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Architecture
Design
Urbanism
Landscape

Design Book Review

44/45

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Rebecca Solnit
on gentrification and
bohemian communities

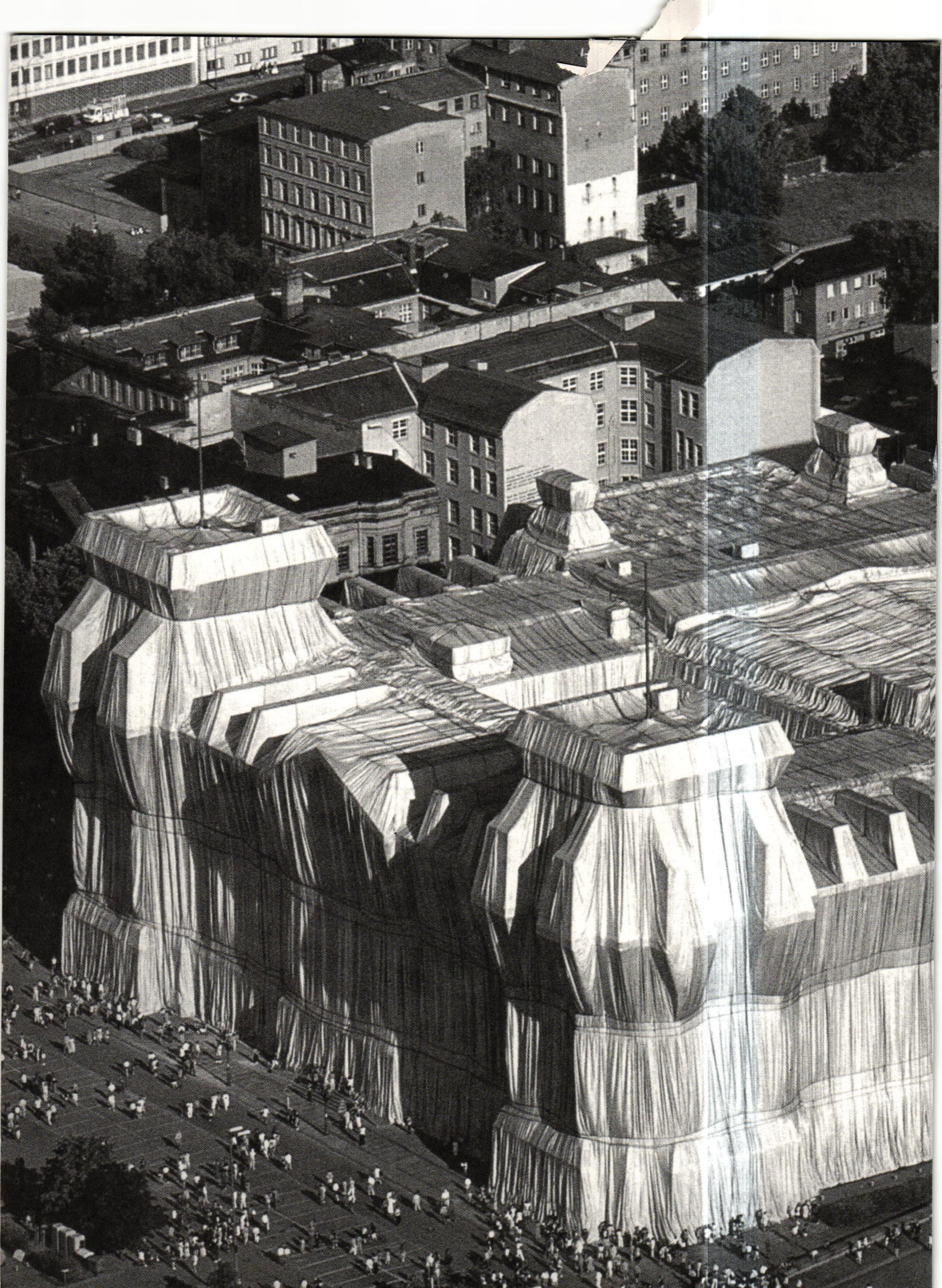
Leslie Becker
on the democratization of
graphic design

