Pearlman and Marjorie Schwarzer each examine contemporary criticisms of the architectural profession, the way well-known architects all come from the same elite schools, and how they create buildings that are to be appreciated solely as art but that are unsatisfactory for their occupants.

Several reviewers stress the overlooked aspects of landscapes. Juliet Flower MacCannell shows how cities are now refashioned as tourist zones; Andrew Cruse examines ways of representing cities that go beyond two-dimensional maps; and Mark Linder reviews the situationist movement—a dadaist and surrealist crusade to open our senses to the madness that pulses throughout the modern city.

Other authors explore new ways of looking at graphic and industrial design. Barry Katz uncovers the weaknesses of design theory and history. Andrew Blauvelt looks at graphic designer Tibor Kalman, a postmodernist before it became fashionable. Finally, Sandy Isenstadt discusses the new field of visual culture, an insightful yet overly strident attempt to bring the study of visual images out of their disciplinary cocoons.

We hope to create in **Design Book Review** an unbounded forum to investigate cities, buildings, images, products, and art. In future issues we will review those texts that—for theoretical, historical, or literary reasons—extend and break out of their disciplines. This magazine will foster writing that is both innovative and a pleasure to read. We encourage essays that go beyond description and definition and sustain open-ended arguments. With your help, **Design Book Review** can set the table for unpredictable encounters of the design arts and be a place where writer and reader can savor the fullness of our visual world.

Photomontage sources
(from left): **Victoria Newhouse**, *Towards a New Museum*; **Gabriele Basilico** and **Stefano Boeri**, *Italy: Cross Sections of a Country*; **Robert Wojtowicz**, *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism: Eutopian Theories for Architecture and Urban Planning*; **Neil Harris**, *Building Lives: Constructing Rites and Passages*; **Peter Hall and Michael Bierut**, eds., *Tibor Kalman: Perverse Optimist*.

cover
Burning chair; photograph by Cindy Palmano.
 (from Peter Hall and Michael Bierut, eds., *Tibor Kalman: Perverse Optimist*)

inside front cover
Hubert Gessner, Karl-Seitzhof housing project, 1926–1929.
 (from Eve Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919–1934*)

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Design Book Review 43

2 From the Editors

6 Barry M. Katz

The Work of the Hand in the Life of the Mind

16 Swati Chattopadhyay

Expedient Forgetting: Architecture in Late-
Twentieth-Century Indian Nationalist Imagination

30 Mark Linder

A Few Things Architects
Should/Don't Know about
Situationists and Literalists

The Situationist City
by Simon Sadler

Constant's New Babylon:
The Hyper-Architecture of Desire
by Mark Wigley

Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews
by Michael Fried

36 Sandy Isenstadt

Looking at Visual Culture

The Visual Culture Reader
edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff

An Introduction to Visual Culture
by Nicholas Mirzoeff

44 Marjorie Schwarzer

Towards the Same Museum

Towards a New Museum
by Victoria Newhouse

Art Museums into the 21st Century
by Gerhard Mack

50 Christopher Long

Modern Architecture in the
Other Europe

The Architecture of New Prague,
1895-1945
by Rostislav Švácha
translated by Alexandra Büchler
foreword by Kenneth Frampton

The Architecture of Red Vienna,
1919-1934
by Eve Blau

Romanian Modernism:
The Architecture of Bucharest,
1920-1940
*by Luminița Machedon and Ernie
Scoffham*

56 Tim Culvahouse

Looking Backward:
Architectural Theory Since
the 1960s

Theories and Manifestoes
of Contemporary Architecture
edited by Charles Jencks and Karl Kropf

Theorizing a New Agenda for
Architecture: An Anthology of
Architectural Theory, 1965-1995
edited by Kate Nesbitt

Architecture Theory since 1968
edited by K. Michael Hays

Essays

Reviews



Photograph by Marguerite Gardiner.

63 **Juliet Flower MacCannell**

The Non-Accidental Tourist

The Tourist City
*edited by Dennis R. Judd and
Susan S. Fainstein*

On the Beaten Track:
Tourism, Art, and Place
by Lucy R. Lippard

72 **Andrew Blauvelt**

Tibor Kalman:
Postmodern Optimist

Chairman: Rolf Fehlbaum
by Tibor Kalman

Tibor Kalman: Perverse Optimist
edited by Peter Hall and Michael Bierut

76 **Howard Davis**

The Life and Death of Great
American Buildings

Building Lives: Constructing Rites
and Passages
by Neil Harris

79 **Jill Pearlman**

Designed for Success

The Favored Circle:
The Social Foundations
of Architectural Distinction
by Garry Stevens

82 **Terrence Doody**

Cities in Words

The City in Literature:
An Intellectual and Cultural History
by Richard Lehan

85 **David R. Walters**

Better than Utopia

Lewis Mumford and American
Modernism: Eutopian Theories for
Architecture and Urban Planning
by Robert Wojtowicz

88 **Andrew Cruse**

Cartographic Consciousness

Representation of Places:
Reality and Realism in City Design
by Peter Bosselmann

Italy: Cross Sections of a Country
by Gabriele Basilico and Stefano Boeri

92 **Sharon Irish**

Paradise Sold

Visions of Paradise: Glimpses
of Our Landscape's Legacy
by John Warfield Simpson

The Work of the Hand



I The technological insurgency currently under way has thrown traditional cultural theory into complete disarray.

The Internet, in less than a decade, has generated a wholly new form of economic exchange. The aggregate of digital art forms collectively known as "new media" represents the first new artistic medium since the invention of photography and its time-based extension, film. In 1991, the World Wide Web unleashed a new document type, the first since the high-speed rotary press made possible the daily newspaper and the weekly newsmagazine. Electronic mail constitutes the first new channel of interactive communication since the invention of the telephone. And it has, finally, brought forth whole classes of consumer products whose functions, not to say forms, are almost entirely without precedent.

The discipline of design theory, which had its origins in the effort to grasp the meaning of the mass-produced object of the industrial age, has been particularly overwhelmed by the scale and rapidity of the cultural transformation taking place. It now faces the task of deciphering the *postindustrial* object, and the only thing that is clear is that the old categories will no longer do.

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n the Life of the **Mind**

by Barry M. Katz

Consider, for example, a recent product developed by a Silicon Valley design team, comprised of interaction designers, hardware and software engineers, a couple of industrial designers, and a human factors specialist with a Ph.D. in cognitive psychology, and prototyped at multiple sites via remote stereolithography. This newly created device (or is it a service?) allows subscribers to download from the Web an audio recording of, for instance, Frank McCourt reading *Angela's Ashes* and, using RF (radio frequency) technology, play it back through their car radios while commuting to work. What have the homilies of John Ruskin and William Morris to do with such a situation? Or the polemics of Peter Behrens and Walter Gropius? Or the earnest exhortations of Henry Dreyfuss and Charles Eames? We are confronted today not merely with an array of new products, but with entirely new *categories* of products that address needs and desires that may not even have existed a generation ago. In terms of both its products and its process, there can be little doubt that design has entered a new era.

Although designers have responded with alacrity to the challenges of the new microdigital regime, design theory has not. The best evidence of this is our failure to produce a satisfactory history of design that can contextualize the extraordinary moment in which we are living. Many serious scholars have tried to build a convincing narrative around the careers, products, and institutions of twentieth-century "design," including Michael Collins, Peter Dormer, Adrian Forty, John Heskett, Arthur Pulos, Penny Sparke, and, most recently, Jonathan Woodham. Their research has enriched our appreciation of that history with invaluable insights and information. What is most conspicuous about their writings, however, is the absence of a truly foundational inquiry into just what it is they are writing the history of: Is it the functional object in general? Is it the product of the industrial design studio? What is the relationship between engineering design and product design? Between concept studies and manufacturing? How do both the design process and the designed object function within a cultural, social, and economic matrix? What, exactly, do designers do when they design? And how are we to make sense of the coming of the digital? Perhaps it is too much to ask of historians to grasp a tale that is still unfolding. Perhaps G. W. F. Hegel was right when he conceded, with a humility quite uncharacteristic of the philosopher of Absolute Mind, that "The Owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the coming of dusk."¹

This timidity of design scholarship is troubling, however, because the torrent of new technologies we are witnessing today shows no sign of abating and the cultural dislocations wrought by the new chip- and Web- and, soon enough, gene-based products they engender call urgently for analysis and critique, and even, optimistically, a degree of theoretical guidance. Given the centrality of the functional object in literally every zone of human affairs, it is by no means unreasonable to suppose that a cogent theory of design could illuminate some of the deepest mysteries of history, culture, psychology, and even of design itself.



The Audible MobilePlayer, designed and developed by IDEO, downloads recordings from the World Wide Web and then uses RF (radio frequency) technology to play back the recordings through regular car radios.
(photograph by Steven Moeder)

1

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel,
The Philosophy of Right (Oxford:
Clarendon Press, 1952), 13.

II

To assert that the functional artifact has been slow to inspire a compelling body of theory is not to say that it has been ignored; far from it. The antiquity of the use-object, its ubiquity, and the universality of its fabrication and use assure us of a plentiful supply of documentation both of its nature and of the ideas and ideologies that have attended it. Moreover, there have been promising developments of late in a number of adjacent disciplines.

The history of technology, once a wayward stepchild of the history of science, has in recent decades found its bearings and begun to establish a respectable body of theories and methods.² But just as the internal-combustion engine is not a car nor the microprocessor a laptop computer, "technology" is not "industrial design," and design is still awaiting a body of theory that combines the erudition of Lynn White with the imagination of Lewis Mumford.

The growth of material-culture studies has likewise enriched the soil in which a theory of the object might grow by analyzing the reciprocity between patterns of social interaction and the physical context of artifacts and environments.³ But here, too, the object is not so much explained as presupposed, as if the ripples were more interesting than the stone tossed into the water. The new art history, conversely, by shifting the critic's gaze from the fine arts to the entire spectrum of our shared "visual culture," promises to enliven the inquiry into design.⁴ Insofar as the meaning of the designed object is bound up with utility, however, the formal analysis of its aesthetic properties can never be more than partial.

The use-object has been analyzed in terms of the technical details of its manufacture, the social status of its operator, the economics of its exchange, the quality of life it makes possible, the information it communicates, and the metaphoric possibilities of its form. The thing itself, in other words, is typically the point of departure rather than of arrival; rarely has it been the object of theoretical reflection, in and of itself.

While the last decade has seen a remarkable broadening and deepening of design discourse, the resistance this new scholarship must overcome has ancient roots.⁵ In contrast to the spiritual aspirations that have always been associated with art, the use-object is immersed, by definition, in a world of utility. Embedded deep within Western culture is a profound ambivalence toward physical need, the putatively "lower" functions of everyday life, and the common things we use to service them. Embarrassed, perhaps, by the gross physicality of our bodies, alarmed by our dependence upon a world of our own making, and suspicious of materialist proclivities that might undermine the pursuit of pure reason, every major tradition of thought has tended to dismiss the functional object as a problem worthy of theoretical reflection. Only at the intellectual margins—in premodern magic, alchemy, and witchcraft; in the "primitive" preoccupation with the cycles of gift giving; in the aberrant and disreputable practice of fetishism—has the power of the supposedly inanimate object been acknowledged.⁶

I have examined points of convergence between design studies and the historiography of technology in "Technology and Design: A New Agenda," in *Technology and Culture* 38 (April 1997): 452–66.

For recent samplings, see Daniel Miller, ed., *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), and Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Among the most suggestive examples of this new turn are Barbara Maria Stafford, *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), and James Elkins, *The Domain of Images* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

See, in particular, the campaign centered around the journal *Design Issues* to cultivate an autonomous discipline of "design studies," and the several anthologies that have resulted from it: Victor Margolin, ed., *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989); Richard Buchanan and Victor Margolin, eds., *Discovering Design: Explorations in Design Studies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995); Victor Margolin and Richard Buchanan, eds., *The Idea of Design: A Design Issues Reader* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995); Dennis P. Doordan, ed., *Design History: An Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).

From a very large body of literature, see Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (New York: Random House, 1983); Werner Muensterberger, *Collecting: An Unruly Passion: Psychological Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

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Platonic thought, to cite the most powerful example of this bias against the quotidian, hinges quite specifically on the premise that the highest form of reality resides in an ideal realm of abstract universals, accessible only through the exercise of pure and uncontaminated thought. For centuries, the effect of this doctrine has been to direct attention away from the ephemera of everyday life to a higher sphere of timeless forms, to which the material productions of the artisan—"concrete objects you can touch and see and perceive by your senses"—can never be more than crude approximations.⁷ If the accounts of Plato in Plutarch's *Lives* are to be believed, Plato was critical even of the use of mechanical models to illustrate geometrical truths and railed against those who shamefully turned their backs on "the unembodied objects of pure intelligence."⁸

The use-object has a place in Plato's political and metaphysical hierarchy, for it is essential to the survival of the community; indeed, the Platonic dialogues are littered with analogies drawn from the potter's wheel, the blacksmith's forge, and the cobbler's bench. The *techne*, or craft knowledge, of the craftsman is of a different moral order than that of the statesman, however, for it produces not a permanent and universal good but a transient material product whose value is measured precisely by its consumption. Their respective skills are in no way transferable, and Plato deplored the Athenians' democratic practice of "accepting the advice of the smith and the shoemaker on political matters."⁹

If Plato, in effect, devised a system around the lowly status of the functional object, Aristotle codified this philosophical disdain in a manner that remained persuasive in scholarship for the next two millennia. Human activity, he proposed, may be divided into "things done" and "things made," into actions that are "practical" and those that are "productive."¹⁰ Practical activity is complete in and of itself; it is performed, as it were, for the process rather than for the product, and might include political debate, musical performance, athletic competition, or scientific inquiry. Socially, it is the sphere of the free citizen who engages only in actions freely chosen and undertaken without compulsion and for their own sake. Productive activity, by contrast, aims to produce some object: a meal, an amphora, a house, or some other commodity that slavishly serves some higher purpose. Many such productive arts have now come into being, Aristotle noted, "but to dwell long upon them would be in poor taste."¹¹

Classical philosophy reflected a social hierarchy in which praxis, action for its own sake, was ranked above poesis, the material production of useful things, and the same may be said of Greek religion. Within the mythic universe of the Greeks, two deities guided the hand of the ancient craftsman: the chaste goddess Athene and Hephaestus, master of the forge. As described in the Homeric *Hymn to Hephaestus*, together they "taught to men upon earth arts of great splendor, men who in former days lived like wild beasts in caves in the mountains." In the Archaic age, with its low level of technological differentiation, the two half-siblings complemented one another to such an extent that Homer could refer to a master smith who overlays gold upon silver as "one who is taught by Hephaestus and Athene in art complete."¹²

7 Plato *Phaedo*, 79a; *Republic*, X: 596-8.

8 Plato *Life of Marcellus*, 14-17.

9 Plato *Platonic Dialogues*, Protag., 324d.

10 Plato *Aristotle Ethics*, 6: 4; *Pol.* I: 4.

11 Plato *Aristotle Pol.*, I.11: 1258b; *Meta.*, Bk. 1, Ch. 1: 981b.

12 Homer *Odyssey*, 6: 232-4.

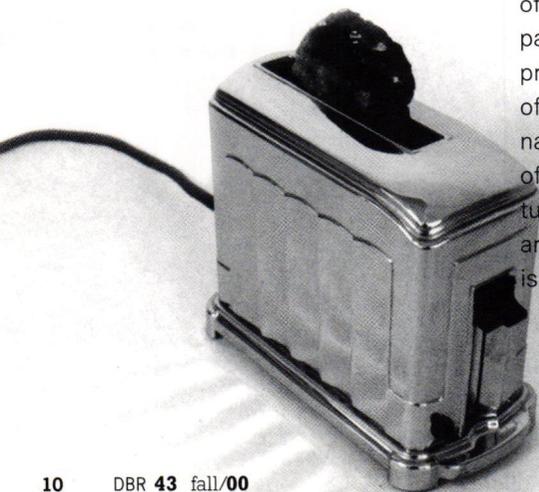


In time, however, a clear hierarchy developed in which the rational intelligence of Athene became progressively elevated over the practical arts of Hephaestus. By the fifth century, Athene had ascended to her permanent home on the Acropolis, while the god most closely identified with the industrial object had been removed, like the sweaty mortals who produced it, to the industrial margins of society. In sharp contrast to the citizen-aristocrat, the bronze caster and the marble cutter had as their protector an incongruous and slightly ludicrous figure. The god of the forge is described by Homer as disfigured and ill-tempered, with "massive neck and hairy chest," a proletarian servant-deity among the idle rich. A popular theme of Attic vase painters shows Hephaestus being escorted back up to Mount Olympus by Dionysus, the god of drunken revelry; he is disgracefully inebriated, and seated backward on a sexually aroused donkey.

It is clear from the earliest textual sources that the theory of the object is not off to a particularly promising start. Even if we allow for the hands-on ethos of the Hippocratic medical community or the mechanistic tradition associated with Archimedes and his school, the Greek philosophical tradition transmits to us a value system that privileges the products of mental over manual labor and tends to direct thought away from, rather than toward, the functional artifact that labor creates or uses. The exceptions, to the extent that they deliberately positioned themselves in defiance to the orthodoxies of Greek and Latin thought, may indeed be said to prove the rule. The monastic communities of late antiquity, founded upon the Benedictine dictum that work is an expression of piety ("*Laborare est orare*" or "to work is to pray"), were formed precisely to shield themselves from the metaphysical dominion of pagan thought and culture.

It would be easy to pursue this theme across the centuries; with few exceptions—systematic treatises such as the twelfth-century *Didascalicon* of Hugh of Saint Victor, the thirteenth-century *Opus Majus* of Friar Roger Bacon, the fourteenth-century *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldûn—the denigration of the use-object is one of the few consistently recurring themes in the intellectual culture of the West—except when it is ignored altogether. Thomas Aquinas preoccupied himself with angels while a medieval industrial revolution was exploding all around him; Niccolò Machiavelli delved into the machinery of politics, but ignored the equally complex machinery of Renaissance warfare, communications, and transport.

Not until the seventeenth century does a truly credible defense of the utilitarian object begin to take shape: In the *Novum Organon*, Francis Bacon expressly rejects the classical presumption that "the contemplation of truth is a thing worthier and loftier than all utility." More or less single-handedly, Bacon attempted to redirect attention away from empires, sects, and stars, and toward the "obscure and inglorious" mechanical artifacts that materially governed the lives of people and that were the real agents of historical change. What is significant here is not his crude determinism but his campaign to situate such devices as the magnetic compass, the cannon, and the printing press within a broader theory of culture and history. Bacon speaks categorically, of course—he is interested in the revolutionary impact of the magnetic needle upon navigation, not the design of this or that particular compass—but his progressive vision of a philosophy that would dignify objects as well as ideas marked an epistemological turning point: "The end which this science of mine proposes is the invention not of arguments but of arts," he declared in the *Magna Instauratione*, and the role of the arts is to produce useful objects that will contribute to "the relief of man's estate."





There are, to be sure, catastrophic flaws in Bacon's project for the technological domination of nature and its reckless subjection to the requirements of human progress. What is important, however, is that he articulated a defense of the object—"mechanical and illiberal as it may seem"—around which both his allies and his adversaries could rally. And rally they did. What had for centuries been a marginal preoccupation of philosophical, political, and religious thinkers emerged from the shadows and began to assume the proportions of a coherent, if dissident, movement.

Even so, the faintly disreputable air that hung over the material object was slow to dissipate. By the time that Denis Diderot and his colleagues began to publish the first volumes of their encyclopedic *dictionnaire raisonnée* of the sciences, the arts, and the technical trades, the growing interest in the materiality of everyday life had assumed a subversive and even revolutionary character: "The liberal arts have sung their own praises long enough," Diderot declared at the beginning of his *Encyclopédie*; "they should now raise their voices [and] free the mechanical arts from the degradation in which these have so long been held by prejudice." But a call to elevate the epistemological position of the arts was equivalent to a call to elevate the social position of the artisan, and as such the project of enlightenment became a conspiracy against the structure of the *ancien régime* itself. Diderot, like a respectable number of his predecessors, continued his speculations about design from behind bars.

To an extraordinary degree, then, we find ourselves marveling not that a rigorous discourse was so slow in forming around the object, but that it formed at all. Arrayed against it was the powerful legacy of antiquity and the institutionalized power of church and of state. Still, a cultural fortification had been breached once Diderot and his allies committed themselves to what Roland Barthes, in one of his most perceptive essays, called "an autonomous iconography of the object."¹³ A generation of designer-critics—A. W. N. Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris—stood ready to lay the foundations of a rudimentary philosophy of design during the Industrial Revolution. This generation witnessed the wholesale conversion of handcraft into serial mass production, the artisan into the proletarian, and the singular object into the generic type. Paradoxically, the devaluation of the object in practice was the condition of its revaluation in theory.

13

Roland Barthes, "The Plates in the Encyclopedia," in *New Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980).

From the standpoint of the theory of design, specifically, it is advisable to speak of two phases of the industrializing process. The first, associated with the period in which, to borrow the memorable phrase of Siegfried Giedion, "mechanization takes command," was characterized by a huge but essentially quantitative proliferation of objects.¹⁴ No one has yet improved upon the beguiling simplicity with which Karl Marx began the first volume of *Das Kapital*: "The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense accumulation of commodities." An economy of scarcity was transformed more or less abruptly into one in which vast quantities of inexpensive goods became available, and the cultural and psychological impact was stupefying. Charlotte Brontë, upon visiting London's Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in 1851, described the event by means of an intuitive theory of commodity fetishism: "The multitudes filling the great aisles seemed ruled and subdued by some invisible influence....[N]ot one loud noise was to be heard, not one irregular movement seen."

Approximately 100,000 products were on display at the Great Exhibition, but rather than elevate the status of the object, the effect of such suffocating material excess was akin to what Martin Heidegger would later call "the annihilation of the thing." The products of the first phase of industrialization were, by and large, factory-made versions of preindustrial goods. Indeed, it was the disingenuous attempt to reproduce by machinery the products of the artisanal workshop that provoked the wrath of Pugin, Ruskin, and Morris, whose protests laid the foundations for all subsequent work toward the formulation of a theory of industrial design. The duplicity of the factory-made product was in some respects an easy target for this first generation of design writers and design reformers, and it is surprising that their moralizing critique was so deliriously wide of the mark. What they failed to appreciate was the formation of the second phase of the industrializing process, which was essentially qualitative.

From the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the consumer market began to be characterized not just by growing numbers of things but by entirely new types of products. Innovations in the German chemical-dye industry, in the nascent automobile industry, in long-distance communications, and, above all, in electricity and power generation made it possible to domesticate the hot radiance of Promethean fire and wire it into toasters, doorbells, and vacuum cleaners, and these technological breakthroughs placed new questions on the cultural agenda: What should these wholly unprecedented appliances look like? How should they function in relation to us, and to one another? Who has the right to bring culturally disruptive products into existence, and who has the authority to regulate them? And where do we look for an appropriate measure of quality? By the beginning of the twentieth century, the problem of the material object in physical space could no longer be avoided, anymore than at the beginning of the twenty-first we can avoid the problem of the virtual object in electronic space. It was not Gropius or Le Corbusier but Edmund Husserl who caught the spirit of the age with his famous battle cry, "To the things themselves!"

III

Thus it was that after centuries of disparagement and neglect, the humble use-object began to find a place within the larger framework of cultural theory and to become a locus of theoretical interest.

With few intellectual reference points, no tested methodologies upon which to draw, and little guidance from adjacent disciplines, it may not be so surprising that when it finally fell under the gaze of theory, the object was once again—as it had been for Vitruvius—claimed by architecture: Louis Sullivan bequeathed to posterity the enduringly potent but ultimately meaningless phrase, “Form must ever follow function,” while Frank Lloyd Wright expatiated on “The Art and Craft of the Machine”; Behrens prophesied the coming of an “Industrial Culture”; Le Corbusier tried to ignite “*l’esprit de production en série*,” (the spirit of mass production); and, under the tutelage of Gropius, the Bauhaus sought to instruct a new generation of craftsmen in “the necessary unity of art and technics.” The polemics of modern architecture, in other words, were simply extended to the industrial artifact, which was characteristically subsumed within the field of architecture (the early Bauhaus manifestos were absolutely clear about this). Nikolaus Pevsner, in the first of many failed efforts to write the history of design, simply followed this lead.

But there are serious limitations involved in seeing the object as merely architecture writ small and in subsuming it within the typologies of architectural history and theory: The site-specificity even of the mass-housing development, the modernist office building, or the generic corporate franchise raises questions that apply only indirectly to the mobile and less contextual mass-produced object. And just as the designed object cannot be fully comprehended by architectural theory, so its meaning cannot be reduced to a subset of art history or a problem of mechanical engineering. The meaning of a use-object is rarely exhausted by an analysis of its formal aesthetic properties (the Tupperware pitcher may well have a base, column, and capital, but surely there is more; and an airplane seat is not simply a problem of mechanical design). Still, architecture’s renewed interest in the object was a beginning.



Kathryn B. Hiesinger and George H. Marcus, eds., *Design since 1945* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1983), 3.

15

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

16

Roland Barthes, *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979); Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996).

17

Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

18

For the industrial artifact to find its spokesman, it would have to disengage itself to some extent from the adjacent disciplines of architecture, engineering, and art, and seek out theoretical guidance in a broader humanistic compass. The radical Italian Joe Columbo claimed that he was *not* a designer but “an epistemologist”; Ettore Sottsass insisted that “design is a way of discussing life.”¹⁵ Such statements were once dismissed as the flamboyant posturings of Italian *artistes*, but there are indications today that such seemingly rhetorical gestures are being taken very seriously indeed. Design and culture *can* be read in terms of their reciprocal illumination, but only if the use-object is understood in its full anthropological significance, as an index of the human condition *in toto*. For this reason, it is fair to say that the best design writing today is not about design at all.

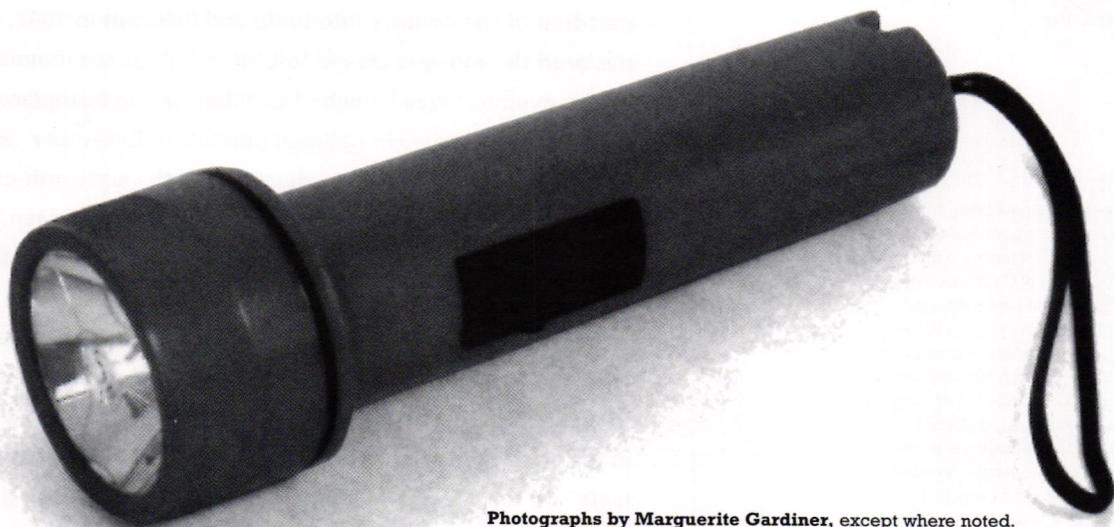
There is no better way to illustrate this claim than by examining the manner in which the modernist dogma that “form follows function” has been overtaken by developments in a variety of disciplines. On the one hand, a growing body of philosophy, linguistics, and empirical social science has effectively demolished the presumption that the “function” of an object can be defined in terms of its operational characteristics. It is now possible to demonstrate that objects comprise a dense symbolic ecology in which meaning is constituted by the interplay of multiple signifiers, by cultural determinants of various sorts, and by their power to represent what social psychologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton have called “the extended boundaries of the self.”¹⁶

Barthes’s suggestion that “use never does anything but shelter meaning” and Jean Baudrillard’s contention, first presented in *Le système des objets*, that consumption consists of nothing more than “the systematic manipulation of signs” are among the more radical of the arguments that have undermined the orthodox conception of functionality and have helped cast the object in a new theoretical light.¹⁷ The empirical research programs of anthropologist Clifford Geertz and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu have further elevated the object’s status and added to its complexity. How is it, asks Bourdieu, that certain seating arrangements, kitchen gadgets, or musical instruments impart to their users greater or lesser degrees of “cultural capital?”¹⁸ Why is the Rolex a mark of cultural nobility but the Swatch, which is no less accurate or well crafted, is not? Thus, the object takes its place as a prop in the *theatrum mundi* of “aristocratic” or “petit bourgeois” performance.

Parallel to the cultural attack on “function” there has been a technological assault on “form,” and together they have seriously weakened the industrial-modernist grip on the object. When the “power plant” of a digital apparatus has shrunk to a point at which it is unrelated in any obvious way to classical ergonomics—engineers routinely pack five million transistors onto a one-quarter-inch silicon chip—the shape of the package in which it sits becomes almost wholly arbitrary. The electric table fan of the 1920s or the streamlined toaster of the 1950s appeared essentially as a metallic skin wrapped more or less tightly around a motor, heating coils, vacuum tubes, etc.; in other words, we cohabited a world of objects, whose visible surfaces still expressed their technical-operational workings. Today, a new type of product is beginning to proliferate for which this is simply no longer the case. It is reconstituting the visual culture of postmodernity as surely as the movie camera recast the mechanism of perception a century ago.

The new wave of networked information appliances; of "smart" materials; of handheld medical, navigational, and occupational devices, operates at speeds that are unrelated to lived experience and at scales imperceptible to the senses; as such, they defy the modernist framework that championed the ultimate reduction of "form" to "functionality" and a reduction of functionality to the human body. Indeed, to the extent that they are Web-based, interactive, or actuated by remote sensors, the very materiality of such objects is in doubt. A flashlight, for example, is essentially a tube designed to hold a couple of bulky cylindrical batteries; the miniscule power consumption of an Internet-enabled cellular phone, by contrast, nearly eliminates the overriding form factor once imposed by the power supply and shifts the designer's focus almost entirely to "meta-physical" problems of interaction and interface. The loosening of the heavy constraints of the electromechanical age, in other words, has afforded designers a vast new range of functional and expressive possibilities: Sculptural gestures, hidden metaphors, and cultural references that not so long ago would have been dismissed as arbitrary have been legitimated if only because there is no objective norm or precedent from which they constitute a deviation. Where once the "On/Off" switch was a big green button, today it can be located on the appliance, on a keyboard, on a pull-down menu—or dispensed with entirely.

The scholarly imagination, too—spurred by the undeniable cultural transformation that is taking place around us—has awakened and begun to shake off a protracted legacy of prejudice toward the functional object. Insofar as we still have bodies, most products will retain at least some degree of tangible materiality, but the balance is surely shifting. What is needed is a typology that grasps, in its rich complexity, the situation of the functional object under the regime of the microprocessor and the Web. ■

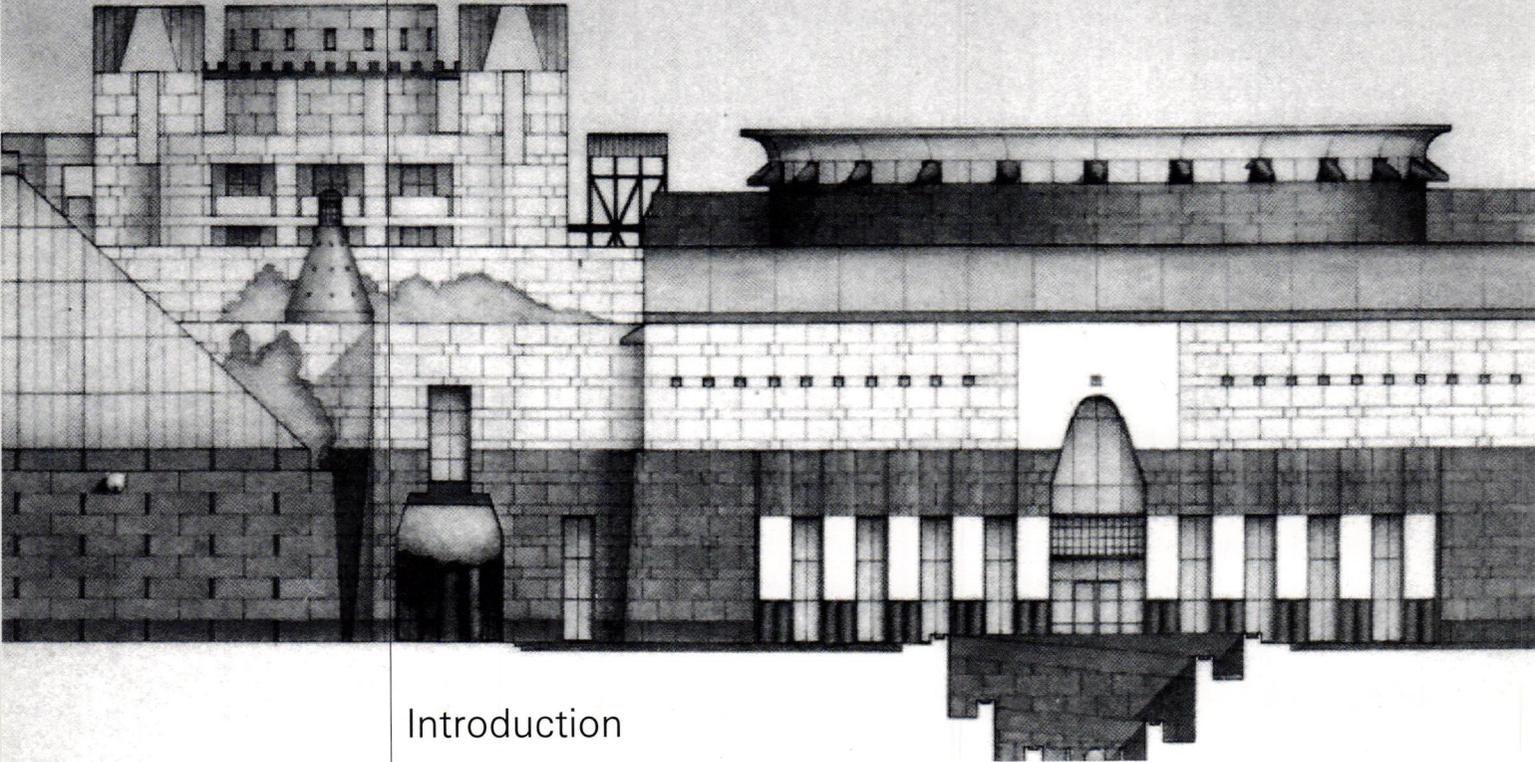


Photographs by Marguerite Gardiner, except where noted.

Expedient Forgetting:

ARCHITECTURE IN LATE-TWENTIETH-CENTURY INDIAN NATIONALIST IMAGINATION

by Swati Chattopadhyay



Introduction

Ralph Lerner's design for the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.
(from Razia Grover, ed., *Concepts and Responses* [New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1992].)

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The site of the Babari mosque in the city of Ayodhya, India, has been under dispute for over a century. Hindus claim that the mosque was built on the very site of the birthplace of Rama, the principal deity of Ayodhya. When the British took over the city in 1856, they heeded this local belief and put up a railing around the mosque. At the same time, they built a platform outside the mosque where Hindus could worship while Muslims prayed inside the structure. After independence and the partition of the country into India and Pakistan in 1947, the Indian government declared the mosque closed to both religious communities. In 1984, a Hindu nationalist movement was launched to "liberate the birthplace of Rama," and this issue became a main topic in national politics. In December 1992, Hindu extremists rushed into the Babari mosque and demolished the sixteenth-century structure. The state was unable to prevent the widespread rioting between Hindus and Muslims that followed the mosque's destruction. Thousands of people, mostly Muslims, died in the riots.

Not only did the Ayodhya riots demonstrate severe fractures in India's body politic, the ensuing carnage brought into sharp focus the unresolved problem of religion in the definition of India as a secular, liberal state.¹ In a broader sense, the turmoil in the country in the early 1990s demonstrated the significance attributed to "creating facts" on the ground—altering the physical landscape through the creation of monuments as a means to define national identity and re-form the nation.²

At the same time that the Babari mosque was brought down brick by brick and a Hindu temple built in its place, another monument was taking shape in the nation's capital. The Indian government hoped that the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts in New Delhi, a cultural complex planned as a memorial to the late prime minister, would convey a message far different from that of the events in Ayodhya. Assassinated in 1984 by Sikh militants demanding a separate homeland, Indira Gandhi was committed to opposing separatism, and this goal was to be enshrined in the Arts Centre. Although at first the destroyed mosque and the new Arts Centre appear to have little in common, they are connected by the legacies of India's "religious nationalism." In both cases, religious and political figures recognized architecture primarily as a political act and sought to establish their respective notions of cultural identity through physical form.

A close examination of the guidelines for the design competition for the Arts Centre reveals the government's effort to formulate a singular nationalist imagery that linked the nation not through secular themes, but through its Hindu traditions. The Arts Centre, located at the ceremonial center of New Delhi, was to embody this nationalist imagery and, in doing so, legitimize the government's claim to represent India's diverse cultural forms. The officials responsible for the design competition hoped to achieve this end by connecting the design of the building with New Delhi's colonial legacy, namely, the early-twentieth-century buildings and urban plan created by the British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker between 1911 and 1931.

The Arts Centre design competition of 1986 was the most important international design event in India since the planning of Chandigarh in the 1950s. Over six hundred architects from around the world registered for the competition, and 194 designs were submitted for assessment by the jury.³ The competition guidelines, the designs themselves, and the debates over the winning entries raised critical questions regarding the state of architecture and of the profession in postindependence India. The designs demonstrated not simply Indian architects' positions on the subject, but how the rest of the world read the past, present, and future of Indian architecture. The entries ranged from modern and neomodern designs that championed formal rationality and the technological demands of the site and the brief, to designs that included "Indian" referents as a way of coding a postmodern assemblage, and designs that resurrected ancient Indian planning principles to justify historical continuity and "Indianness."⁴

Ralph Lerner's winning project, a Lutyensesque response to the brief, was commended for the clarity of its organization and for maintaining "necessary connections with history." Gautam Bhatia's second-place project, based on the metaphor of the riverine city and *ghats* (stepped landings) along the river's edge, was praised for its strong use of an Indian metaphor, but was rejected because it slighted Lutyens.

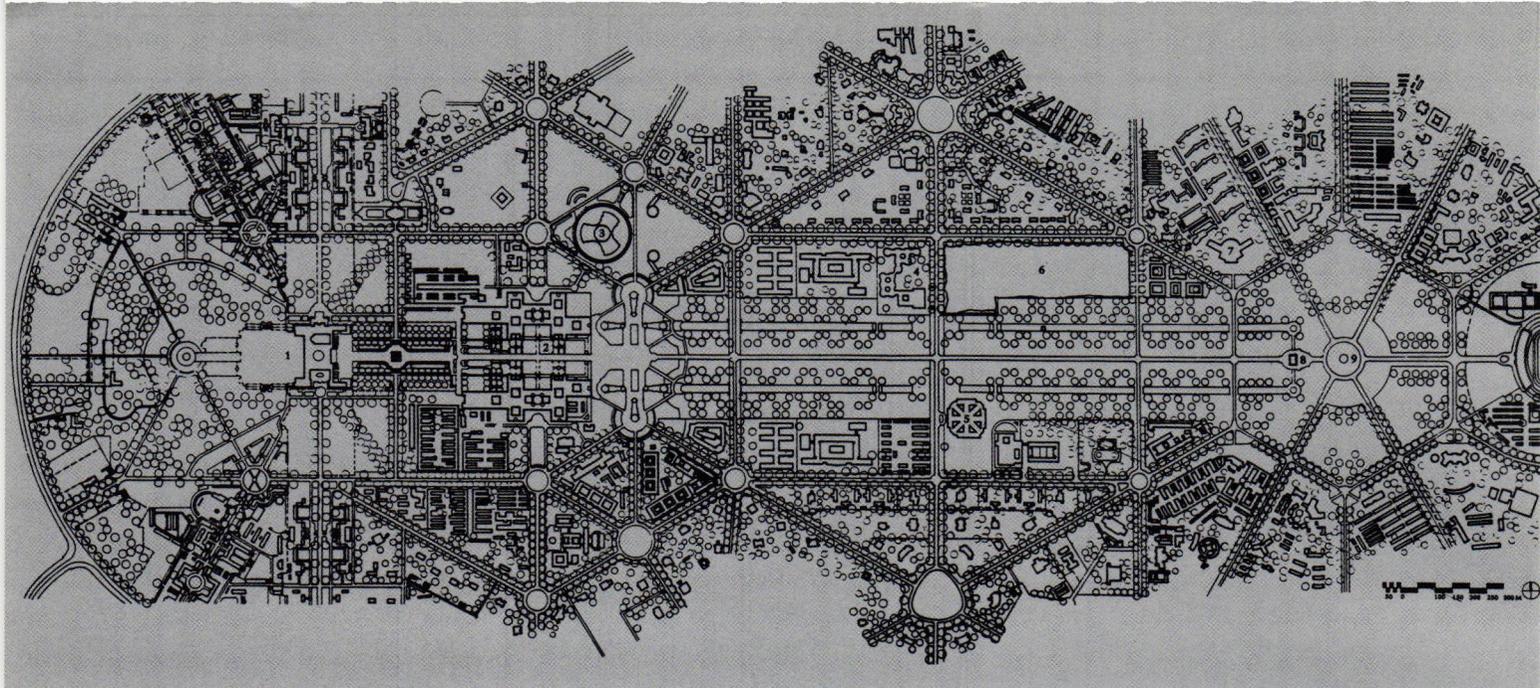
At the time of the Arts Centre design competition, the crisis among Indian architects seemed to be one of architectural language—the anxiety to discover an "Indian" vocabulary free from the tutelage of Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn, the two architects seen as responsible for planting modernism in India.⁵ In retrospect, the crisis was more than a question of architectural style, more than a debate about modernism or post-modernism. It was about weaving new myths around the ideas of nationhood and national figures using the troubled territory between such categories as colonial and postcolonial. It was about selective reading of historical monuments, and expedient forgetting of the deeply problematic colonial regime and the Indian political struggles against it.

1 For more details on the controversy, see Peter van der Veer, "God Must Be Liberated: A Hindu Liberation Movement in Ayodhya," *Modern Asian Studies* 21 (1987): 283–303; also by the same author, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). For a discussion of secularism and the unresolved problem of religion in India, see Subrata Kumar Mitra, "Desecularising the State: Religion and Politics in India after Independence," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33 (October 1991): 756–77.

2 I borrow the phrase "creating facts" from a discussion of a parallel spatial controversy in Israel. See Michael Romann and Alex Weingrod, *Living Together Separately: Arabs and Jews in Contemporary Jerusalem* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 33. Unlike in this book, the spatial dimension of the Ayodhya controversy has been largely neglected in scholarly works.

3 Razia Grover, ed., *Concepts and Responses: International Architectural Design Competition for the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 1992), 34.

4 A large number of design entries are published in Grover, *Concepts and Responses*.
5 The term *modernism* refers to the style of international modernism and not to modern architecture, which has a much longer history in India.

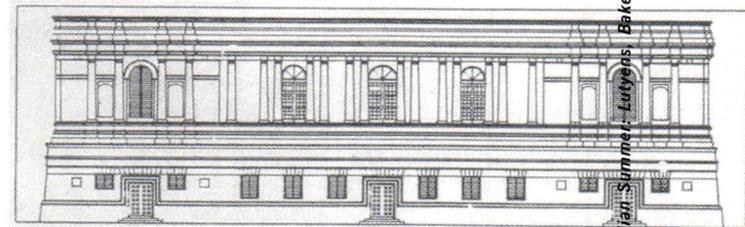


Plan of the ceremonial axis of New Delhi.

- 1 Viceroy's Palace/Presidential Estate
- 2 Secretariat buildings/Government offices
- 3 Council House/Parliament Building
- 4 National Archives
- 5 National Museum
- 6 Site of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts
- 7 Hyderabad House
- 8 War Memorial/India Gate
- 9 Pavilion (*chattri*) formerly housing the statue of King George
- 10 National Stadium

(from *Concepts and Responses*)

6 Robert Grant Irving, *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker, and Imperial Delhi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).



The Arts Centre design competition raises several significant questions for those studying postcolonial architecture and urban planning, as well as questions about making architectural interventions in existing urban fabrics. How closely does one associate architectural form with a certain regime or ideology? To what degree can architectural form engage in new interpretations? What is the permissible degree of interpretative freedom before historical struggles are all but obliterated from memory? In 1951, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had invited Le Corbusier to design Chandigarh. Having already proven himself as one of the most creative apostles of modern architecture, Corbusier was the architect of choice because Nehru wanted to move away from the recent colonial historical legacy and start anew. The reversal of values—and a move back to a mimicry of colonial architectural forms—scarcely three and a half decades later cannot be attributed merely to the failure of modernism or even to the fact that the Arts Centre was meant to be located in Delhi, where historical associations are hard to resist, but rather to the political necessity of a past that could only be rendered useful once its meaning had been reinvented. Only then could the new Arts Centre bolster grandiose claims of national unity and the immortality of national figures.

The Design Parameters

The site for the Arts Centre was the southeastern corner of the crossing of Rajpath and Janpath (formerly called King's Way and Queen's Way, respectively) at the heart of what used to be British Imperial New Delhi. Lutyens, the chief architect of the imperial city, had envisioned this crossing to be the "cultural" node, comprising four symmetrical buildings at four corners of the intersection—the Ethnological Museum, the Oriental Institute, the National Library, and the Imperial Record Office. After 1918, the War Museum and Medical Research Institute was added to this ensemble. These institutions, the British claimed, represented the meeting of the east and the west, and demonstrated the west's gifts to India. The "cultural" rhetoric notwithstanding, these institutions were instruments and justifications for gathering "knowledge" about India for administrative purposes.

The Imperial Record Office, now called the National Archives, was the only structure built according to Lutyens's design. After independence the Indian government constructed the National Museum in place of the Ethnological Museum on the southwestern corner. The Arts Centre was seen as "one step towards realizing the original concept of the cultural node in Lutyens's plan."⁷ But why was it necessary to fulfill an imperial destiny in postindependence India?

The competition guidelines were extremely elaborate, attempting not only to articulate the programmatic needs of the Arts Centre and specify detailed spatial requirements, but also to delineate the urban context and symbolic preferences of the government. The Arts Centre, with approximately 450,000 square feet of enclosed space, was to include an administrative center; an information data bank and library for the humanities and the arts; a research division responsible for publishing national arts glossaries, dictionaries, and encyclopedias; a tribal and folk arts division housing "a core collection for conducting scientific systematic studies and for live presentations"; and a division to provide space for exhibitions and performances that included four theaters, auditoriums, conference rooms, a concert hall, galleries, and open-air performance spaces. These different divisions were given Sanskrit names, thus ensuring their classical Indian provenance. The competition announcement included a laboriously detailed recommendation about the symbolic references that designers could bring into play and presented a curiously uncritical reading of Lutyens's plan of New Delhi.

opposite

Elevation of the National Archives.
(from *Architecture + Design*)

left

**The Secretariat buildings, designed
by Herbert Baker.**
(photograph by Greg Castillo)



Taming Indianness

Designed between 1911 and 1931, New Delhi was the last gasp of an empire that was crumbling even before the city was completed. The idea of a "new" Delhi was part of a continuing British attempt to legitimize colonial rule by positioning itself as the successor of the Mughal dynasty and was prompted by the urgency of moving the administrative center of British India far from the political turmoil of Calcutta.

The use of symbols in the new capital and in art and architecture in general was a complicated operation for the British colonizers. Foreign rule had to appear naturalized, domesticated within the cultural parameters of India, without sacrificing its own sovereignty in the process. Consequently, the process was not one of domestication of Englishness, but of establishing what was in fact a new language of authority that used some Indian design motifs, bereft of their meaning, in order to appear legitimate.

The centerpiece of New Delhi was the Viceroy's Palace, which was flanked by the Secretariat buildings, designed by Baker. At the time it was built, British officials and architects debated over the choice of an architectural vocabulary for the new buildings. Neither Lutyens nor Baker harbored any respect for Indian architecture, and they considered anything short of a strong Greco-Roman classical order inappropriate to the purpose of projecting British might that likened itself to imperial Rome. They scorned the hybrid combination of Indian and European motifs in the official style of British India, named Indo-Saracenic, with its three-centered arches, turrets, and *chattris* (canopies) attempting to signify a happy meeting ground of east and west. This Indo-Saracenic style was itself a move away from the standard vocabulary of colonial India, namely, eighteenth-century Palladian classicism and the neo-Gothic of the late nineteenth century. The overwhelming concern in evaluating both the Indo-Saracenic and Palladian styles was the external look of the buildings. The spatial arrangement of the interiors was a different story, independent of the façades. The Palladian classicism common in colonial India was, in fact, thoroughly domesticated by Indian building practices: the interiors were organized using the traditional Indian open-plan arrangement of rooms. Even the buildings built later in the Indo-Saracenic style were, spatially speaking, an attempt to augment the courtyard pattern of Indian houses with corridors, instead of retaining the older pattern of room-through circulation.



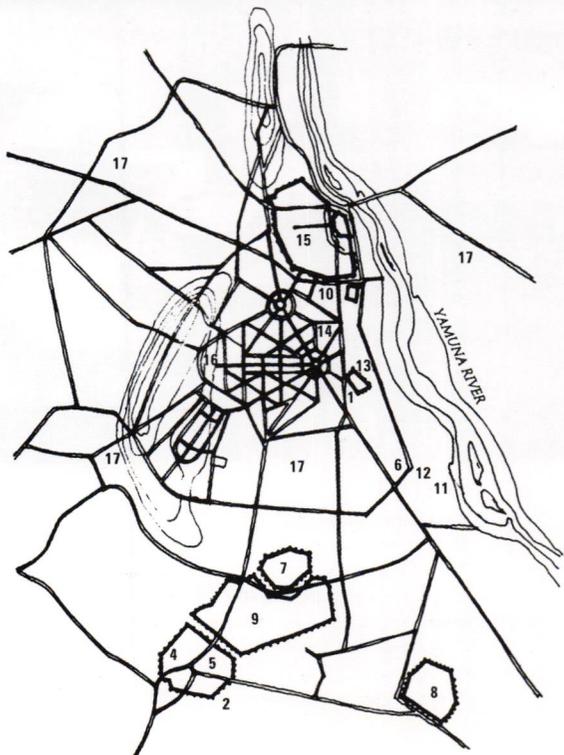
Aerial view showing the Viceroy's Palace (at the top), Secretariat buildings with their twin domes, and the circular Council House-turned-Parliament building.

(from Concepts and Responses)

insert

Established by the British in 1911, the colonial city of New Delhi was surrounded by more than a dozen historic cities, including the Mughal city of Shāhjahānābād. The British capital was located on a gently sloping hill and offered views of Shāhjahānābād and the remains of the older settlements.

(from Concepts and Responses)

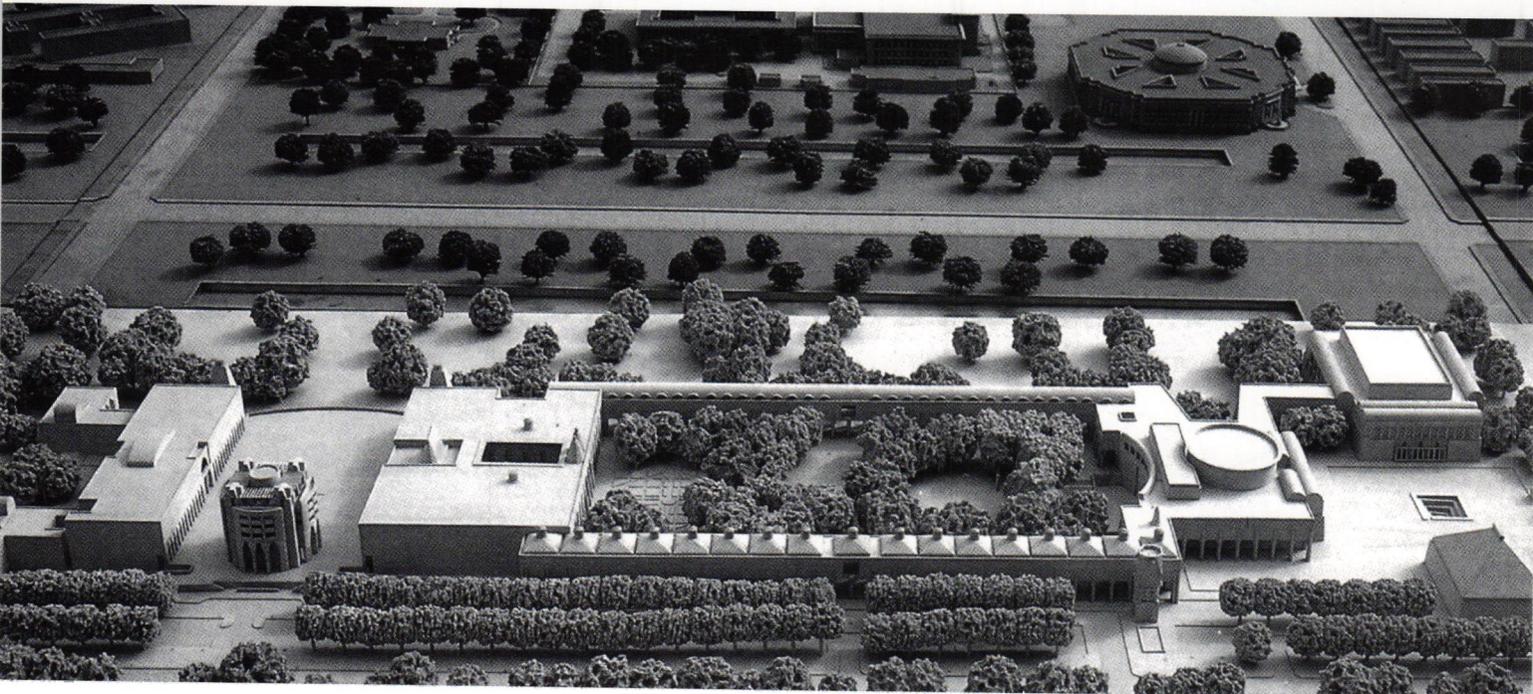


Cities of Delhi in chronological order:

- | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | Indiaprastha 1450 B.C.–350 A.D. | 10 | Firuzābād 1351 A.D. |
| 2 | Dilli 100 B.C. | 11 | Khizrabād 1415 A.D. |
| 3 | Surajkund 1024 A.D. | 12 | Mubārākābād 1422 A.D. |
| 4 | Lal Kot 1024 A.D. | 13 | Dīnpanāh 1530 A.D. |
| 5 | Quila Rai-pithora 1170 A.D. | 14 | Dilli 1542 A.D. |
| 6 | Kilokri 1288 A.D. | 15 | Shāhjahānābād 1648 A.D. |
| 7 | Siri 1302 A.D. | 16 | New Delhi 1911 A.D. |
| 8 | Tughluqābād 1320 A.D. | 17 | Postindependence expansion 1947 A.D. |
| 9 | Jahanpānāh 1334 A.D. | | |

The neoclassicism of Lutyens and Baker was of a distinctly different origin. The spatial syntax of the Viceroy's Palace and the Secretariat buildings was borrowed directly from nineteenth-century English architecture, with its emphatic hierarchy of rooms and access. Gone were the ubiquitous semiopen spaces of nineteenth-century colonial buildings that worked as transition zones between the outside and the interior rooms.

The *chattris* in the Viceroy's Palace that are often seen as concessions to Indian architecture were, as the story goes, acceded only after British administrators and politicians reminded Lutyens that a city built with Indian revenue needed to cater to Indian "sentiment." In Lutyens's vocabulary, *chattris* were "stupid, useless things" that if included could only be emblematic, soundly subsumed within and dominated by the neoclassical order.⁸ Cajoled into including Indian motifs, Lutyens used the most stereotypical images of Indian exoticism—snakes, elephants, bells, and lotuses—to act as foils to show off the grandeur of his classical order, or as grounds on which British superiority and claim could be inscribed. These images also acted as ironic comments that enlivened the imperial assemblage, just as the color of Indian clothing struck picturesque contrast to the gray, plain profile of English attire. Administrators and the English press never failed to point out the charming yet "barbaric" appearance of Indian princes and their retinues. These inclusions of Indian culture were also demonstrations of the appropriate place for things Indian in the imperial scheme, a lesson to the Indian public never to forget that there was only one political and cultural order that was supreme enough to encapsulate these diverse imageries, just as the British administration claimed to be the only power that could retain the unity of this multifaceted subcontinent. Yet such rhetorical strategies in stone allowed admirers to claim that this vocabulary reflected the meeting of the east and west.



**Model of the Indira Gandhi
National Centre for the Arts
by Ralph Lerner.**
(from *Concepts and Responses*)

The grand myth perpetrated at New Delhi was the willing cooperation between Indians and Britons, as well as Britain's ability, via the viceroy and the civil service, to define, control, and represent the Indian population. The sheer magnitude and spectacle of the new city and palace attempted to overshadow the contradictions inherent in the project, including the construction of such a capital during World War I and a worsening worldwide depression, and the rising tide of Indian nationalism. Scarcely a couple of days after the city's spectacular inauguration ceremony, when Mahatma Gandhi walked past the row of stone Britannia lions to meet Lord Irwin at the Viceroy's Palace, Winston Churchill as well as King George found it revolting that Gandhi was admitted to the "beautiful new house." Nothing, after all, could have more devastatingly revealed the contradictions inherent in the "new" order that could only admit chosen forms of Indianness, carefully tamed and clothed in colonial regalia.⁹

9 Ibid., 351.

Nationalist Myths

Why did the Arts Centre committee require the design of the new building to hearken back to the work of Lutyens and British colonial architecture in general, commending Lutyens's architecture for its "unique style that at once has the gravity of European classicism and the humane charm of indigenous architecture"?¹⁰ The committee, which saw itself as the guardian of art and architecture in independent India, managed to distill the value of Indian architecture down to its "charming" quality, one that necessitated a more stout—or European classical—vocabulary for support. This stance portrayed Indian culture as feminine and weak, one that needed the protection of masculine British culture. But the committee's approach was not an isolated lapse of critical thinking—much of the competition guidelines and its suppositions had deep colonial moorings. Anticipating the obvious question about the political implications of the colonial legacy of New Delhi, the brief quoted Indira Gandhi as saying, "whatever influence came to this country the end product was unmistakably Indian," a rather frail logic that demands a suspension of political belief. What conceptual leap made Lutyens's architecture the necessary referent for a postindependence Indian identity? Was it merely the fact that these edifices now housed the president and the Parliament of independent India, or was the concern purely architectural?

At first glance, the crux of the problem may seem to reside in the obsessive desire by Indian architects and officials to define Indianness and, consequently, to create distinctions between that which is European or Western and that which is Indian. The desire to define Indianness along nationalist lines and the reverence for Lutyens's work draw upon two larger conflicts: an artistic debate about Indian art at the turn of the century and the political milieu of late-twentieth-century India.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, a new Orientalist art history replaced the prevailing nineteenth-century British view of Indian art. European collectors and self-appointed guardians of Indian art like George Birdwood and Henry Cole had maintained that India had no "fine art" to compare with the achievements of the West, casting the most vitriolic aspersions on Hindu art, whose deities were unsuitable for "higher" forms of representation. Responding to this "official" position on Indian art and the increasing Europeanization of art training in government art schools in India, a new group of artists and historians, led by Ernest B. Havell and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, championed an alternate view of Indian art. Rejecting a false division between arts and crafts, and energized by a heavy dose of William Morris, they argued that India had a living art tradition embodying a higher sense of imagination inscrutable to the Western eye.¹¹

10 Grover, *Concepts and Responses*, 19.

11 Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New Indian Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

A model of the Sutradhara, or administrative, building at the Arts Centre by Ralph Lerner.
(from *Concepts and Responses*)



In this reassessment, the fountainhead and synthetic force of Indian art was Hindu spirituality, encompassing and absorbing all influences that arrived on the subcontinent, one that could be found in the unchanging, living traditions of Indian craftsmen. That which was considered purely decorative in Indian architecture was now imbued with a deeper symbolism. Indian art was grouped into two major chronological phases: one centered on early "Hindu-Buddhist art," which came to be seen as the core of Indian art; the other defined by the secular, court tradition of Mughal art, which was implicated as a lesser art form because it did not share the divine inspirations of Hindu art.

In the first phase of early Hindu-Buddhist art, the Maurya and Gupta periods, singled out as the high points of Indian artistic achievement, were seen as the times when indigenous traditions merged with influences from western Asia, Greece, and Rome, and these artistic values disseminated in the Far East. The synthetic ability of Hindu art, shaped during the "golden" imperial age of the Mauryas and Guptas, transformed later Muslim artistic ideas and made them essentially "Indian." This view firmly rested on Orientalist assumptions of a spiritual India that had changed little since the days of antiquity. But this time around the unchanging tradition gained positive attributes. The ancient achievement of Indian art was associated with its Aryan pedigree, prompting Havell to argue that it was this Aryan connection that tied British authorities to Indian subjects. The pervasive understanding of Indian art and architecture today, in terms of its spirituality and metaphysical quality, developed as a result of this new orientalism.

Havell's paternalistic assertions regarding the need for British protection of Indian art notwithstanding, Indian nationalists found in such a view another way to define national culture. The nationalists believed that they could define the essence of Indian culture by allying it with a pan-Asianism, rather than posing a direct comparison with European art tradition. Indian art firmly equated with Hindu art and its implicit Aryanness came to serve this purpose. One did not have to reject India's Muslim, or even British, colonial heritage once it could be seen as absolved and absorbed by the force of "Hindu"/Indian spirituality.

The guidelines for the design competition for the Arts Centre relied on and perpetuated this early nationalist myth. In consonance with the aspirations of the Festival of India and its attendant exhibitions, the competition guidelines projected a view of India whose cultural genius resided in its spiritually inspired craft tradition harkening back to ancient times.¹² The central provision for tribal and folk arts in the cultural complex to complement what was considered the classical heritage of Indian art reflected this point of view. A national center for the arts would enable the presentation and inculcation of these values about tradition and continuity and provide a wonderful opportunity to present the assassinated prime minister as the preacher and embodiment of these values.

The Arts Centre was one of a series of memorials to Indira Gandhi planned by the Government of India. The competition guidelines explicitly stated this intention and presented the concept behind the project to be Indira Gandhi's vision of a unitary India, "all comprehensive and all encompassing." The Arts Centre was expected to fulfill a "holistic conception germane to the Indian world view as powerfully articulated by modern leaders from Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore and Maulana Azad to Nehru and Indira Gandhi."¹³ In other words, there was a unique "Indian world view" that could be articulated and utilized to launch Indira Gandhi as one of the canonical figures of Indian nationalism, equated with some of the mainstays of the nationalist movement in British India. The burden of this task would rest on the power of symbolic arrangement. If the Arts Centre based on the "principle of a center radiating dynamically into autonomous units" was the art analog of a political ideal, the antiquity of this ideal was expressed during the ceremony inaugurating the Arts Centre:

The elements—fire, water, earth, sky and vegetation—were brought together. Five rocks from five major rivers—the Sindhu, Ganga, Kaveri, Mahanadi and the Narmada (where the most ancient ammonite fossils are found) were composed in sculptural forms. They will remain at the site as reminders of the antiquity of Indian culture and the sacredness of her rivers.

The logo for the Arts Centre was derived from a second-century Badami ceiling and comprised of four intertwined swastikas, "the symbol of great antiquity known to all cultures of the world." Scientific and historical evidence and mythical constructs were brought together to project national unity as a "natural" outcome of geographical integrity. Once such unity is revealed as sacred, any threat to that unity becomes not just a matter of rational state politics but a spiritual sacrilege.

The threefold ideal of Indian cultural identity espoused by the competition guidelines consisted of the inherent spirituality of Indian art expressed in various symbolic references, a village-centered art tradition that could chart its lineage to antiquity, and the universal principles and ideas expressed in the art of a nation that transcended national boundaries. The potential applicants for the competition had to be constantly reminded that this "Indian world view" or the idea of the nation was not new, constructed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but one that emerged "countless centuries" ago and had the evidence of antiquity and the alibi of the most prominent historians of Indian art in the twentieth century. Indian art and, clearly, all artistic manifestations from painting to architecture could be brought under the aegis of a singularly defined model that was at once peculiarly Indian and truly universal, "inscrutable to Western eyes" and wholly recognizable by anyone; such art was

¹² For a more elaborate discussion of the problem of displaying Indian crafts, see Paul Greenhough, "Nation, Economy, and Tradition Displayed: The Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi," *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South-Asian World*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 216–48.

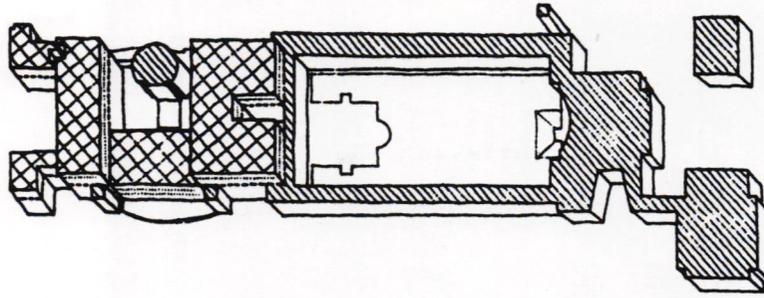
practical and spiritual, looking forward and backward, urban and rural, with no discernible seams, no fractures, no dissonance. Consciously promoting the image of the nation-self forty years after independence, the competition officials presented India as a cradle of "ethnic" art. In doing so, it fundamentally relied on received views of Indianness, located it in their own terms, and promoted a view of India that the world wanted to see: a rich, stable, caste-based art-and-craft tradition, exotic and yet housed in a modern structure. Invoking the rhetoric of a secular Nehruian tradition in which one were to make no distinctions on the basis of religion, region, caste, or creed, Indian officials still could not and would not shake the religious associations that they found expedient to promote.¹⁴

Lutyens did not agree with Havell or Coomaraswamy regarding the noble stature of Indian art and architecture. Lutyens had used his version of the classical order to represent and define in physical form the relation between the ruler and the ruled, to claim that the architectural order could control the symbolic constitution of India. But once the "alien" architectural order could be divested of its imperial politics—not once did the competition guidelines mention British imperialism or the unsavory political past—it could be incorporated into the pantheon of Indian art. Moreover, the competition was being held during a wave of Raj nostalgia from which Indian tourism had much to gain.

The officials associated with the competition imagined the Arts Centre as a memorial fashioned as a cultural complex in which the symbolic order of the nation would pervade and triumph over the architectural order left behind by the British colonial government. After all, the Viceroy's Palace was now used as the Presidential residence, and the Secretariat buildings and Council House-turned-Parliament building harbored a new breed of civil servants and politicians. Transforming a British imperial legacy into a democratic ideal of a new nation necessitated selective amnesia. Architecture and landscape planning were emptied of meaning to make room for new unifying myths.

These myths gain significance when one considers the political backdrop of competing nationalisms in India during this time. Each nationalist organization wished to give concrete spatial manifestation to its own religious and/or nationalist identity, including separatist movements in Kashmir, Punjab, and the Northeast, and Hindu extremism throughout the nation. A series of political assassinations and violent confrontations between militant Sikhs and the state had created a crisis by the mid-1980s. Increasingly, Hindu extremists argued that India should be constituted as a Hindu state on the basis of a numerical Hindu majority. Only then, they claimed, could the nation forestall the "threat" posed by religious minorities and the protection guaranteed them by the state.¹⁵ For Hindu extremists, Indianness is synonymous with a Hindu identity, and people of other religions are perceived as foreigners.

The notion of Hindu nationhood held by Hindu fundamentalists contradicts the religious neutrality promised by the Indian constitution. Although the government does not always treat all religions with equal tolerance, the Indian constitution presents religion as a personal matter and promotes the view of a nation that can contain religious, cultural, and social differences under the aegis of a secular state. Thus, increased communal activity in India in the last three decades may be read as the failed hegemony of a state that sought to overcome such "primordial" religious associations with modernizing projects.¹⁶ This failure has been attributed to Nehru's personal atheism and his teleological view of modernization. Nehru hoped this modernization would gradually wean the people of traditional and tribal attachments on the way to becoming a secular nation. In contrast, the Arts Centre authorities fetishized "tradition" to define a national culture. The central provision of tribal and folk arts and the



A drawing by Ralph Lerner of the Arts Centre phases of expansion. The crosshatched area is to be constructed first; the diagonal lines mark the second phase of expansion.

(from *Concepts and Responses*)

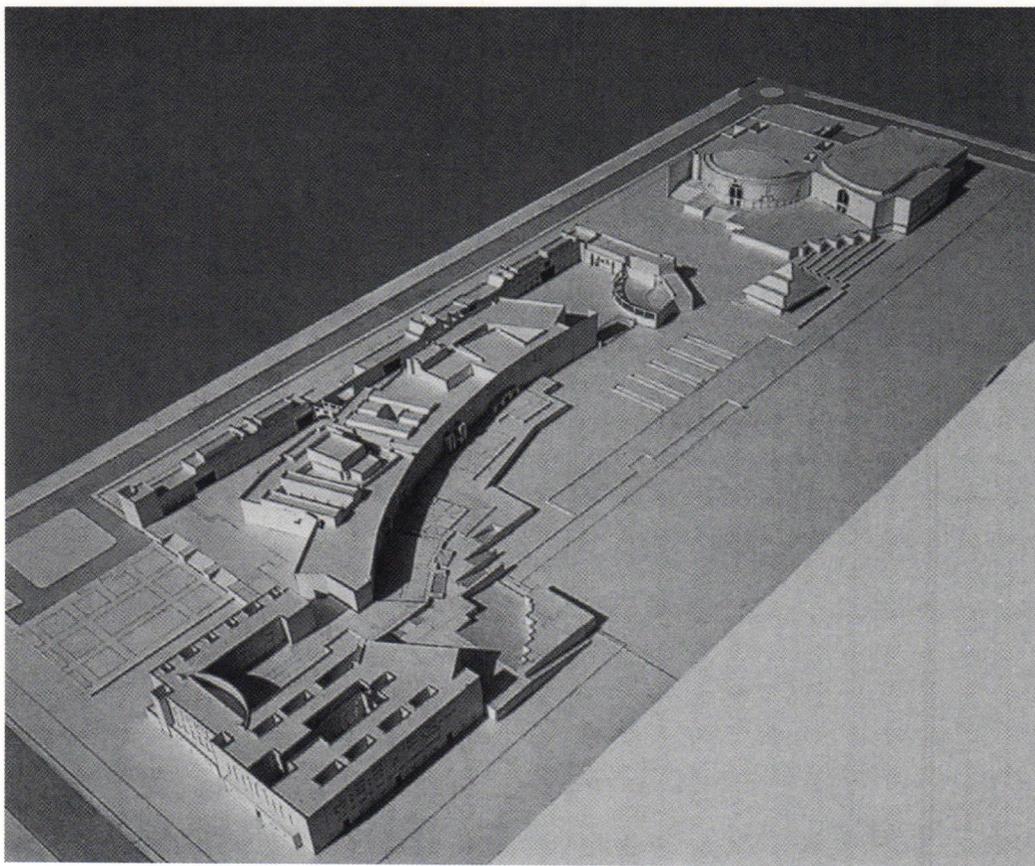
14 This statement refers to Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of the Indian state after independence.

valorization of subaltern life must be understood in political terms and alongside the constant effort to bring disenfranchised groups within a Hindu majority. After all, a Hindu majority can only be maintained as long as tribals and untouchables do not openly declare themselves outside this majority. The feeble secular rhetoric of the competition guidelines could not mask a model of a nation grounded in an imagined Hindu antiquity. The "natural" geographical unity of India coincided with the view of Hinduism as the "natural religion" of India, as opposed to Islam, which came from "outside." But for matters architectural, this tradition fetish allowed many entrants to flirt with postmodern aesthetics using traditional artistic motifs. The emphasis on tradition also gave an impression that cultural identity and the architecture of the nation had found their own voice and could be considered truly "Indian."

The Arts Centre authorities decided to use the colonial edifice as an exemplar of how "foreignness" could be subsumed under the projected view of Indianness. Consequently, an "alien" architectural vocabulary was necessary to demonstrate that Indian tradition could embrace such variety and make it its own. It was time to look past the idea that Lutyens had unhinged architectural form from its specific contextual meaning to use it for the purpose of empire building. These forms could again be treated for their purely architectonic features, generic elements on which one could project general symbolic properties of one's choosing. The spectre of colonial politics could not be raised lest one questioned the new political myth that was in progress.

15 Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 10.

16 Several scholars, including van der Veer and Subrata Mitra, have argued that the view of religion as a "primordial" attachment is misguided. Rather, religion needs to be understood as part of a changing social matrix and political processes. See van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 12-13.



**Model of the Arts Centre
by Gautam Bhatia.**
(from *Concepts and Responses*)

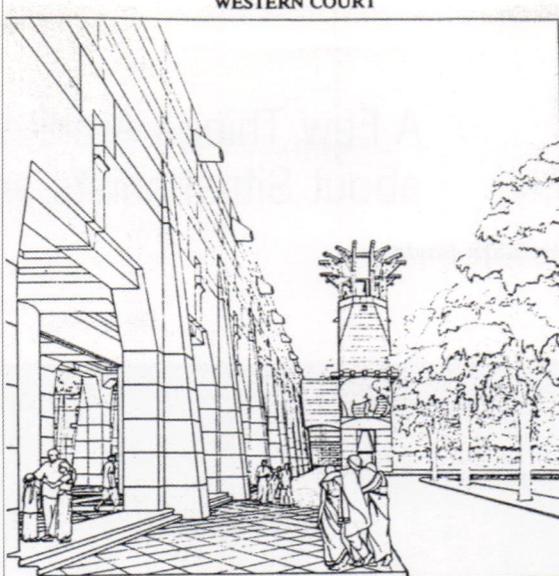
opposite
Drawing by Ralph Lerner.
Western Court of the Arts Centre.
(from *Concepts and Responses*)

Conclusion

Lerner won first prize because he satisfied the safe, sophisticated, and monumental response the selection committee was looking for. At the very outset of his design presentation, he used analytic diagrams to spell out his adherence to the formula set out by the competition guidelines. One could clearly see in the Arts Centre's courts and site strategy the desire to enjoin Lutyens's cultural node. In Lerner's design, the courts of the Viceroy's Palace appear in similar shapes, albeit overscaled. The axuality and symmetry of access is Lutyensesque, but the external bilateral symmetry is abandoned in favor of a more eclectic ensemble. The elevations reveal the slightly battered walls of Lutyens dressed in the uniform of red-and-pink sandstone but devoid of Lutyens's use of shading devices. Thus, the National Archives designed by Lutyens received its late-twentieth-century counterpart across Janpath—the Arts Centre's National Theatre that invokes Michael Graves and James Stirling in equal measure. The stylistic problem of locating a traditional Indian theater (specifically prescribed by the competition guidelines) next to the National Theatre is solved by completely enclosing the former in an external shell where it would not disturb the complacency of a postmodern Lutyens. The ensemble was completed by sculptural elements performing compulsory gymnastics.

Several Indian architects did not compete for the Arts Centre commission, for they believed that it would have been inappropriate to design the facility using Lutyens's architectural language. What, asked architectural critic Roger Connah, would have been the result of the competition if the brief indicated "the expression of Imperial Authority given by the scale and design of New Delhi is not an appropriate message for a new complex of buildings for the study and celebration of Indian arts"?¹⁷ Connah, like many others who visited the exhibition mounted by the Arts Centre to display the entries for the competition, clearly found the inventiveness of Bhatia's second-place design more promising. Bhatia had taken the symbolic aspirations of the brief and a new Indian architecture to heart, but rejected overt symbolic references, such as Lutyens's use of sculptural elephants and carved lotuses. Bhatia's design was based on the metaphor of

17 Roger Connah, "Please Mr. Lutyens, Hold My Pencil," *Architecture + Design* 3 (January–February 1987): 35.



NORTHERN AMBULATORY GALLERIES INFORMATION TOWER BUS AND TAXI DROP OFF

the *ghat*, with Rajpath being the “river,” and the imagery of the Ajanta caves. His design included a series of shaded courts between and inside the buildings. An arcade connected these interior open spaces with the south-facing open courts, and thus created an intricate fabric of open, semiopen, and enclosed spaces. The administrative center was not an isolated building but a “tissue” that ran through the complex, diffusing the implied hierarchy of the brief. Bhatia did anchor the southeast corner of the site, respecting the location of the National Archives, but his design was far from being conventionally monumental. Consequently, Bhatia’s project wasn’t enough of a gesture to either Lutyens’s architecture or the demands of the competition guidelines, despite his favoring of Indian symbolism. If the competition guidelines in its espoused political innocence had invited the designers’ complicity in myth making anew, Bhatia chose to reinvent the meaning of the ceremonial axis of Rajpath and create a radically different spatial order.

For a design event so keen to define Indian cultural identity, and for an Indian architectural community suffering from a profound inferiority complex in its inability to measure up to “Western” architecture, one would imagine Bhatia’s project would be seen as a new lease of imagination. But Bhatia’s design was instead read as a critique of the competition brief itself. The design of the Arts Centre could neither be self-referential nor challenge the existing spatiopolitical diagram now used by the Indian government. The objective was to connect to the existing institutions in its symbolic arrangement, so that as a memorial to Indira Gandhi the Arts Centre would become an inextricable part of the larger governmental infrastructure. The selection committee could neither muster the courage to criticize Lutyens, considering his enormous prestige as a great architect, nor accept a proposal that defied the guidelines. Better a compliant Lerner than an unpredictable Bhatia, even if Lerner’s vocabulary is—as Connah put it—“as local as Lutyens was local.”¹⁸

While the Arts Centre is still under construction and its management embroiled in political controversy, we are left to consider the role of architecture in creating national identity in a postcolonial and postmodern world, where colonial fantasies can be reworked by architects and administrators in the name of postmodern witticism and symbolic necessity. The irony is that while the mosque’s destruction and rebuilding at Ayodhya is commonly accepted as a “political act” without any architectural significance, the design competition for the Arts Centre was only seen as an architectural problem. While so much has been written about the appropriateness of architectural vocabulary, almost no one at that time questioned the political purpose of the Arts Centre—as a didactic space to instill deeply problematic notions of nationhood and citizenship. ■

A Few Things Architects Should/Don't Know about Situationists and Literalists

by Mark Linder



Members of the Situationist International at a Munich restaurant in 1959. From left: Har Oudejans, Constant Nieuwenhuys, Guy Debord, and Armando.
(from *Constant's New Babylon*)

The Situationist City

by Simon Sadler
MIT Press, 1999
248 pp., \$19.95

Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire

by Mark Wigley
O10 Publishers, 1998
256 pp., \$45.00

Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews

by Michael Fried
University of Chicago Press, 1998
333 pp., \$21.00

In two otherwise divergent books on virtually the same subject, *The Situationist City* and *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, authors Simon Sadler and Mark Wigley agree on at least this: Despite the grand scale and revolutionary politics of the work of the movement known as the Situationist International (SI), the group conceived of urbanism as an accumulation of minutia discerned and manifested particularly at the scale of the body. In other words, the most interesting aspect of the group's research and experiments is its insight that "unitary urbanism" would actually occur through small-scale interventions. The situationist city was at once a "concrete collective," a "mass collaboration," and a matter of details—a project built for chance encounters between, and solitary drifting of, individuals. One might even say that the situationists' project aimed to build an urbanism of the extra small (XS), the excluded term in the now ubiquitous urban taxonomy described in Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau's *S, M, L, XL*.

While Sadler and Wigley find very different ways to navigate the same network of facts, events, and artifacts, both aim to challenge the official and familiar accounts of the significance of urbanism and architecture in relation to the whole of the situationist project. In doing so, both Sadler and Wigley give special status to New Babylon, the fifteen-year project by the Dutch artist-become-

architect Constant Nieuwenhuys, an early member of the SI. Each author speculates on the fact that New Babylon and unitary urbanism remain unrealized. Each insists that it had to be so.

The fact that Constant's (he preferred to be called by just his first name) project is the primary example in these books requires some explanation, since Constant left the situationist collective in 1960, only three years after it had begun. Whether this dissociation was by edict (by SI leader Guy Debord) or by choice (Constant's) is a key question lurking in these two tales, and in many ways the vast differences between these two books hinge on Sadler's and Wigley's very distinct interpretations of events. For Sadler, Constant's expulsion from the SI reveals "the group's abandonment of any serious development of unitary urbanism." For Wigley, Constant's departure (along with that of Pinot Gallizio and Asger Jorn) was not an abandonment of architecture by the situationists. By Wigley's account, "Architecture was redefined rather than rejected. If anything, it was architecture that separated itself from the situationists rather than the other way around."

Thus these two books present incompatible assessments of the aims, efficacy, and ends of the SI and its urban agenda. Sadler assembles forensic evidence as to the cause of death, "search[ing] for

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the situationist city among the detritus of tracts, manifestos, and works of art that [are] left behind. ...The sooner that historians have completed the autopsy and preservation of situationism, the sooner others can make something new from its corpus." Wigley reconstructs and exhibits the traces of a project that shows signs of life but is dying to be born, "a project somewhere between the present and the future—which is where architecture, in the most practical sense, lies....It remains a haunting presence in our discourse today."

For Sadler (who maintains a "fastidiously academic" skepticism throughout his book), "the program that situationists set themselves was so ambitious and uncompromising that it condemned itself to failure." Even as he describes, explains, and catalogs their revolutionary devices, including *dérive* (drift), *détournement* (diversion or unraveling), and concepts such as "psycho-geography" and "constructed situations," Sadler concludes that "at the center of their project was a

drawal from urban design was not a withdrawal from architectural ambition. On the contrary, political strategies were now understood to be, by definition, architectural. Space was addressed by other means." In other words, Wigley argues that the SI launched original understandings of social and political space that were articulated in various ways within the movement but could only be realized and represented in recognizably architectural terms by artists and architects outside of the collective.

Wigley does not attempt to save architecture from the "abuses" of the SI, nor does he apologize for the perceived distance between today's standards of scholarship and the subversiveness of situationist tactics. Instead, Wigley represents this dialectic between SI insiders and outsiders as nothing less than a contest over the political efficacy of architectural work in the post-World War II era. He reverses the presumption of failure that taints situationist architecture and urbanism by rewriting



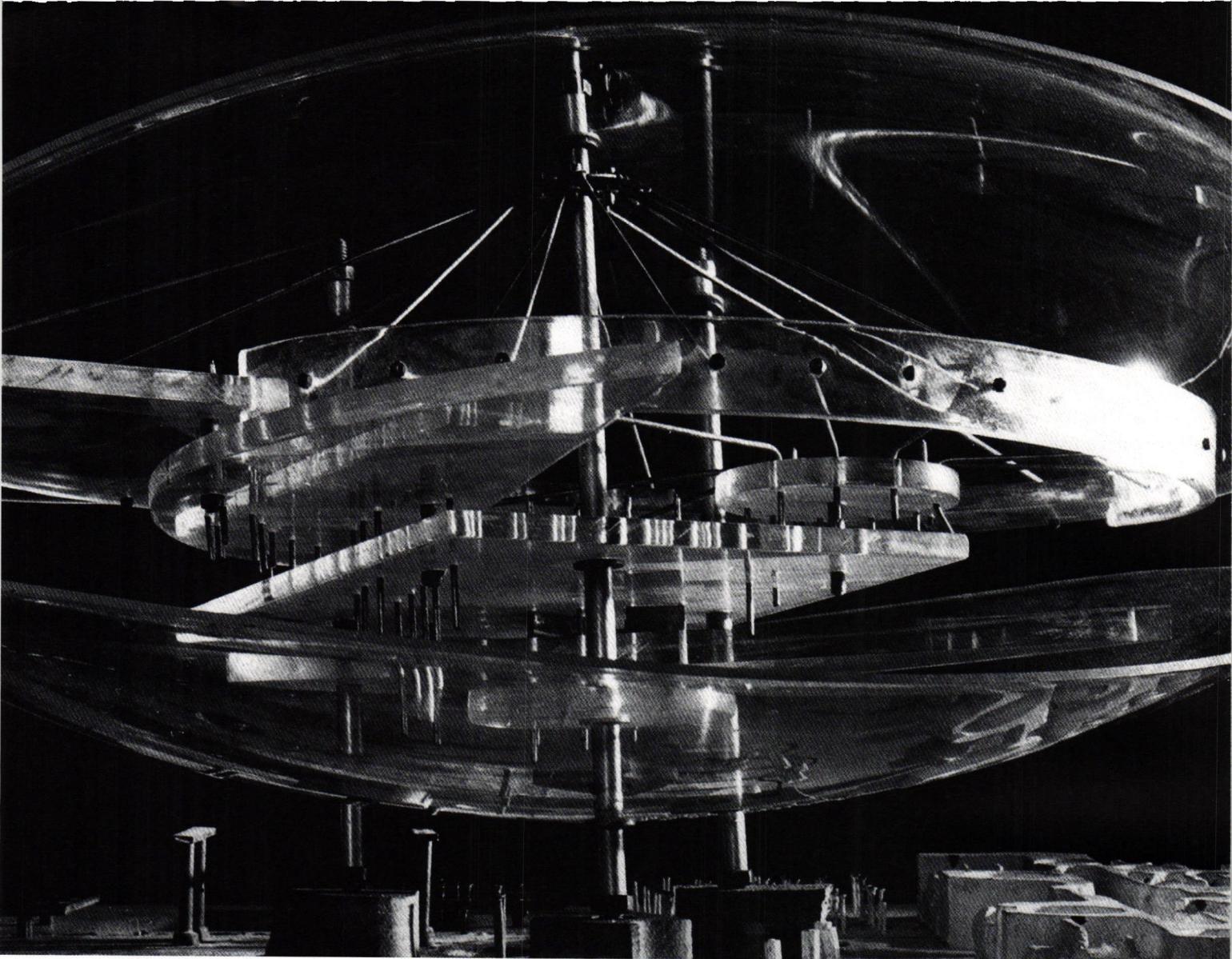
methodological vacuum" and "for all the brilliance of situationist critiques, virtual incomprehensibility was an inherent feature of their urban project." He attributes the group's confusion in large part to the fact that "none of the main players in the formation of situationism were designers or architects by profession." This appearance of confusion was compounded by events: soon after the founding of SI in 1957, all of the members who were working on urban proposals would leave the movement. As if to rescue architecture from its abuse and neglect by the SI, Sadler writes that he "takes perverse care in extracting situationist architectural theory from a revolutionary program that attempts to confront the ideological totality of the Western world."

For Wigley (who is by now famous for finding that what we think we have known all along is but half true), the seemingly tenuous relationship between the situationists' specifically architectural and urban proposals and the broader political goals of the SI should not be amplified or clarified, but needs to be reconfigured as a complex interaction. He argues that "the situationist with-

An illustration from the journal *Internationale situationniste* that reads, "Tonight, the spectacle at home." (from *The Situationist City*)



its story as a still unfinished and still lingering project, insisting that "the events have to be followed in more detail" as "a nuanced discourse about the limits of architecture." What he writes is both a *dérive* through the archive of Constant's work and a historical *détournement* of the relations of power between official and expelled situationists. What he finds is that Constant's project is far from a failure: it offers nothing less than "a fully formed critique of architecture."



Constant, *Spatiovore*
(*Space Eater*), 1959.
(from *Constant's New Babylon*)

Sadler's and Wigley's contrasting discursive models bracket and exemplify the breadth of current scholarship on avant-garde and neo-avant-garde architecture and theory. Each of these books details the hazardous engagement with quotidian space that emerged in the work of artists, intellectuals, and agitators who, even briefly, joined the SI, yet neither book aims to align particular theoretical sources with current work. Rather, they examine the complex interdisciplinary interactions between all-too-easily assimilated theory-texts and the simultaneous development of the architectural discipline. In such historical work on the avant-garde, as Manfredo Tafuri insisted, the most difficult and least examined territory is the seeming gap between professed politics and produced projects. (Debord's role in the events of May 1968 is but the most obvious example of this gap and is epitomized in Debord's infamous statement that "initially the situationists wanted to build cities.... But of course this was not easy and we found ourselves forced to do much more.") As Debord's statement makes clear, this incongruity

between agendas and achievements is as important to the study of the SI as to any of the avant-garde movements, if not more so. The SI was founded as a critique of modernist (or "rationalist," in Sadler's terms) presumptions about urbanization, space, and human behavior, in, as Sadler says, "the belief that general revolution would originate in the appropriation and alteration of the material environment and its space."

However sympathetic Sadler is to this critique and its modus operandi, he maintains his scholarly distance and provides a general historical view, concentrating on the "nexus of ideas" that predate the SI and would influence its development. For this reason, his book is a useful introduction to the movement, especially for architects. This is particularly true of the first of its three main chapters, in which Sadler establishes the context against which the SI formulated its critique and details the sources, mostly within the architectural discipline, from which the SI assembled its urban program. This construction of the prehistory of the SI is the most intriguing and revealing section of

the book, in which Sadler arrives at the provocative and ironic conclusion that the most significant architectural result of the SI's urban agenda is Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers's Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Constructed in 1977, the Centre Pompidou would serve—only twelve years later—as the site of the first retrospective exhibition on the SI. Thus, one building represents two distinct projects: it is both the best realization of situationist architectural and urban theory as well as the site of the official academization and historicization of the movement. Sadler's aim as a scholar, based on the premise that "architecture was the key to situationist consciousness," is to perform historical work on SI artifacts that, although it is far from heroic or revolutionary, might nonetheless begin to restore the credibility and applicability of situationist architectural and urban theory.

Sadler's circumspect and more straightforward book sets the stage for Wigley's tour de force. Serving as the introduction to the catalog of a large exhibition of Constant's work (which Wigley curated), his essay begins as a detailed—and wily—presentation of facts and anecdotes, but gradually turns into a nuanced—and polemical—piece of theoretical writing. Where Sadler strikes an alternately ironic or apologetic tone in his attempt to make the strands of SI's unitary urbanism palpable as "history," Wigley argues that Constant's fifteen-year project is nothing less than the exemplary case of theory's necessity in architectural work. Theory appears in several modes in Constant's project, including his writing; his slide lectures; his crafting of a persona; and his drawings, paintings, and models. In each case, Wigley presents Constant as an innovator of new theoretical modes. The most elaborate examples of his approach are his models. Taking entirely literally Constant's insistence that, from 1956 to 1974, his mesmerizing but often enigmatic models were the most adequate representational mode for situationist urban projects and, for Constant, the closest he could get to creating actual built form, Wigley writes: "The model is a form of exploration, a means of designing as distinct from the representation of a design. What is exhibited is the process....The life of each model simulates the transitory world that is being proposed." In this way, and in others, Wigley identifies Constant as a defining architectural character of late modernism, who, as an artist-become-architect, was able to recognize and exploit what has become Wigley's rallying cry for more than a decade: "Architects are theorists. Being fundamentally speculative, architecture is inseparable from theoretical discourse. It is even theoretical when built. Polemic transforms a building into 'architecture.'...Architects necessarily leave a trail of manifestos, journals, articles and books."

While Wigley's position has not lost its power to provoke, it is nonetheless true that many of the traits that Wigley attributes to Constant could as well be discerned in the Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti, who not only became an architect only after (and as a result of) the production of his treatise but also insisted on models as the architectural mode of representation par excellence. According to Wigley, in Constant's work "the architectural model is what appears when art is discarded." Yet five centuries before Constant, Alberti also argued that models best avoid painterly representation and most tellingly epitomize and manifest the appearance of architecture. Of course, there are obvious differences between the situationist and the Renaissance architects. Alberti ultimately did construct buildings that are now firmly established as canonical works. Constant arrived at an entirely different conclusion by returning to painting and declining the necessity to "build" what his models and the New Babylon project already exemplified.

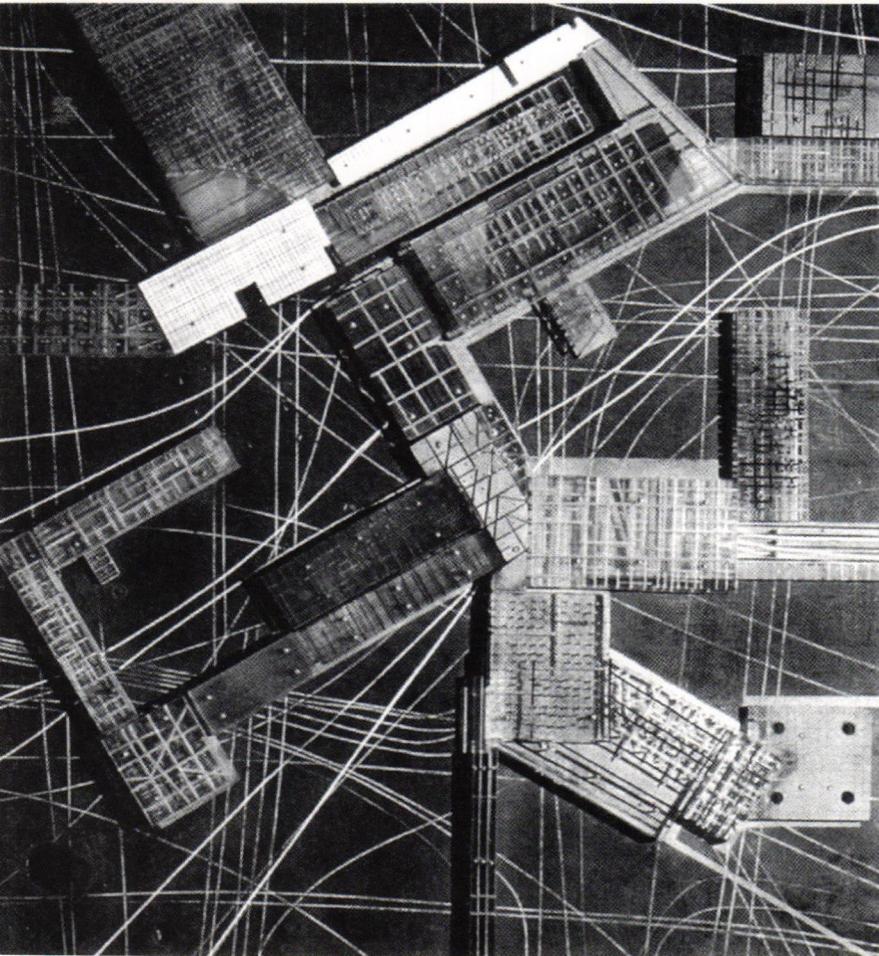
There is another powerful analogy between the two architects. While Alberti codified and formulated the identity of the Renaissance architect, Constant constructed a persona that Wigley identifies as the "hyper-architect—more an architect than any architect." Surprisingly, though, it is not the models and the carefully constructed photographs of them that best reveal Constant's architectural role. It is his lectures, "another key trait of the architect's persona," that (unlike the models and their reproductions that seamlessly enact and represent his project) reiterate the problematic gap between aims and works, or polemic and products, that marks situationist history: "The key moment of each lecture was the transition from the theory to the slides." So even as Constant's self-presentation "appropriates and challenges disciplinary expectations," his performances are not free of the symptoms of the situationist predicament. Wigley advocates scrutinizing the project of this situationist architect not because Constant offers solutions or techniques for contemporary practice, but because such scrutiny "might help to reconsider contemporary work. It is not just a matter of looking back at the formal strategies or the theoretical position from a contemporary perspective so that current discourse can see what it would like to see in its own past. Rather it is a matter of looking more closely to see what the discourse has never wanted to see."

This is where Wigley leaves us near the end of his essay, contemplating Constant's own visions of what even he did not want to see in New Babylon. At this point, Wigley observes that near the end of his fifteen-year project, as Constant gradually

returned to painting, the architect increasingly placed shadowy human figures in his representations of New Babylon. Whereas “the absence of human figures in the first representations was polemical” (it would be preposterous for the designer to predict the forms of inhabitation in an unrealizable world), by the late 1960s vaguely human bodies began to appear in Constant’s work. Wigley writes that these figures, which resembled “stains,” do not represent an optimistic and futuristic vision of liquid desires or transparent beings but, in fact, reveal that “the space of desire is finally understood as a space of conflict,” fraught with “ongoing violence.”

Wigley makes no reference to psychoanalytic theory, yet his conclusions seem to follow those of Jacques Lacan, whose rereading of Sigmund Freud found some of its most brilliant moments in his elaborations on vision, space, identity, and stains. In Lacanian space, what one wishes to see and what one wants never to see are two sides of the same vision. For Wigley as for Lacan, the effect of the situationist city, or New Babylon, is not embodied in the identity or the work of the architect. Rather, “it is realized in its effect on others.” There are not only two, but many, situationist cities.

Constant, *Groep sectoren*
(*Group of Sectors*), 1959.
(from *Constant's New Babylon*)



At virtually the same time that the SI and its former members were theorizing and projecting the city of the XS, a remarkably parallel discourse on architectural space was emerging in New York. More than any other writer or artist of that time, art critic Michael Fried (perhaps inadvertently) articulated and established the terms of that discourse. He did this by vehemently attacking the artists who would come to be known as minimalists. Like the situationists, minimalist artists rejected the rationale of “modernism” (especially the modes of visual abstraction that defined painting) and suggested that artists should fabricate objects that engaged the individual at the scale of the body and build their work as interventions in, or alternatives to, urban space. On the one hand, this meant engaging and manipulating the interiority of the white-walled gallery, and on the other, it meant installing or performing artworks in the landscape. This work not only proposed a new identity for the artist, but reconfigured the relationships among the art object, the observer, and the situation they inhabit. In other words, as with the SI, the minimalists devised their practices as both a critique of “modernist” artistic norms and a creative engagement with the limits of architecture.

While their stated motives were by no means as overtly political as those of the SI, the minimalists were no less ideological or polemical. It was precisely this aspect of their practice that provoked the vehement attack by self-proclaimed modernists like Fried, who has edited a collection of his criticism, titled *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews*. Covering the period from 1961 to 1977, and taking its title from his notorious and much discussed 1967 essay, “Art and Objecthood,” this new collection of essays (all published previously in journals such as *Art International*, *Arts Magazine*, and *Artforum*) does not offer any new evidence of architecture’s place in Fried’s carefully argued polemic against minimalism and in support of “modernist painting and sculpture.” Nor does the long introduction Fried wrote for this collection discuss architecture for this occasion, at least not explicitly. In his eagerness to revise and redirect the reception of his own legacy, however, at least one passage in the introduction seems to imply that architecture does indeed play a role in his understanding of modernist painting and sculpture. Architecture and space are integral to Fried’s intimate, yet nearly incredible, account of his first encounter with the sculpture of Anthony Caro, the single sculptor he championed. He recalls “climbing a maze of streets in Hampstead, England,” to arrive at “a gate” and then pass “through it into the courtyard beyond,” where he “was alone with two sculptures for several minutes before Caro came out of the house.”

In that time and in those spaces, Fried realized he was viewing some of “the most original and powerful sculptures I had ever seen, that *Midday* in particular was nothing less than a masterpiece.” It would be Fried’s nature to argue, however, that to attribute significance to the temporal and spatial experience surrounding his encounter with Caro’s work is, quite literally, to make much ado about nothing.

Of course, he would be right: a single passage proves (almost) nothing. Yet there are other, more significant passages in his work in which architecture makes an appearance. Thus, by collecting most of his criticism in a single volume, Fried should at the very least assist a renewed investigation into the ways in which architecture (disguised in Fried’s writings as “literalism” or “theatricality”) plays a key role in his argument. That is, by insisting that “art” must divest itself of any “literalist” or “theatrical” concerns, Fried rejects the aesthetic significance of numerous conventions that are “proper” to the architectural discipline and present in minimalism: for example, “spatial recession”; “scale”; “duration”; and, most important, “objecthood,” which for Fried suggests not only a simple awareness of the physical “presence” of an artwork, but also an awareness of one’s own body when “beholding” a work of art. Fried’s consistent, but not total, avoidance of architecture as a term in his polemic is fundamental to his claims of greatness regarding the paintings of Kenneth Noland or Caro’s sculptures. For instance, when Fried explicitly mentions architecture in two short essays on Caro, it is only in order to insist—against all the evidence—that while his work seems to “explore possibilities for sculpture in various concepts and experiences which one would think belonged today only to architecture,” Caro does this “only by rendering it anti-literal or (what I mean by) abstract.”

It is in this negative sense that architecture is fundamental to Fried’s criticism. That is, his lack of interest in architecture is a tacit denial of the obvious: minimalist practice makes discernable the inescapable alliance between art objects and the sites in which they are displayed. This dialectic of refusal and engagement with site or context is a fundamental aspect of minimalism, of which much of the recent “minimal” architecture remains unaware. A greater awareness, however, might emerge through understanding the architectural and spatial implications of Fried’s apt—if hostile—substitution of “literalism” for the more pervasive and misleading term, “minimalism.” Despite his derision of minimalism, Fried’s identification of a lineage that emphasizes the literal character of the art object—a lineage that begins long before the 1960s in the work of early modernist artists



Constant, *Ontwaakt, verworpenen der aarde* (*Arise Ye Workers from Your Slumbers*), 1912.
(from *Constant's New Babylon*)

whose formal devices could be considered proto-minimalist, such as Constantin Brancusi, Paul Klee, Vladimir Tatlin, or Marcel Duchamp—offers a historically derived alternative to the pervasive application of the less robust notions of minimalism or simplicity that have been invoked to characterize a wide variety of recent architecture.

Thus, Fried’s book has appeared at an opportune time for architects. Now that the vogue of minimal design is at or past its peak, this book of twenty-seven essays may facilitate a discourse to critically reassess the supposed affinities between the legacy of minimalist art and recent trends in architecture. Of course, the promise of such discourse is not what motivated this book. Rather, as Fried explains in his introduction, it was a desire to shift attention from a single, notorious essay and place it among his prior and subsequent writings, including his three later books on art historical topics, works that Fried describes as “an account of the evolution of a central tradition within French painting from...the mid-1750s to the emergence of modernism...in the 1860s and 1870s. The core issue for that tradition concerned the relation between painting and beholder, which is to say that it was a version of the issue I had invoked in ‘Art and Objecthood’ when I accused Minimalist art of being theatrical.” Despite Fried’s effort to correct what he clearly sees as a misunderstanding and simplification of his interests, it is not likely that many readers—however sympathetic—will agree with Fried’s self-assessment or find themselves newly convinced by his critical arguments. It is likely, however, that this book will provide easily accessible material for a flurry of historical revisions of Fried’s role as the midwife of minimalism and the self-appointed arbiter of its legacy. ■



The Visual Culture Reader

edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff
 Routledge, 1998
 560 pp., \$85.00; \$27.99 (paper)

An Introduction to Visual Culture

by Nicholas Mirzoeff
 Routledge, 1999
 272 pp., \$70.00; \$19.99 (paper)

Looking at Visual Culture

by **Sandy Isenstadt**

One undeniable aspect of our turn-of-the-century world is that it comes to us in great part visually—as a series of images. Vision, surely, was never a minor sense, but so much today is directed toward the eyes; so much is postulated as only, or as primarily, visual phenomena, regardless of whether it ever existed for other senses; and so much that was once invisible has been by now powerfully pictured. At the same time, material objects—like buildings—that once were known largely in real time and as actual space may now endure more vividly, more influentially, as representations. In fact, deciding whether an image is a faithful record of a moment in time and a presence in space or “merely” an imagined world etched in light on a cheap, plastic disc is getting harder and harder to do. And, while an event may emerge first via the visual media, it can have significant effects in the fully sensed world, especially when what’s seen and what is real are tied so closely.

Few would argue that visual media—film, video, television, photography, computers, books, periodicals, and all sorts of toys and ordinary appliances that rely on screens—are part of the daily fabric of life across much of the globe. Images pouring from visual media are the immaterial foundation for so much of contemporary life, including as a matrix for the presentation of information, for the maintenance of personal and business relations, for the conduct of government,

and for the exercise of leisure. So familiar is all of this that such heralding of our visual and spectacularized society elicits barely a yawn from the general public.

If this describes a world familiar to readers, then it should also be clear that there is a need to investigate how visual media alter or, even, construct cultural life. Certain sorts of images—such as easel paintings, or specific easel paintings—or even particular parts of specific easel paintings, have received over the years enormous scholarly attention. Yet the sheer number of images; the widening spectrum of visual experiences; the increasing visualization of aspects of all disciplines, from medicine to economics; indeed, the emergence of a cultural matrix of visuality, are only now being examined.

The very ubiquity of visual media has led to a common belief that ever greater visual transmission of information has been at the expense of other senses; other perceptual modes dwindle and, as a result, our contacts with the world are attenuated, even as the number of media outlets increases. As Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., said of photography in the middle of the nineteenth century, appearance is stripped from the substance underneath; surface is peeled from matter by the solvent of thin light.

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“Visual culture” is the still-emerging term that describes those aspects of a culture that center on the visual presentation of information or that carry an especially powerful visual charge. The term may also describe a specific culture, such as modern Western civilization, that is itself increasingly oriented to visual phenomena. Various academic departments are gradually dedicating resources to address the mechanisms of social seeing and the cultural construction of vision. Anthropologists, for example, have produced a number of significant studies of visual anthropology—there is even a journal by that name, as well as a Society for Visual Anthropology founded on a cross-cultural perspective embracing visual theories, symbolic forms, and interactions among different modes of human communication. Representational conventions in archaeology, to take another example, are the subject of Charles Goodwin’s “Professional Vision,” a seminal essay that appeared in *American Anthropologist* in 1994.¹

Sociologists, too, look at viewing practices and consider how looking at images in different venues affects a whole range of human thought and behavior. They consider not only how media influence the social sphere but also how the study of societies is influenced by the media, as in Elizabeth Chaplin’s 1994 book, *Sociology and Visual Representation*, and in Michael Lynch’s article, “Pictures of Nothing? Visual Construals in Social Theory,” published in 1991 in the journal *Sociological Theory*.²

Historians of science also look at how observations are represented and at the role played by images in the formation of scientific theory. *Representation in Scientific Practice*, edited by Lynch and Steve Woolgar, brings together a range of such studies. In addition, Martin Rudwick has described how images are made and interpreted in the fields of paleontology and geology, while Bruno Latour, as part of his larger project to demonstrate how science is constructed socially, inverts scientific reliance on explanatory diagrams to propose “socio-technical” maps of how empirical findings turn into “facts” in the first place. James Elkins also writes extensively on a broad range of “nonart images” that are nevertheless expressive and carry epistemological weight. His essay, “Schemata,” for instance, in the recently released *Domain of Images*, goes a long way toward establishing a basis for the detailed study of graphic conventions in scientific as well as artistic disciplines.³

Visual images like maps and charts are now receiving historical attention appropriate to their enormous influence on thought. At the same time, graphic designers continue to conceive of new ways to represent abstract concepts, as in Edward Tufte’s admirable books. With advances in the computational interpretation of visual data,

cognitive psychologists, too, have increasingly focused on visual matters. Philip Johnson-Laird, for example, has looked at a variety of ways that knowledge itself is bound up in specialized sorts of images, like diagrams and graphs, and also at the ways vision is represented in language. There is, in fact, a large body of work examining how images affect rational discourse, and, vice versa, words referring to the visual world appear regularly, including in journals with titles like *Word & Image* and *Visible Language*. Subfields blossom, like semasiography and subgraphemics, which consider the pictorial aspects of signs and the narrative aspects of pictures, respectively.⁴

Art historians, of course, have always traded in images, although that field has historically been marked by a concern for art self-consciously produced by the artist. Art history is further guided by a web of historiographical issues that spring from this traditional focus on a set of objects and a class of agents. The arena claimed by media studies already includes new forms of image transmission and has likewise produced scholars interested in visual culture. Often, however, these scholars tend to study specific media, with, for example, analyses of filmmaking techniques or iconographic readings that focus

opposite

Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Buenos Aires*, 1994. Performance artists Fusco and Gómez-Peña locked themselves in a cage to satirize Western ideas about indigenous peoples. Their project is described in *The Visual Culture Reader* and *An Introduction to Visual Culture*.

(from *The Visual Culture Reader*)

below

Eugène Atget’s photograph *Au Tambour, 63 quai de la tournelle*, 1908. In *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Nicholas Mirzoeff claims that the rise of computer imaging and the ability to manipulate the photograph through digital means signal the demise of photography.

(from *An Introduction to Visual Culture*)

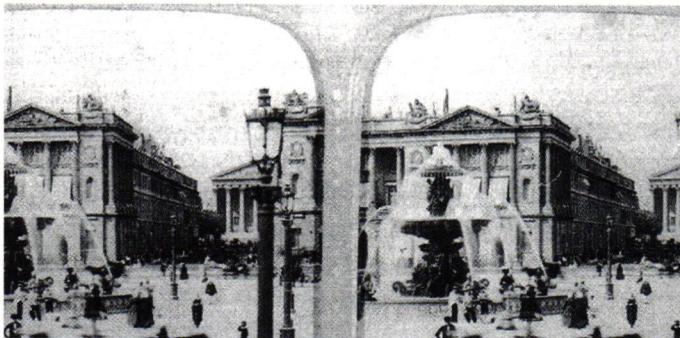


Two virtual-reality machines of the nineteenth century. In *The Visual Culture Reader*, Geoffrey Batchen argues that virtual reality is one of the "fundamental conditions of modernity itself," whether it is provided by a stereoscope or a computer monitor.

(Top image is from *The Visual Culture Reader*; bottom, from *An Introduction to Visual Culture*)



more on the visual construction of narrative through symbolic objects and actions, rather than address the sheer ubiquity of the visual. More theoretical studies, most famously Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, assert that social relationships—commercial, personal, and otherwise—are based in images that have been created for exchange.⁵ Even the most intimate of relations is subject to visual *media-ation*.

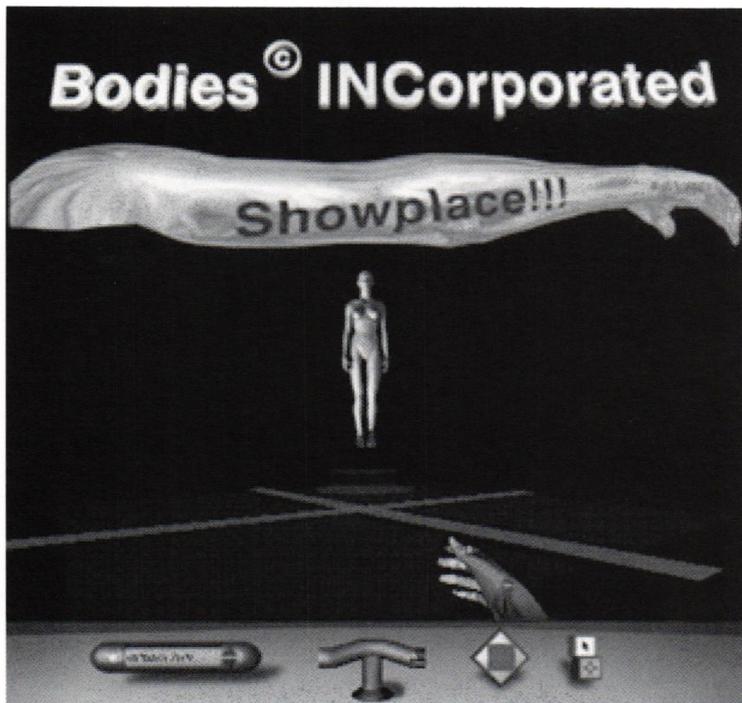


The study of visual culture nevertheless emerges out of all these varied fields and in productive conflict with usual preoccupations of different disciplines. In 1996, for example, the art-theory journal *October* took the unprecedented, nearly empirical step of sending a "visual culture questionnaire" to "a range of art and architecture historians, film theorists, literary critics, and artists." The editors were motivated, they wrote, by the "uses and abuses" of visual culture and by a fear that the aesthetic potential of new visual technologies would be submerged by a flood of mindless commodity images. Explicitly focused on the theorization of avant-garde artistic practices, and serving a spectrum of readers, the editors felt they held a particular stake in the definition and direction of visual culture studies. Thus, the journal sought reactions to the claim that the study of visual culture is (1) anthropological in method, (2) radically interdisciplinary and thus conceptually powerful, (3) based on a notion of disembodied images, and (4) simply following up on current changes in the actual production

of visual culture. The responses to this questionnaire, published in the summer 1996 issue, were as varied as one might imagine. Many respondents grappled with questions of disciplinary boundaries, while others calmly asserted that visual culture, as Susan Buck-Morss put it, "entails the liquidation of art as we have known it," where artists yield to "camera women, video/film editors, city planners, set designers for rock stars, tourism packagers, marketing consultants, political consultants, television producers, commodity designers, layout persons, and cosmetic surgeons."⁶ How, Buck-Morss asks, do we talk meaningfully about the visual world we already occupy? What do today's students need to know about the world they will inherit?

Visual culture studies should provide tools for dealing with visual media, for critically negotiating environments and practices that are saturated with or entirely dependent on visual media. Such studies would need, on the one hand, to help individuals simply to recognize how thickly layered their world is with visual cues, especially as that layering is more and more naturalized, that is, taken for granted. On the other hand, visual culture studies must provide intellectual skills to help individuals excel in such a world by being critical of their own culture. How much meaning or ideology (in the sense of a set of unquestioned conventions that reinforce already existing social categories) is embedded in how things are organized visually? How does the way the world looks relate to how it works? Posed this way, and in the context of an increasingly visual society, might visual culture studies grow enough in content and importance to take the place of traditional liberal arts programs? Can one imagine, then, along the lines of a "great books" program, a course of study that charted a curricular path running, as Buck-Morss hinted, from Willem de Kooning's *Woman* series of paintings to advertisements for soap, from the history of anatomy to "fashion surgery" in Beverly Hills, from the films of Wim Wenders to Rodney King, from the visual analysis of a sneeze to the representation of landscapes in museums of natural history, from the panoptic gaze to gay pornography, from dioramas to cyberspace, from postcards of Africa to snapshots of viruses?

Precisely such topics, and many more, are collected in *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff and published by Routledge in 1998. In many ways, the book is a revelation: many of us are familiar with these subjects to various extents and could come across a great many of them in a single day without any discomfort, or, at least, any visual discomfort. Especially for those in design professions, where synthetic skills are paramount, negotiating visual content and crossing representational venues, even assimilating alternative visual strategies are all in a day's work.



The insight that the collected work in *The Visual Culture Reader* offers is how very constructed such things are; that images are laden with unintended content, organized by unspoken agendas; and that depicted objects, images, and settings propose categories for cognition that are often internalized beneath the level of rational discourse and conscious observation, or that indirectly reinforce assumptions that might otherwise be found repugnant.

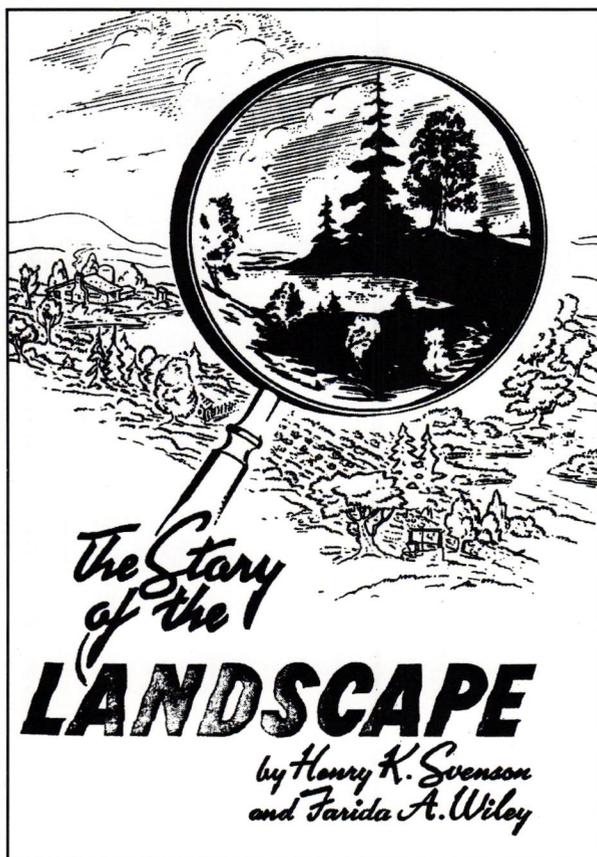
The revelation, then, that stems from the various essays in *The Visual Culture Reader* is that we move within a visual matrix that not only tints what we see, but that begins to shape how we operate, that subtly guides what we think, that ends, inevitably, in defining who we are. The essays in *The Visual Culture Reader*—many of which are excerpted from larger studies—reveal that we reckon in visual units without fully understanding which social relationships are being measured. The essays thus explore not only the visual realm, but the myriad dimensions affected by the visual, from which it is hard to exclude much of anything. Indeed, the book's greatest contribution seems to be not its range of subject matter, but the understanding that builds, essay after essay, that our very identity is shaped by the things we see. In this sense, the book's subject is the construction of subjectivity itself, with few discernable limits on possible topics and encompassing the varied approaches and disciplinary backgrounds of its contributors.

Michel Foucault's essay, "Of Other Spaces," for example, sketches changes in historical conceptions of space in order to characterize our present condition as an experience of "juxtaposition." The term juxtaposition refers to the simultaneous awareness of near and far, as opposed to an outmoded unfolding of space through time. Space, as described in physiological terms, is some combination of vision and kinetic sensation, and Foucault implies that vision has in the twentieth century overwhelmed motion.

As Foucault historicized conceptions of space, Jonathan Crary proposes in his essay, "The Camera Obscura and Its Subject," that vision may also be historicized. An excerpt from his seminal 1990 book, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, considers in particular the camera obscura as a model of seeing that has served both art and science since the Renaissance.⁷ It is a model that involves a world of objects, defined by their ability to reflect light and by the impartial observers upon whose retinas that light falls.

The control of visible light is, in Anne Friedberg's contribution, "The Mobilized and Virtual Gaze in Modernity: Flâneur/Flâneuse," a key to understanding some pleasures and punishments of the nineteenth century, ranging from the panorama to the panopticon. For Friedberg, such devices become steps along the way to the creation of virtual mobility, a sense of motion gained by vision alone, which presupposes both a visual adventure and a stationary viewer to whom the adventure is given. Mary-Louise Pratt demonstrates the connection between stories of seeing new lands and the very real enterprise of imperialism in her essay, "From the Victoria Nyanza to the Sheraton San Salvador." In this excerpt from Pratt's 1992 *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, British travel narratives are far from being disinterested descriptions of cultures and places, and instead set up a conceptual infrastructure for colonization, a visual validation for the subjugation of other peoples.⁸ To her credit, Pratt also dwells on ways in which such travel narratives were contemporaneously satirized and exposed as self-serving.

The Bodies©INCorporated website, designed by Victoria Vesna, allows the user to create a new body, including choice of gender, skin texture, age, and sexual orientation. Reviewer Sandy Isenstadt asks whether new studies of visual culture can transform rather than reinforce current understandings of the categories of gender and race. The website can be found at www.bodiesinc.ucla.edu. (from *An Introduction to Visual Culture*)



The cover of the guidebook for the Felix Warburg Man and Nature Hall at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. In the 1940s, museum director Alfred Parr developed innovative methods of displaying visual images to explain the scientific principles that formed the ordinary landscape.

(from *The Visual Culture Reader*)

The very tension between what is virtual and what is real is, according to Geoffrey Batchen's piece, "Spectres of Cyberspace," central to the construction of a modern subjectivity. He reviews various instruments of virtuality, from the stereoscope to cyberspace, to suggest that what's "real" in our own time is a product of matter and media. Batchen claims that virtual reality is "one of the fundamental conditions of modernity itself." Furthermore, he states that one of the activities that comprise a modern sense of self is humankind's preoccupation with resolving the difference between the virtual and the physical.

To gain a sense of the scale of this book, one need only learn that the five essays described above form just one subsection, "Virtual Spaces," of one section, titled "Virtuality: Virtual Bodies, Virtual Spaces"—which is one of six sections altogether in the book. In total, *The Visual Culture Reader* contains forty-four separate contributions, not including section introductions. And the whole lot of them has not one but three introductory essays. Phew!

The task of editing such a volume is unusually precarious. Apart from the binding, what holds such a text together? How does one define a field of study that, as editors of *October* supposed, is premised on exceeding the usual disciplinary fixations? On the other hand, how can one delimit a new set of investigations while also guaranteeing

enough conceptual space for the field's continuing development? How does one circumscribe an inquiry without constraining it? How can an editor claim the significance of selected texts without at the same time proposing a canon—an act Mirzoeff finds inimical to visual culture studies? But, if there are no limits on the objects of study or the approaches to study, then how can an inquiry have any form? And without form, how can it have meaning, since meaning is always and only posed in form?

In both *The Visual Culture Reader* and its companion volume, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Mirzoeff ventures a definition of visual culture that is an excellent place to start to understand the field. Visual culture, he writes in *The Visual Culture Reader*, responds to "the postmodern globalization of the visual as everyday life"; while in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, he states that "Visual culture is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology. By visual technology, I mean any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil painting to television and the Internet." The value of such a definition is that the study of visual culture is thus situated in time—the postmodern—and it manages a balance between the simultaneous needs for order and possibility: the idea of technologically mediated visual events allows for a universe of phenomena that, at the same time, maintains a set of conceptual boundaries. In other words, Mirzoeff here describes a direction without determining a destination.

As concise and open as this definition is, a major flaw of *The Visual Culture Reader*, and *An Introduction to Visual Culture* as well, is that Mirzoeff operates with other definitions of visual culture. Some of these definitions are explicit, but some are not, and often they conflict with one another. Most commonly, the very term being introduced—visual culture—shifts in these texts among a set of everyday practices, common or esoteric strategies for visual interpretation, the culture or subculture that employs such strategies, and the self-consciously academic discipline that studies them.

One of Mirzoeff's definitions of visual culture reads: "It is part of an emerging body of post-disciplinary academic endeavors," which makes it "a tactic, not an academic discipline. It is a fluid interpretive structure, centered on understanding the response to visual media of both individuals and groups....[I]t hopes to reach beyond the traditional confines of the university to interact with people's everyday lives." Another version appears in the next sentence in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*: "One of the most striking features

of the new visual culture is the growing tendency to visualize things that are not in themselves visual." In the first version, visual culture is an academic endeavor. In the second version, visual culture is the implied matrix for everyday life, which Mirzoeff goes on to illustrate with the example of a truck driver rapidly and seamlessly processing complex visual cues. The idea of visual culture as an interpretive framework—"It is a means of interpreting the world visually"—can also appear on its own in Mirzoeff's writing, though it is often unclear whether it is an unspoken framework for everyday experience; or, for academic explanations; the territory itself or a preliminary map. This is akin to confusing the study of literacy with the act of reading, or, for that matter, ornithology with flight. A claim could be made that shifting definitions are Mirzoeff's very strategy for bridging life inside the university and "people's everyday lives," but this strategy is not explored as such and, in any case, would need to be explicit about the university's own imperatives and preoccupations. Instead of using provisional definitions to advantage, the text ends up wavering between them, blurring distinctions rather than sharpening them.

Mirzoeff claims that the definition of visual culture "comes from the questions it asks and issues it seeks to raise," but the text instead overflows with pronouncements and conclusions that try to resolve intractable issues. He writes, for example, "The pixelated image has made photography unbearable." Mirzoeff means us to take this statement literally, since paparazzi drove Princess Diana to her death (Diana's death is the subject of the final chapter), and metaphorically, since photography has become sublime, as contemporary artists show us.

Elsewhere in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, we read that, due to the computer, "we can say that photography is dead" and that its death occurred in the early 1980s. I can follow the point about photography theoretically, or perhaps just rhetorically, but I am left wondering what to do with the still-growing photofinishing industry, which prints millions of pictures each day, or with the hundreds of slides that I show in lectures every week.

In the world of everyday experience, which is the field Mirzoeff claims to be concerned with (another of his definitions: "In the present intensely visual age, everyday life is visual culture"), photography is alive and well and multivalent. Having dramatized the death of photography, Mirzoeff clarifies that he is referring to photography's status as a reliable index of reality. But influencing subjectivity is just one of photography's roles: how does photography's shift away from being a reliable barometer of reality play out across

the many practices in which photography is used? Does photography shift from being a document to being a catalyst or stimulant to social action? What other modes of representation can be used to portray the real if photography can no longer do so? (Were courts of law really unaware that photographs could be staged? You wouldn't know it from the text at hand, but legal scholars have for some time debated the status of photographs as evidence, with mixed opinions.) How, like the everyday truck driver, do we balance all sorts of appearances with specific, present needs in the intuitive calculus of everyday life? Are the pictures of me as a baby more reliable than the ones I took of my own kids after 1982, even though I am a stranger to myself in my own pictures? And what about the routinely real effects of fictitious images, such as those described, for instance, by Anne Higonnet in her work on photographs and child pornography?⁹ Rather than weighing the richly ambivalent modes of photography in the present day and then posing questions for all of us to bring to our subsequent encounters with pictures, Mirzoeff leaves us with overreaching declarations and surprisingly tidy temporal demarcations. His declarations seem to run counter to the larger polemics of visual culture studies, which call for a catholic approach and an engagement with daily social practices.

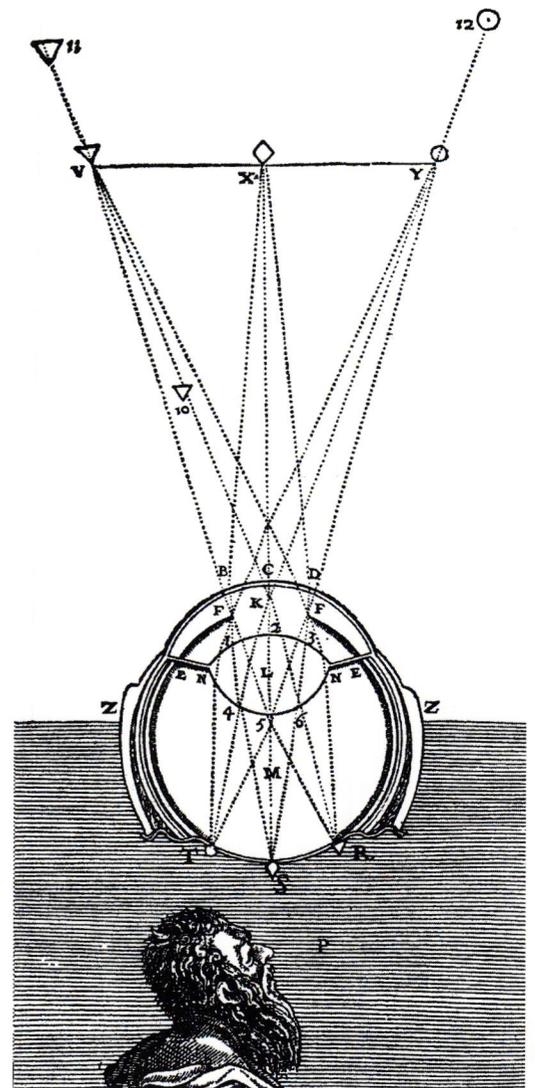
The problem here is not that he includes too much theory but that he presents too many unquestioned conclusions that are ultimately drawn from standard preselected theoretical channels. *The Visual Culture Reader*, for example, invites comparison with the 1993 *The Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Simon During and also published by Routledge.¹⁰ During lays out, on the first page, two distinguishing features of cultural studies: a concentration on the social construction of subjectivity and a commitment to socially engaged analysis—that is, scholarship with an eye toward the ways in which social inequities are created and maintained. During manages to frame the essays in *The Cultural Studies Reader* clearly without limiting their theoretical range. If anything, his concise introduction facilitates the reader's ability to grasp the principles that bring together (what philosophers of history refer to as the process of "colligation") the particular events or practices that are addressed in the essays.

Diagram of the eye.
(from *The Visual Culture Reader*)

Mirzoeff shares During's concern for socially engaged analysis, but this position is implied rather than explicit. Thus, in *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, the reader encounters the notion that the study of visual culture focuses on "places of resistance in postmodern everyday life from the consumer's point of view," but is left to guess who, exactly, is resisting; whether "resistance" is intended or even experienced as such; what is being resisted; who is applying the pressure; and to what ends. Although Mirzoeff states that visual culture is a postmodern response, we learn also that Plato, for whom vision was a powerful metaphor, harbored a "hostility to visual culture," and his view remains to influence the present day. The differences among a cutoff of funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities, the burning of books, the validation of philosophy, or an academic turf battle are all gathered up by Mirzoeff implicitly and without differentiation as the exercise of social control and the political subordination of one or another vaguely identified group. My objection to this approach is that gathering up such vastly different individuals and enterprises as examples of oppressors of visual culture trivializes both historical specificity and cultural differences and undermines my trust in Mirzoeff as a guide to the literature of visual culture.

Mirzoeff's polemic that visual studies should be engaged with everyday life is troubled by his subscription to familiar theoretical landmarks, like Michel de Certeau's theory of a "society of control," which largely is focused on the actions of elites. Further, occasional conspiratorial phrases, like "science was not content to rest here" (after color blindness testing was adopted to make rail travel safer), obscure his search for constructions of subjectivity by granting intentional agency to an abstraction and thus diverting attention from individuals and their often ambiguous reasons for behavior.

And finally, Mirzoeff has a tendency toward overreaching conclusions, like the aforementioned death of photography. This predilection starts to stifle the reader's critical faculties rather than awaken them. The problem, again, is that whereas the essays on visual culture included in *The Visual Culture Reader* deconstruct otherwise unvisited conventions, the ready acceptance of theoretical pronouncements tends to naturalize current conjectural conventions; that is, it dictates theoretical destinations from the start.



If, as Mirzoeff claims, visual culture is a new paradigm both in scholarship and in everyday life, then one would expect new social categories to emerge from it and to transform other, more standard, categories of gender, race, and sexual orientation, rather than simply reproduce them. Notwithstanding visual media's power to reinforce existing social relations, what new classes of citizen emerge from our visual culture? Can we imagine categories of visual phenomena that aim toward the documentary, a claim to represent the real? What about media and images that facilitate mass production, or that aid cognition by visual means, or that facilitate the pursuit of leisure? Does it make sense to revive "the beautiful" to differentiate those images that are either intended or received as being highly aestheticized, that are objects of attention? What about a place for the use of visual-culture studies for analysis of large-scale objects, like environments? Real estate developers often link the sale of hundreds of units of housing to their successful use of symbolic cues in buildings and neighborhoods, and such developments remain on the surface of the earth for decades. Whole built landscapes, in this sense,

are as much a visual-symbolic infrastructure as they are a functional one. How would the use of a visual-studies methodology differ in the analysis of such environments from that of more established fields, such as cultural studies or, for that matter, area or regional studies?

The use of "visual culture" as a catchall by many scholars is illustrated nicely by the Smithsonian Institution Press's recent "American Studies" catalog. The catalog contains three headings: "20th Century," "Visual Culture," and "Also of Interest." Visual culture, it seems, is asserted everywhere, but its conceptual structures still want for adequate theorization. Since we know that visuality also encompasses what is not seen as well as what is seen, how can "visual culture" be distinguished from "everything studies?" Because *The Visual Culture Reader* contains no visual categories in the organization of subject matter, the reader will invariably question whether there are any boundaries to visual culture studies at all.

Mirzoeff's reliance on familiar theoretical landmarks bypasses the most promising and pivotal position from which to study visual culture: architecture and the urban environment—the setting for and the perceptual matrix within which visual media are encountered. Describing the book not written is never fair criticism, but it seems that many writers on visual culture end up dedicating most of their attention to the usual suspects: art, film, photography, video. Yet Mirzoeff largely overlooks the visual environment as a whole.

Some essays in *The Visual Culture Reader* do address specialized environments, but an area of scholarship like cultural-landscape studies is ignored, even though landscapes are regulated more and more in terms of visual traits. The whole history of the visual regulation of landscapes and cities, with roots in law and real estate practice, as well as in architectural and urban design, simply does not appear in the two books by Mirzoeff.

The spaces of everyday life, complete with the regular influence of the media, are best understood through an analysis of landscape because of its environmental scope, its reliance on materiality simultaneous with its assimilation through movement and perception, and its ability both to transport and to ground those it would enclose.

As a visual environment, architecture may endure longer or in different ways than the images that range over its surfaces. Architecture will, in any case, influence how those images are received, in the same way that images alter not just our reading of architecture but our use of it as well. Not exactly a medium in the usual sense of the word,

architecture is nevertheless a technology for transmitting information across specific distances, as Robert Venturi observed in Las Vegas.

This emphasis on architecture theoretically reintroduces the notion of boundaries and nested spheres of viewership to the field of visual studies, which engages the fact that visual media are not just ephemeral images but whole physical infrastructures, a common omission, again, of much current writing on visual culture.

Visual culture is best studied at just this intersection of the material and the perceptual. Students of this still-emerging field should grow dizzy as they learn of the complexity of the visual world they inhabit; for example, from architecture, landscape design, and urbanism to industrial and product design, idealized bodies and clothing, video, television, film, advertising and merchandising, food and dining, visual forms in music and sports, politics, the military, styles for genders, ethnicities, and stages of life. At the same time, they should be astounded with even an eight year old's ability to deftly negotiate this world with staggering ease. If Mirzoeff is right in emphasizing the social changes wrought by visual media and their increasing ubiquity—and I believe he is—then the stakes for architecture and urban life could not be higher. ■

Notes

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| <p>1 Charles Goodwin, "Professional Vision," <i>American Anthropologist</i> 96 (September 1994): 606–33.</p> <p>2 Elizabeth Chaplin, <i>Sociology and Visual Representation</i> (London: Routledge, 1994); Michael Lynch, "Pictures of Nothing? Visual Construals in Social Theory," <i>Sociological Theory</i> 9 (spring 1991): 1–21.</p> <p>3 Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, eds., <i>Representation in Scientific Practice</i> (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990); Martin Rudwick, <i>Scenes from Deep Time: Early Pictorial Representations of the Prehistoric World</i> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bruno Latour, Philippe Mauguin, and Geneviève Teil, "A Note on Socio-Technical Graphs," <i>Social Studies of Science</i> 22 (1992): 33–57; James Elkins, "Art History and Images that Are Not Art," <i>Art Bulletin</i> 77 (December 1995): 553–71.</p> <p>4 Edward Tufte's publications include <i>Envisioning Information</i> (Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press, 1990); <i>The Visual Display of Quantitative Information</i> (Cheshire, Conn.: Graphics Press, 1983). Philip Johnson-Laird's studies of drawings and graphs are part</p> | <p>of his more general studies of mental representations. On this subject, see Philip Johnson-Laird and George A. Miller, <i>Language and Perception</i> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).</p> <p>5 Guy Debord, <i>La Société du spectacle</i> (Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1967).</p> <p>6 "Visual Culture Questionnaire," <i>October</i> 77 (summer 1996): 29–31.</p> <p>7 Jonathan Crary, <i>Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century</i> (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).</p> <p>8 Mary-Louise Pratt, <i>Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation</i> (London: Routledge, 1992).</p> <p>9 Anne Higonnet, "Conclusions Based on Observation," <i>Yale Journal of Criticism</i> 9 (spring 1996): 1–17.</p> <p>10 Simon During, ed., <i>The Cultural Studies Reader</i> (London: Routledge, 1993).</p> |
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Towards the Same Museum

by Marjorie Schwarzer

Designing today's museums is a baffling enterprise for architects and museum professionals.¹ New museum-building projects raise a number of challenges. Should the building or its contents dominate? Should the collection's themes and strengths influence the style of the building, or should the building make a statement of its own? Is the ideal museum a neutral box or a sculpture in its own right? Does the museum need to have an iconic presence in a community to give stature to what's being shown? How can a design be appealing enough to both entice donors and attract mass audiences? How flexible should the design be in order to accommodate different uses? Who is the museum for?

More than 150 major museum building, renovation, and expansion projects are under way or in the planning stages in the United States alone, and museums remain a prized commission for architects.² As architect Susanna Sirefman proclaims, "winning a large museum commission is perceived as an instant claim to fame for most architects."³ Architects covet museum commissions because they give them status among the art and architecture communities. Or, as architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable has noted, contemporary art museums "legitimize architecture as art."⁴ Architects look at the varied prototypes for museums and envision a commission for such a structure as a haven for free and flexible experimentation. The program of the art museum comes most closely to the ultimate goal of architecture: providing a heightened cognitive, visual, and sensual experience. If art is about wonderment and provocation, so too is architecture. Art museum commissions provide visionary architects with perhaps their most fanciful opportunities to sculpt with light, color, and materials. They allow architects to reshape art viewing and to stretch and compress the viewer's interaction with art objects.

Marjorie Schwarzer is the chair of the Department of Museum Studies at John F. Kennedy University in Orinda, California. She has held senior positions at Chicago Children's Museum and Boston Children's Museum, and has coordinated large-scale exhibition projects at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago and the MIT Museum in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She is a frequent contributor to *Museum News*.

Towards a New Museum

by Victoria Newhouse
Monacelli Press, 1998
288 pp., \$45.00

Art Museums into the 21st Century

by Gerhard Mack
Birkhauser, 1999
112 pp., \$33.00

The design of a museum is often a contentious process, provoking fierce struggles among architects, critics, museum staff, and the public. It's no wonder that Huxtable called museum architecture "an uneasy, ambivalent, consistently controversial and passionately debated subject since the first portrait or *predella* was transferred from a palace or a church to a museum for the purpose of collection and display."⁵ Victoria Newhouse's *Towards a New Museum* and Gerhard Mack's *Art Museums into the 21st Century* are good examples of how architects and critics envision the museum as a place for unbounded experimentation. Through essays, interviews, and lavish illustrations and photographs, the two authors pay homage to architecture superstars and recent inventive art museum designs. Both Newhouse and Mack are excited by the possibility that museum commissions allow for the creation of radical building forms not possible elsewhere. In fact, Newhouse is critical of architectural capitulation to marketplace demands.

This belief that the architect has free rein with a museum commission is an illusion. Museum buildings are not the result of architects' subjective visions. Rather, they are the outcome of complex decisions involving site selection, audience, financing, and changing ideas of the meaning and purpose of exhibitions and collections. Worlds that orchestrate individual objects into collective stories for a diverse public, museums are ultimately compelled by those who visit them.

Towards a New Museum

Towards a New Museum documents and contextualizes the evolution of art museum architecture and establishes Newhouse as a leading analyst of this building type. This book has been amply praised in art and architectural circles since it was released in 1998, landing prominent reviews by

Victoria Newhouse applauds innovative museum architecture even though it might come at the expense of function and economic survival. She cites the recent works of Frank Gehry as examples of radical and expressive museum design.

(all images from *Towards a New Museum*)

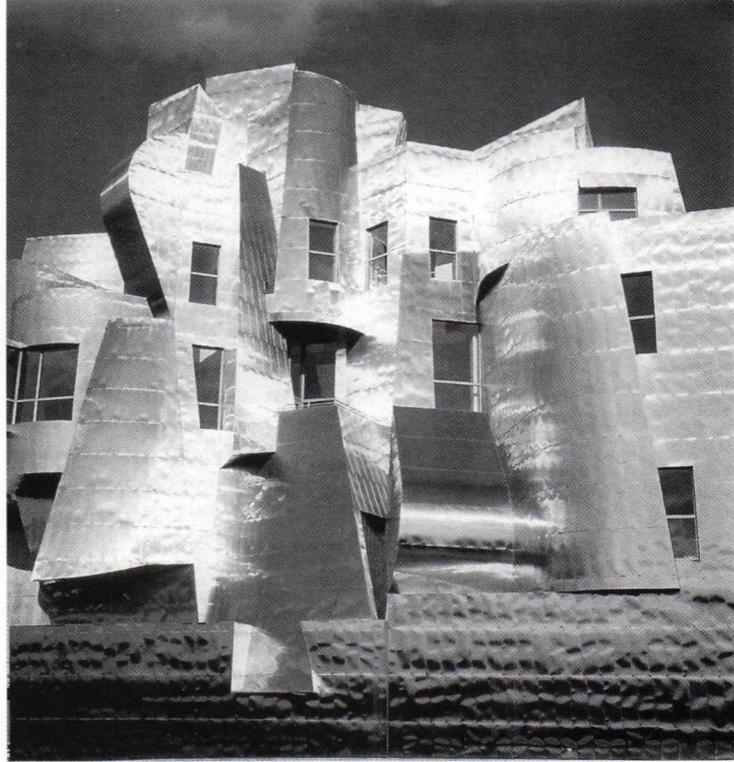
Huxtable in the *New York Review of Books* and by Joseph Rykwert in the *Times Literary Supplement*, as well as recognition in such publications as *ARTNews* and *Metropolis*. Those working inside museums have been more critical of the book. In his review for *Harvard Design Magazine*, for example, Harvard University Art Museums Director James Cuno deftly illuminated Newhouse's (un)willingness to note that architects alone did not create the "new museum." James Volkert's harsh review of the book in *Museum News* gave voice to many museum professionals who have out-and-out hostility toward superstar museum architects and those who adulate them.⁶

Taking the reader on a journey through no fewer than sixty-five art museums, Newhouse offers a convincing story about the museum's evolving role in society. Her narrative concludes at Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, which she presents as an exhilarating new direction for the art museum. Newhouse is a strong defender of architect (creator of container) as protector of artist (creator of contents). Quoting the French poet and critic Paul Valery, Newhouse scripts architecture as the "mother" and painting and sculpture as the "orphans." She advocates deeply absorbing, expressive, and chimerical museum building—even at the expense of function and economic survival—and is not afraid to criticize buildings she feels do not meet this aesthetic standard. In short, Newhouse feels that architects have led the way in reinventing and reconceptualizing the museum. She is not interested in the role of the public as viewer or user, and certainly not in the museum professional as client or shaper of the visitor's experience.

Some of the most lyrical museum buildings described in the book are postmodern cabinets of curiosity—personal containers for private collections. They include Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron's small and elegant concrete-clad Goetz Collection in Munich, and Tadao Ando's sensitive plan for a Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis, which bathes the museum in the reflective light from adjacent pools of water. Newhouse also salutes bold public designs like Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers's Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, Richard Meier's Getty Center in Los Angeles, and Coop Himmelbau's vivid and jagged Groningen Museum in The Netherlands. These buildings, she feels, successfully represent museums' fickle flirtation with the entertainment industry; that is, with the need to be seen as both leisure-time attractions and serious purveyors of high culture.

But she holds her most effusive praise for Gehry's Guggenheim in Bilbao. This radical building benefited from highly sophisticated computer

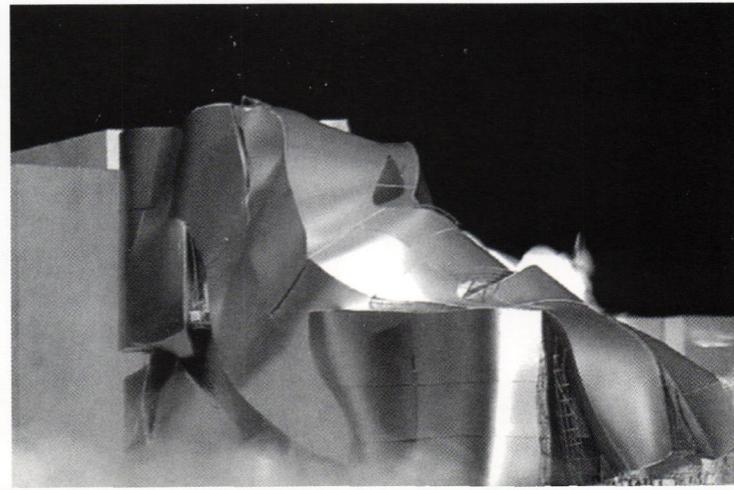
The Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1993.



The Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1997.



Model of Gehry's proposed design for the Samsung Museum of Modern Art in Seoul, South Korea.



technology, which allowed the architect to experiment with materials, forms, and movement. Newhouse believes that the Guggenheim in Bilbao “effectively points to a new kind of museum; its sculptural galleries are among the most evocative forms ever made, and they offer an architectural context for contemporary art equivalent to what many artists and critics have demanded for centuries.”

According to Newhouse, some other architects have been less successful. She chides recent additions and renovations to New York’s major art museums as well as the underground entrance to the Louvre that passes through I. M. Pei’s pyramid. “You don’t enter a palace through its basement or via a shopping mall,” she declares. Nor do you move between floors via an escalator, she posits as she takes on Cesar Pelli’s 1984 remodeling of The Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA), for its use of escalators for circulation as well as for its prominent bookstore on the first floor. More mediocrity is in store for MoMA, according to Newhouse, because of its “restrained” choice in 1997 of Yoshio Taniguchi’s design for its current expansion, as opposed to more revolutionary proposals by Herzog & de Meuron or Bernard Tschumi. In her discussion of MoMA’s expansion competition, Newhouse is more sympathetic to grand architectural statements than to contextual designs that respond to setting, audience, circulation, and economic survival. Taniguchi was chosen because of his sensitivity to these factors. For example, he spent considerable time studying the way visitors actually use MoMA’s current building before he submitted his proposal for the addition.

By focusing on idealistic aesthetic statements, however brilliant, Newhouse wishes away museums’ relationship to the market economy and their visitors. The little-known industrial city of Bilbao supported its new museum to attract tourists in order to revitalize its economy. That is why Gehry was given free rein to make his bold statement. The city of Bilbao needed an icon. MoMA, on the other hand, is one of the largest private urban museums in the largest metropolitan center in the United States. It must respond to a frenetic city and a diverse constituency that often run counter to an architect’s personal vision.

Newhouse is also deeply critical of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York’s expansions over the years, citing the museum’s 1993 overhaul of Kevin Roche’s modernist Andre Meyer Galleries as a particular failure. The museum remodeled the galleries using nineteenth-century architectural motifs and rededicated the space as the Nineteenth-Century European Painting and Sculpture Wing. Newhouse calls the wing a pastiche and an example of how the world-renowned museum does not respect its own history and architecture. The wing is all the more unacceptable, she believes, because, by imitating nineteenth-century architecture in 1993, it both disrespects the legacies of its past architects and blurs the line between original and fake. Perhaps she fails to appreciate the postmodern irony of displaying “authentic” art in a “fake” setting. Like many museums with unsuccessful wings Newhouse would like to remake, the Metropolitan simply gives in to market demands, “sacrific[ing] architecture to expansion.”

The Atelier Mimesis, 1993, located near Munich, Germany, was constructed as a work studio and adjoining exhibition space for sculptor Beate Schubert by the architectural team of Peter Haimerl, Ralph Feldmeier, and Maria Laurent. The flexible building design incorporates scaffolding, aluminum plates, Plexiglas sheeting, and air-inflated Teflon foliate.
(from *Towards a New Museum*)



The Museum Profession's Perspective

If most architects might sympathize with Newhouse's conclusions, museum professionals often disagree with her approach. Museum-industry conferences routinely offer sessions for these beleaguered staff on how to understand and work with the architectural process. There are even high-minded museum consultants who serve as go-betweens, advocating the museum's functional program—from retail to collections conservation—to equally high-minded architects. This tension between museum, as client, and architect is best symbolized in the negative review by Volkert that appeared in *Museum News*, the most widely read professional museum journal in the United States, distributed to over forty thousand subscribers. Volkert, the assistant director for exhibitions and public spaces of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., voiced the bitter feelings of many museum professionals when he wrote, "architects occasionally give sidelong glances when their clients speak. Function is subordinate to form in all cases, if function means the inner workings of the museum."⁷ Although Volkert believes *Towards a New Museum* is a significant book about museum design, he has an ax to grind with museum architect-celebrities who, to paraphrase Newhouse, sacrifice the museum to architecture. Volkert writes: "The theological epoch in art museum design had its Moses in Le Corbusier, leading architects to the light, and its disciples in Peter Eisenman, Wolf Prix, Rem Koolhaas, Daniel Libeskind and Frank Gehry." Alas, museum clients are left to deal with the flawed designs that result from the insatiable egos of well-known architects. Thus, many museum professionals question why Newhouse pays such attentive tribute to the accepted hierarchy of "star" architects.

Volkert also takes issue with the author's high regard for how architects create "neutral space"—stark, white spaces devoid of ornament. He writes: "I suspect that there is no such thing as a neutral space. While architects struggle to make galleries more neutral by making them whiter and more minimal, I propose they are simply making them more like galleries—full of meaning-laden class distinctions, visual cues and social dictums."

For many museum professionals, aside from architecture curators, books like *Towards a New Museum* are filled with jargon, targeted to those with a highly sophisticated architectural vocabulary. Why, they also mutter, does a book with a title that invokes the entire museum community focus only on art museums, as if they are the only museums with stature significant enough to merit important buildings? Museum professionals are concerned with the museum's

shift from an elitist enclave catering to artists, scholars, and educated society to a much more populist institution embracing many disciplines and reaching beyond its traditional audience to a more diverse, broadly based public. By contrast, Newhouse overtly looks down on novice audiences, whom she believes "fail...to actually visit the art." As lover and defender of architecture, she is more interested in documenting and analyzing the art museum's historical roots and recent innovative projects from an aesthetic perspective. Architecture will triumph in all cases. After all, we will always need buildings. But, museum professionals fret, if we don't pay attention to a museum's evolving role in society, will museums vanish, due to recent technological advances that bring art images and museum-like experiences to homes across the world? Will the very economic circumstances and technological advances that made Gehry's masterpiece possible render the museum as public space obsolete?

Art Museums into the 21st Century

In the introductory essay to Mack's *Art Museums into the 21st Century*, curator Harald Szeeman poses the question of what institution might replace the museum of the future. Mack, unfortunately, does not address this intriguing question. Instead, this slim book is more concerned with the present than with the future. Like Newhouse, Mack presents a heroic perspective on contemporary art museum architecture, one that fully capitalizes on the current building boom and the accepted hierarchy of the high-profile stars designing major museum buildings. Unlike Newhouse's painstakingly researched book, however, Mack's contribution is a loosely stitched effort. He has compiled interviews with seven prominent architects: Gehry, Herzog, Meier, Rafael Moneo, Jean Nouvel, Piano, and Peter Zumthor. Taken together, these interviews confirm the rift between museum professionals and architects who seek to make bold personal statements through their museum designs. In the interviews, the architects, particularly Gehry and Meier, clearly voice their biting opinions about the museums that hired them, in some cases even reproaching their clients for hanging art in the galleries. The interview format is one of the primary values of the book—besides its beautiful illustrations—because Mack allows us to hear each architect's own colorful words about his particular approach to museum design.

Szeeman's idiosyncratic introduction focuses on how the new art museum has replaced palace and cathedral: "The great difference between [museums] and earlier palaces is that no one lives in them. They have opening times, and they are... showcases for works of art with an aura that now have a patina, or have even been recreated by iconoclasm. This is my body, this is my museum, whether it is privately or publicly funded, whether it is necessary or not.... Obviously I have long since replaced the church with the museum."

In the pages that follow the introduction, Mack offers each architect an opportunity to express his personal vision for the design of art museums. Gehry, not surprisingly, favors a highly dramatic approach to museum architecture: "Artists would rather be in a very strong building. They do not want to be in a neutral box...oh god, another neutral gallery, stupid." Piano and Zumthor also oppose neutral spaces. Piano states emphatically that "white cubes...kill works of art," yet, perhaps as a swipe at Gehry, he continues, "hyperactive spaces...make the museum...into a piece of self-indulgence...[M]any museums are mere self-fulfillment rather than serving the art." Surprisingly, Piano—who with Rogers designed the Centre Georges Pompidou, one of the most exciting and visited museum buildings of the twentieth century—expresses a conservative perspective on the social role of the museum. Museums are ultimately, he believes, about preserving and keeping works of art. Zumthor concurs: "I want to make it possible for people to concentrate on art."

Many of the interviews explore how the architect responds to materials and the museum's natural environment. Nouvel believes that museum buildings can be compared to cemeteries or prisons, ripping artwork away from daily life and forcing art to relate to its container. Nouvel's solution for his Culture and Congress Centre in Lucerne was to create a building that is extremely flexible and visually opens up to its lakeside location. With minimal interior walls, it is "a non-space that has to be re-created every time" there is a new exhibition. Moneo is similarly sensitive to the history of his site, choosing to hide his Moderna and Arkitektur Museet in Stockholm behind existing buildings to maintain the flavor of its island site. Although Meier's J. Paul Getty Museum within the Getty Center is hardly hidden, the architect believes his creation is an inward-looking monastic institution, rather than the acropolis to which it has frequently been compared. He also states that his Getty campus allows for a range of intimate and public experiences both with the art and with the site, whether the buildings are seen from the passenger seat of a car on the freeway or from within.

The architects interviewed by Mack differ in their visions of the essential definition of the museum's function. Herzog, who designed the new Tate Modern gallery in London as well as the new M. H. de Young Memorial Museum currently in the planning stages in San Francisco, presents the most visionary idea of the art museum, extending the role of the museum beyond exhibition space and keeper of art. He believes that a museum is "heterotopian," meaning a site for a large variety of aesthetic, social, and sensual encounters that can be expressed by an architect through the use of different materials and the creation of varying junctures and spaces within an open building. Zumthor, on the other hand, opposes this kind of mixed use: "[B]uying clothes, art gallery, coffee-bar, museum shop, a mixture like that takes the edge off [the art-viewing experience]." His notions of art viewing are so pure that he even opposed taking advantage of the spectacular views of Lake Constance from the roof of his Kunsthau Bregenz: "The sensation evoked by a roof terrace and a viewing tower has nothing to do with an art gallery."

Despite Zumthor's chaste notions, twenty-first-century museums are, in fact, multifunctional, multitasking spaces. They accommodate varied uses—exhibition spaces, gift shops, cafés, and other amenities—and varied needs—comfort, social contact, flexible exhibiting, and collections preservation. These often conflicting uses and needs not only challenge museum architects, they challenge the core identity of the museum itself. Unfortunately, Mack does not probe his interviewees' differing approaches to art museum architecture in light of these complex demands.

Towards a New Dialogue

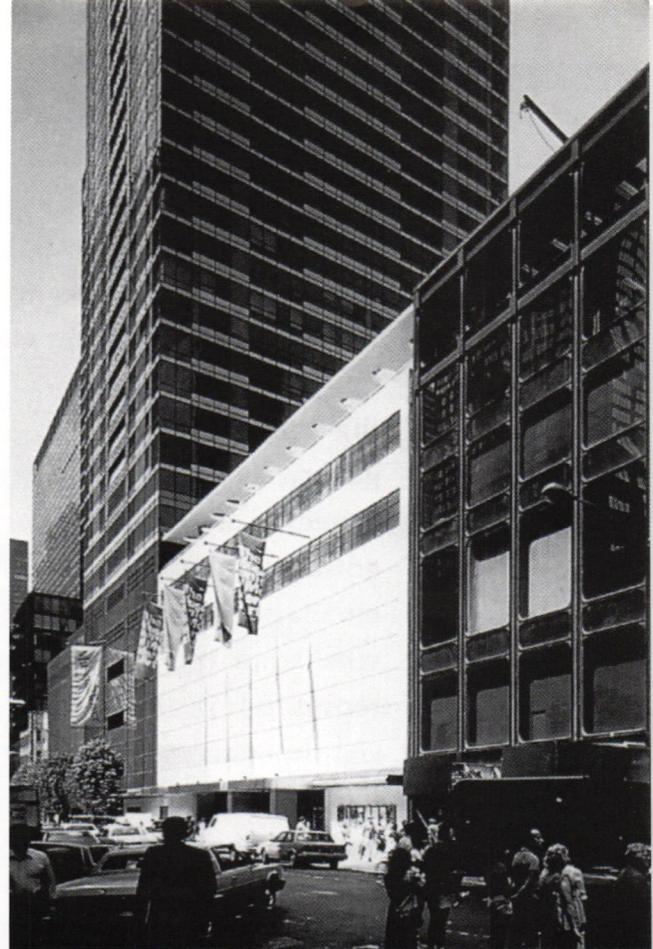
Newhouse and Mack both extol the love affair between art museum and architect and minimize the fact that the marriage between high-profile architect and museum is full of practical and philosophical adversities. As architect Denise Scott Brown has claimed, art museums are notoriously difficult clients.⁸ First, there are the obvious funding issues. Despite their luster as well as their precious collections, museums are usually cash-poor organizations, embroiled in funding crises of one form or another. Second, museum officials are inexperienced with the architectural process. Unlike hospitals and universities that build and renovate regularly, museums infrequently commission new buildings. Most importantly, museums are intensely politicized environments. Staff and trustees hold strong beliefs (and hardly harmonious ones) about the subject matter and sanctity of their collections, the public function of their building, and the means to raise the funds to build and sustain it. Gehry states it most succinctly

in Mack's book: "The biggest problem is that there is no consensus on what a museum is and what the needs of the museum are."

Add to the architect's difficulties the fact that if many museums are muddled about their societal role and identity, they certainly distrust architects to define them.⁹ Architects have had highly fractious relationships with museums for reasons ranging from personalities to politics. Herzog and de Meuron, for example, were forced to resign from the commission of the Blanton Museum of the University of Texas at Austin in 1999 because of a political explosion about the role of the museum and its design in the community that involved the university regents and governor, and ultimately led to the resignation of the university's chair of the School of Architecture. Yet, museums need signature architects. At one time, they could be identified most readily by their holdings that symbolized traditional authority and history. Today, in our fast-paced society, museums need a peppier image. Like other commodities, they are best known if they are branded. Architect brands help lend credibility to museums as factors in creating exciting public spaces; revitalizing tired downtowns; and legitimizing edge cities, sunbelt communities, and boomtowns. As Newhouse asserts, "The identification of museums by their most famous holdings—the *Mona Lisa* for the Louvre, *Demaiselles d'Avignon* for the MoMA—is being replaced by an association with their high-profile architects."

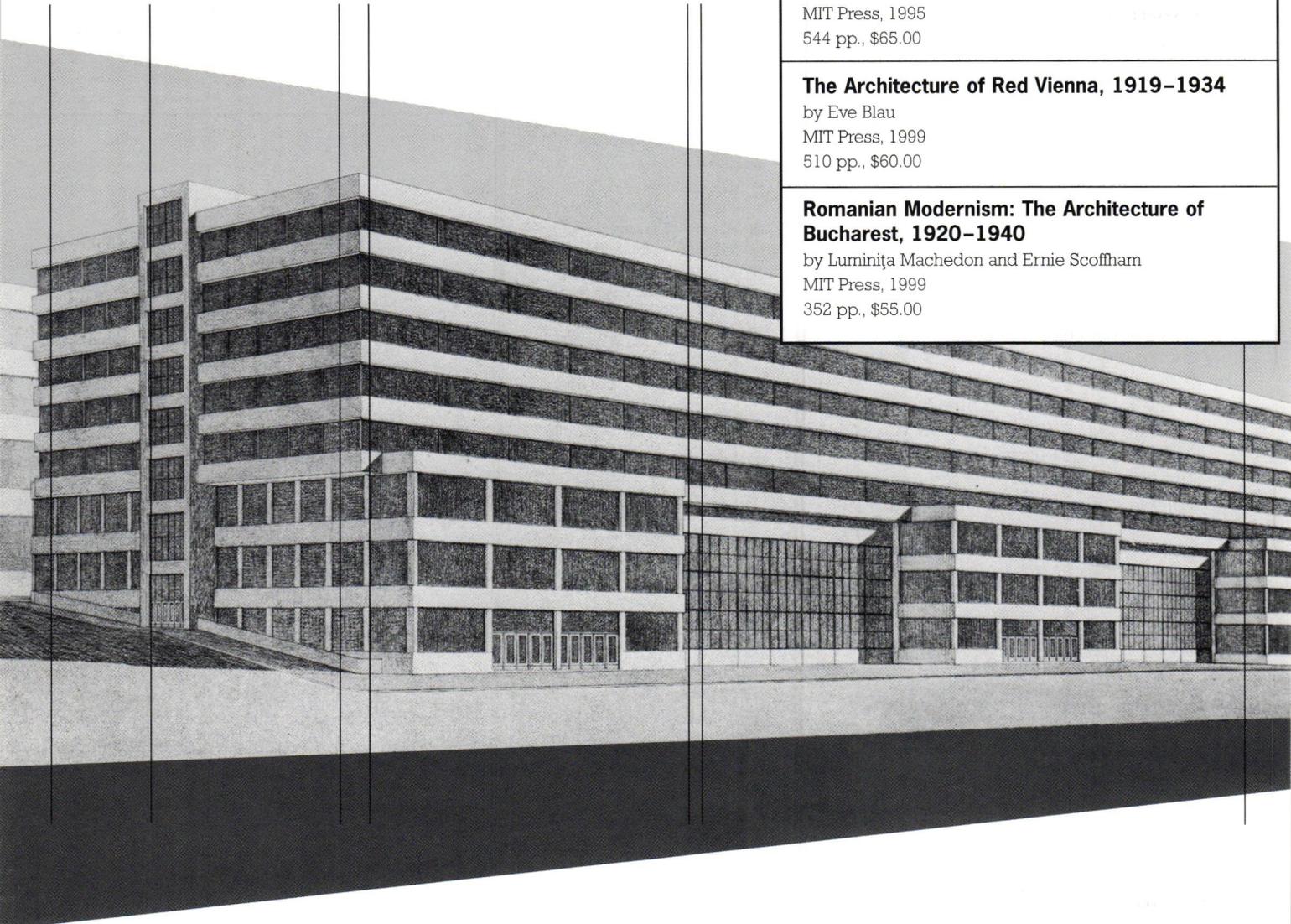
Signature architects need museums as well. Szeeman writes, "[B]uilding a museum today means just about as much for an architect as building a cathedral used to." Urban historian Witold Rybczynski concurs: "[A]rt museums have become the chief patrons of trendsetting architecture."¹⁰ Architects can use museums to establish their reputations and make important contacts. Clearly, however, there is a danger in this high-stakes relationship between star architect and public museum. Literature that celebrates the newest museum masterpieces of star architects further strains this relationship. This is especially true of a weighty publication like *Towards a New Museum*, which offers a veritable menu of "acceptable" star architects for trustees and other museum officials to consider when planning a new museum. The creation of a new museum is too large and complex a task to be left to a single architect alone. Museum design should involve the contributions of the museum's staff, who understand the complex and interrelated functions of the new museum, as well as all who have a stake in preserving and celebrating culture—those who truly understand the value of museum as public institution, not as showcase for architecture. ■

Newhouse disapproves of the use of escalators in Cesar Pelli's 1984 remodeling of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In contrast to the sense of anticipation and ceremony normally associated with actively climbing stairs or walking up ramps in order to view art, the passivity of riding escalators, according to Newhouse, reduces the experience of museumgoers to that of inanimate objects.
(from *Towards a New Museum*)



Notes

- 1 According to the American Association of Museums, 824 million people visited museums in the United States in 1998.
- 2 Statistics for this review were obtained from *America's Museums: Building Community* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1999).
- 3 Susanna Sirefman, "Formed and Forming: Contemporary Museum Architecture," *Daedalus* 128 (summer 1999): 300.
- 4 Ada Louise Huxtable, review of *Towards a New Museum*, by Victoria Newhouse, *New York Review of Books* 46 (April 22, 1999): 10.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 James Volkert, "Sacred Spaces—With Restrooms," review of *Towards a New Museum*, by Victoria Newhouse, *Museum News* 78 (March/April 1999): 23–53.
- 7 The National Museum of the American Indian fired its architect, Douglas Cardinale, in 1998, amidst scandal. James Polshek was asked to complete the project using Cardinale's preliminary designs, a project that broke ground on the Washington, D.C., mall in fall 1999.
- 8 See Donald Garfield, "The Next Thing Now: Designing the 21st-Century Museum," *Museum News* 75 (January/February 1996): 34–46; and Thomas Volner, "Museum Architecture: The Tension between Function and Form," *Museum News* 66 (May/June 1988): 24–30.
- 9 Editorial, "Mental Sets and Museum Architects," *Museum Management and Curatorship* 16 (December 1997): 329–36.
- 10 Witold Rybczynski, "Keeping the Modern," *The Atlantic Monthly* 280 (October 1997): 108.



The Architecture of New Prague, 1895–1945

by Rostislav Švácha
translated by Alexandra Büchler
foreword by Kenneth Frampton
MIT Press, 1995
544 pp., \$65.00

The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919–1934

by Eve Blau
MIT Press, 1999
510 pp., \$60.00

Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920–1940

by Luminița Machedon and Ernie Scoffham
MIT Press, 1999
352 pp., \$55.00

Modern Architecture in the Other Europe

by **Christopher Long**

Christopher Long is an assistant professor of architectural history and theory in the School of Architecture at the University of Texas at Austin. He recently completed a monograph on the Viennese architect Josef Frank (to be published by the University of Chicago Press). He is currently working on a book on the Austro-American designer Paul T. Frankl.

In 1928, while on one of his several visits to Prague, Le Corbusier was taken by his Czech hosts to view the newly completed Trade Fair Building. The massive structure, designed by Oldřich Tyl and Josef Fuchs, was among the first monumental functionalist buildings erected in Europe, and it provided, as Rostislav Švácha writes in *The Architecture of New Prague, 1895–1945*, his new study of modern architecture in the city, a work “where the founders of the international style could test the virtues and pitfalls of functionalism on a large scale.”

Le Corbusier, who up to that time had been able to realize only a handful of small houses, reportedly remarked that the Trade Fair Building,

which was marred by a somewhat awkward fenestration pattern, was “not yet architecture”; he added grudgingly, however, “but I congratulate Prague and local architecture for being able to realize such a grandiose construction. When I inspected the Trade Fair Building, I understood how to create large constructions.”

Indeed, it was in the Czechoslovakia of the period between the two world wars that the new doctrine of functionalism found its most fervent champions. And it was Prague, not Berlin or Paris, which was to emerge with perhaps the most complete and impressive array of modernist buildings from that era.

Prague's development into a crucible of modern architecture was a consequence of a particular set of cultural, economic, political, and social conditions extending back to the time of the great religious wars of the seventeenth century. The crushing defeat of the Czech Protestants by the Catholic Habsburgs at the battle of White Mountain just outside the city in 1620 ushered in a long period of Austrian repression. Prague lost its status as the imperial residence, and the capital was relocated to Vienna. For the next two centuries, the city stagnated culturally and politically, despite the construction of a number of important Baroque churches and palaces in the eighteenth century designed by Giovanni Santini, Christoph Dietzenhofer and others. It was not until 1861 that the Czech-speaking majority was finally able to wrest control of the local government from the German minority and embark on a program of modernization. Fired by Czech nationalism and civic ambition, the municipal authorities erected a remarkable array of public edifices and monuments, including the National Theater (1868–1883) and the Rudolfinum (1876–1884), both designed by Josef Zitek and Josef Schulz. In the interests of "hygiene," the city leaders also undertook a wholesale rebuilding of Josefov, the old Jewish Quarter. They simplified its network of streets and laid out a new boulevard, Pařížská, which, like the famed Ringstrasse in Vienna, became a symbol of late nineteenth-century bourgeois culture.

The first winds of modernism swept into Prague at the turn of the twentieth century in the form of a rich admixture of various historic styles—especially the neo-Baroque—and Art Nouveau. Czech Art Nouveau, however, remained mostly indistinguishable from its Viennese counterpart, in spite of the concerted efforts of Prague architects to assert their artistic autonomy. Yet, ironically, it was two Viennese-trained architects, Jan Kotěra and Jože Plečnik, both products of Otto Wagner's master class at the Academy of Fine Arts, who would set the architecture of Prague on its singular course. Kotěra, who assumed the chair of architectural design at the Prague School of Applied Arts, announced his new modernist program in his article "O novém umění" (On the new art), which was published in the journal *Volné směry* in 1900.¹ Borrowing from the ideas of Wagner and John Ruskin, Kotěra called for a new honesty of structure and materials, while at the same time demanding that both space and function determine a building's form and expression. In Kotěra's own works these aims were only partially fulfilled, but in the years after 1906, his students and those of Plečnik (who assumed Kotěra's teaching post at the School of Applied Arts in 1911 after Kotěra was appointed to a professorship at the Prague Academy of Fine Arts) began to explore a wide assortment of new modern styles, from a radically pared-down classicism to an austere protofunctionalism.

The early experiments of the younger generation of Prague architects, among them Pavel Janák, Josef Gočár, and Otakar Novotný, paralleled those of their fellow modernists elsewhere in Central Europe. But around 1909, Janák and other designers began to formulate a novel program, one that sought a more plastic and radical expression. Inspired by the interpretation of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque's cubism of Prague artists such as Bohumil Kubišta, Emil Filla, and Otto Gutfreund, they forged a new and distinctive architectural idiom, or, as Janák said, a "turning and bending of whole forms from their original, still, classical position into positions which went against the core of the building in an oblique and dramatic fashion." The language of Czech cubism not only represented a radical reformulation of traditional modes of composition and massing, it also marked a departure from the stream of European modernism. Suddenly and with scant forewarning, the Czechs appeared at the forefront of the effort to fashion a new architecture.

Švábica's lucid and engaging account of Prague's development into a modernist center, however, is focused neither on the rise of cubism nor even on the formation of its more arresting postwar variant, rondocubism (which was derived, in formal terms, from circles and spheres rather than from triangles and prisms). Rather, Švábica is concerned mainly with the ascendancy of functionalism in the 1920s and 1930s. The original Czech title of *The Architecture of New Prague, 1895–1945, Od moderny k funkcionalismu* (From modernism to functionalism), provides a more precise description of its content

opposite

Oldřich Tyl completed this preliminary design for the Prague Trade Fair Building in 1924. When the structure was completed in 1928, it became a model for Prague's modernist architects. Although the symmetry of this design suggests historical influences, the constructed version featured a more irregular and functional façade.

(Courtesy of the Architecture and Planning Library, University of Texas at Austin)

below

The courtyard of the Julius-Poppohof, a housing block built in Vienna in 1927. The Julius-Poppohof is an example of the communal housing projects, or *Gemeindebauten*, built by the Social Democratic city council in the 1920s.

(from *The Architecture of Red Vienna*)



The entrance of the Matteottihof housing project, designed by Heinrich Schmid and Hermann Aichinger, and constructed in Vienna in the late 1920s.
(from *The Architecture of Red Vienna*)



than the more general English title. For Švábka, the early trials of the prewar years may have constituted interesting and original episodes in the evolution of modernism, but it is clear that his interests—and, indeed, his sympathies—lie with the radical architects of the interwar years. Even Prague architects' brief flirtation with purism in the early 1920s, according to Švábka, provides merely an overture for the unfolding of functionalism in all its many variants.

The great merit of Švábka's treatment of this period lies in his careful dissection of the myriad ideological positions of the Prague avant-garde—a powerful reminder that in its heyday, modernism was far from the monolithic movement its later opponents, and sometimes even its apologists, presented. What also emerges from Švábka's account is the extraordinary fecundity of the Czech architects of those decades and, as anyone who visits the surviving works in Prague may observe, the remarkable quality of their construction and detailing. What was, in many instances, still theory in Germany and France—the dream of a new technologically based form of building—became reality in the Czechoslovakia of the First Republic.

The intense building program that molded the “New Prague” was a product of the prosperity Czechoslovakia experienced after the end of the Great War. The thriving democracy was the real economic and political success story of the reconfigured postwar Central Europe, a story that only ended with Hitler's tragic forced annexation at the end of the 1930s. The situation was profoundly different in neighboring Austria, which was left dismembered and barely viable by the Versailles

treaty. The abrupt cessation of trade between Austria and the new successor states of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, and Romania spelled disaster for the country's economy, which traditionally had been dependent on its outlying provinces for raw materials and markets. The Allied blockade, which continued until the middle of 1919, prevented the importation of aid from abroad, aggravating the country's already severe food and fuel shortages. As the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig recounted in his 1943 memoir, *The World of Yesterday*, there was “no flour, bread, coal, or oil; there appeared to be no solution other than revolution or else some other catastrophe.”²

For a time it seemed that revolution was imminent in Austria. The country was rent by deep divisions between “Red Vienna” and the Catholic provinces, between the Social Democratic and Christian Social parties. Although the new government was able to crush an attempted putsch by the Communists in April 1919, the economic situation remained bleak. Spiraling inflation, which reached its peak at the end of 1922, wiped out the savings of the middle class, virtually putting to a halt all private construction. Compounding the problem was an endemic housing crisis in Vienna, exacerbated by the successive waves of refugees who fled to the capital during and after the war. As a result, not only was housing in short supply, but the existing housing stock, especially for working-class families, was woefully inadequate. A housing census conducted by the municipal authorities in 1919, at the peak of the housing crisis, revealed that more than 90 percent of the typical *Kleinstwohnungen* (one- or two-room-and-a-kitchen apartments, the types that constituted



Designed by Hubert Gessner, the Reumannhof was completed in 1924. The project, containing 485 apartments, 22 stores, and a child-care center, was one of the largest of the Vienna *Gemeindebauten*.

(Photo: Bildarchiv der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Vienna)

the vast majority of housing stock in the proletarian districts) lacked indoor toilets and running water; 77 percent had neither electricity nor gas; and 15 percent had no kitchen.

To combat the housing shortage, the Social Democratic city council in the early 1920s launched an ambitious program to construct new dwellings. The first five-year program for housing launched in 1923, which called for the erection of five thousand units, was fulfilled in less than two years; by the beginning of the 1930s, the building program had resulted in the erection of sixty-four thousand new units, providing dwellings for nearly one out of every ten Viennese. Unlike Prague, however, the architectonic language of the new socialist Vienna was not that of functionalism—the doctrine of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or new objectivity, found only limited acceptance among the Austrian avant-garde—but of a modernized monumentalism, which was Wagner’s principal legacy in the 1920s. As Eve Blau writes in her thorough and wide-ranging book *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919–1934*, one of the most conspicuous features of the city’s housing

program, despite the participation of more than 190 different architects, was the remarkable homogeneity of the buildings’ designs:

Like the iron tracks and railings that had literally bound together Wagner’s *Stadtbahn* stations, viaducts, and bridges a generation before, the distinctive proportions and spatial hierarchies of the *Gemeindebauten*—as well as their standard window sizes, and the inscriptions printed in bold red letters on their facades: “Erbaut von der Gemeinde Wien in den Jahren...” (Built by the municipality of Vienna in the years...)—were a continuous thread that bound each building to the Social Democrats’ political purposes, identifying it as part of a larger architectural program that encompassed the entire city of Vienna.

Blau’s examination of the *Gemeindebauten* (communal housing projects) is especially engaging. She argues that although the Social Democratic authorities were committed to raising the living standards of the urban proletariat, the particular form of the buildings was a product of policy and practice rather than a clearly articulated architectural program. Some of the decisions, such as the Socialist Party leadership’s emphasis on large housing blocks (*Höfe*) rather than row housing settlements (*Siedlungen*), were shaped as much by practical considerations as by politics. City building officials reasoned that large apartment blocks could be more readily integrated into the existing urban infrastructure and were ultimately cheaper to construct. But it is also clear that by 1923 the Socialists were becoming increasingly interested in erecting buildings that would symbolize the power of the party and provide evidence of its accomplishments. The party’s decision to



Karl Ehn, Karl-Marx-Hof, 1927–1930.
(from *The Architecture of Red Vienna*)

abandon the *Siedlungen*—which had been the dominant type constructed in the early postwar years—in favor of the monumental *Höfe* alienated many within the avant-garde, who saw in the self-governing *Siedlung* cooperatives an example of true grassroots socialism in action. Adolf Loos, who had headed the municipal building office in the immediate postwar era, resigned in protest, and Josef Frank and several other young architects of the Left sharply condemned the decision in print or left Vienna to seek opportunities elsewhere.

What was even more troubling to Vienna's handful of radical architects was the Socialists' increasing reliance on the architects of the political Right. Many of these figures, including Hermann Aichinger, Karl Ehn, Josef Hoffmann, Rudolf Perco, and Heinrich Schmid, were former students of Wagner at the Academy of Fine Arts, and they brought with them certain conventional—and, for the radicals, outdated—assumptions about the need and means to foster a new monumentality. The *Gemeindebau* type was in key respects already established by the Metzleinstalerhof, completed in 1923, which was the work of Hubert Gessner, another Wagner school graduate. Gessner was, in contrast to most of the other *Wagnerschüler*, sympathetic to the Left, but like them he avoided the newer, modern form language already beginning to emerge in Germany, and he turned instead to local building traditions. The basic configuration of the Metzleinstalerhof—a massive seven-story structure arranged as a perimeter block, with a large courtyard (*Hof*) in the center—and its

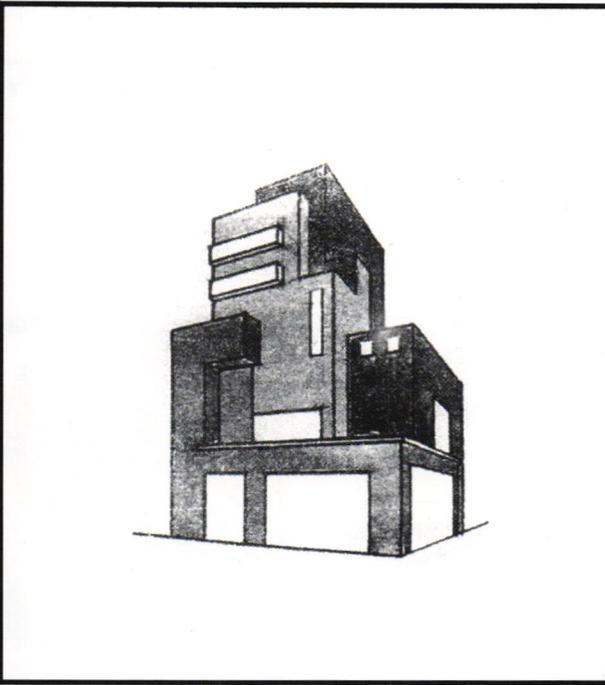
traditional windows, bays, arches, and pitched roof suggested a continuation of a Viennese housing type extending back to the time of the *Biedermeier* and before, while the overall composition drew on the grandiosity of the Austrian Baroque. These basic elements became a more or less fixed feature of the municipal housing estates, including the two most famous buildings, Ehn's massive Karl-Marx-Hof (1927–1930) and the Friedrich-Engels-Platz-Hof (1930–1933), designed by Perco.

Blau ascribes this unexpected reversal to the cultural conservatism of the Social Democratic leadership, who “evinced little knowledge or interest in the architectural or ideological debates of the avant-garde.” Rather, they found in Wagner students' avowal of progressive urbanism and stylistic traditionalism based on the city's own past—both products of the special intellectual and artistic climate of the prewar Wagner school—the formula that best suited their aims and tastes. Blau argues, moreover, in defense of the Viennese program, that the attempt on the part of the Wagner school architects to find a means of engaging the city's building traditions was both more “creative and complex” than the work of the reactionary *Heimat* (folk) architects of the period. That may indeed have been the case, but the contrast with contemporary housing programs in Frankfurt, Berlin, or the Soviet Union is nonetheless striking.

If the post-World War I era was generally a time of retrenchment in Vienna, in Bucharest it was a period of expansion and invention. Luminița Machedon and Ernie Scoffham's solid survey, *Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920–1940*, offers a revealing and useful introduction to Romanian modernism, providing a profusion of material that until now was unknown to historians outside of the country.

In 1918, as a reward for joining the Entente, the victorious Allies doubled the territory of Romania, and Bucharest became the capital of a country of seventeen million. The unification of greater Romania not only stimulated the country's economy, it also reinvigorated its culture. Many young Romanians who had studied abroad before or immediately after the war returned, spurring radical changes in a variety of fields.

Among the central figures in the early development of modernism in Bucharest was the architect and painter Marcel Janco. Unlike many of the other Romanian modernists, Janco chose to study in Zurich rather than in Paris. In 1915, he enrolled at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule, but he soon became involved with a group of artists and intellectuals (among them, his brother Iulius Janco, Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball, Hans Arp, and Richard Hülsenbeck) who would soon form the core of the dadaist movement. Janco returned



to Romania during the winter of 1921–1922, and with the poet Ion Vinea founded the review *Contimporanul*, which aimed to introduce to Romania the ideas and work of the European avant-garde. Aside from literary works by many of the notable writers of the time, including the playwright Eugène Ionesco, the journal also featured drawings and photographs of Janco's visionary designs, as well as projects by architects such as Bruno Taut and Gerrit Rietveld. It was not until 1926, however, that Janco was able to realize his first building, a house in Bucharest for his father; and it was only at the end of the 1920s that modernism began to take firm root in the country.

The ascent of modernism in the 1930s, when Bucharest, much like Prague, served as a hub for new architectural experiments, was due in large part to the very rapid expansion of the city. Between 1918 and 1930, the population increased from 380,000 to 650,000, and by 1939 it had swelled to more than 870,000. Equally important, however, was the Romanian middle class's growing acceptance of modernism as a means to express their own newfound prosperity and embrace of contemporary life.

Although Janco continued to design houses and apartment blocks through the end of the 1930s, by the early years of the decade the leadership of the modern movement passed to Horia Creangă. A few years younger than Janco, Creangă returned from Paris in 1926 and soon began to develop his own distinctive style, a complex fusion

of different compositional elements and ideas. Creangă's multiform designs sometimes lacked the elegance of the Western modernists' more austere aesthetic; but his buildings were widely imitated and played an important role in shaping the face of Bucharest's architectural landscape. Toward the end of the 1930s, Creangă and many of the other Romanian modernists also began to reintroduce elements of neoclassicism—not unlike the Italian fascists of the time. But it was only the outbreak of World War II that brought a halt to this fertile period in the “Paris of the East.”

As is the case with the other two books reviewed here, Machedon and Scoffham's book, *Romanian Modernism*, also suggests the need for a broadening of our view of modernism. Like Le Corbusier in 1928, we are only now beginning to see the full scope of what had been achieved under the banner of the new architecture. ■

above left

Horia Creangă, Burileanu-Malaxa apartment building, Bucharest, 1935–1937. Creangă's building style was an important influence on modernist architects in Bucharest.
(from *Romanian Modernism*)

above right

Marcel Janco's 1925 design for a villa in the city was published in the modernist review *Contimporanul*. Through his designs and literary efforts, Janco helped bring the ideas of the European avant-garde to Romania.
(from *Romanian Modernism*)

Notes

- 1 Jan Kotěra, “O novém umění,” *Volné směry* 4 (1899–1900): 189–95.
- 2 Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday, An Autobiography by Stefan Zweig* (New York: Viking Press, 1943), 281.

Looking Backward: Architectural Theory Since the 1960s

by **Tim Culvahouse**

Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture

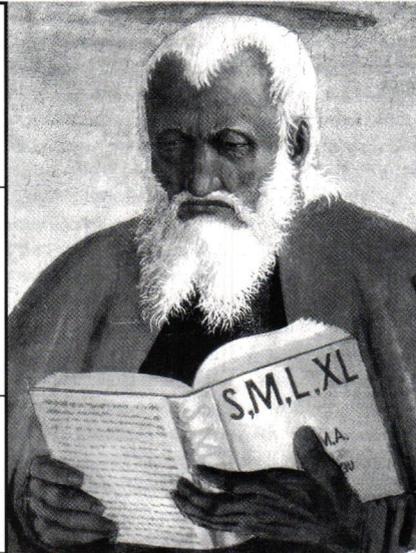
edited by Charles Jencks and Karl Kropf
Academy Editions, 1997
312 pp., \$34.95

Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965–1995

edited by Kate Nesbitt
Princeton Architectural Press, 1996
683 pp., \$50.00; \$34.95 (paper)

Architecture Theory since 1968

edited by K. Michael Hays
MIT Press, 1998
784 pp., \$70.00; \$35.00 (paper)



Madelon Vriesendorp, *St. Jerome Reading Rem Koolhaas, S, M, L, X-L*, 1997. All three books discussed in this review contain contributions from **Koolhaas.** (from *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*)

Going on three decades or more, the architectural community has been puzzling over what is and what isn't architecture theory, what it consists of, what its purpose might be. It seemed like the subject would never settle down, but now it may have: the anthologies are appearing. The publication of anthologies marks the maturity of an intellectual trend, just as surely as a cover article in the *New York Times* Sunday magazine section signals its demise.

Three significant anthologies of architecture theory have appeared in the United States over the last four years: *Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture*, edited by Charles Jencks and Karl Kropf; *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965–1995*, edited by Kate Nesbitt; and *Architecture Theory since 1968*, edited by K. Michael Hays.

As I was pondering the years these books cover, the invitation for my twenty-fifth high school reunion arrived in the mail, prompting, as such coincidences will in midlife, questions: Is this my architectural life? Can I claim the familiar but at times uncongenial legacy described in these anthologies as my own? Must I?

One does, after all, want to belong, to have been part of the memorable movements of one's time. To have been present at the beginning of something—the first days of the Fillmore, or CBGBs, or postmodernism. Perhaps this is one reason we write theory: to certify our place amidst the contingencies of our time. Remember that day? What a time that was. I was there. The flip side, of course, is that people are already starting to talk about deconstruction the way people talk about Woodstock.

The Whole World Wide and Half an Inch Deep

There is, of course, no purely original moment; there are no clean divisions between stages of intellectual development. Each of us does, however, enter the discussion at some particular moment, and it bears keeping in mind that, at that moment, seminal events may appear more recent than they are. For me, beginning my architectural education in the mid-1970s, Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* and Moore, Lyndon, Turnbull & Whitaker's Condominium I at Sea Ranch, California, could not possibly have been (as they were) a decade old; they were too prominent in my imagination. Most of us will recall some such building or text that, by showing that architecture might act something like a language, helped to initiate this period of theorization.

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Jencks broke dramatically (some would say infuriatingly) onto this theoretical scene in 1977 with *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*. He pointed out that buildings inevitably communicate ideas beyond those concerning structure and use (which were the modern movement's *raison d'être*), and he popularized the notion that modernism had neglected, with dire consequences, the language-like character of buildings. For Jencks, this neglect of language was a social failure, brought home finally in the demolition of St. Louis's Pruitt-Igoe Housing.¹

Jencks also carried to exuberant heights Venturi's complaint, voiced in *Complexity and Contradiction*, that late modernism had not only perpetrated social and urbanistic blunders, but had produced tedious, uninteresting buildings. Jencks's career since has been a restless pursuit of interestingness (in this respect, his only near rival is Peter Eisenman), and his recent anthology of theories and manifestos furthers this pursuit.²

By size and title, the Jencks and Kropf anthology declares its affiliation with Ulrich Conrads's popular 1964 collection, *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*. The substitution of "theories" for "programs" in the title is, however, telling. In the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, the period Conrads covers, architecture was unabashedly progressive. It thought the world perfectible, and, by God, intended to perfect it. Every manifesto implied a positive program. In the last third of the century, Jencks and Kropf's territory, "theories" has replaced "programs" in a field in which we increasingly write (and build) commentaries on our troubles, rather than presume to fix them. Thus in Jencks and Kropf, we find many anti-progressive arguments, some historicist and others nihilist in tone. In our current, less unified time, theoretical positions multiply so prodigiously (Jencks and Kropf collect 121 entries in 312 pages) that one might tire of the whole idea of new agendas.³

Jencks is a man for the times. His tastes are catholic. He has always had his eye out for the latest crazes, and he has promoted more than a few himself. It shouldn't surprise us that the most oft-cited author in Jencks and Kropf's collection is Jencks himself. At the same time, this is the only one of the three anthologies that is significantly global in its reach, and the breadth of Jencks and Kropf's hospitality is their anthology's central virtue. They allow, as Nesbitt barely does and Hays

decidedly does not, that architectural thought takes place in India and Malaysia and Egypt, as well as in Venice, New York, and Tokyo.

Yet the breadth of the Jencks and Kropf collection is matched by its lively and insouciant shallowness. To compare: In Conrads's earlier anthology, only 13 of the 68 entries are excerpts; the rest are complete texts. These are, indeed, manifestos: terse, to the point. In Jencks and Kropf, by contrast, only 10 of the 121 entries are written to stand alone. Where Nesbitt and Hays collect complete essays or substantial portions of larger works, Jencks and Kropf assemble snippets of no more than 4 pages in length from what are frequently book-length sources. Of the 130 pages of *Complexity and Contradiction*, the editors include 3 pages; of Kevin Lynch's 180-page *The Image of the City*, 4; of Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Intentions in Architecture*, 3 out of 224 pages.

Jencks and Kropf's book is also marred by sheer carelessness. Without trying, I noticed ten typographical errors, among them this remarkable mishandling of Venturi: "I prefer 'both-and' to 'either-or,' black and white and sometimes gray to black and white." Venturi, of course, wrote, "...to black *or* white."

Also problematic are the consequences of publishing originally well-illustrated texts without their accompanying images. The brevity of Jencks and Kropf's format makes short shrift of the visual components of its authors' arguments, some of which, such as Venturi's, are *fundamentally* visual. Nesbitt and Hays both include crucial illustrations in those essays that cannot do without them, but in neither book is the number of images generous. Cost is no doubt a factor, but it is also the unsettling case that architecture theory, as represented in all three anthologies, is not greatly concerned with visual judgments.

A Certain Chinese Encyclopedia

The precursor for Nesbitt's collection, as for that of Hays, is Joan Ockman's *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology*, which sets a high standard for the genre. Neither Nesbitt nor Hays quite lives up to that standard. Among the exemplary characteristics of *Architecture Culture* are, first, that it is introduced by a concise, lucid setting of the historical scene; second, that it explains, again concisely and as clearly, the criteria by which selections are made; third, that while recognizing the impossibility of comprehensive

coverage of a quarter century of thought, it nevertheless seeks to include evidence of the breadth of thought within that period; and fourth, that it avoids the temptation to reduce that breadth of thought in the interests of a singular argument.⁴

Nesbitt attempts to match the first three of these characteristics; regarding the fourth—the framing of a singular argument—she is ambivalent. Her introduction is, if anything, more thoroughgoing than Ockman's (it is certainly longer), and among its virtues is its illumination of institutions and events that are involved in the development of architecture theory, including research centers, publications, and exhibitions. She offers an argument for the necessity of theory, definitions of types of theory, and explanations of five theoretical paradigms within which recent theory operates: phenomenology, the aesthetic of the sublime,

the disclaimer, Nesbitt apparently wants something more definitive from the term, as she spends forty-five pages trying to nail it down. The result is an unresolved and unsatisfying ambivalence about the utility of the term that is meant to be "the subject and point of reference of the entire book."

To further confuse things, she organizes the book into *fourteen* chapters, covering, on the face of it, only four of the five paradigms and five of the six themes; she then finds it necessary to supplement these classifications with five not previously distinguished categories of investigation: typology, The School of Venice (which supplies the apparently missing paradigm, Marxism, by way of Manfredo Tafuri's "Problems in the Form of a Conclusion"), nature and site, critical regionalism, and tectonic expression.

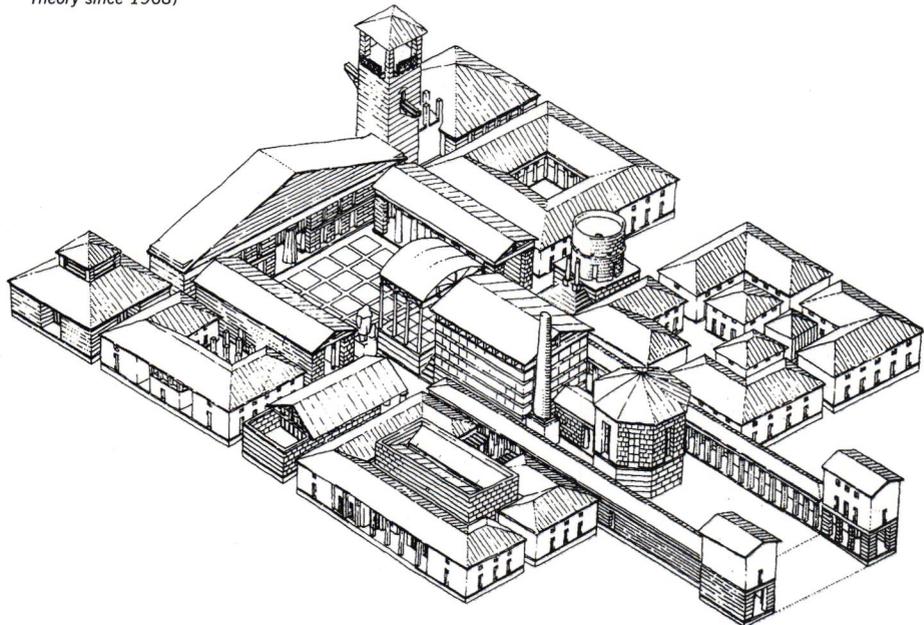
This overabundance of organizing apparatus—paradigms, themes, chapters—results in disorganization and confusion. One would be amused if this were that "certain Chinese encyclopedia" of Jorge Luis Borges, in which "animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs," and so on. But it is not. Nesbitt's writing itself is accessible and clear, yet it shares the problem of much poststructuralist architecture: lacking hierarchy, it is a chain of equally weighted, simply declarative statements, each so distinct that the whole remains fragmented. Her work serves, unwittingly, as a critique of that central conceit of poststructuralist architectural thought: that fragmentation is (as one exponent of postmodern consumerism might put it) "a good thing." *Theorizing a New Agenda* demonstrates that fragmentation, far from being a difficult or elusive challenge, is simply what you get when you don't take the time, or don't have the time, to do the job well.

I imagine that haste, not faulty scholarship, is behind the confused organization and bumpy commentary of Nesbitt's work. Whatever its cause, it diminishes what is otherwise the most useful and the most responsible of these three anthologies. It is the most useful because it takes the most care to define its terms and to put its selections in a broad context. It is the most responsible because, unlike Jencks and Kropf's collection, it maintains the integrity of extended arguments, and, unlike Hays's work, it provides a balanced and comprehensive view of the field, one of general use to students and teachers of architecture.

linguistic theory, Marxism, and feminism. In addition to these theoretical paradigms, she identifies six themes that animate architectural thought today: history and historicism, meaning, place, urban theory, political and ethical agendas, and the body.

The reader who wonders if these themes are really parallel or who questions their comprehensiveness has recognized the chief flaw of Nesbitt's work: a cumulative organization that treats unevenly the relationships among its categories. Most telling is her use of the term "postmodern." She writes, "I hope to make clear that postmodernism is not a singular style, but more a sensibility of inclusion in a period of pluralism. Reflecting this, the selected theoretical essays present a multiplicity of points of view, rather than a nonexistent, unified vision." Despite

Leon Krier's 1978 design for a school at St. Quentin-Yvelines, France. Krier believed that schools should resemble small cities rather than single, massive structures.
(from *Architecture Theory since 1968*)



Whose Line Is It, Anyway?

The quickest way to improve both Nesbitt's and Hays's books would be for the two editors to swap titles, since Hays, in fact, is the one theorizing a new agenda. Out of a field that is as varied as at any time in the history of architectural thought, Hays has fabricated a more or less cohesive representation of architecture theory, or what would better be called *architecture critical theory*, in acknowledgment of its debt to the strain of thought associated with Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School.

Hays's agenda in *Architecture Theory since 1968* is troublesome. More disturbing is his attempt to present his agenda as if it *weren't* one. To those of us who might accuse him of taking sides, he rejoins that "the importance of the period in question...is not one of competing styles or group allegiances...but rather of the collective experience of an objective situation." If this were true—if there were in fact agreement about an objective situation—Hays would not need to devote his general introduction to heading off what has become a well-worn set of challenges. These include the charge that architecture critical theory is obscure; that it is subservient to disciplines outside of architecture; that it regularly presents highly manipulated images of the world as if they were objective pictures; that it is socially and environmentally irresponsible; and that it is neither practical nor relevant.

Anticipating the first of these challenges, Hays points out that "this anthology is not an introduction to architecture theory," and that "at least some general background knowledge of the intellectual history of the twentieth century is assumed." These are reasonable disclaimers for any anthology, but they evade the question of what competence, precisely, is expected of the reader. The answer is: a very high competence, indeed; but not, in fact, a "general" knowledge of intellectual history at all. Instead, the intellectual history that supports these selections includes less than it ignores. It is a Eurocentric history, and more exactly a French-German-Italian history. Even within this narrower circle, where Friedrich Nietzsche and the post-structuralists loom large, one need not know—

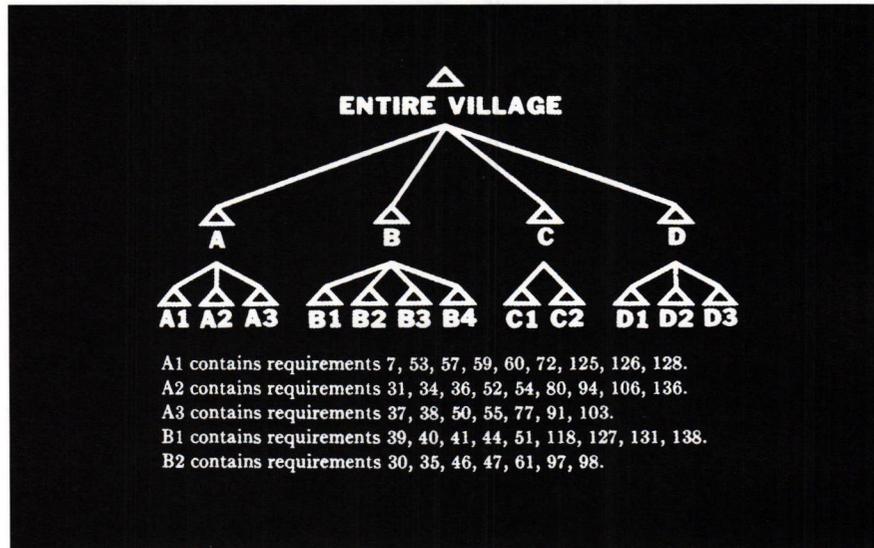
and might be better off not knowing—anything at all about existentialism, German reception theory, or Antonio Gramsci, to give merely a few examples. To have read something by a twentieth-century Briton, other than Colin Rowe or Alan Colquhoun, would be a decided distraction.

In the introductions to individual selections, Hays charts the immediate connections that shape this restricted history, but he does not explain the intellectual terrain as a whole. He does include a useful essay by Jean-Louis Cohen, titled "The Italophiles at Work," which describes how the University of Venice served as a conduit for introducing French critical theory to French architectural thought. Cohen's essay shows how the movement represented in Hays's volume might be properly contextualized.

It is easy, of course, to lambaste the *language* of contemporary theory in any discipline. There are selections in all three of these anthologies that are barely penetrable; and if *Architecture Theory since 1968* in particular were advertised on television, we'd expect a cautionary caption of the sort advertisers put at the bottom of the screen in Nissan Xterra commercials: "Professional readers. Closed course." In fairness, new and difficult thoughts may produce new and difficult language, but they neither need stay that way. We expect the meanings of neologisms to stabilize. Hays, however, does not choose to precipitate that process, and his commentaries are frequently as turbid as the essays they accompany.

Hays simply denies the charge that architecture critical theory is subservient to other disciplines. He writes, "While...there still remain vestiges of older, 'philosophical' criticism that simply apply various philosophical systems to architecture in occasional and opportunistic ways, architecture theory has been, in part, a displacement of traditional problems of philosophy...in favor of...distinctly and irreducibly *architectural* ideas." Pleasant to imagine, but not true. *Architecture Theory since 1968*, like architecture theory since 1968, is nothing if not an attempt to reduce architectural thought to other modes of thought.

In fact, architecture has consistently trailed broader theoretical scholarship, promoting structuralism at the very moment when, on its home turf, its critique was in full swing, touting deconstruction as that movement was itself being critically challenged. To be forever bringing up the rear of critical studies is a nagging embarrassment, and, it fuels, moreover, an ever-increasing intellectual trade deficit. In what would appear to qualify as properly "intellectual" arenas, architecture has returned next to nothing over the last quarter century—to literary criticism, to philosophy, to political theory.



This diagram from Christopher Alexander's 1964 book, *Notes on the Synthesis of Form*, is an arrangement of 141 requirements for a "properly functioning village" in rural India. These prerequisites include "easy access to drinking water," a "place for village events," and "provision of cool breeze." This diagram is reproduced in Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's essay, "Collage City," and used as an example of Alexander's reliance on scientific reasoning and "laborious" mathematical models to solve design problems. The essay, first published in 1978, is excerpted in Kate Nesbitt's *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory, 1965-1995*.

Where architecture has *exported* ideas is in precisely those sectors excluded from Hays's anthology: environmental sustainability and the notion of "livability," a talking point of the 2000 presidential campaign. That livability is a centrist, liberal humanist notion should not discount it as *theory*; it arises from *theoretical* activity in architecture: the theorizing of terms of the relationship between the dimensions and characteristics of physical space and human experience and interaction. Its popular appeal shouldn't disqualify it either; the last time the Left defaulted on popular questions of value, Newt Gingrich took over the House of Representatives.

When it comes to picturing reality, Hays is more candid, if not more lucid, than most of the authors collected in his anthology. He allows, "I have not tried to...anthologize history 'as it really happened.' Rather I have rationally reconstructed the history of architecture theory in an attempt to produce...the *concept* of that history." Admitting this reconstruction, he nevertheless maintains that the anthology describes "the collective experience of an objective situation." But whose collective experience? In his introduction to Eisenman's "The End of the Classical: The End of the Beginning, the End of the End," Hays quotes from an earlier Eisenman essay: "The problem [we face now is] choosing between an anachronistic continuance of hope and an acceptance of the bare conditions of survival."⁵

Eisenman's "choice" is the late colonial conceit of an architect whose own experience is worlds away from "the bare conditions of survival." That he is referring not to malnutrition but to the articulation of building façades doesn't make things any better. The appropriation of the idea of poverty as

an aesthetic gambit may be characteristic of "the collective experience" of ennui among a certain set of intellectuals in midtown Manhattan, but there are "objective situations" more in need of our attention. It is nothing short of bizarre that a theory anthology published in 1998 does not even acknowledge the ideological blindness that adopts the language of famine, *romantically*, to validate rarefied First World architectural production.

Blithely ignoring a world of profound need, but also of profound aspiration, this sort of theory is fundamentally an aesthetic operation in the *derrière garde* of modernism. For all of its references to the "political," it resolutely avoids the contamination of political praxis, of questions of social and economic justice. Such theory appeals not to an activist Marxism but to the politically disillusioned Marxism of the Frankfurt School, with its radical skepticism of good intentions. In "Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology," which opens Hays's anthology, Tafuri spells out the argument: the practice of architecture is so thoroughly incorporated within the mechanisms of capitalist production that it is, as a profession, incapable of improving anything.

Hays does not altogether embrace Tafuri's position—if he did, there would hardly be any point in assembling the anthology—but most of his selections are consistent with this position. They either describe the world as a system of operations in which architecture and architects are haplessly caught up (for example, Mario Gandelsonas, Diana Agrest, Georges Teyssot); or they advise making the best of a bad situation, by putting aside stress-producing ideals (e.g., Venturi, Rowe, and Fred Koetter); or they dismiss 95 percent of the architectural enterprise to celebrate dark-humored production at the margins of the discipline (e.g., Bernard Tschumi, Eisenman, Paul Virilio).

The oddest and most poignant moment in Hays's book is near the end of his introduction, where he writes:

Architecture theory during the past quarter of a century seems to have been produced and read mostly by individuals nurtured on popular culture, schooled on contradiction and paradox, and instilled with the belief that things can be changed, that theory can and must make a difference....These are individuals with some remaining faith in an engaged resistance to "the system" yet still able to be titillated by the ecstatic surrender of the architectural subject to the very forces that threaten its demise. But the almost manic mood swings of those of us who do theory, between exhilaration and contempt for the absolute ease with which signs can be redistributed... cannot, I suggest, be dismissed offhand. They are but a reaction formation against what history has dealt us—a totally reified life—and they are but one side of a demand for something different, *the other side of which is theory itself.* (italics in original)

Never mind the psychoanalytic posturing (by "reaction formation" he means, simply, "reaction"), and never mind the Edgar Allen Poe ending. What is striking here is the giddily stifled recognition of architecture critical theory's inability to engage soberly the moral or ethical problems of the world it describes. This recognition cannot, indeed, "be dismissed offhand." But a coin that is "manic mood swings" on one side and "*theory itself*" on the other has limited street value.

Which brings us to Hays's most bewildering claim, that the work collected in his anthology is practical—as he puts it, that it is an "essentially *practical* problem of theory to...relate the architectural fact with the social, historical, and ideological subtexts from which it was never really separate to begin with." So it should be; but the elusive thing, in this volume, is precisely the "architectural fact."

Denise Scott Brown once charged architecture with "physics envy," a longing for the universally law-abiding fact. Lately, as so often happens, envy has been succeeded by disdain. The Theory of Relativity is factually supportable; that is, facts may be, and regularly are, adduced to demonstrate—or challenge—its accuracy. In contrast, Hays's theorists, in flight from behaviorism and "naive functionalism"—more broadly, from positivism—have all but renounced facts. Measured data now have, with respect to architecture theory, roughly the same status that they hold for young-earth creationists. Indeterminacy is the rule, and diligent investigation of the complexities of formal determination is proscribed.

Consequently, when architects do determine forms, as they must to secure building permits, a stunning naiveté emerges regarding how buildings actually influence behavior. Daniel Libeskind, for example, has recently designed a building he claims will, through the agency of interpenetrating parallellepipeds, "reshape the university as a social organism with common interests and goals."⁶ I, for one, will believe such an achievement when they release the postoccupancy evaluation.

It is the abhorrence of the factual test—whether involving photometers or (God forbid) user surveys—that most distances theory from responsible practice and renders much theoretically engaged practice irresponsible. Hays would dismiss "the much decried split between theory and practice, and the tedious laments about theory's relevance." As one who has, from time to time, committed this very same tedium, and who is doing so now, I must say that one thing I lament about Hays's volume is that it will do nothing to ease the standoff between the theory folks and the practice folks who, huddled on either side of the hall, spend far too much time tediously lamenting one another.

Having made this criticism, I will suggest that what architecture critical theory needs is some theory; that is, a disciplined and rigorous self-critique. Terry Eagleton, in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, writes that "theory is in one sense nothing more than the moment when [routine social or intellectual] practices are forced for the first time to take themselves as the object of their own enquiry."⁷ Hays has himself described how such critique might work, by the testing of a discipline's theoretical propositions against both material evidence and background theories.⁸ Close, attentive tests of ideas rarely, however, have the brio that the contemporary scene demands, and so, like Mary McCleod and Ockman's "Some Comments on Reproduction with Reference to Colomina and Hays" (an eminently readable yet systematically *critical* commentary published in Beatriz Colomina's *Architectureproduction*), at best make only the footnotes in Hays's anthology.⁹ By and large, Hays gives the reader the idea that architecture theory moves along swimmingly, critiquing everything around it, but without internal critique—and such is too nearly the case.

Out of Gas

You've probably had this experience: You come out of the local Piggly Wiggly, and you see these two guys pushing a car toward a gas pump, one at the rear bumper, the other leaning into the open driver's door, trying to push and steer at the same time. You're a thoughtful person, so you put down your six-pack and corn chips and trot over to help. By the time you get there, though, they've got a bit

of momentum going, and you end up just sort of half jogging beside the car with your hand on it. You're not really pushing, but you don't want to waste your good deed, so you pretend that you are, until they get up to the pump. You feel a little disingenuous.

These days, architecture theory is a bit like that—it huffs and puffs at arguments for incoherence and fragmentation when the world is producing those qualities just fine without the help. Within “the discourse” itself, there are a lot of second- and third-generation theorists shuffling alongside the Bataillemobile as it coasts up to the pump.

There is something of this modish fatuity in all three anthologies. For, even though Nesbitt's collection is broad and Jencks and Kropf's compilation is broader still, they share the common ground more intensively developed by Hays, a socially alienated, historically belated, wintry sort of modernism. Accordingly, the only essay to appear in all three anthologies is Eisenman's “Post-Functionalism,” which crystallizes the fundamental, and fundamentally misguided, project of contemporary theory. Viewing man purely as “a discursive function among complex and already-formed systems of language, which he witnesses but does not constitute,” the theory that Hays champions evades, indeed dismisses, architecture's ethical responsibility.

The Eurocentrism, the behind-the-timesness, and the dismissiveness of architecture critical theory—all are products of its nostalgia for a brand of artistic modernism that architecture, during the middle decades of the twentieth century, could not embrace. Modern architecture, ever optimistic and progressive, adopted neither the irrationalism of Dada nor the nihilism that characterized so much of modern art.¹⁰ While the Vietnam War was the seminal catastrophe for literary critical theory of the 1970s, architecture critical theory has continued to look back in wistful anguish to World War I, as if the most important thing in the world were, still, the shock of awakening from Victorian innocence.

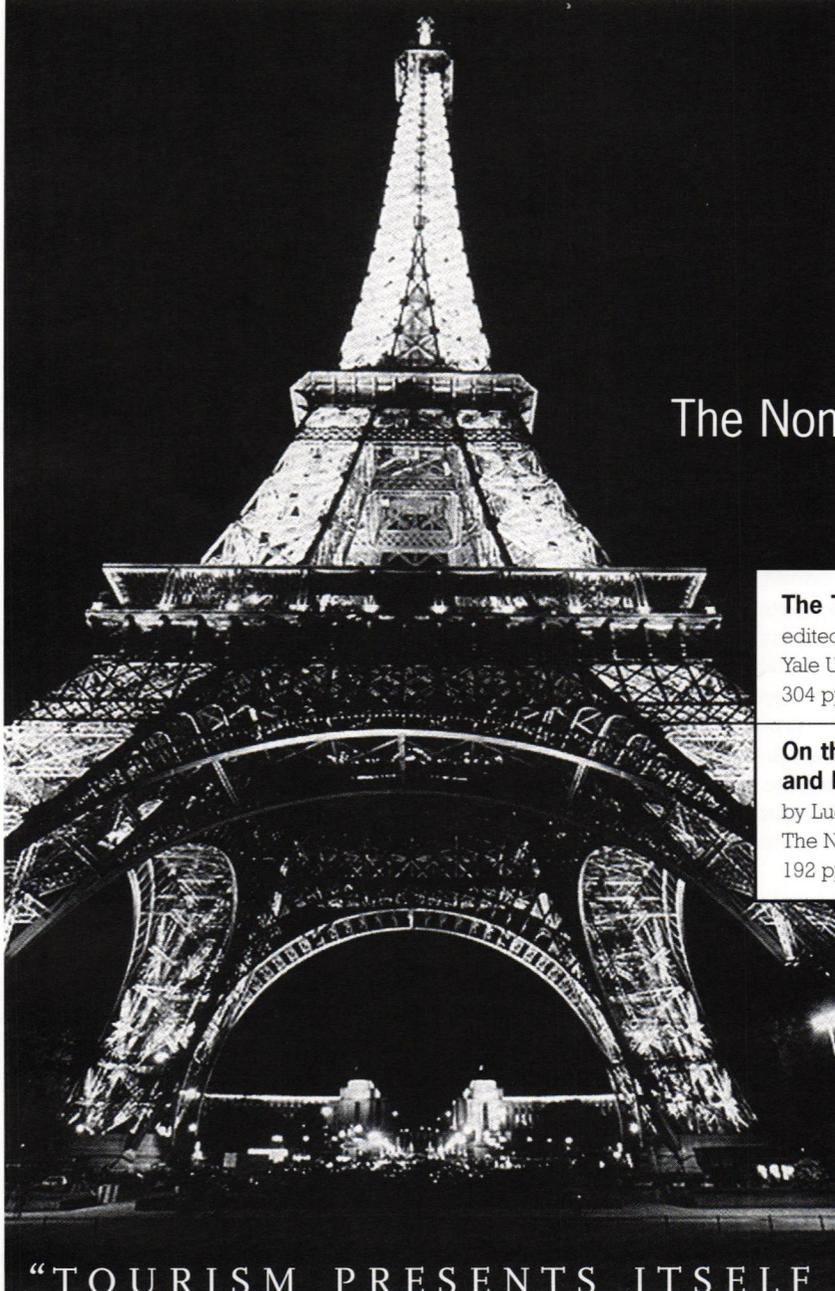
Contemporary architecture theory regrets both the positive and the positivistic character of architecture's modernism. Yet the two terms demand distinction: one can be *positive*—hopeful, loving, good-humored—without being *positivistic*; that is, without believing that a hierarchy of scientific methods of determination, with math at the top and sociology at the bottom, accounts for all things. Architecture theory has, however, conflated the two and done its darnedest to deny them both.

The late William Turnbull, Jr., has attributed to Donlyn Lyndon the aspiration to create “places that have the qualities of deep history, exhilarating presence, fundamental lawfulness, cyclical change, sparkling light and infinitely surprising detail.”¹¹ All of these qualities—indeed, the very *words*—are beneath the dignity of the architecture theory chronicled by Hays. Contemporary architecture theory of the poststructuralist stripe, like similarly striped contemporary architecture itself, proceeds by the accumulation of negatives: not humanist, not coherent, not comfortable, not expected. This “architecture of resistance,” as it is sometimes called, is, like America's Cold War policy of Russian containment, a “dry negation,” in which all other possible objectives, all other possible aspirations for architecture, must be subordinated and even sacrificed to the task of resisting some undefined threat.¹²

And so, while intrepid bands of critical theorists pad along beside the sport-utility vehicle of post-structuralism, architecture waits. As Louis Kahn once remarked, it is patient, it can wait a thousand years if it has to. I don't think it will have to wait that long. I'm keeping my eye on the cover of the *Sunday Times*. ■

Notes

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| <p>1 Charles Jencks, <i>The Language of Post-Modern Architecture</i> (New York: Rizzoli, 1977).</p> <p>2 Robert Venturi, <i>Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture</i> (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).</p> <p>3 Ulrich Conrads, <i>Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture</i> (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970).</p> <p>4 Joan Ockman, with Edward Eigen, <i>Architecture Culture, 1943–1968: A Documentary Anthology</i> (New York: Rizzoli, 1993).</p> <p>5 A characteristic device of architectural thought (but not architectural thought alone) is to identify a value (in this case, “hope”) with a historical period, and thereby dismiss that value as out-of-date. The bracketed material is Hays's paraphrasing of Eisenman's original text.</p> <p>6 <i>Architectural Record</i> 187 (June 1999): 132.</p> <p>7 Terry Eagleton, <i>Literary Theory: An Introduction</i> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 190.</p> | <p>8 K. Michael Hays, “Theory-Constitutive Conventions and Theory Change,” <i>Assemblage</i> 1 (October 1986): 117–28.</p> <p>9 In Beatriz Colomina, ed., <i>Revisions: Papers on Architectural Theory and Criticism</i>, vol. 2 (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988), 223–31. This essay should be required supplemental reading for Hays's anthology.</p> <p>10 For a lucid discussion of nihilism in modern art, see William Barrett, <i>Time of Need: Forms of Imagination in the Twentieth Century</i> (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973).</p> <p>11 This quote appeared as wall text for the fall 1999 exhibition titled <i>William Turnbull, Jr., FAIA—Grounded Architecture</i>, at the American Institute of Architects San Francisco gallery.</p> <p>12 Archibald MacLeish, “The Conquest of America,” <i>The Atlantic Monthly</i> 184 (August 1949): 17–22.</p> |
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The Non-Accidental Tourist

by Juliet Flower MacCannell

The Tourist City

edited by Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein
Yale University Press, 1999
304 pp., \$40.00; \$17.95 (paper)

On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place

by Lucy R. Lippard
The New Press, 1999
192 pp., \$25.00

“TOURISM PRESENTS ITSELF

as a major avenue for people to satisfy the cultural imperative
to consume....For those who can afford it,
an international network of cities
is emerging to satisfy their demands.”

—Patrick Mullins in *The Tourist City*

“TOURISM IS ABOUT DESIRE—
desire for change, but also a more sensuous
desire to become intimate
with the unfamiliar.”

—Lucy R. Lippard in *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*

Juliet Flower MacCannell is a professor emerita of comparative literature at the University of California, Irvine. She is working on a book with Dean MacCannell on contemporary urbanism that is tentatively titled *Four Perspectives on the Future of the City*, which will be published by Tercer Mundo.

previous page

A city must have a "world-class marker" like the Eiffel Tower or the Sydney Opera House to market itself to tourists.

(from *The Tourist City*)

opposite

Two views of the Sony Metreon in San Francisco. Juliet Flower MacCannell writes that the design of the Metreon allows grand views of the city yet insulates tourists from the realities of urban life.

(photographs by

Marguerite Gardiner)

Apples and oranges. No two books about how tourism transforms public space could be more dissimilar. *The Tourist City*, published by Yale University Press, is a state-of-the-art survey about the way urban planning and design are linked to the rush to market urban places to tourists. *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*, written by Lucy R. Lippard, uses the work of contemporary artists to provide the reader with a way of looking at places *with* tourists. Lippard's book examines every vernacular variety of tourism and explores its potential need to be influenced by—and, more crucially, to influence—art.

The Yale volume, edited by Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein, characterizes a "tourist city" as a place designed for tourist consumption. For Judd and Fainstein, "capitalists within the tourist industry, in combination with city officials, are the primary creators and reproducers of tourist attractions." *The Tourist City* advocates enveloping "the traveler so that he/she moves inside secured, protected and normalized environments," through the creation of what the book calls "tourist bubbles."

In contrast to Judd and Fainstein's economic approach, Lippard focuses on the social nature of tourism. She defines tourism as a desire for change by the traveler and a quest for experiences that marketing and tourist bureaus cannot provide. For Lippard, art creates a metaphor or parable to express the tourist's desire. Lippard objects to the "smoothing over of the glues and edges of the collaged cuttings" that tourists are served up in such bubbles. She offers an astonishing catalogue of how places yield up unexpected experiences to artists and unguided tourists that contrasts vividly with Judd and Fainstein's collection, which depicts a general homogenizing of the tourist experience of space and place.

Where Judd and Fainstein's *The Tourist City* describes how cities are marketed to tourists, Lippard's *On the Beaten Track* stands firmly against the way corporations are selling us ourselves. *The Tourist City* vividly reflects the way cities from New York to San Francisco, Prague to Bangkok are mutating to accommodate tourism. On the other hand, *On the Beaten Track* suggests concrete alternatives to the "better tourist trap" that transnational economies are building. Explicitly or implicitly, each book reflects on the value of the city today, and, predictably, each suggests opposing strategies for its public spaces in the regime of tourism.

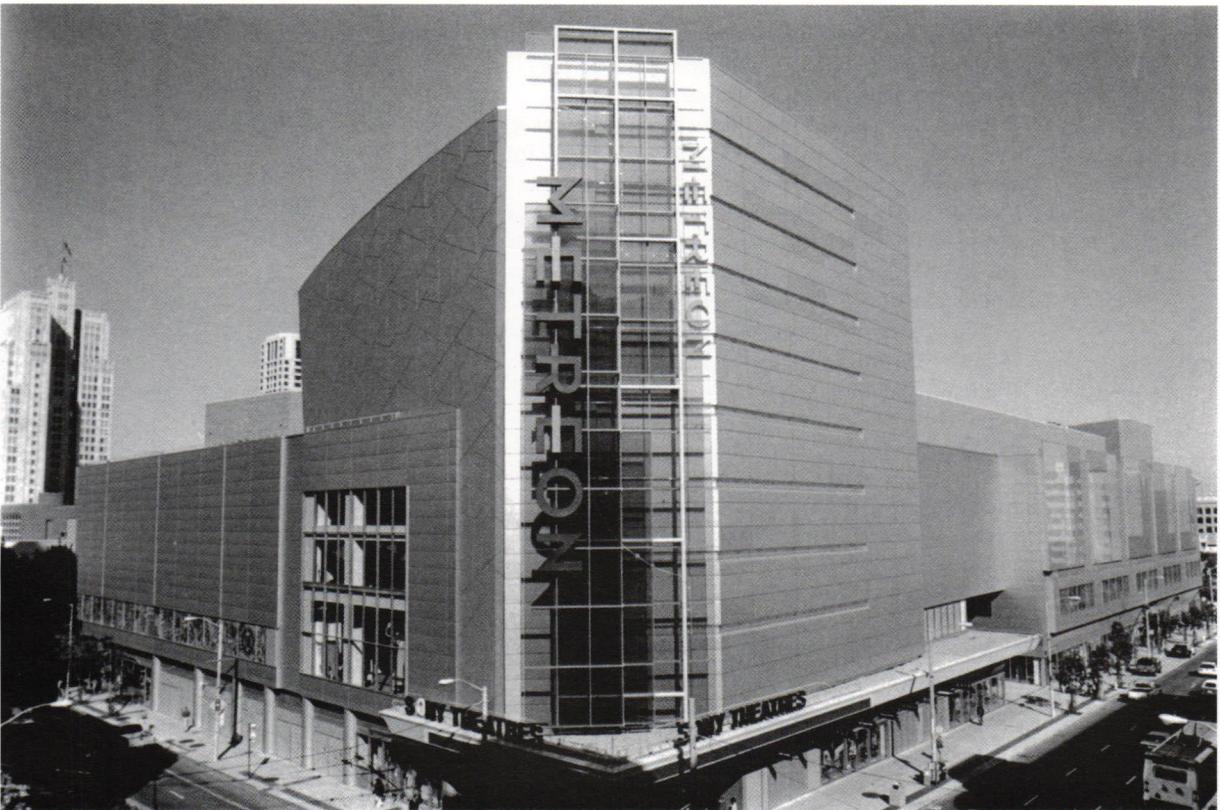
The Tourist City

The essays collected in *The Tourist City* don't always focus on particular cities. Only a quarter of the book (Part III, "Converting Cities to Tourist Sites") is devoted to "classic," established cities (e.g., Prague, Boston, Jerusalem). Part II, "Constructing Cities as Theme Parks," explores nonurban sites like Walt Disney World and the upstart tourist erections of Las Vegas, Cancún, and Southeast Asia. Parts I and IV, "Political Economy of Tourism" and "Tourism Strategies," respectively, provide descriptions of and prescriptions to "generic cities" readying themselves for the tourist market. The last section, Part IV spotlights the tourism market associated with play: sports, riverboat gambling, and other "jock" entertainments of the sort that, for most, hardly conjure up images of urbanity.

The edited collection is, nonetheless, unified by virtue of its attitude *toward* the city. The city as a site of *sophisticated* pleasures is absent here, and that is precisely the point: the tourist city is one shaped by what the consumer wants, and those consumers are now, according to *The Tourist City* contributors Saskia Sassen and Frank Roost, largely suburbanites and country folk:

Now that most people in the highly developed countries reside in suburbs and small towns, the large city has assumed the status of exotica. Modern tourism is no longer centered on the historic monument, concert hall, or museum, but on...some version of the urban scene *fit* for tourism.

An example of a tourist bubble tailored for suburbanites might be San Francisco's new Sony Metreon—a shopping and entertainment center. The patrons of the Metreon have a distinctively suburban air, and the building contains a mix of design elements that should make this customer base feel at ease. For example, several of the movie theaters inside the Metreon have entrances that face walls constructed of full-length windows that overlook the city. This design arrangement thus insulates the tourist from the city and creates a sharp contrast between the cozy movie theater inside and the harsh city outside.¹



below

Old Town Square, Prague, Czech Republic. Lily M. Hoffman and Jiří Musil write in *The Tourist City* that while the historic buildings of the central city remain intact, older residents of Prague have been replaced by high-paid white-collar service workers.
(from *The Tourist City*)

For the editors of *The Tourist City*, the city is thus remade as a commodity designed to please the sorts of people that likely have little desire to deal with it in its raw state: suburbanites, people from rural areas, and tourists. However difficult it may be to conceive of a large, populous, built environment as a single gigantic commodity, the book's thesis is that, indeed, "urban life" can be packaged, wrapped, and inserted into the ever-widening array of commodities.² This book has a distinct marketing flavor; in places it reads like a "how-to" manual for urban planners and tourist trade professionals who want to reconstruct the city as theme park or to convert and market cities to tourists.³ Indeed, the reader will find the book to be a rich source of information regarding the theory and practice of marketing. For example, in his contribution, "Marketing Cities for Tourism," Briavel Holcomb distinguishes *marketing* from *selling*:

Selling is an attempt to persuade the consumer to buy what one has available, whereas marketing is the production of what the consumer wants. In marketing, the product is custom made to suit the consumer's needs and preferences. The role of the marketer is to identify, anticipate, and satisfy the consumer's requirements profitably. Selling, on the other hand, is persuading a customer to buy your product.

Of course, tourists do not buy the whole city outright; they only purchase prepackaged enjoyments of it. While residents may deplore trying to live and work alongside the tourist bubbles that break out upon their city's skin as it morphs into a commodity, there's no recourse for the public, no one to whom they can appeal the way their lives are being altered, since it's not as if their elected officials were selling them out; after all, it is we the people who are selling our lives to others like ourselves—on the free market.

The Tourist City defines "tourists" principally as business travelers or transitory employees of transnational corporations, not as residents. However insulated the tourist bubble used by businesspeople may be, their fleeting enjoyments leave an indelible (if deliberately erased) mark on the city. Consider the following from *The Economist*, cited by Lily M. Hoffman and Jiří Musil in "Culture Meets Commerce: Tourism in Postcommunist Prague":

Visit Prague...and you see a city center that is booming and indubitably bourgeois. The hauntingly beautiful period buildings now house the engines of a modern market economy. Stockbrokers' computers hum beneath hand-painted 17th century ceilings.

Prague's prized physical structures have not really undergone any real change—after all, "beautiful period buildings" are the foundation of its tourist value. But a terrible disconnection has occurred. It's not simply that capitalists have taken over communist ground (an irony *The Economist* relishes). It's that the very *way* of inhabiting the buildings has fundamentally altered, as transient white-collar workers, ready to fly off to temporary duty in some other city, perch in the old buildings that have been converted into offices and condos. Hoffman and Musil note that in Prague "overall residential use is declining"—that is, no one really *lives* there anymore. But now, this esteemed Eastern European city center, untouched by the world wars and continuously occupied for six centuries, a city that once freely welcomed cosmopolitan artists and intellectuals from all over the world, finds virtually everyone precluded from forming intimate connections to the spaces they temporarily occupy.⁴ Its native residents have not fled because they are xenophobic nationalists; Prague's former inhabitants have been displaced by armies of workers furnished with salaries that are three times their own, and cannot compete with these new residents for food, drink, and shelter.





Life and the Tourist City

Tourists and international workers are lumped together in *The Tourist City* because both groups consume cities; they do not live in them. From the perspective of market tourism, cities that have permanent residents have negative worth. (Real life is too chancy to display to tourists, it is too messy and unpredictable.) Only ten or fifteen years ago, writers such as William Whyte, Jane Jacobs, and Catharine Ingraham were concerned with the life (and death) of cities. *The Tourist City* largely ignores the possibility of concern for viable, long-term urban residentiality.⁵ Its message seems to be that cities are nice to visit, but you wouldn't want to live there. Those cities that haven't started marketing themselves to tourists are labeled "unpleasant." Judd praises Baltimore for having carved out a "pure tourist space" apart from the city's "urban decay." According to Judd, only opportunities for consumption make cities "fit for tourism." Patrick Mullins addresses this topic in his article, "International Tourism and the Cities of Southeast Asia":

Contemporary tourism, and international tourism, in particular, is...the product of the globalizing demand to consume as many goods and services as possible. Travel offers a way to expand consumption opportunities.

Our lives...are now defined by the things that we consume.... [T]his is an obsession from which few of us wish to escape, whether rich or poor, whether living in developed or less developed countries.

Mullins's message is that the "international network of cities...emerging to satisfy consumers' demands" must start giving tourists what they want; to resist the magic touch of consumer capitalism (its megamalls, four-star hotels, and casinos) is to turn away those who count: migratory "business executives who tend to consume as an overt expression of their social standing and privileged position." Mullins adds that "others, such as professionals, are more ascetic in their orientation."

What Does a Tourist Want?

Before I read *The Tourist City*, I assumed that "marketing" for tourists meant supplying the goods and services a visitor needs (or is tempted) to purchase during a temporary stay. I also assumed that "cities" were in fact long-term collaborative productions that places like Las Vegas or Disney-influenced Orlando could not yet

above
Rigo, *One Tree*, 1995, San Francisco. Lucy R. Lippard writes that this mural, at the foot of a major freeway on-ramp, comments on the environmental and human cost of urban sprawl. (photograph by Marguerite Gardiner)

claim to be. Having read *The Tourist City*, I discovered I was wrong on both counts. According to its contributing authors, the “tourist” city is defined exclusively as a city that refashions itself compliantly to provide “what the consumer wants.”

No one, of course, can know for certain what tourist-consumers want. But *The Tourist City* tells us what they *do not* want: unpleasant surprises. Where critics might see tourist traps in the clean, well-lighted tourist bubble, Judd and Fainstein see only “fun”⁶:

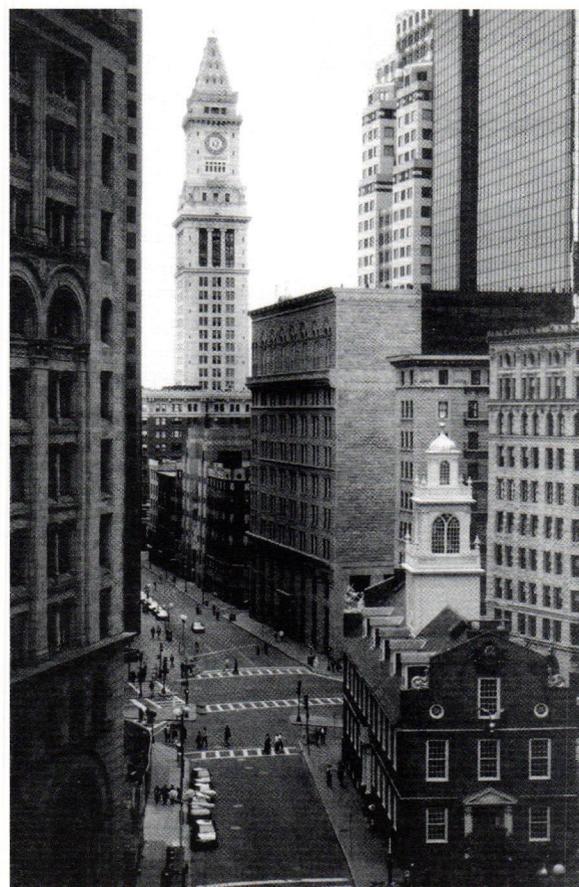
[T]heme park.... The phrase tends to be used pejoratively and has incorporated within it a view that tourist spaces, by disguising or excluding the harsher sides of reality, reinforce the dualism of a world divided between work and play, production and consumption, wealth and poverty. The undeniable purpose of leisure is to escape from life's unpleasantness. Accordingly, the designers of tourist spaces understandably avoid the troubling aspects of life.... The main spatial effect of urban tourism is to produce spaces that are prettified, that do not feature people involved in manual labor... that exclude visible evidence of poverty, and that give people opportunities for entertainment and officially sanctioned fun.

The Judd and Fainstein collection features an inventory of bland pleasures for tourists: mall shopping, gourmet dining, golf, gambling, sports, and sex. Art and local culture—including handicrafts—are thrown in to give tourist bubbles “an upscale aura of civility.” But what distinguishes these pleasures from those that factory workers might once have sought in the city? Given the editors' insistence that the world of work has fundamentally altered, it is surprising that they didn't speculate on what new pleasures today's information-oriented, dot-com workforce seeks.⁷ (No note is taken, for example, of “adventure” tourism or extreme sports Silicon Valley workers seem to prefer.)

Lippard, an art critic, is far more perspicacious than Judd and Fainstein's tourist experts in her book, *On the Beaten Track*. She closely examines how to connect changes in leisure patterns to changes in living patterns. She notes, for example, that neighborhoods seem to arise more spontaneously in campgrounds than in suburbs and cities, and that this phenomenon is part of camping's renewed appeal.

The Old State House, 1713, in Boston is one of sixteen historic sites along Boston's Freedom Trail. Bruce Ehrlich and Peter Dreier argue in *The Tourist City* that Boston's preservation, promotion, and successful integration of its historical legacy into its everyday urban experience has turned the city into one of the most successful tourist destinations in America.
(from *The Tourist City*)

Tourist marketers avoid most such people-oriented matters. Still, not long ago, new forms of leisure came about to improve the lives of everyday citizens and offer “relaxation” and relief from stress. The industrial city had to respond (however reluctantly) to its laborers' cries for relief with a degree of inventiveness: Chicago's Jane Addams, for example, although not a city administrator, was the first to conceive of public playgrounds; Daniel Gottlieb Schreber, a Leipzig doctor who founded therapeutic gymnastics in nineteenth-century Germany, designed “Schrebergartens”—parks that gave factory workers and their families the opportunity to enjoy fresh air and natural weekend getaways from their crowded hovels. These public retreats were designed by citizens, not ordered up by “capitalists and government officials.” Even if they were mere palliatives, these forms devised for mitigation through tourism and play were focused on real people with real human claims. Can one fully believe that shopping, gourmet food, general upscale-ness, and easy sex are the final destination for all future human desire? Will these items really meet the needs of the new, electronic proletariat? Will “tourist bubbling” be transferable, like corporate employees themselves, once every business professional telecommutes? The tourist bubble, like any real or virtual gated environment, makes life safe (safe fun, safe sex, safe drugs), but also makes us safe from life. It disconnects us from anything resembling what Jacques Lacan called fundamental human desire—the *desire* for something *else*.



Generic Cities

“Standardized venues of the tourist bubble seem mass-produced....The tourist strategy has become an extraordinarily standardized phenomenon in the United States.”

—Dennis R. Judd in *The Tourist City*

The tourist city is one that is marketed as a global entity.⁸ For a city to remain competitive under conditions of “parity marketing” (i.e., selling a product that is essentially indistinguishable from that of its competitors), “intentional place marketing” must escalate. Although “a locale has to convey something seemingly out of the ordinary” when it is marketed for tourist bubbles, this effort renders a city more generic, less unique, and less distinctive than ever. Cities must have, or get, “world-class markers.” Lacking an Eiffel Tower or a Statue of Liberty, a city must forge a unique icon to represent itself, or play host to hallmark events like the Olympic Games (the “image-builders of modern tourism”). The Olympics put Atlanta on the map, gave it a world-class stadium—and displaced five thousand low-income housing units. The steps that a municipal government takes when attempting to promote tourism may entail *saving* a city *from* its inhabitants through urban renewal. A city’s “soft contents” (e.g., current residents) might need to be forced out to facilitate marketing and to make way for the construction of hardware items like new sports facilities and highways. Mayors are advised to fill their “trophy cases” with amenities demanded by tourist-consumers (defined in *The Tourist City* as those types who are produced by the practices and protocols of the transnational capitalist class and transnational corporations). What these upscale visitors want is, according to *The Tourist City*, “an atrium hotel, festival mall, convention center, restored historical neighborhood, domed stadium, aquarium, new office towers, and a redeveloped waterfront.”

A fixed menu of enticements does not satisfy people for long, of course. But are tourist-consumers people in the ordinary sense? A curious picture of a new type of human emerges from *The Tourist City*: a cosmopolitan traveler who nonetheless dutifully accepts whatever’s served up by tourism directors, catered to as both a despot and a patsy; or a spoiled child—demanding one minute, trusting the next, and always in need of shielding from unpleasanties. When a city’s important public spaces are redesigned around this child-consumer, so many things are proscribed that these places lose dimensionality.



Hulleah J. Tsinhnahjinnie,
Damn!, 1998.
(from *On the Beaten Track*)

Judd and Fainstein find “tourism has reshaped the ecology of cities.” It’s true; built cities are accumulated cultural capital and thus are highly attractive to marketers, and, when “prettified,” they are ripe for tourist takeover. So, although *The Tourist City*’s third section, “Converting Cities into Tourist Sites,” offers several frank discussions of social and environmental costs associated with start-up tourism, it nevertheless bolsters the book’s tacit support for transforming well-known residential cities into tourist havens. The natural ecologies of localities are stubborn stumbling blocks to touristification and marketing, especially in previously tourist-dry regions (e.g., deserts and swamps) of the sort Walt Disney pioneered.⁹ Disney’s start-ups had to wrangle with existing laws and local circumstances, as he turned cheap, unpalatable real estate into entertainment gold. Cancún and Las Vegas have experienced similar obstacles as they redesign themselves to meet the needs of tourist-consumers.

One essay in *The Tourist City* resists the collection’s general thesis, warning that, in certain cities, keeping tourists safe within a specially created cocoon can fail. In “New Boston Discovers the Old,” Bruce Ehrlich and Peter Dreier claim that genuine public space remains vital to urban tourism.

Public spaces, whether in the heart of the downtown area or in outlying neighborhoods, are a key part of Boston’s reputation for livability. As Michael Sorkin has noted, “In the ‘public space’ of the theme park or shopping mall, speech itself is restricted. There are no demonstrations in Disneyland. The effort to reclaim the city is the struggle of democracy itself.” Maintenance of public space is important primarily for its effect on the quality of life for a city’s residents, but it also serves to make cities like Boston more attractive for visitors and tourists.

To draw tourist-consumers at the expense of local residents is wrongheaded, Ehrlich and Dreier say, because Boston’s fundamental attractiveness to tourists lies in those districts that reflect its *people’s* past—or that afford a glimpse of their present life and work. However fleeting a tourist’s connection to Boston’s people may be, it is formed only through the city’s public spaces, not inside tourist bubbles.

Tourism and Desire

The megamalls crucial to the contemporary tourist experience elide genuinely free markets. The increasingly similar goods inside shops seem not to say, "Please buy me," but to command it (as in the famous recent Gap advertisement titled "Everybody in Vests!"). Thirty or forty years ago, tourists found unexpected pleasures and treasures in places like the Istanbul bazaar, London's Portobello Road, el bazar San Angel outside of Mexico City, or Chicago's Maxwell Street. The odd trinket, the "bargain," was prized because it had been discovered and the price haggled over. However tacky these tourist items might be, the commercial interchange still honored a human relationship—selling as a solicitation of desire. Nowadays, if you have no relationship to your own desire, marketers will manufacture it for you: they will tailor your desire to fit it to the experiences they have ready-made for you.

As time-honored methods of "selling" yield to marketing, the tourist experience becomes a series of one-size-fits-all, standard enjoyments, drained of desire. Even with designer labels, most goods today feel generic: from the Gap to Armani, everything seems to be stamped with the same code of studied casualness, the same limited palette of colors and shapes. The citizens of tourist destinations may someday revolt against losing their public space, their cultural coordinates, and the spice of life that comes from variety—their own desires—to touristification. But are tourists "regular people" moved by their own private wishes and hoping to find a response to them "out there"? Apparently not for Judd and Fainstein. They claim that only "the standardization of the tourist experience...provides common symbols and shared memories within otherwise fragmented cultures."

Lippard disagrees emphatically with such fabrication of new human beings from the whole cloth of managed memory. When she speaks of "nostalgia"—in full cognizance of its pitfalls and the cynical ways it is marketed—she points out that it is nonetheless a crucial relation to *your own* memories. Lippard seizes on whatever makes such connections, reserving her disdain for whatever tries to bury them. Even private nostalgia can be a way to share your story, she tells us, a *real* way to connect you to "common" experience—as she herself does in her final, unsentimental chapter. "History created and recreated is the mother lode of tourism," she writes, but a "history that does not share its story with people unlike its creators, devolves into commercial 'heritage.'" This statement sums up the crucial divide between Lippard's generous tourist "track" and the narrow one tourist bubbles skim over.

"Designed environments...globally dominate most major cities, from 'vine bars' to the thicketed courtyards of Hyatt Hotels—to prim pocket parks, to cement channeled rivers, to the world's largest malls, to the regimented suburban parklands that claim to imitate the environment they replace."
—Lucy R. Lippard in *On the Beaten Track*

"Artists should do postcards as a way of teaching people how to see what's out there."
—Lippard in *On the Beaten Track*

On the Beaten Track

Lippard is well aware of the protocols currently in vogue for revamping cities to attract tourists that is described in *The Tourist City*. Her complaint against them is not limited to the harsh words she resorts to ("regimented," "prim") nor to pointing out its perverse ironies (hotels masquerading as thickets, riverbanks vying to be highways). Though her opinions will surely evoke visceral responses in people who either accept or reject the kind of programmed experiences redesigned tourist cities try to deliver, her real challenge to urban designers is to go them one better and to picture a tourist landscape shaped by art.¹⁰ Art always honors experience—if it is good art. In complete contrast to *The Tourist City*, experience is firmly at the root of Lippard's approach, which acknowledges wanting to know, wanting to see—the Pascalian *curiosité*—as intractably human.¹¹

Lippard's writing is so polished that it often has to point out its own radicality, as in the last chapter, "Taken Aback, or, the Nostalgia Trap," which conceptually takes us aback without its prose ever losing poise despite its immense departures from clichéd thinking. What makes *On the Beaten Track* a lovely and original book is that, beyond the fact that it is a handsomely designed object, it is a beautifully written text. Its beauty emanates as much from its ethical stance as from its overall design and its liberal illustration with the artwork under discussion.

Lippard sees both sides of every controversy. When she says, "four eyes are better than two," she expresses what sustains "tourist desire" and makes it the signature of her own writing. Indignant that culture and art are being pressured by economic factors that demand they be "more tourist-friendly" (i.e., bland and pleasant), she nevertheless considers the potential in the alliance between tourism and art. In fact, she states that art "trussed up with tourism" and "shackled to governmental and corporate image-building, damage control, and white washing, is no longer permitted to play the role of free expression and wild vision that is integral to good art." Her entire

book, however, is an incitement to artists to plunge into the tourist domain: "Tourism," after all, "represents a vulnerable point in the city's PR anatomy." She doesn't have to urge an art-guerrilla takeover of tourism; by documenting so vividly the many artists who have already taken on "tourism," she entices more to get involved—like Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, who revises the "notion of the tourist as hungry consumer" by stopping to cook for people along his route as he travels. Lippard's unforgettable array of tourist-artists includes some who have managed to prick the insular tourist bubble (e.g., Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña with their *Caged Indians* or Zig Jackson with his *Indian Photographing Tourist Photographing Indian*) and others who are focused more on the human predicaments that any tourist faces, safe bubble or no. Some tourist-artists have led city tours designed to "showcase" what is no longer there (e.g., streams covered by roadbeds, unmarked graves). Each chapter of *On the Beaten Track* presents artists offering eloquent alternatives to the "marketed" standardized experience that "tourist city" denizens now accept as their lot.

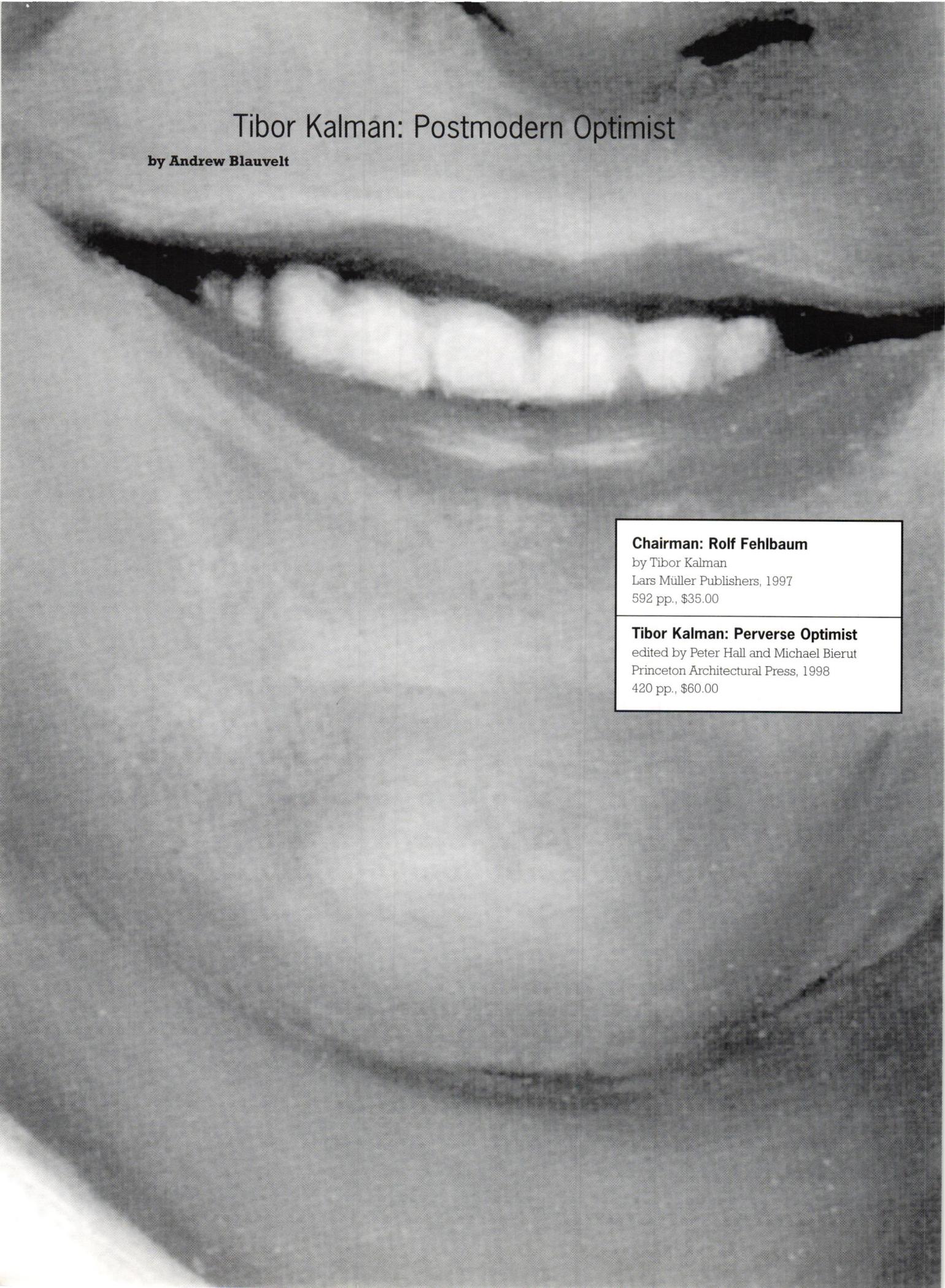
Although she would "hate to sic tourists on anyone," Lippard remains unusually sensitive to the idea that tourism is a *relation between people*, a relation without which we all lose a significant portion of our humanity. As she delicately traces the baffling quality of tourism in New Mexico, or in her own Maine town, she sees the degradation and downside that tourism often brings to "natives" or "locals." But she also sees that tourism can call attention to crucial problems that pre- or postdate the advent of tourism (neglect or "toilet paper now all over the woods")—the kinds of things tourist bubbles block out—and to the *people* whose lives are impacted by tourism. Lippard moves beyond the naïve assumption that there is an "unspoiled" environment that is so fragile that a glance from a tourist will bring ruin to it. This politically correct assumption concerning a tourist's gaze unwittingly grants tourists far more power than they in fact possess. Lippard's simple refrain, that "four eyes are better than two," reveals tourists and their critics as equally naïve regarding their superiority: not only do the natives stare back, but when they are seen by the creative eye, the natives, too, are moved to bring an unsuspected vision of their own to light.

It seems that the "managed gaze" is here to stay, and that the apparent free flow of traveling and the liberty of looking are increasingly subject to overt and subtle forms of tracking and channeling. Both *The Tourist City* and *On the Beaten Track* regard these forms of control as the current state of affairs, but they differ radically in their responses to it. Of the two, Lippard's is the more appealing, and also the more challenging.

Lippard's conclusion, based on ample evidence, is that the guiding of tourist vision, the framing of the basic tourist desire for just "looking around," can and must be performed by those capable of opening rather than constricting vistas. The alternative to this approach is the careful editing of the tourist's experience. When we are made to look on the world through standard-sized, prefabricated windows, it suits international mass-marketing practices, but a most basic human desire—to see something else—disappears from view. ■

Notes

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| <p>1 My thanks to observations by Jason MacCannell and Susan Schwartzberg.</p> <p>2 This may be what artist Javacheff Cristo was pointing out when he wrapped the Reichstag in Berlin.</p> <p>3 Dennis R. Judd and Susan S. Fainstein have appropriated, without apologies, the inventive title of Michael Sorkin's book <i>Variations on a Theme Park: Scenes from the New American City</i> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) for the name of part II of <i>The Tourist City</i> ("Constructing Cities as Theme Parks"). When the authors refer to Sorkin's book, they use it to subvert his entire agenda (which is notoriously opposed to the tourist bubble and the theme-parking of the city, which Judd and Fainstein, of course, strongly advocate).</p> <p>4 The connection need not be positive or joyous; it simply has to be there. Jacques Lacan calls architecture "actualized pain," a shield against all experience. The tourist bubble exploits the shielding aspect of architectural form in the absence of experience to begin with. It is designed to prevent experience from taking place.</p> <p>5 "Developments imitate the diversity of cities...by bringing together desirable pieces of the urban fabric. The more one imitates, the more artificial the results seem. The development stands as a bulwark against the very diversity that it capitalizes on." Catharine Ingraham, in William Whyte, <i>City: Rediscovering the Center</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 330.</p> | <p>6 Commentators like Dean MacCannell (whose name is misspelled in the index) and Sorkin (whose critique of "cities as theme parks" is mentioned only to rebut it; see Judd and Fainstein on pp. 268–9).</p> <p>7 Affluent trekkers, "gear junkies" with superlight equipment, seem to be "getting away" from the bubble, but Lippard notes in <i>On the Beaten Track</i> that "the outdoor recreation movement's emphasis on health and physical rigor, the noble savage and return to nature...[is] ominously reminiscent of early fascism."</p> <p>8 According to <i>The Tourist City</i> author Briavel Holcomb, "generic countries" will be so, too, once revenue/profit streams can be adequately controlled.</p> <p>9 Lippard isn't especially happy with "ecotourism": she calls it "ecolonialism."</p> <p>10 In a March 10, 1999, talk at the Davies Forum titled "Las Vegas: The Post-Cinematic City," I consider Las Vegas as more shaped by art and experience than it would wish to admit.</p> <p>11 The moral writings of the seventeenth-century philosopher/mathematician Blaise Pascal first pinpointed that one of humanity's central passions is curiosity.</p> |
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Tibor Kalman: Postmodern Optimist

by **Andrew Blauvelt**

Chairman: Rolf Fehlbaum

by Tibor Kalman

Lars Müller Publishers, 1997

592 pp., \$35.00

Tibor Kalman: Perverse Optimist

edited by Peter Hall and Michael Bierut

Princeton Architectural Press, 1998

420 pp., \$60.00

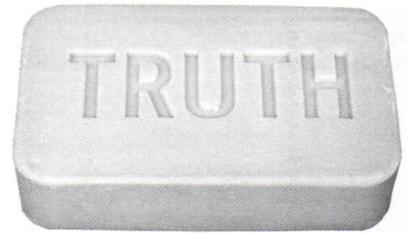
During the 1998 Christmas Eve broadcast of the Charlie Rose Show, Tibor Kalman readily described himself as a modernist designer. This admission came as something of a surprise because I have always considered Kalman, who died last May, and his colleagues at his New York design firm, M&Co, to be among the first postmodern designers. Not postmodern in the sense of the revamped Swiss typography emanating from Wolfgang Weingert and his disciples at Basel, but postmodern in a uniquely American sense. M&Co did not practice the postmodernism of historical revisionism—the so-called “retro” detritus of art moderne design. Nor did they indulge themselves in the nostalgic, postmodern pastiche of the commercial vernacular, although the designs sometimes lapsed into that category. Kalman and company’s work, at its strongest, represented another kind of postmodernism—witty, ironic, referential, but never sentimental. It was a practiced cosmopolitan sensibility that informed the work of M&Co—one that defined its quintessential New York-ness.

In the 1980s, graphic design in the United States decentralized and developed a multitude of distinct regional identities. Just as cities such as Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Dallas offered their own regional challenges to the historical dominance of New York, M&Co and its spin-off studios helped redefine the region’s sensibility, offering up a brand of urban hipness.

Most design studios attain their reputations through a body of work that can be encapsulated in a series of visuals, but M&Co’s work is most memorable for its conceptual conceits. In contrast to other forms of postmodernism that unified themselves in their emphases on visual appearance, Kalman’s work was radically verbal. If there are any antecedents to M&Co’s work, they

might be found in the seminal work of the New York firm Doyle, Dane, Bernbach, which defined the “big idea” or “copy concept” approach in advertising with its own heavy dose of humor. As Kalman liked to remind people, he was not professionally trained and therefore lacked the visual bias of most graphic designers. In fact, his role was more typical of the adman-cum-creative director, someone painting a bigger picture with words and concepts. This “lack” on the part of Kalman fueled many professional fires, contributing, on the one hand, to his self-proclaimed “outsider” status within the profession, and defining, on the other, his aesthetics of the ordinary, the realm of what he liked to call “undesign.” This combination makes for a very postmodern circumstance. At what other historical juncture could someone with no formal design education define his professional reputation on the rejection of contemporary design’s professionalism? Many of his best arguments were verbal, not visual. His voice still rings true in essays such as “fuck committees (I believe in lunatics)” and “What’s Happening to Logos?”; and in his keynote address to the 1989 American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) National Design Conference, in which he admonished designers to be bad in order to do good. It is fitting that journalist John Hockenberry, in his role as master of ceremonies at the 1999 AIGA National Design Conference, would pay homage to Kalman by evoking his name as the conscience of the profession, suggesting that he would be reincarnated as a verb: to be “Tibored”—which described a force that would make the assembled crowd and speakers face their obligations for social responsibility.

While the so-called “cult of the ugly” (manifested in rough-hewn forms and awkward compositions) was being developed as a visual antidote to the design profession’s increasing slickness, Kalman developed his own verbal rhetoric of resistance



In 1991, Tibor Kalman’s office gave away bars of soap imprinted with the word “truth” as part of the firm’s Christmas gift to clients. The arrival of Kalman’s idiosyncratic gifts was an annual event for the New York graphic design community.
(from Tibor Kalman)

opposite
Vanguard Studios, Portrait of Tibor Kalman (detail), 1992.
(from Tibor Kalman)

Andrew Blauvelt is design director at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. He writes about design culture for numerous publications and recently guest-edited “Remaking History,” an issue of the *American Center for Design Journal*.

opposite

The Kalman-edited *Colors* magazine published this photograph of Queen Elizabeth II with altered racial characteristics. British tabloids reprinted the image of the black queen, and some called Kalman's work a racial "slur."

center

Spread from *Chairman: Rolf Fehlbaum*.
(from Tibor Kalman)

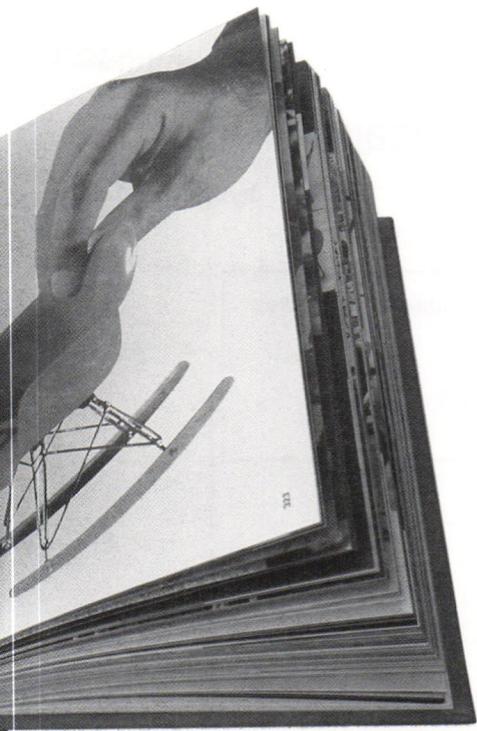
against marketing, focus-group testing, demographic studies, and the development of the new "global strip mall" (as he once referred to the problem). In this way, he pointed a way out in both words and pictures. Kalman led the way with his own brand of iconoclastic contrariness. The sentiment of these admonishments was not utopian, although they were certainly tinged with optimism. His was not the revolutionary rhetoric of the 1960s he knew well as a member of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)—the kind of hope extinguished by the failures of outright social revolution in 1968. Rather, this was a form of postmodern resistance, in which tactics and strategies might prevail in limited circumstances. This type of resistance takes the position of trying to dismantle the system from within, the position of an insider. By its very nature, it is an impure position—complicated, contradictory, and necessarily compromised. One can trace the trajectory within Kalman's career, moving inward—into corporations and deeper into the profession—while focusing his energies outward. He used his outsider position to challenge the insider tenets of how the profession of graphic design operated in the 1980s and leveraged his corporate insider status as art director and editor at *Colors* (a magazine underwritten by Benetton, the Italian clothing company) to promote socially progressive issues in the 1990s.

Two final publications from Kalman before his death offer two different insights into his work, one microcosmic, one macrocosmic. *Chairman: Rolf Fehlbaum* is a five hundred-plus-page tribute to Rolf Fehlbaum, the chairman of the furniture manufacturer Vitra, which was published to commemorate Fehlbaum's 1997 award for design leadership from the German government. An intimate, red cloth-covered book, sized to fit nicely in the palm of your hand, it was authored, edited, and designed by Kalman. *Chairman* is a synthesis of Kalman's working methods over the years. From its punning title (Vitra makes chairs and office furniture, hence Fehlbaum as both a chairman and chairman of the board) to its physical pun on Chairman Mao's little red book, *Chairman's* simple, straightforward, foil-stamped cover also recalls M&Co's 1986 Christmas gift to clients, *A Book of Words*, which was a repackaged dictionary. Designed in the style Kalman employed when he art directed *Colors*—terse, centered sans-serif text pages with a multitude of full-bleed photographs from diverse global and historical sources—*Chairman* opens with a lighthearted social history of sitting, before tackling the specific contributions and influences of Fehlbaum's Vitra. For Kalman, this publication represented not only a summary of accumulated strategies and styles, but also the culmination of the work he sought so



eagerly to pursue as a shaper (not just a designer) of content. Just as he was able to craft the form and the content of projects at *Colors*, Kalman applied the same process to *Chairman*, collaborating with the like-minded Fehlbaum, who once said, as Kalman did, that "good design is good business and that good business can fund culture (which is its ultimate purpose)."

The embodiment of Kalman's entire career is formally compiled in the 420 pages of *Tibor Kalman: Perverse Optimist*. This hefty coffee-table tome highlights Kalman's short but extremely prolific career, from his early days of producing rather mediocre graphics for the predecessor of the Barnes & Noble bookstore chain, to the heyday of M&Co's innovative work, and finally through his own professional maturation at *Colors*. Kalman understood the value of effective packaging, and through the editing and design of this book Michael Bierut succinctly encapsulates the idea of the designer-as-brand. Kalman is presented in wholly iconic terms, from the smirk on his face that graces the cover (painted by a portrait studio in Bombay) that sets the emotional tone of the publication to the bold spine of the book with the letters "TIBOR" stacked vertically—evoking one-word celebrities like Cher.



I wanted the experience of cracking the cover to be akin to penetrating the façade of this iconoclastic figure. My hopes were raised as I found on the first page an image of a chair engulfed in flames—the proverbial hot seat? Unfortunately, the seat has only been warmed, and the book leaves some questions unanswered.

Tibor Kalman: Perverse Optimist offers numerous insights into the various transformations of this designer from a variety of commentators: critics, colleagues, employees, friends, and clients. Aside from providing a comprehensive photographic documentation of his major design projects, the book also contains the requisite celebratory texts, such as Steven Heller's chronicle of Kalman's many achievements, which usually justifies the publication of such a lavish monograph. There are tinges of critical insights, the best provided by Rick Poynor in his essay, "Thirteen Provocations." Throughout the book, however, we are offered several defenses of, for example, Kalman's appropriation of the vernacular, the cultural politics of Benetton's publicity machine, and the "Disneyfication" surrounding the Times Square redevelopment project (which he worked on in the early 1990s), without laying any real groundwork of the original criticisms of these issues. Among the more surprising texts are several client testimonials from a who's-who list of the glitterati: David Byrne, Jenny Holzer, Isaac Mizrahi, and Ingrid Sischy, among others. It's not so much that they provide profound insights (some do), but rather that you might actually hear from a former client—any client—in a designer's monograph these days seems like anathema. It becomes clear through the running commentary of former



M&Co employees, as they reflect on specific projects, that Kalman had a knack for spotting young design talent. While at M&Co, he surrounded himself with some of today's more innovative and influential designers. In the end, and, perhaps, not surprisingly, the boldest words come from the man himself, with a little help from his numerous coauthors. Collected in this book are Kalman's short, pithy texts, most of which were published in various graphic design magazines in the 1980s, but which still remain relevant today. The texts include a gem of an interview conducted on the Today show with a slightly puzzled Katie Couric in which Kalman showed retouched photographs that depicted Couric as an African American woman and her cohost, Bryant Gumbel, as a Caucasian man. At the end of the interview, Couric said, "Maybe I don't look so cute as an African American," and Gumbel responded, "I look like Al Franken."

Ultimately, Kalman was his own best spokesperson. It is fitting, therefore, that Kalman was able to organize *Perverse Optimist* before he passed away. But it also raises important questions about graphic design publications today. Since the designer-controlled monograph has become *de rigueur*, one wonders what effect this will have on historical interpretation and publishing. Will the subject of Kalman demand another, perhaps more historically distant analysis in the future? If so, will publishers and readers support such a venture? Or are these self-published monographs foreclosing or at least delaying independent critical and historical analysis? Is there not a broader set of issues and cultural phenomena against which to read Kalman's work? Of course, these questions and problems are not specific to *Perverse Optimist*. While this book certainly ranks above the typical fare being offered to the design community these days, it raises these issues only because it allows us to see just a glimpse of the cracks in its own strategies more clearly, and that sounds like a very postmodern idea to me. ■

The Life and Death of Great American Buildings

by Howard Davis

Building Lives: Constructing Rites and Passages

by Neil Harris

Yale University Press, 1999

224 pp., \$40.00

The idea that buildings are like people, with life cycles that include conception, birth, renewal, and death, is the theme of *Building Lives: Constructing Rites and Passages* by Neil Harris, a cultural historian at the University of Chicago. The metaphor, which the author himself characterizes as a “conceit,” is nevertheless an appealing conceit and allows Harris to range widely over aspects of building history that ordinarily are not the province of the architectural historian. Upon first glance, some of the issues in *Building Lives* might seem marginal to the central concerns of architectural history—what, after all, can be the importance of examining promotional brochures for office buildings, or nineteenth-century groundbreaking ceremonies, or the professions of building management and building maintenance? But one comes away from this book feeling that these examinations are not simply footnotes to the architectural history of the recent past, but are instead leading the reader toward a new appreciation of the broad frameworks within which buildings are built. *Building Lives* fits in well with the new direction architectural history has recently taken, in which buildings are interpreted not only as aesthetic objects but as entities that are intimately linked to the cultures in which they are produced and to the large number of people who make them, use them, and look at them.

Legitimate subjects for study in architectural history now include virtually all types of buildings and urban configurations. Likewise, the field now borrows from sociological, cultural, and economic approaches to analysis while retaining the traditional emphasis on the aesthetic. These expanded approaches, however, are still used largely to deal

with the content of buildings and their interpretation, and, with some exceptions, tend not to be concerned with the physical, legal, and economic processes through which buildings are built; the people who make, maintain, and use them; or the idea of buildings as dynamic artifacts that change over time. Such a perception of architecture as a physical product rather than a social process exaggerates the role of architects in the production of the built world and downplays the role of clients, bankers, developers, contractors, and many other players.

By helping to extend the idea of a socially and culturally anchored architectural history into the realms of development, construction, and use, *Building Lives* is a welcome addition to a small but growing multidisciplinary field that includes works such as Linda Clarke’s *Building Capitalism: Historical Change and the Labour Process in the Production of the Built Environment*, Catherine W. Bishir et al.’s *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building*, and Mary N. Woods’s *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America*.¹ *Building Lives* treads a little more lightly than these other books, and, apart from the choice of subject matter, offers no real theoretical breakthroughs or methodological innovations. Indeed, in his introduction, Harris admits that he is “fundamentally and unapologetically eclectic, humanistic, and traditional in [his] epistemological and phenomenological concerns.” Although the author is careful not to enter the realm of biology or biological analogies too deeply (these were dealt with in depth in a book by Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in*

The Santa Fe Railroad Station in San Diego was demolished in 1914. Neil Harris briefly compares the documenting of doomed buildings before and during their final moments to the nineteenth-century American practice of photographing corpses.
(from *Building Lives*)

Howard Davis is a professor of architecture at the University of Oregon and the author of *The Culture of Building* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

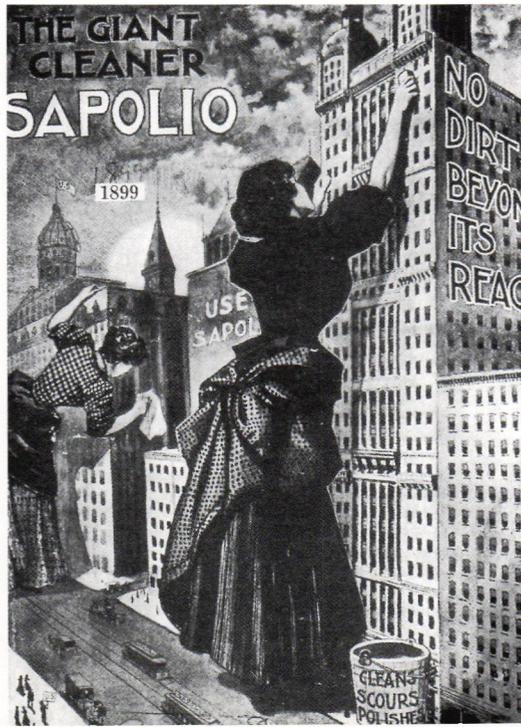
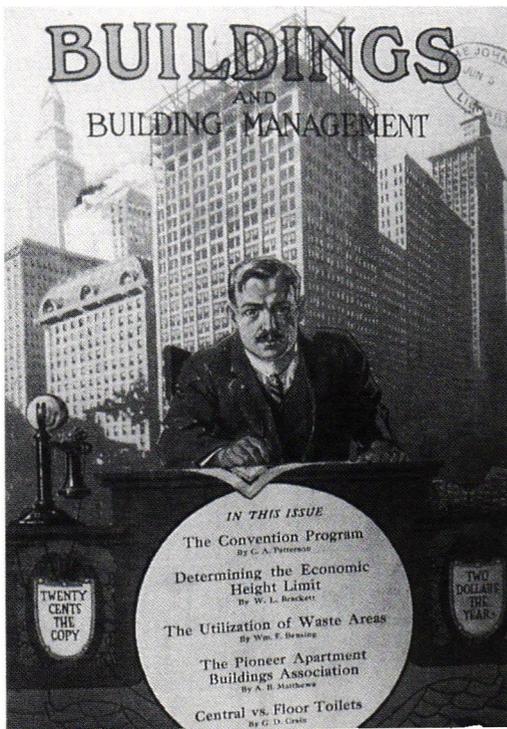
Architecture and the Applied Arts), the dynamic nature of biology and the growth of organisms seem to be apt concepts with which to approach what is a highly dynamic and socially interactive phenomenon.² By expanding the idea of the building process to include that of the entire building life cycle, Harris helps strengthen the idea that a building, as an artifact in the world that persists long after its design and construction, is worthy of study for reasons that go beyond the original intentions of its architect or its role in architectural thought at the time it was conceived.

As a cultural historian, the author must have felt no particular need to observe the boundaries that continue to restrict the work of architectural historians. Harris's "eclecticism" serves the book well as he brings together a wide variety of material to develop his argument. The book's three chapters, based on lectures Harris originally delivered at Columbia University and organized respectively around the themes of a building's birth, life, and death, present the reader with much new material, particularly with respect to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century American buildings. This material is largely concerned with how buildings are symbolized, advertised, and mythologized, and thereby come to be anchored in the cultural understandings that people have.

The first chapter, titled "Meeting the World," addresses the birth phase of a building's life cycle. Under this heading, Harris covers such topics as ceremonies for the consecration of churches, the laying of cornerstones for Masonic halls (at which "official lodge jewels were displayed, as well as swords, white rods, silver vessels filled with oil and wine, a golden vessel containing corn, and three major building tools: the square, the level, and the plumb"), building dedications, and even

the naming of buildings and the installation of plaques with those names. Adopting the attitude an anthropologist might take toward an unfamiliar culture, Harris interprets such rituals as indicative of the role buildings play in reinforcing the sacredness of the world. Harris shows how even small ceremonies that still exist today, like the laying of Masonic cornerstones, are opportunities to connect the temporal act of building with more eternal values underlying our society. He describes the dedication of the Brooklyn Bridge, for example, which signified not only the linking of two great cities but also the growing triumph of a technological worldview in the late nineteenth century.

The life of a building over time, and its everyday presentation to the world, are the subjects of the second chapter, "Signs of Life." This chapter is the most eclectic in its coverage, and it is here, if nowhere else in the book, that Harris's biological analogy is exposed as merely a convenient artifice for gathering very different kinds of interesting material. But the many tales of building use Harris cites in this chapter, to demonstrate that a building's "rites of passage do not cease with its formal opening," are some of the most intriguing in the book. The chapter opens with descriptions of finely produced albums of photo documentation, which the author compares to scrapbooks, published to celebrate new buildings for promotional purposes, and goes on to cover the commissioning of building photographs, the marketing of building souvenirs and postcards, the celebration of building anniversaries, and the creation of organized building tourism. This chapter also addresses the unique requirements of large buildings with complex technology, particularly in regard to their maintenance. Such requirements led to "the rise of the janitor to economic power and social influence" and the development of the profession of building management as a whole.



left
Cover from the June 1914 issue of *Buildings and Building Management*. Articles in the magazine covered topics ranging from lobbying against building-height ordinances to directions on how floors should be washed. (from *Building Lives*)

right
Advertisements, such as this example for Sapolio detergent, began to proliferate in professional journals, aggressively promoting the vast new array of accessories, hardware, and cleaning products necessary to support the "life" of buildings. (from *Building Lives*)

By this point in the book, readers have been effectively drawn into the expansion of the nineteenth-century building industry, almost as seductively as they were drawn into the world of real estate speculation in Steven Millhauser's great novel set in nineteenth-century New York, *Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer*.³ The reader has been made aware of some of the myriad industries spawned by large buildings: directory systems; cleaning supplies; elevator indicators; coordinated key-and-lock systems; and hardware stores themselves, which "have become dominated by the thousands of items which make up the life-support systems that buildings contain—sockets, locks, wires, faucets, drains, hoses, gutters, shingles, switches, pipes, and hundreds of pieces with no easily recognized name." The author's innovative comparison of the hardware store to a pharmacy or hospital supply room is particularly apt, underscoring Harris's main thesis while leading the reader into the vast industrial and commercial world that surrounds buildings.

The third chapter, "Saying Good-Bye," concerns the final stage of a building's life cycle and includes the transformation and renovation of buildings, as well as their eventual destruction. Harris continues his biological analogy with the statement that "nothing better reveals the linkages made, sometimes unconsciously, between building and human life cycles, than the powerful emotions raised by the expiration of a structure's time on earth." He associates the ends of buildings' lives with old age, disease, attempts to cure disease, and death, by examining issues of building depreciation, the retrofit of buildings with new technical systems, adaptive reuse, historic preservation, demolition, and the moving of buildings and parts of buildings to take on new life in other places. In this chapter, the author makes important connections to the

fields of architectural history and historic preservation. Harris ends the chapter with some thoughtful comments on the significance of looking at "building rites of passage." The documentation of buildings about to be demolished, efforts toward their preservation, and even the construction of replicas after their demise all resemble actions that might be taken when a person dies. These acts help to fulfill a human need for the continuity that comes with memory.

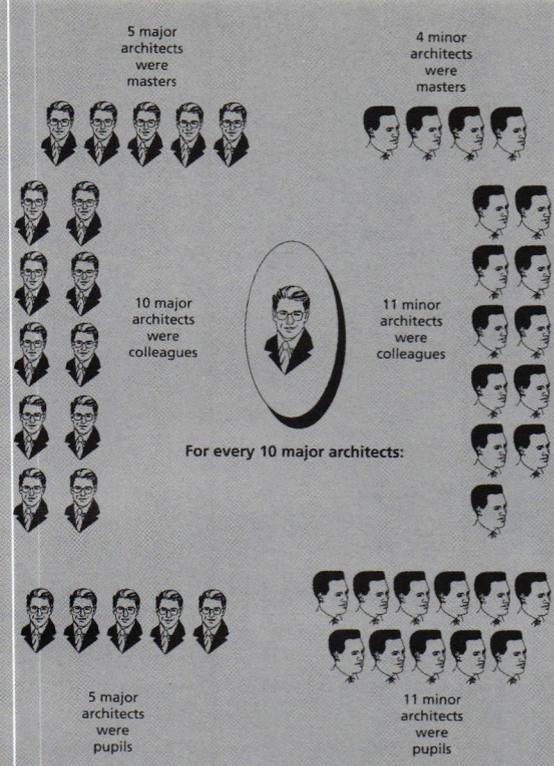
Building Lives includes a wide range of evocative photographs from various archives, including images of cornerstone layings, invitations to building dedications, brochures that marketed buildings, advertisements for building cleaning companies and building directory companies, and scenes of building demolitions. These photos—many of which might be considered ephemera, the sorts of things that might ordinarily be ignored or discarded—help give substance to the author's story and bring to light sources that might otherwise not have been known.

Harris only briefly acknowledges the work of other contemporary authors who write about similar or related themes—for example, Stewart Brand's *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built*, which describes the physical transformations of buildings over time; and Clare Cooper Marcus's book based on Jungian ideas and many years of fieldwork, *House as a Mirror of Self*, which elaborates on how people's thoughts and their dwellings are intimately bound together.⁴ Pursuing these connections further might have helped Harris develop his own metaphor more completely. He has also largely missed the work of anthropologists such as Roxana Waterson, who describes in *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia* how the vernacular dwellings of Southeast Asia are seen as living things, a concept that is reinforced through language, design, and rituals of construction and use.⁵

But these are minor criticisms of a book that has so engagingly—and often entertainingly—dealt with the subject of building life cycles from a perspective that deftly brings together architectural and cultural history. The book will appeal to both the specialist and the general reader who wishes to gain more of an appreciation of the role buildings play in social and cultural life. ■

Notes

- 1 Linda Clarke, *Building Capitalism: Historical Change and the Labour Process in the Production of the Built Environment* (London: Routledge, 1992); Catherine W. Bishir, Charlotte V. Brown, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Ernest H. Wood III, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); Mary N. Woods, *From Craft to Profession: The Practice of Architecture in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).
- 2 Philip Steadman, *The Evolution of Designs: Biological Analogy in Architecture and the Applied Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
- 3 Steven Millhauser, *Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer* (New York: Crown, 1996).
- 4 Stewart Brand, *How Buildings Learn: What Happens after They're Built* (New York: Viking, 1994); Clare Cooper Marcus, *House as a Mirror of Self* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1995).
- 5 Roxana Waterson, *The Living House: An Anthropology of Architecture in South-East Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).



Designed for Success

by Jill Pearlman

The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction

by Garry Stevens
MIT Press, 1998
228 pp., \$37.95

This diagram by Garry Stevens demonstrates how distinguished architects are connected to one another through a tight social network of master-pupil and collegial relations. Stevens surveyed architects listed in the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* and found that well-known architects (with entries of a page or more) pass down greatness to their students. For every ten major architects, five learned their craft from other noteworthy designers while four served under lesser architects in the *Encyclopedia*. The group of ten had an average of ten famous and eleven semifamous colleagues. Finally, the ten major architects had five famous and eleven nearly famous students.
(from *The Favored Circle*)

Jill Pearlman received her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. She teaches the history of the built environment in the Environmental Studies program at Bowdoin College in Maine. She is currently finishing a book on the Bauhaus legacy during the Hudnut and Gropius years at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Why do some architects make it, while others don't? Why do some spend their days behind computers detailing garages, while others design high-toned buildings for powerful clients with exquisite tastes? Why are some architects celebrities like Philip Johnson, while others just toil in the trenches, distant from the architectural hubs of New York and London?

Garry Stevens, author of *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*, is not even close to being an architectural star. Stevens was for many years affiliated with the University of Sydney's Department of Architectural and Design Science—where students train in architectural structure, computer-aided design, and building services. To understand where Stevens is coming from in his book, one must know that he is not affiliated with the University of Sydney's other architecture department, the white-collar Department of Architecture, Planning, and Allied Arts. This branch of the university's faculty of architecture educates students in design, history, professional practice, and construction.

The two departments coexist uneasily, according to Stevens; at times the differences between the "artists" in the latter department and the "techies" in the former have caused all-out warfare. The local architectural community, design professors, and undergraduates at the university all seem to think that design science courses are boring, irrelevant, and time consuming. The proper role for the techies, as they see it, is the occasional lecture, the casual consultancy in the design studio—some kind of subordinate role. Fine.

Why should we care anyway about faculty infighting at the other end of the world?

All of this matters enormously to Stevens's book—a book that other reviewers have found teeming with "splenic resentment" toward the architectural elite at Sydney and beyond. Indeed, the schism at Sydney seems to have inspired Stevens to write his book, and his disdain for the architectural elite floats on the surface throughout it. Stevens takes numerous jabs at Peter Eisenman, for example, precisely the sort of elitist architect he loathes. And without naming them, he occasionally assails others at the pinnacle of architectural achievement for their "extraordinary lack of humor and priggish self-righteousness," as well as their galling "lack of modesty."

Stevens identifies himself in the book as an architectural sociologist. *The Favored Circle* is, indeed, a well-written work of architectural sociology that belongs alongside the writings of Judith Blau, Dana Cuff, Magali Sarfatti Larson, and Robert Gutman.¹ The book's basic argument is this: most of the architects who make it to the top in the architectural field—winning fame, followers, great commissions, prestigious posts, and fancy friends—do so not because they have an abundance of talent or creativity, but because they have the right social experience. It's not "genius" that makes the architectural genius, but "hidden forms" of class domination.

Stevens's book falls somewhat outside the realm of the sociology of the design professions eminently occupied by Blau, Cuff, Gutman, and Larson. Gutman's primary interest, for example,



lies in the changing status of the architectural profession. Writing in the late 1980s, he suggests ways in which the profession must change its educational system, philosophy of practice, and the structure of firms to survive in an increasingly competitive world. Cuff, too, looks at the culture of architectural practice, in large part as a participant-observer in a number of architectural offices, and argues that architecture schools must prepare students to take the helm in the complex collaborations where design evolves. Blau and Larson also examine the structure of the profession, with Larson's recent book focusing on the role discourse plays in shaping practice. While all four of these authors examine what the architect knows and often does—with the manner of a guidance counselor—Stevens argues that to succeed in architecture, it's *who* you know and where you come from that really count.

Stevens not only stands apart from these other sociologists for methodological reasons, but also because he is an architect and his book has a definite personal agenda. There is nothing objective or disinterested in what Stevens has to say. He has discovered that no matter what he does, he can't get into the "favored circle." One aim of his book is to explain why he doesn't want to be there anyway. Johnson is, of course, a great example of the company Stevens doesn't want to keep. The noted architect first joined the "favored circle" in 1932 when, along with Henry-Russell Hitchcock, he launched the Museum of Modern Art, New York's, controversial International Style exhibition, while working gratis, thanks to family wealth. And despite Johnson's antipathy for the Harvard-affiliated Walter Gropius and his esteem for the Illinois Institute of Technology's (IIT) Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, he could not imagine an IIT degree on his resume and opted for Harvard instead.

That architectural distinction has social foundations is hardly a radical notion, reluctant as some may be to admit that their careers haven't rested solely on talent. What makes Stevens's book interesting and engaging, however, are some

of the specifics of his argument and the bold way in which he sets out to make his case—though at the start of the book he does warn us (accurately) that he will overstate it. Stevens asserts that a primary aim of our architectural education system is "to produce cultivated individuals"; that the ultimate goal of the architectural field is "to produce instruments of taste"; and "that efflorescence of architectural creativity at the highest levels can be most readily explained by the existence and particular structure of master-pupil chains." Stevens concedes that one does acquire skills in architecture school, and that to make it in the field, one must also have talent. But these things are beside his point.

To make his case, Stevens uses the conceptual equipment of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu is chairman of sociology at the College de France (where Michel Foucault taught) and an author one turns to when one is interested in why people act as they do and how their actions are affected by their social status and position in their field. Bourdieu's 1979 book *Distinction: A Social Critique of Taste* is of particular interest to Stevens, who has subtitled his own book *The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*.² Stevens describes Bourdieu as "an angry man... motivated by the conviction that modern society is riven by profound iniquities," which we simply accept. We learn that Bourdieu, who comes from the French provinces, harbors a visceral resentment of Parisian patricians that motivates his work. (Substitute Sydney for Paris and we see why Stevens feels a strong connection to Bourdieu.) Much as Bourdieu tries to "unmask the realities behind the surface appearances of our everyday experience" in *Distinction*, so does Stevens try to unmask the realities of those in the "favored circle." In a lengthy chapter devoted to unpacking Bourdieu's "sociological toolkit," Stevens does a good job of making Bourdieu's complex prose and ideas accessible to the reader who is generally interested in things architectural.

One of the primary features of Bourdieu's sociology, and of Stevens's now, is "habitus." Habitus refers to a set of deeply ingrained dispositions that one acquires mostly from early socialization or social experience. We don't exactly choose to be who we are, but from our background we acquire a way of seeing or doing things. Although our habitus will likely change as we encounter new people, places, and experiences in our lives, it will only change so much. Our class background, the outlook of the people with whom we identify—these things don't just go away. As Stevens puts it, "habitus is a social analogue of genetic inheritance." Johnson has a good one. Apparently, Stevens's doesn't match up.

"Cultural capital" is another important concept of Bourdieu's sociology on which Stevens relies. A person with a lot of "cultural capital" likely has ample academic qualifications and privileged social ties; no doubt has some artwork or perhaps an admirable book collection; and, of course, has the right tastes, clothes, and manner. But architects who have lots of cultural capital—a Harvard degree, a David Hockney painting, a regular table at Berkeley's Chez Panisse—still may not make it into the "favored circle" if their habitus suggests that their blood is not blue. As Stevens explains, "where the newcomer must work for recognition, those who have been immersed in the game from youth seem to have a natural gift for it, effortlessly rising to the top by 'natural talent.'"

Stevens's concern for the broader architectural "field," rather than "profession," also derives from Bourdieu. Stevens sees the field as a "mutually supporting" group of individuals, organizations, and discourses, including not just architects, but critics, historians, clients, financial institutions, and construction supervisors, among others. All of these people or groups of people affect every architect in the field. No one's place in the field is absolute, as we know from the examples of Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, whose positions in the profession have waxed and waned at various points, even if their talents did not.

To consider the architectural field in the light of Bourdieu's theories, as Stevens does, is intriguing and may indeed change one's views of the architectural universe. Stevens's analysis becomes problematic, however, in the latter half of his book. Here he tries to use Bourdieu's ideas to draw grand conclusions about the changing structure of the architectural field over the last six hundred years—primarily to look at what has allowed architects to enter "the pantheon of the great and the good" over time. This is a huge challenge, of course, though Stevens makes it easy on himself by using the four-volume *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* as his sole source of data. Knowing that readers of his book might

object to his simplistic analysis of the history of the architectural field since the Renaissance, Stevens offers an elaborate apologia of his use of the encyclopedia. Moreover, in an irritating footnote that attempts to dismiss the criticisms he anticipates from his reviewers, Stevens claims that historians in the English-speaking world have never liked the kind of analysis he offers. His proof of this lies, he says dubiously, in the negative reaction of some Americans to the work of Annales historian Fernand Braudel. (Mr. Stevens, you are no Fernand Braudel.)

Stevens's conclusion, once he presents his data with an array of charts, graphs, maps, and statistics, is that throughout its history, "the field of architecture has relied on the transmission of symbolic capital through chains of masters and pupils, webs of personal contacts, to reproduce itself." We can even trace a direct link, he tells us, between the designer Stanley Tigerman and the seventeenth-century architect Jacques Lemercier. Faulty as his reliance on the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* may be, Stevens is probably right that getting to the top of the architectural field—where one designs "structures of power and taste for people of power and taste"—is only possible for very few architects, those with the right habitus and ample cultural capital. For those hoping unrealistically to make it to the architectural peak, do not despair. By the time you finish *The Favored Circle*, being outside of it seems the right place to be. ■

Notes

- 1 See Judith Blau, *Architects and Firms: A Sociological Perspective on Architectural Practice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984); Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); Magali Sarfatti Larson, *Behind the Postmodern Façade: Architectural Change in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1988).
- 2 The English version of the book is titled *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

Cities in Words

by Terrence Doody



The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History

by Richard Lehan
University of California Press, 1998
330 pp., \$45.00; \$17.95 (paper)

Richard Lehan's *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* is excellent in every way—a rare book that is useful both to the newcomer who wants an introduction to urban literature and to the veteran who wants to match wits. As the modern city has developed from the Enlightenment on, so have the novel and the kinds of modern poetry that the novel has influenced; and Lehan treats the relationships between the city and its representations as more than merely aesthetic issues. His book is, as his subtitle indicates, an intellectual and cultural history. The book's title and its ambition clearly allude to Lewis Mumford's magisterial study *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*; however, Lehan's book is both shorter and broader.¹ Mumford's thesis is based on Sigmund Freud's argument in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that for every gain the city makes, there is a corresponding loss.² The more protection a city offers, the more incentives it has for aggression; the greater the populace, the greater the need for regimentation. Lehan has read Freud, of course; but he has also read Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and the great urban sociologists like Georg Simmel. His book draws, therefore, not upon any single idea of the city's development, but upon many ideas from many different sources.

Lehan thinks of his book as annular in organization and reflective of the annular organization of the city itself. The inner ring of his book, as it were, contains the history of the modern city; the outer ring treats the ways in which the city has been represented in literature; and the middle ring connects the two with discussions of the history and sociology of urban movements and themes. This organization creates a context that enhances his presentation of the literature in many ways. Because European imperialism defines the capital

city as a metropolis, Lehan can argue that Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which is set mainly in the Congo, is a metropolitan novel. Likewise, the importance of the frontier in American culture, and the distrust of the city that the frontier's myth of freedom has always encouraged, allow him to treat pastoral writers like Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway as a part of urban discourse. For Lehan, even William Faulkner is an urban writer.

Nonetheless, Lehan addresses the inevitable major figures of urban literature very well—Charles Dickens, Walt Whitman, the Parisian *flâneur*. Equally well, he illuminates unexpected topics like the urbanity of Gothic novels and of T. S. Eliot's plays. He treats the poets Hart Crane and William Carlos Williams as seriously as he does the novelists Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola. And Lehan's inclusiveness produces surprises. He presents Herman Melville, for instance, as an urban writer—not as the author of *Moby Dick*, but as the author of *Redburn*, set in the Old World city of Liverpool, and of "Bartleby the Scrivener," set in the New World city of New York. And the detective becomes a more interesting literary figure when Lehan connects him both to the *flâneur* who preceded him and to the figure of the alienated modern artist who followed as the representative of human consciousness in the twentieth-century city. This puts Charles Baudelaire, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, and Leopold Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses* on the same tramline, and is very nicely done.

Lehan published his first book, on Theodore Dreiser, in 1969, so he is a mature scholar who has been thinking about the city in literature for some time. He seems to have read everything, and he knows a lot. He knows, for instance, what Eliot was reading when he wrote *The Waste Land*

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(Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* and Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, two great, dark, city books), and he explains why the sense of historical decline in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is not merely a result of postwar depression or the nostalgia of the narrator, Nick Carraway. Lehan incorporates population figures and trends into *The City in Literature*, and his prose is unusually fast and clean. The index is good, too, and Lehan repeats his governing principles often enough that you can return to parts of the book without feeling you've lost a sense of the whole. A sweeping argument can be exciting without being particularly useful, but Lehan's is both, and his central historical thesis unfolds quite clearly.

In *The City in Literature*, the modern city begins in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the land-based economy of the estate gave way to the commercial economy and the surplus of people and materials the city housed. But this early modern city is also a construct of the Enlightenment, and is, therefore, secular rather than sacred or mythic in nature. This city's economic origins oppose the privileges of the clergy and aristocracy, and its emphasis on natural rights and individual accomplishment, rather than on inherited advantage, brings into literary focus characters like Daniel Defoe's Moll Flanders, who would have been beneath notice in the social order of the landed aristocracy. Lehan asserts that the great book to come from this early modern city, the epitome of its Enlightenment values, is not any sacred text (or even the novel itself) but the encyclopedia, which is organized according to reason and written by many hands. More than once, he calls capital "matter in motion," a phrase that becomes suggestive of the modern city's whole history.

The next phase of urban development in Lehan's exposition is the great commercial city of the nineteenth century, which is presented most completely in novels of Dickens. Lehan's bias is clearly Anglo-American: he does much more with Dickens than with Balzac, for example, and more with T. S. Eliot than with the absolutely seminal Baudelaire. But there is some historical justification for this bias. By the early 1800s, London's population exceeded a million people, and England as a society had become much more urbanized than France. And Lehan's analysis of Dickens's work is excellent. Dickens's novels, like London itself, are crowded and complex; his characters actually go to work, and the atmospheric darkness of his writing is both sooty and psychoanalytic. Because Lehan thinks of Dickens as a comic writer who can only come to tragic conclusions, he is sympathetic with the way Dickens's sentimentality tries to "bring the city back to human scale."

In Lehan's study, the end of the nineteenth century brings the industrialized city, the novels of Zola, and the era of literary naturalism, in which the hostile, deterministic forces of the material universe are often expressed in metaphors of machines or mechanistic systems more powerful than man or human will. Zola and his scientism, Lehan writes, "gave his contemporaries a wholly new way of thinking about the novel. Temperament was more important than character [so the morality of Dickensian sentiment would no longer work], setting could not be separated from a naturalistic theory of the environment, nor plot from theories of evolution." Lehan's account of Zola is unusually complex and provides another good example of how his thoughtfulness and experience work for us. He points out that the theories of physiology and heredity on which Zola based his cycle of Rougon-Macquart family novels are not as important, ultimately, as Zola's instinctive sense of economic forces. Lehan also points out that although Zola's plots may doom the individual, they argue for the progress of the masses. Naturalism, therefore, is not a complete dead end of human opportunity. And one of the smartest things Lehan does is to demonstrate naturalism's surprising connection to impressionist painting and to the passive form of consciousness implicit in impressionist style, as well as the way in which this connection offers an avenue into modernism and the freedom modernist literature claims for consciousness.

Impressionism is a passive form of perception that records the material world's concrete, fleeting impingement on the individual eye and mind. The subjectivity of such impressions leads eventually into the heroic consciousness of Leopold Bloom in the Dublin of Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Bloom may be isolated in the modernist city, but what is missing from his experience of community is compensated for in the variety and range of his full consciousness. In Bloom, the figure of the artist *is* the city, to the extent that the modernist city is a state of mind as surely as it is a physical place. Because Joyce places his characters both in a specific historical setting and in a mythic timelessness, he argues neither for progress nor for historical decline. *Ulysses* is an affirmative book because its characters are at least adequate to their environment, and Bloom is actually a virtuous man.

The chapter following Lehan's treatment of Joyce begins, "We have moved in the twentieth century from apocalypse to entropy," and in this chapter he treats Eliot's poems and plays. Without a character equal to Bloom, *The Waste Land* (1922), in particular, depicts a much bleaker, more incoherent version of the modernist city than *Ulysses* does, and from Eliot's London to the entirely entropic postmodernist city of Los Angeles in Thomas

opposite

Gustave Caillebotte's painting Paris Street: Rainy Day, 1877, illustrates the psychological effect of a new urban environment on individual lives. Baron Georges Haussmann's transformation of Paris during Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte III's reign resulted in an urban center more suited to the isolated consciousness of the flâneur, the quintessential figure of modernity in literature.

(from *The City in Literature*)

Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1965), there is a short step but steep descent into centerless mystery and despair. Pynchon does not analyze and enlarge the consciousness of his heroine, Oedipa Maas, as Joyce does Bloom's; he diminishes her by treating her quest for meaning as a problem in information theory, which deprives her of any agency as completely as any theory in Zola's work deprives his characters. Lehan writes, "The self that emerges from Defoe's city is collapsed into the maze of Pynchon's, and the old self is as different from the new as the simple mechanics of Defoe's commercial world are different from the complex mechanics of the world city. The world city exacts a high price, as the sense of individual freedom that emerges in Defoe gives way to totalitarianism and repression in Pynchon."

I am struck and depressed by this kind of argument. Lehan's book is so rich in other ideas and possibilities that it does not have to sound this conventionally pessimistic note. At one point earlier in his argument, in fact, Lehan writes, "Whitman is to American literature what Joyce is to European literature: he changed its direction in midstream...[because] Whitman's philosophy, like [Ralph Waldo] Emerson's, turns on a theory of the One and the Many." And, like Joyce—who saw in Bloom a version not only of Homer's Odysseus, but of William Shakespeare, Dedalus the artificer, God the Father Himself, and both the Wandering Jew and the Good Samaritan—Whitman believed himself to be fluid rather than fixed. He contained multitudes, he proclaimed, and he celebrated their contradictions. This kind of characterization is not merely a literary theme in Joyce and Whitman, it is the result of a general change in our understanding of human consciousness and its social environment. Joyce's characters and Whitman's are not reduced to enact a mechanistic theory, as is Pynchon's Oedipa; rather, they are expanded to embody all the possible senses of the self that we, too, can feel in our experience of the city's variety and of the novel's vision and characters.

I know that an attitude like mine can seem naïve and that Lehan's position of tragic disappointment with the city is an easier one to take because it is tough-minded and so well established in literary history. But we have always known that the real city is not the heavenly city that Enlightenment thinkers hoped for as a part of man's perfectability. Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), Alessandro Manzoni's treatment of corruption and the plague in seventeenth-century Milan in *The Betrothed* (1827), and Andrei Bely's account of filth and dissolution in revolutionary *Petersburg* (1915) have all been central to the novel's critical tradition. Yet Lehan himself praises Defoe precisely

because Defoe does *not* subscribe to the Puritan belief that the plague means the city is always and intrinsically evil, a belief that defines "the infected city" not as an Enlightenment idea, but as "the city—Sodom, Babylon, Vanity Fair—founded by Cain."

The city is neither good nor evil, but, like everything human, it is something of both. Yet the glamorous promise that drew Balzac's Rastignac to Paris, Dickens's Pip to London, and Fitzgerald's Gatsby to New York has now been relegated to movie backgrounds and expensive magazines, as we in the world of academia have come to feel not only that the Enlightenment has "failed," but that representations are more authentic than reality, images of the city more powerful than our actual experience of it. We do think of the postmodern as the age of the virtual. The semiotic wilderness of Pynchon's L.A., however, is not wholly or actually Los Angeles, and Lehan's own eagerness to argue otherwise is a telling sign of the literary tradition's power to shape our desire and distort perception. Exposing this power and its destructive clichés is one of the most important things Raymond Williams does in *The Country and the City*. His point—that the city is not its traditional representations, and neither is the country—is confirmed again and again by millions of young women and men who are still fleeing the provinces, despite literature's warnings, for the magic and possibilities of big cities all over the world.³ And, in America, fleeing back to them from the disillusioned suburbs.

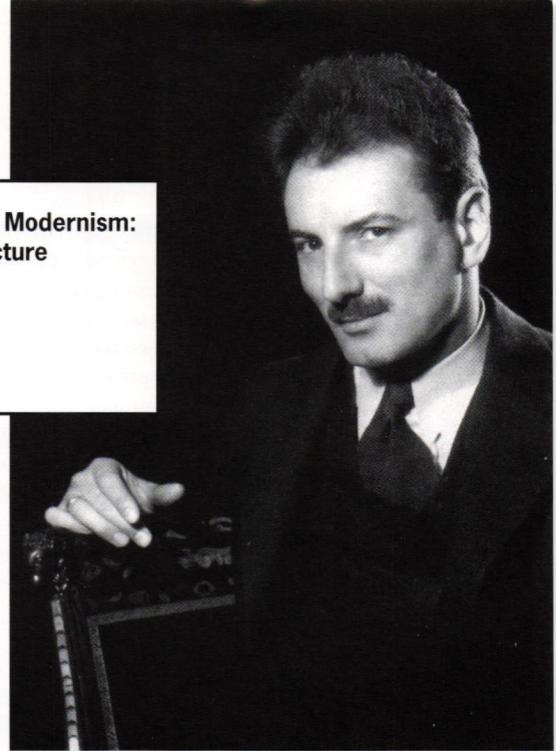
But this quarrelsome note is not the one on which I want to end. When I began to read *The City in Literature*, I found myself wishing I had had it years ago when I began to teach my own course on the city. When I finished, I wished I had been able to write it myself. I have only begun to suggest its fullness—the range of Lehan's thematic framework; the wealth of his book's details; his fast, full readings; his network of insights. This is a book I will keep assigning and rereading, teaching and learning from. And for this I will always be grateful. ■

Notes

- 1 Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961).
- 2 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London: Leonard & Virginia Woolf at the Hogarth Press, 1930).
- 3 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

**Lewis Mumford and American Modernism:
Eutopian Theories for Architecture
and Urban Planning**

by Robert Wojtowicz
Cambridge University Press, 1996
240 pp., \$64.95; \$19.95 (paper)



Portrait of the critic as a young man: Lewis Mumford in 1932.
(from *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*)

Better than Utopia

by David R. Walters

In *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism: Eutopian Theories for Architecture and Urban Planning*, author Robert Wojtowicz, an associate professor of art history at Old Dominion University, presents a balanced picture of the intellectual life and writings of twentieth-century America's preeminent architectural and urban critic Lewis Mumford, a leading proponent of modernism.

Wojtowicz wisely lets Mumford's own words speak for themselves and keeps his editorializing to a minimum, preferring instead to place excerpts from the book within the context not only of Mumford's complex relationships with his colleagues and opponents, but of the intellectual climate of the times. What emerges from this structure is the relevance of Mumford's original sentiments to today's architectural climate, in his arguments for an authentic regionalism in planning and in defining the canon of American architects that he felt should form the basis for meaningful architectural design. Given our own struggle within the design fields to find authentic American voices in the postmodern age and the current debate over whether such authenticity even exists, Mumford's acerbic attacks on the retreat to historicism in both architecture and urban planning provide timely perspectives.

Mumford's largely independent development as a social thinker and critic in the 1910s and 1920s was significantly influenced by the work of the great Scottish biologist and town planner Sir Patrick Geddes and by the English garden city reformer Ebenezer Howard. It was Geddes who brought to Mumford's attention that Sir Thomas More's classic 1516 work *Utopia* was, in fact, a pun on the Greek "eutopia," the good place, and "outopia," no place. But Wojtowicz takes this association further by demonstrating clearly how profoundly Geddes's work affected Mumford

in areas beyond those of classical scholarship—so profoundly, in fact, that during the years on either side of the First World War, Mumford became America's chief advocate in print for the Scotsman's radical societal critiques of the city and its processes of urbanization.

In particular, Mumford despised the City Beautiful movement and its Beaux Arts foundation. He viewed this movement as an architectural pillage from Europe that would stifle the development of an authentic American architecture, which, in his view, needed to develop from a new appreciation of its own past. Writing in 1917 from his deeply held perspective, Mumford reviled the civic artifice as "the mere application of beauty patches and cosmetics to an ugly, diseased, and dilapidated town."

Without mentioning their names, Mumford clearly targeted architects like Charles Follen McKim and, above all, Daniel Burnham. His argument, as set out in the *Journal of the American Institute of Architects* in 1919, was that the City Beautiful movement was all form and no content—a mere façade that masked urban problems without confronting them:

The new idea was that beauty could be superimposed upon the work of the jerry-builder and the speculator by getting an electrician to light up the main thoroughfares, an architect to rear up a classic city hall, a sculptor to sprinkle a few monuments, and the local municipal engineer to carve up a public place. And the result was, of course, not beauty to satisfy the artist, but conspicuous expenditure to satisfy the businessman. The aim was simply to "put on a front."

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Wojtowicz examines how Mumford compared this superficiality to Geddes's and Howard's regional approaches, which each placed emphasis not on architectural style, but on understanding and improving the complex patterns of social and economic forces that were responsible for shaping settlements. Mumford was convinced that improvement in civic life and living conditions was a prerequisite to creating better towns and cities; any other solution would be a sham.

At one point, Wojtowicz describes Mumford's passion for cities via the words of another Mumford biographer, Donald L. Miller, who wrote in *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (1989) that for Mumford, as for Geddes,

[t]he city...was above all a stage, or physical setting, for the complex drama of living. In the city, with its sprawling cast of characters and pulsating energy, the drama of human life reached its highest pitch. A city's physical setting—its architecture and urban plan—could either frustrate this drama or intensify it.*

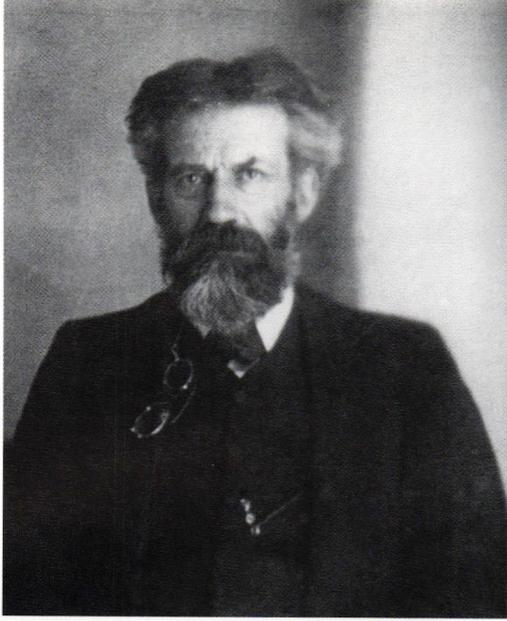
Wojtowicz structures his book around tracing the course of this passion, beginning with a chapter on Mumford's developing social critique of cities in the early years leading to the publication of his *The Story of Utopias* (1922) and ending with a chapter on Mumford's other prolific writings on cities; his active participation with Clarence S. Stein and Henry Wright in the Regional Planning Association of America; and his monumental and best-known work, *The City in History: Its Origins,*

Its Transformations, and Its Prospects (1961). Sandwiched between these sections are two chapters on Mumford's development and ideology as an architectural historian and critic. Wojtowicz pays particular attention to Mumford's search to discover and articulate a usable past—a panoply of precedents within the nation's architectural history that would serve as a foundation for constructing America's answer to Europe's formal and intellectual domination of modernism.

In *Sticks and Stones: A Study of American Architecture and Civilization* (1924) and *The Brown Decades: A Study of the Arts in America, 1865–1895* (1931), Mumford gradually defined his pantheon of American architects whose works, for him, embodied and illustrated the nation's basis for a flourishing modernism. Henry Hobson Richardson, John Wellborn Root, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright, together with John and Washington Roebling and Frederick Law Olmsted, provided a lexicon of American talent that still dominates most textbooks today. Of particular interest is the fact that Mumford supported Wright during the ups and downs of his mercurial career, but that even this close affiliation could not withstand Wright's later isolationist and antiwar views during the grim days of 1941. In a vitriolic correspondence that spawned a break of ten years in civil relations between the two men, Mumford scolded Wright for his dogmatic isolationism. Wojtowicz excerpts

In order to reflect upon the advantages and disadvantages of life in the modern city, Mumford withdrew with his wife for at least part of every year to their farmhouse in the countryside of Leedsville, New York.
(from *Lewis Mumford and American Modernism*)





Lewis Mumford, whose image is on the right, believed that the City Beautiful movement favored form over content and merely masked urban ills. On the left is Scottish town-planning theorist Sir Patrick Geddes, who had a profound influence on Mumford's early intellectual development. Geddes advocated an interdisciplinary approach to studying civilization and was a proponent of the regional survey. In 1925, Mumford named his firstborn son Geddes, after his mentor.

(from Lewis Mumford and American Modernism)

a particularly bitter letter Mumford wrote on May 30, 1941, to the man he had long admired and championed:

You shrink into your selfish ego and urge America to follow you; you are willing to abandon to their terrible fate the conquered, the helpless, the humiliated, the suffering: you carefully refrain from offending, if only by a passing reference, those Nazi overlords to whom in your heart you, like [Charles] Lindbergh, have already freely given the fruits of victory. In short: you have become a living corpse: a spreader of active corruption. You dishonor all the generous impulses you once ennobled. Be silent! lest you bring upon yourself some greater shame.

Although the last years of the 1930s had seen the demise of the Regional Planning Association of America along with the end of the New Deal, in the years after World War II Mumford once again turned his critical energies toward the city and urban problems. Wojtowicz highlights Mumford's hostility to urban sprawl, which he criticized for causing the low population densities of the British New Towns of the late 1940s and early 1950s. By contrast, Mumford was more impressed by examples of inner-London redevelopment at higher densities, where the design was based on "the social constitution of the community itself, with its diversity of human interests and human needs."

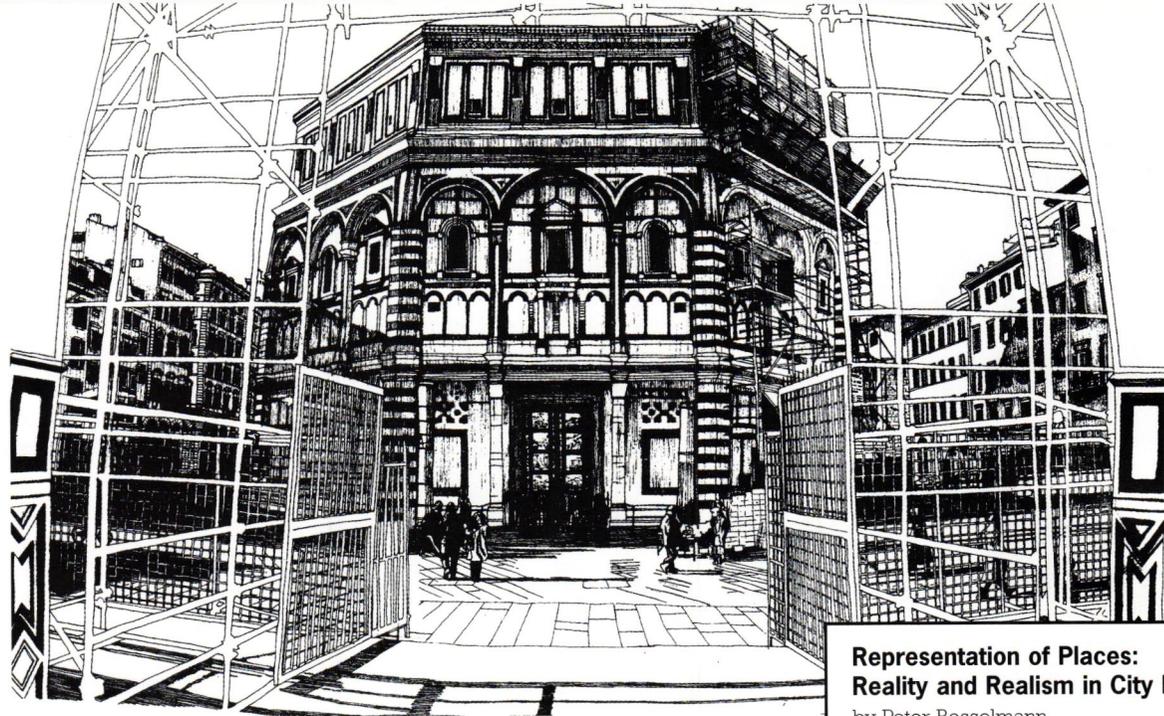
Given his appreciation of higher-density urban diversity, Mumford's attack on Jane Jacobs's arguments in her seminal 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* is, at first sight, remarkable. But Wojtowicz points out that despite the fact that both Mumford and Jacobs shared many beliefs in the value of a sociological approach to understanding cities, Jacobs had, in Mumford's eyes, committed a cardinal sin with her sweeping rejection of all types of city planning, summarized

in her catchy dismissive phrase, the "Radiant Garden City Beautiful." Mumford, according to Wojtowicz, "could not tolerate such a slapdash approach to city planning," and proceeded to attack Jacobs's argument point by point in *The New Yorker*, accusing her of faulty data-collection methods and massive misunderstandings and omissions. In an ironic observation regarding this debate, which is still relevant today, Wojtowicz points out that "[i]n the meantime, the American middle class continues to flee the city for the safety and anonymity of the suburbs and exurbs, an outward flow that neither Mumford nor Jacobs could effectively stanch, their moral pronouncements notwithstanding."

In light of the recent revival of sometimes uncritical interest in Jacobs's thesis, prompted by a new generation of New Urbanist architects and city planners, Wojtowicz's work is a timely return to Mumford's breathtaking oeuvre of writings on the city. Many of Mumford's criticisms of historical pastiche in building and urban design ring as true today as they did seventy years ago, and Wojtowicz's deceptively simple book serves as a tool for new audiences to appreciate the importance of Mumford's message about the vital social and cultural dimensions of architecture and urban planning. To Mumford, the distinction between "utopia" and "eutopia" was an important one. He ultimately came to regard utopianism as another form of totalitarianism; but he equated eutopia instead with a healthy communitarian view, consistent with his belief in regionalism and an organic way of life. Wojtowicz ends his book with a quotation that sums up Mumford's synthesis: "Damn utopias!" Mumford once wrote, "Life is better than utopia." ■

Note

- * Donald L. Miller, *Lewis Mumford: A Life* (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989).



**Representation of Places:
Reality and Realism in City Design**

by Peter Bosselmann
University of California Press, 1998
232 pp., \$35.00

Italy: Cross Sections of a Country

by Gabriele Basilico and Stefano Boeri
Scalo, 1998
152 pp., \$34.95

Cartographic Consciousness

by **Andrew Cruse**

Maps have become a fashionable academic topic. Once considered neutral and objective—"mirrors of reality" is a common metaphor—maps are now studied as rhetorical devices, and the process of mapping as a subjective selection process. This interest is part of a larger "spatial turn" in the humanities, which grew from the poststructuralist attention to sources of power and wariness of universal explanations. In this light, maps are studied for the insight they provide into the values of the physical, social, and imaginary worlds that their creators envisioned. For example, Renaissance maps are examined as expressions of emerging scientific worldviews, trade maps are studied to chronicle the rise of colonialism, and census maps are seen as expressions of a desired social order.

This recent academic attention to maps and mapping has given rise to a growing cartographic consciousness within the design professions as well, fueling the imaginations of architects, landscape architects, and urbanists. Within these professions, creative thinking regarding mapping is often centered on the urban condition: how to understand it, how to effectively design within it, and how to communicate such understanding and ideas to others. Traditionally, the figure-ground technique has been the *lingua franca* of urban representation. First used by Giovanni Battista Nolli in his 1748 plan of Rome, a figure-ground map is based on an orthographic plan, in which the shape and relative position of objects are mathematically transferred onto a two-

dimensional graphic field using the conventions of scale. The figure-ground technique further emphasizes the distinction between private and public spaces: buildings are filled with hatching, or figure, while streets and public spaces are left white, or ground.

The authors of the two books reviewed here find fault with this abstract, two-dimensional type of representation, each for different reasons. Peter Bosselmann, author of *Representation of Places: Reality and Realism in City Design*, sees this technique as a specialized language that excludes those outside the profession. In *Italy: Cross Sections of a Country*, Stefano Boeri faults the two-dimensional map for revealing little about the sprawling, discontinuous nature of the contemporary city. The two authors each then try to redress these shortcomings by proposing other ways of representing the urban scene.

Representation of Places is intended both as a general history of the techniques of urban representation used by designers and as a presentation of case studies carried out by the Environmental Simulation Laboratory, housed within the University of California, Berkeley's College of Environmental Design. This laboratory, which plays a central role in supporting many of Bosselmann's arguments, serves as a research facility for urban planners. Using a variety of representational

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techniques, the lab assesses the impact of such factors as wind, traffic, and sunlight on existing and proposed housing developments, street systems, and zoning patterns.

The book is more informative as a history of the laboratory, through the case studies for downtown areas in New York, San Francisco, and Toronto, than as the general history it also attempts to provide. Bosselmann himself teaches in the College of Environmental Design's Urban Design Department, so it is no surprise to see that the ideas in his book share a lineage with the lab. The lab was established in 1968 by urban planner Donald Appleyard, who in turn was a student of Kevin Lynch. It was Lynch who developed the idea of cognitive mapping in his book *The Image of the City*.¹ With cognitive mapping, Lynch intended to create a popularly accessible visual language that would allow nonprofessionals to represent their experience of a city graphically, and, through this language, to gain a voice in the debates on how their city would be changed. Appleyard and Lynch's call for a populist language of urban representation that could affect public debate is echoed throughout Bosselmann's book.

Representation of Places is divided into three parts. The first is a history of the techniques of urban representation; the second presents case studies carried out by the laboratory; and the third examines how computer technology can be used to offer different visions of the city. The book's central conflict, which Bosselmann establishes in the first section, is between the "abstract," "conceptual" two-dimensional plan and three-dimensional techniques such as perspective or film. Although he claims to be interested in a synthesis of two- and three-dimensional techniques, his analysis strongly favors three-dimensional ones. Bosselmann's goal for perspectival urban representation is realism, as his book's subtitle indicates. Such realistic images are prized because they can be understood easily by a non-professional audience.

While Bosselmann's emphasis on the communicability of urban images grows out of the Lynch-Appleyard tradition at the College of Environmental Design, his observations on the differences between plan and perspective are nearly as old as the making of maps in the Western world. The Greek geometer, astronomer, and mathematician Ptolemy, whose *Geographia* (ca. 150 A.D.) was one of the Western world's first known atlases, distinguished between the two fields of geography and chorography. While the geographer produced a mathematically abstracted, two-dimensional representation of large areas equivalent to a map, the chorographer produced three-dimensional, sensuous images of smaller areas, such as perspective views.

In developing his argument, Bosselmann does not address the fundamental difference that Ptolemy originally established between the scale and subject matter suited to two-dimensional representation and that suited to three-dimensional representation. More importantly, Bosselmann's penchant for perspective limits his notion of urban design, in many cases, to a pedestrian's view of a dense, downtown area. Such a goal for urban representation artificially limits both the role of urban design and the idea of the city. As historians can examine medieval world maps to understand the cosmological belief system of the Middle Ages, for example, so, too, can today's urban and architectural historians look at urban maps to reveal current and changing attitudes toward urban design and the city. Recognizing the biases of different representational techniques becomes even more important when such historians become polemicists, arguing for one way to represent the city over another.

In considering urban representation, one must recognize that maps are not objective "mirrors of reality," but that there is a reciprocal relationship between the act of mapping and an understanding of the urban situation. In drawing a map, one presents an understanding of a place, and, in turn, an evolving understanding of the urban condition can cause one to rethink how maps are drawn. By missing this interplay between the city and the act of mapping, Bosselmann misses one of the main reasons for the current interest in mapping, and one of the most fruitful areas for research.

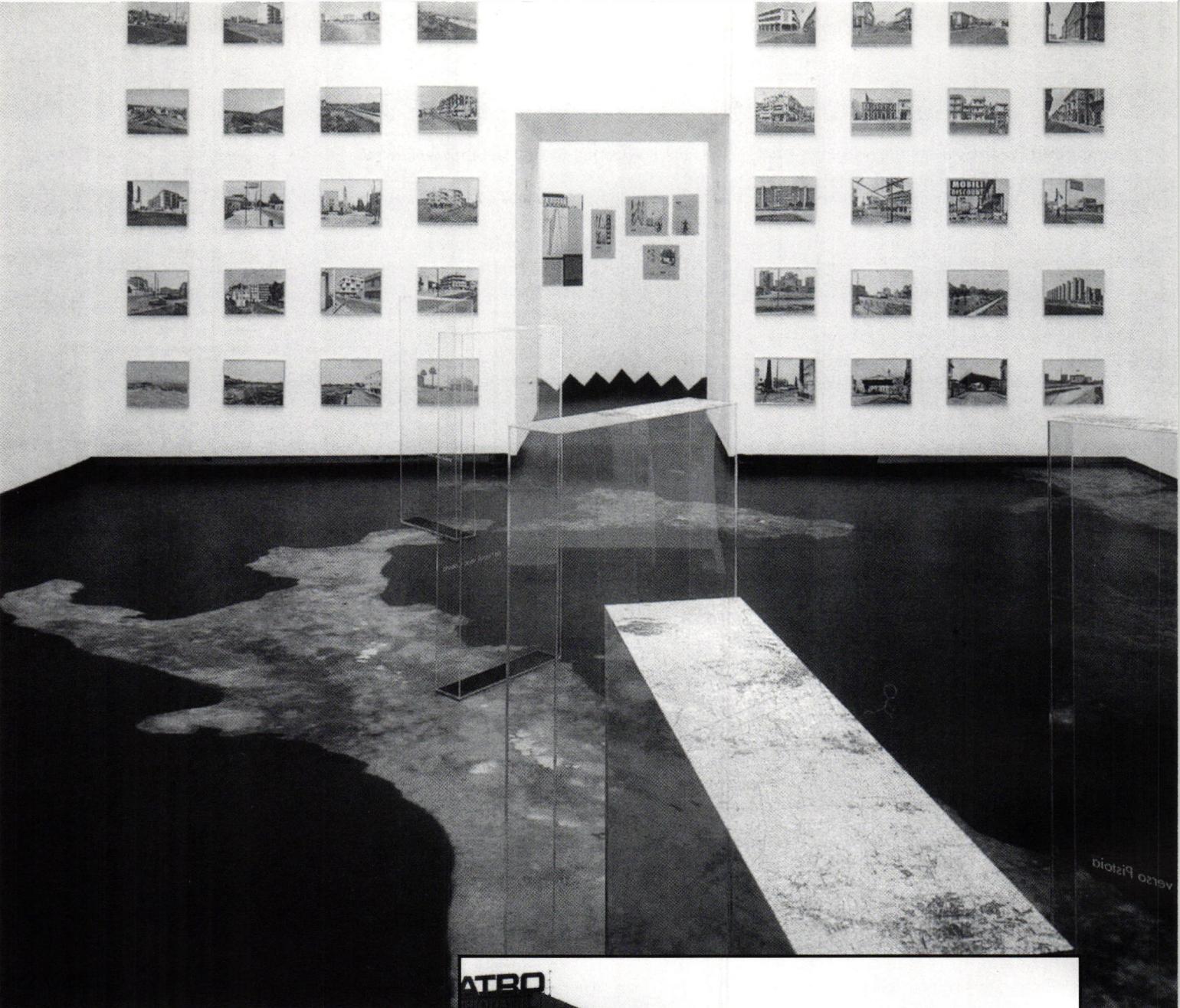
opposite

This multiple-point perspective line drawing of the view from the Baptistery in Florence, Italy, was created as a composite of twenty separate photographs. The drawing attempts to replicate how humans perceive architecture, and each original image records only as much as the eye can take in at one time.
(from *Representation of Places*)

below

In 1987, the Environmental Simulation Laboratory at the University of California, Berkeley, produced an animated simulation, from which this screen shot was taken, of a drive along the proposed new West Side Highway in New York. The film was then aired on public television in order to solicit responses to the project from local residents.
(from *Representation of Places*)





Gabriele Basilico and Boeri's book, *Italy: Cross Sections of a Country*, addresses these evolving understandings of the city in part by developing a catholic attitude toward urban representation. The book was published in conjunction with a 1996 Venice Biennale exhibition of works by Basilico, a photographer, and Boeri, an architect, which examined Italian urban growth over the past twenty years. To conduct such an examination, Boeri selected six "cross sections" of Italy, each twelve kilometers wide by fifty kilometers long. All six were densely populated suburban zones that touched the edges of consolidated historical centers, among them Venice, Milan, Florence, and Naples. Basilico then recorded these sections in a series of black-and-white photographs that chronicle different aspects of this urban expansion. The photos depict a landscape of container stores, single-family homes and speculative office buildings, highways and power lines, and vast urban voids dominated by the automobile.

The exhibition consisted of a large-scale satellite image of the Italian peninsula applied to the floor of a room. Six Plexiglas cases rose from this image, representing the six cross sections. On top of each of these volumes was an orthographic map of its corresponding section, showing roads and general building density. Basilico's photos were displayed on the walls of the room. Judging from the book, the exhibition employed a variety of different media—photography, maps, and satellite imagery—to encourage the visitor to connect local conditions to territorial phenomena, and vice versa. The effect recalls Charles and Ray Eames's short film *Powers of Ten*, in which a photograph of a man lying on the grass is magnified or distanced, each time by a power of ten, until finally reaching the cellular level on one extreme and the cosmic level on the other.² In the Basilico and Boeri show, each of the three media recorded a different scale of Italian urbanization, and each was used to reveal different aspects of this growth. Basilico's photos showed the formal homogenization and prevalence of large, void spaces at ground level. The maps showed how these "dust-cloud cities"—a term Boeri introduces in order to describe the cumulative visual effect of the sprawling development of repetitive, free-standing buildings—have largely erased the clear boundaries between urban and rural areas. And the satellite image showed that such growth stretches from the north to the south of the Italian peninsula. The exhibition's overall impact seemed to have been greater than the sum of its parts, in that its format invited viewers to perceive each of the three scales simultaneously, weaving the perceptual with the abstract, the individual with the collective, and the local with the national.

Given their combined interests in the contemporary urban landscape and urban representation, Basilico and Boeri's concerns mirror those in Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas*.³ *Italy*, however, does not address these issues with the variety of representational techniques or with the irony displayed in *Learning from Las Vegas*. The book primarily consists of Basilico's photos, which Boeri frames in his introductory essay, "The Italian Landscape: Towards an 'Eclectic Atlas.'" In an attempt to capture the features of the sprawling contemporary city, Boeri offers the idea of an "eclectic atlas," of which Basilico's photos are one example, as a means of representing the contemporary urban situation. As demonstrated by the exhibition, the eclectic atlas proposes that a catholic approach to urban representation is the best way to understand the diffuse nature of the contemporary city. Eclectic atlases, according to Boeri, can be "research projects, photographic campaigns, academic studies, urban plans [or] project reports" that "recognize the different subjectivities that encounter one another around the representation of the terrain: these include those who construct the image, those who once codified it, those who observe it, those who see themselves in it, those who insert it in their own sequences of images, those who feel themselves outside of it. It is the prerogative of these 'eclectic atlases' to use a harmony of viewpoints to depict, from several different angles, a terrain that can no longer be represented by a single voice 'offscreen.'"

This emphasis on subjectivity allows Boeri to move beyond the plan-perspective dichotomy that drives Bosselmann's argument. For Boeri, the act of mapping no longer has pretensions of objectivity or strives for a singular fidelity to lived experience. Instead, by highlighting the subjectivity inherent in maps, Boeri broadens the notion of mapping, arguing that different types of representation are necessary to capture different aspects of the contemporary city. Such a position recognizes that representation can never be complete, since all subjectivities can never be recognized; but, as in the exhibition, the presence of many elements in the form of an atlas could acknowledge this polyphony of perspectives, helping to form a more comprehensible picture of the contemporary urban environment. Boeri's argument recognizes how techniques of urban representation can influence urban debates. Moving beyond the traditional belief that a single map can completely communicate the many facets of a given environment, Boeri posits that map making is a creative and idiosyncratic enterprise that allows individual designers to contribute their perspectives to a larger, collective understanding of the contemporary city. In following this approach, *Italy: Cross Sections of a Country* strikes a contemporary tone and establishes a course for further exploration. ■

opposite

Gabriele Basilico and Stefano Boeri's exhibition in the 1996 Venice Biennale synthesizes large- and small-scale views of Italy by juxtaposing satellite imagery and orthographic maps alongside black-and-white photographs, such as this one on the bottom left, to reveal patterns of recent Italian urban growth.
(from *Italy*)

Notes

- 1 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Technology Press, 1960).
- 2 Office of Charles and Ray Eames, *Powers of Ten: A Film Dealing with the Relative Size of Things in the Universe and the Effect of Adding Another Zero* (United States: Pyramid Films, 1978).
- 3 Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972).

Paradise Sold

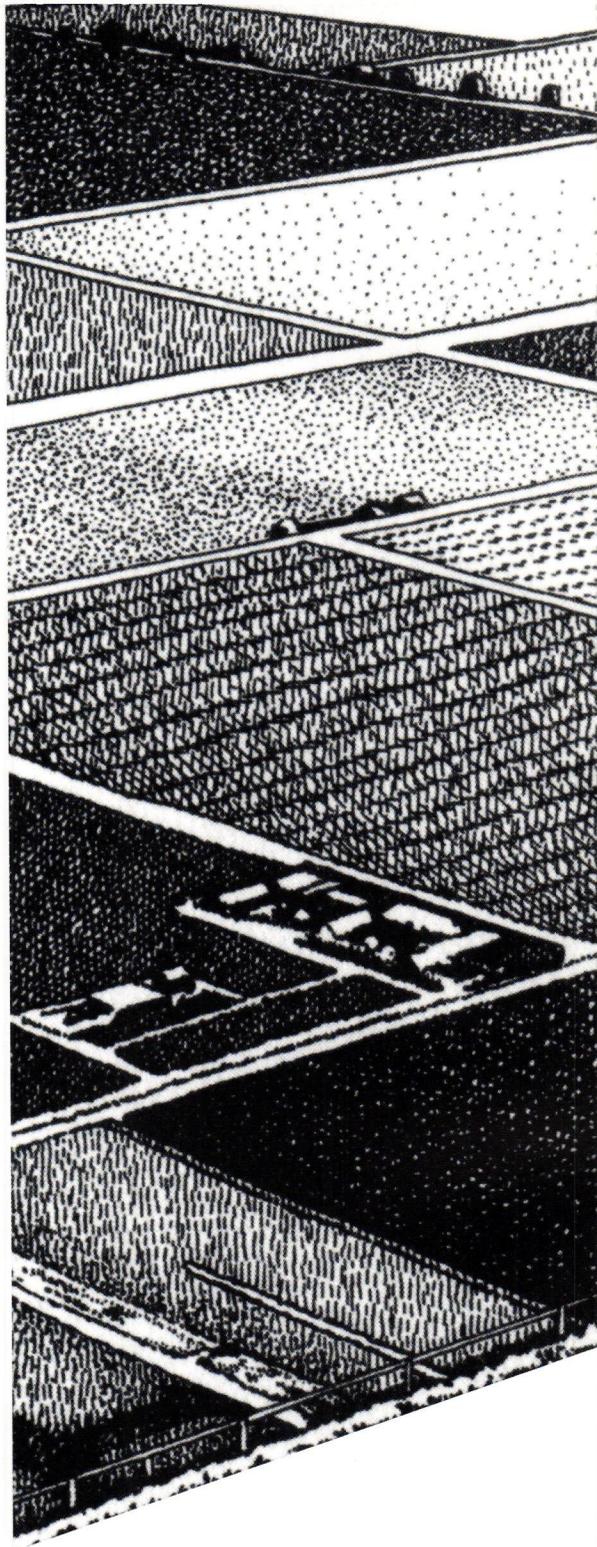
by Sharon Irish

Visions of Paradise: Glimpses of Our Landscape's Legacy

by John Warfield Simpson
University of California Press, 1999
387 pp., \$35.00

A reproduction of a marvelous ink drawing by Abigail Rorer serves as the frontispiece of John Warfield Simpson's book *Visions of Paradise: Glimpses of Our Landscape's Legacy*. The illustration shows a grid of fields from the air, as if seen by a hawk, with a distant grouping of structures and trees breaking up the diagonals that recede across the page. Rorer's hawk-like overview has its parallel in *Visions of Paradise*, which surveys the creation of the American landscape in big sweeps. Simpson dives down occasionally to grab hold of and focus on a single aspect of change since European occupation. The subtitle of this book—*Glimpses of Our Landscape's Legacy*—should have been the main title, however. Vision and paradise have bit parts in Simpson's narrative, whereas the legacies of legal, political, social, and cultural conflicts on the American landscape are central to this admirable book.

Simpson proceeds more or less chronologically to tell the story of how humans—"a disturbance species," he calls us—have transformed the land of the United States. The objective facts he presents here have been published many times before, as Simpson acknowledges in *Visions of Paradise*, a synthesis of his extensive reading about the



American landscape in several disciplines. But Simpson believes that these historical facts alone cannot account for the nation's development. He writes, "the landscape is both objective and subjective," and, indeed, it is Simpson's anecdotes, his warmly personal and idiosyncratic responses to landscape issues, that make this book an exceptional volume on an already well-covered subject.

Sharon Irish is an architectural historian affiliated with the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Author of *Cass Gilbert, Architect: Modern Traditionalist* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1999), she has also written and lectured about public space, civil and sanitary engineering history, and historic preservation.

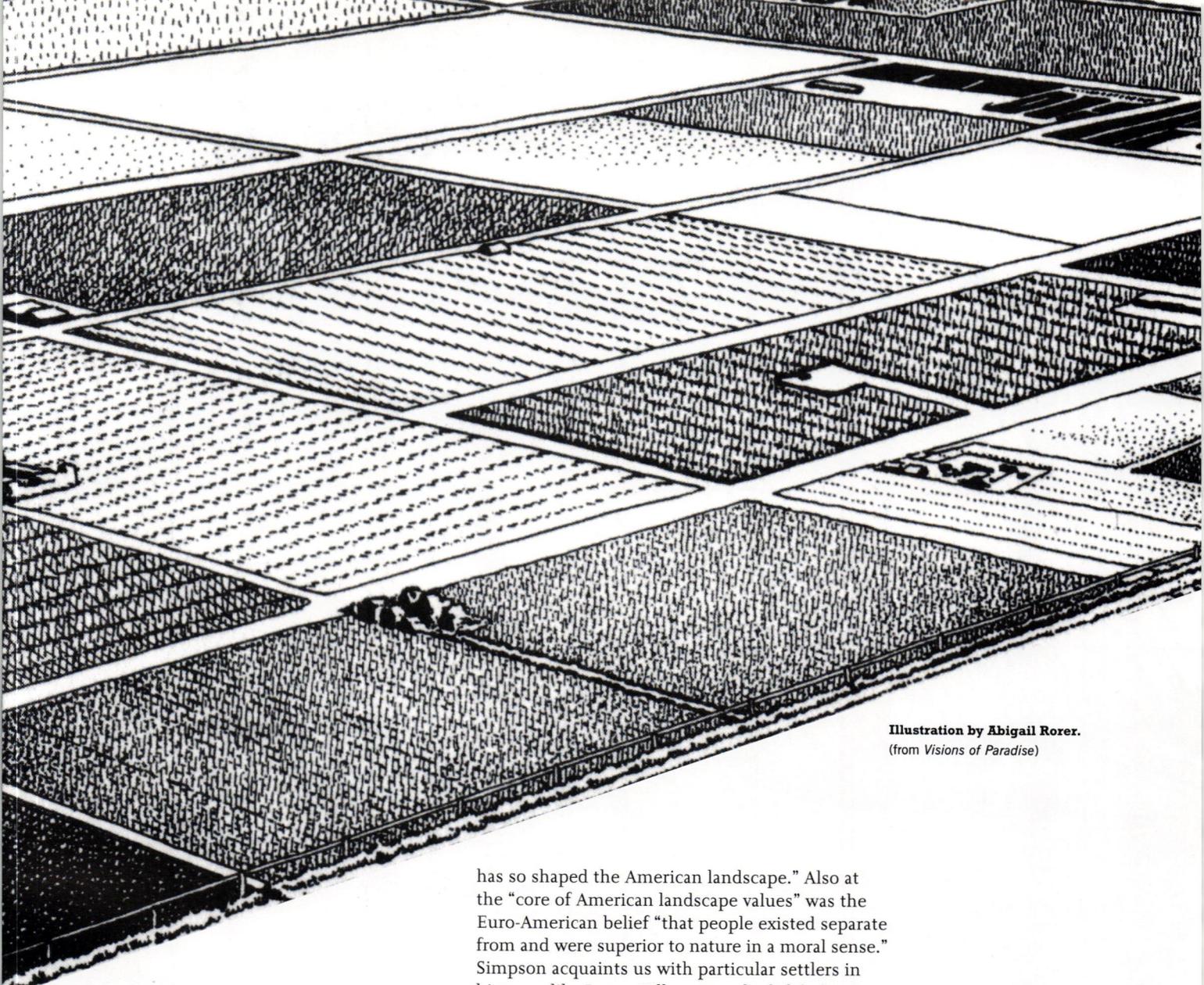


Illustration by Abigail Rorer.
(from *Visions of Paradise*)

In his lengthy book, Simpson offers many vignettes on such topics as storm-water control, lawns, and trains. These stories resonate with everyday experience and deepen the reader's understanding of common occurrences. To his own anecdotes, Simpson adds accounts from others in the past. We learn, to the extent possible from written documents like diaries, about Euro-American colonists' treatment of the land in the eighteenth century and their interactions with native peoples: "[Land] ownership, its use, its philosophical and spiritual significance, even how it was perceived aesthetically...separated the Euro-American and Native American cultures." One of the central ideas of Simpson's book is that the landscape values held by the eighteenth-century white settlers "have remained remarkably constant" over the past two hundred years: "Land was property that could be bought and sold. No single concept

has so shaped the American landscape." Also at the "core of American landscape values" was the Euro-American belief "that people existed separate from and were superior to nature in a moral sense." Simpson acquaints us with particular settlers in history—like James Kilbourne, who left behind a failing farm in Connecticut to eventually prosper in the Ohio Territory. His close attention to specific events and characters allows the rapid transformation of the landscape to take on an individual dimension. Still, his is a Euro-American perspective, tending to discount the experiences of "native Indians who inhabited the landscape for generations," and who Simpson describes simply as "being displaced."

Simpson examines the Euro-American insistence on parceling out land in gridded sections, no matter what the topography, and the obliviousness to the central role of water in the landscapes of the plains and the west. His explanation helps us understand why Americans who live in vastly contrasting regions have failed to develop distinctly different relationships with the land.

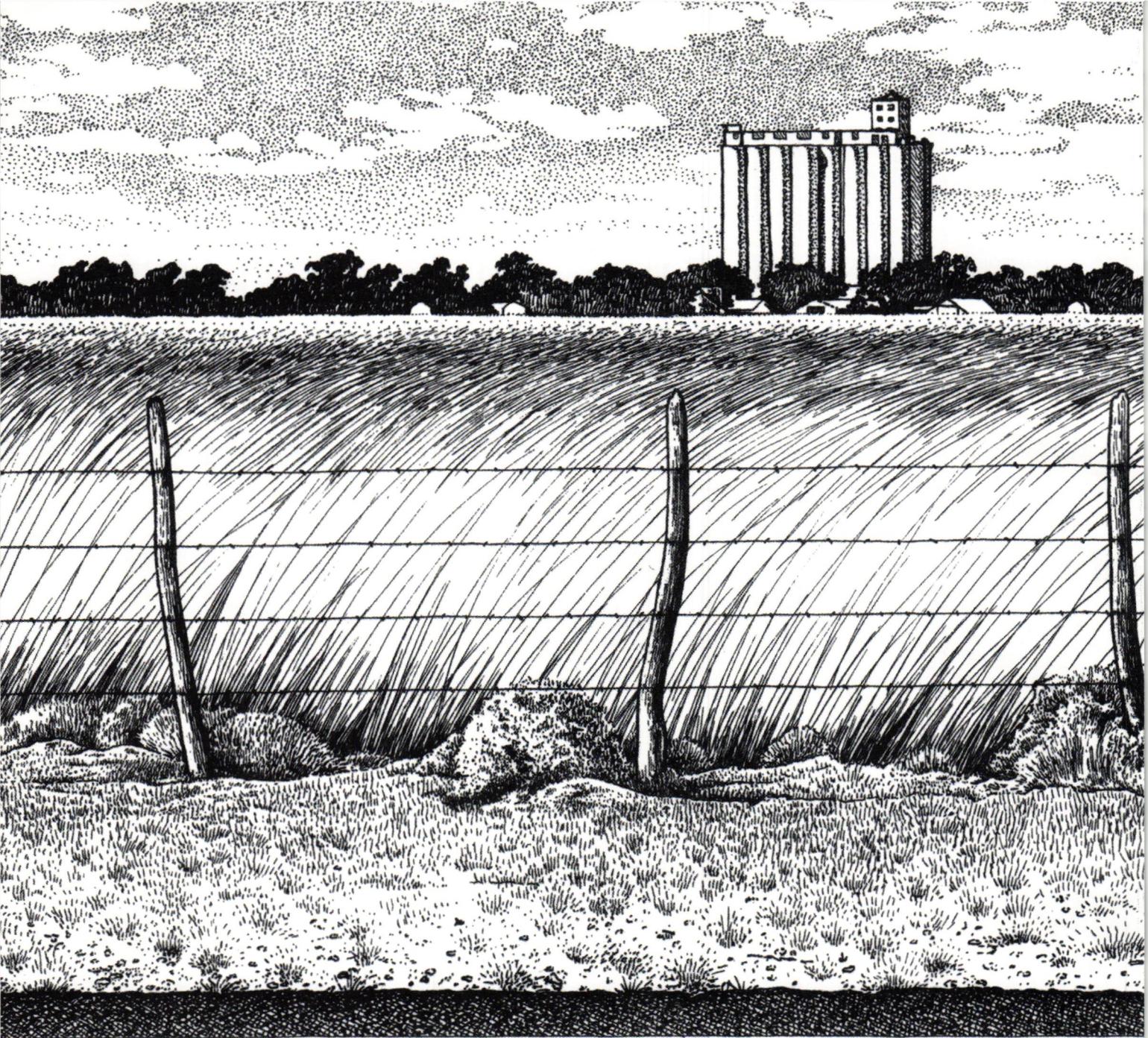


Illustration by Abigail Rorer. Simpson writes that the commodification of land has hindered humankind's ability to perceive the landscape's many other rich dimensions.
(from Visions of Paradise)

Simpson's sweeping cross-country narrative touches upon such diverse topics as the effect of the horse on the landscape and the destructive force of the gold rush. Deforestation is made palpable—the author interpolates vignettes from his experience among the chapters that address treaties and surveying practices, legal and military battles, and sheer unthinking ruination of the landscape: "Where scores of species once comprised forest and prairie plant communities across the continent, we now find vast expanses of monocultures....Defiant plants pushing through cracks in city sidewalks remind me that the 'control' of [plant] succession, like the 'control' of nature, is an endless effort and mostly an illusion."

Speaking of illusions, Simpson also explains the trickery associated with land speculation, which played a crucial role in the takeover of the nation. Many settlers were lured west by promises of paradise, which proved illusory the moment they arrived in the swamp or the desert. The author does an excellent job of clearly explaining the complexity of first the colonies' and then the states' wrangling over land—to keep European powers at bay, to pay off war debts, or to stabilize the federal government. He selects particular landmark legislation—the Landmark Ordinance of 1785 or the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act of 1862—to highlight the compromises and challenges that determined the way in which the landscape was treated, with ramifications that are still felt today.

One of the strongest chapters in the book, titled "The Emotional Landscape" (which first appeared in 1985), addresses strip mining.¹ Here Simpson examines the messy six-year (1971–1977) process that resulted in federal strip-mining legislation: "We passed a law regulating the industry and setting a standard for reclamation based on emotion and aesthetics, not sound ecology, economics, land use planning, or resource use." The analyses of federal forest management and transportation legislation, like the Federal Road Act of 1916, are also tributes to Simpson's skill. While such subjects may sound boring, they aren't; for the most part, the book connects seemingly dull legislative and judicial disputes to my backyard, your gas tank, and our regional landscapes.

Simpson said he wrote this book because humans have ceased to see the landscape in all of its rich dimensions. The conception of land as a commodity to be used for human gratification above all else, in addition to contemporary geographic mobility, have blunted our senses. Simpson attempts "to see [the landscape] clearly, as free as possible from the many tints that commonly color our vision." He believes that if we can sharpen our vision by studying the layers in the land, we will "become better connected to that landscape."

Simpson also comments repeatedly about the "softening" of our landscape values, which likely refers both to individuals working to create a permeable boundary between humans and the land, as well as to a softening of rigid, economically motivated interests. Despite the ambitious overview that Simpson offers here, *Visions of Paradise* is not a comprehensive survey of the nation's landscape. Simpson's effort to remain "as free as possible from the many tints that...color our vision" dilutes the intensity of his critique. I'm all for calm, reasoned analysis, because hysteria and rage do indeed blur vision. But vision needs passion, too; it is clear that Simpson cares deeply about the landscape, but his approach insulates the reader from the shocking atrocities that Euro-Americans have perpetrated. We must confront what we have done and continue to do to indigenous peoples and the land we inhabit, if we are to see clearly. Simpson writes: "[L]ike layers of artifacts uncovered by an archeologist, layers in a landscape provide a wonderful record of a nation's history." Recognizing that the subtitle of this book includes "glimpses," historians of the landscape must examine a comprehensive sample of landscape layers and not glance away when what they see makes them uncomfortable or worse.

Surveys like *Visions of Paradise* should try to present the full range of voices that illuminate "landscape values," especially those that have been muffled for a long time. As a counterweight to Simpson's volume, one might read Ward Churchill's *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* or his *Struggle for the Land: Indigenous Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide, and Expropriation in Contemporary North America*.² Churchill's book on genocide is painful and compelling and is extensively annotated with source material that writers about the American landscape would do well to incorporate into their studies. Simpson does not deny that butchery and theft and unethical bureaucracies shaped much of our American landscape. His good book could have been better, though, if he had focused more sharply on the atrocities through which the paradise he longs for was made into hell for so many. ■

Notes

- 1 Simpson first published this chapter as an article titled "The Emotional Landscape and Public Law," in *Landscape Architecture* 75 (May–June 1985): 60–3, 108–9, 112–13.
- 2 Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997); *Struggle for the Land: Indigenous Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide, and Expropriation in Contemporary North America* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993).

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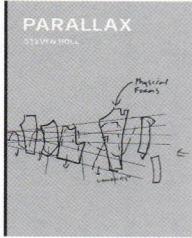
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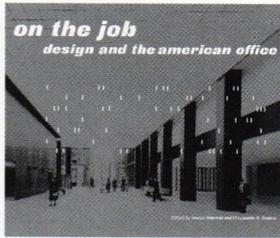


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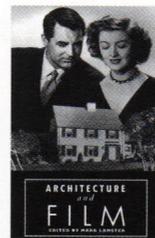


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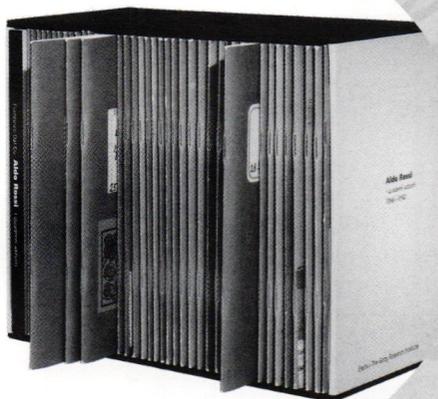
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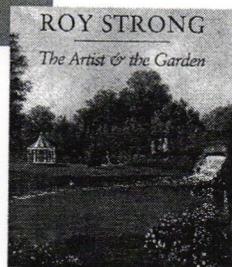
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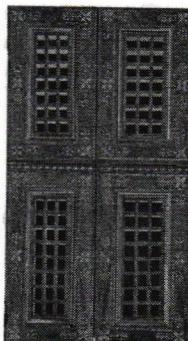
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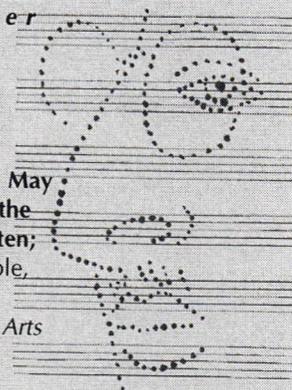
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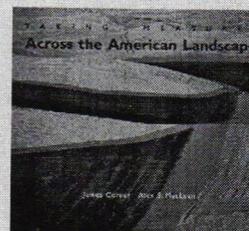
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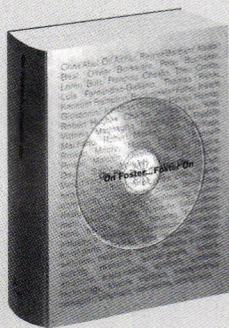
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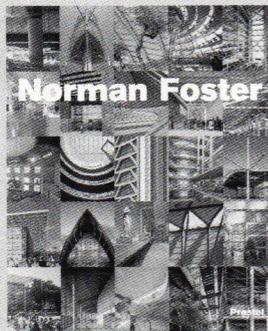


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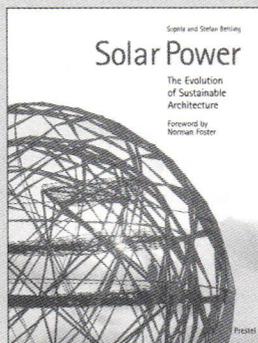
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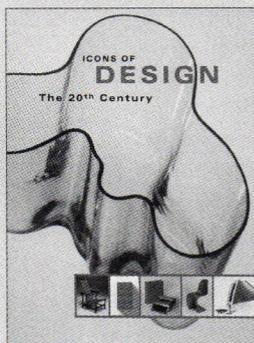
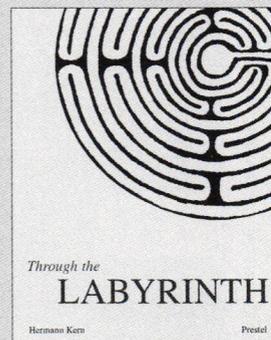
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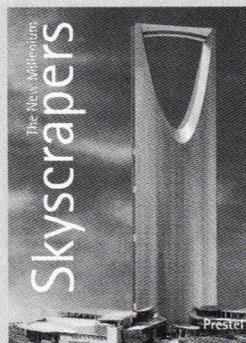
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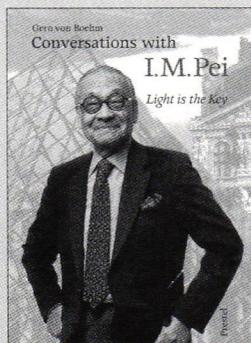


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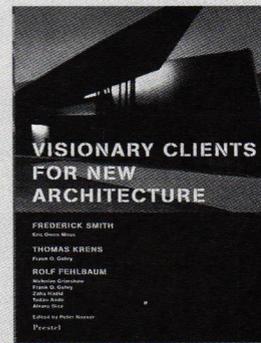
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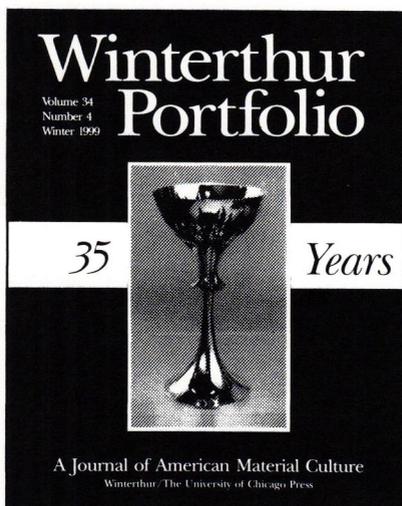
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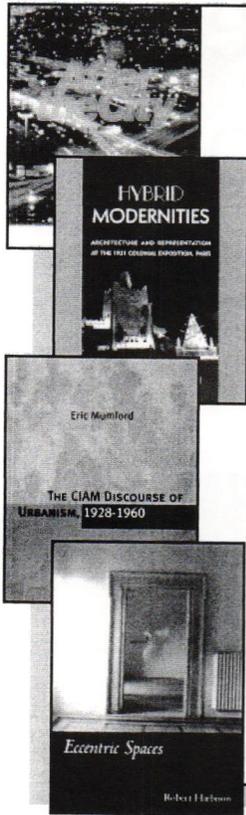
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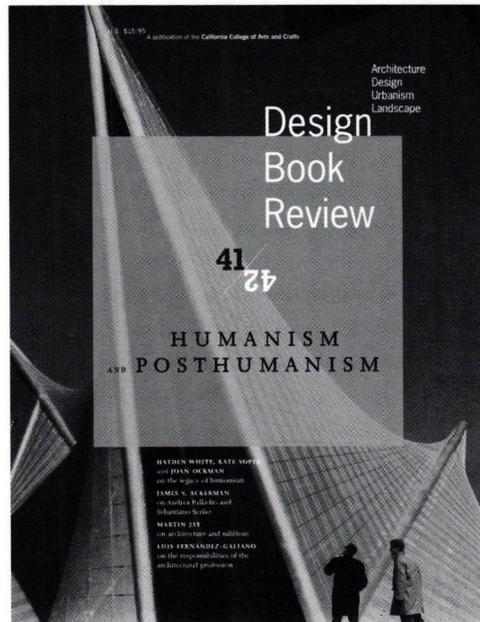
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Winter
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Materiality and Immateriality

DBR essayists and reviewers examine how traditional and new construction materials have influenced architects, engineers, and industrial designers. The issue also examines the effect of the Web, virtual reality programs, and other nonmaterial technologies on the design professions.



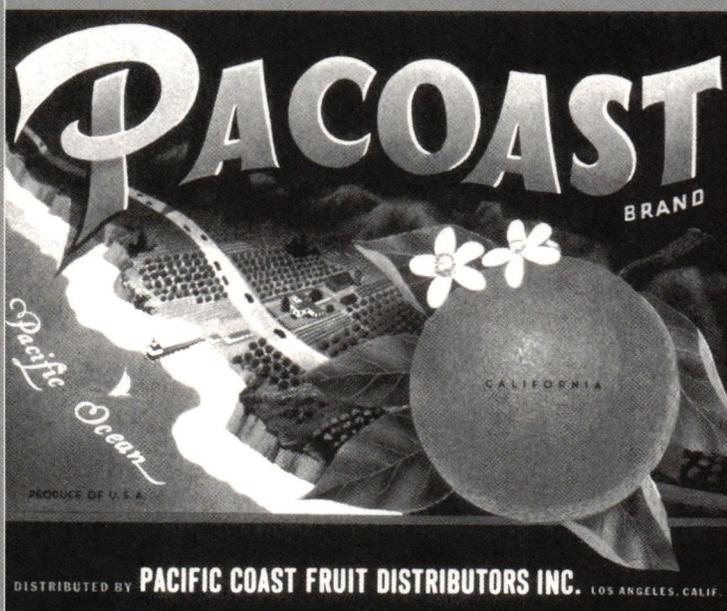
Front cover of George L. Mesker and Company's sheet-metal catalogue from 1902.

(from Pamela H. Simpson, *Cheap, Quick, & Easy: Imitative Architectural Materials, 1870-1930* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999].)

Fall
2002

California

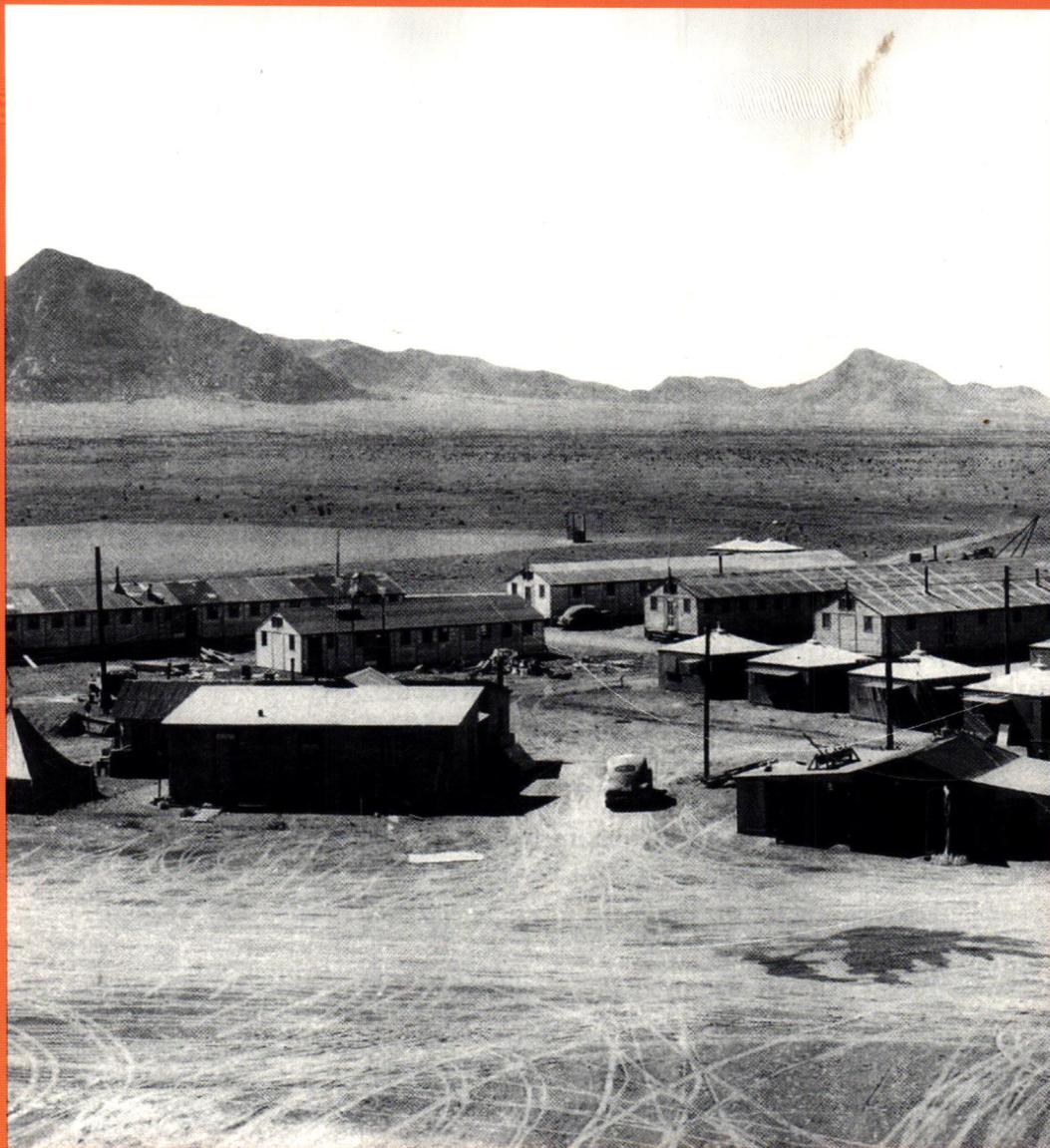
DBR considers the meaning of the architecture and landscape of California. The issue examines the image of the state as an idyllic Eden and as a center of reform. Writers address the ethnic and agricultural landscapes and offer a reevaluation of the key countercultural building guides of the 1960s.



An ideal California landscape is pictured on this citrus brand label, ca. 1950.

(from William Alexander McClung, *Landscapes of Desire: Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000].)

DBR 44
Coming up



Timothy Butler
on Bauhaus architects in America

Jane C. Loeffler
on nuclear landscapes

Robin Greeley
on new studies of graffiti artists