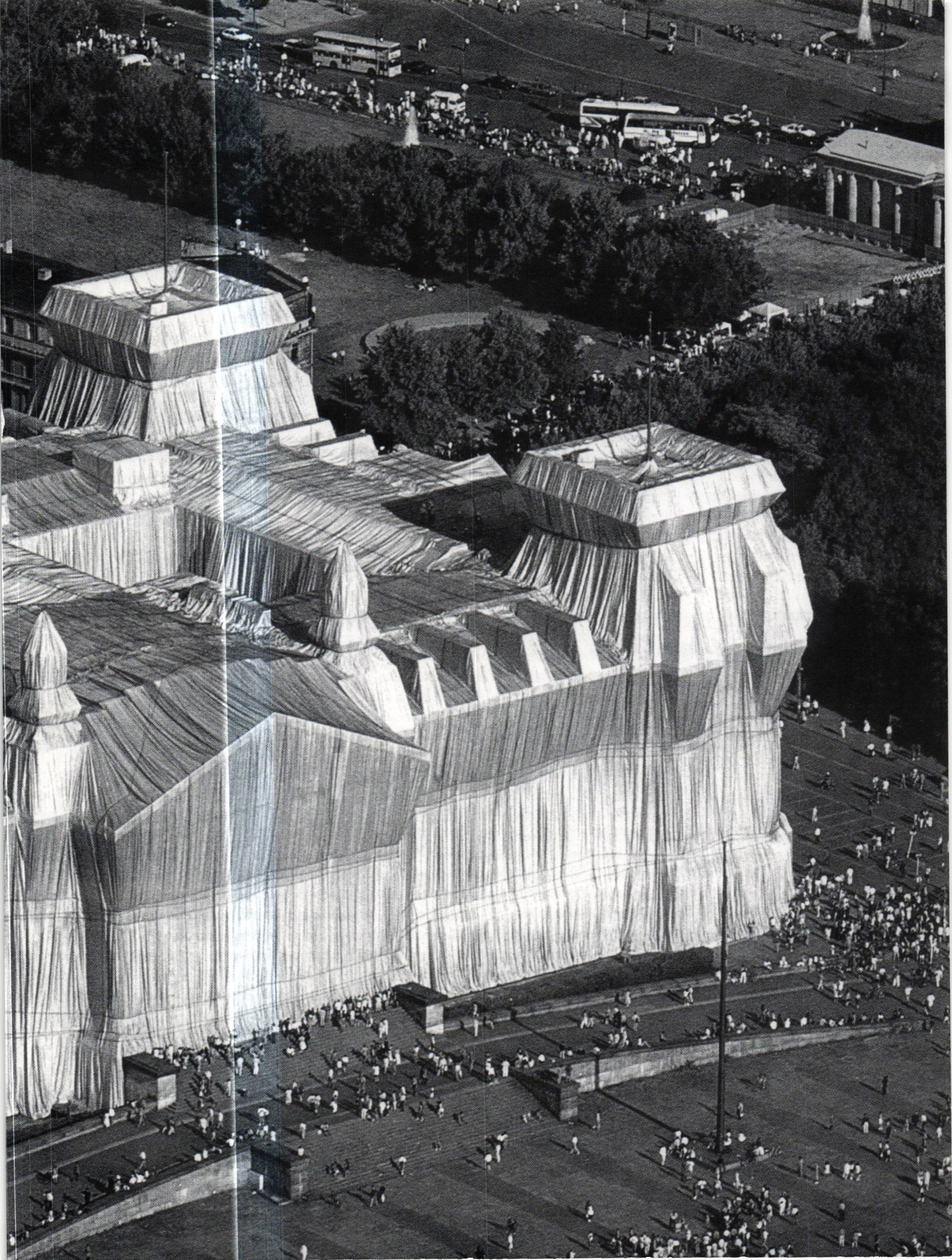
Nicholas Adams
on the architecture of Disneyland

Jane C. Loeffler
on atomic landscapes

Paul B. Jaskot
on Berlin architecture

Timothy Butler
on Bauhaus designers
in America







from the editors

Politics has left an enduring mark on our contemporary landscape.

Political structures and landscapes are among the most visible elements in our world and include county courthouses, municipal parks, and war monuments. J. B. Jackson wrote in his 1984 book, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, that political landscapes were designed to “insure order and security and continuity and to give citizens a visible status” while reminding “us of our rights and obligations and of our history.” He noted that a great many of the objects and spaces that comprise the political landscape were designed as permanent and awe-inspiring symbols that could be immediately interpreted by the community. The ancient Greek city—with its tombs, processional streets, theater, and stadium—served as a primary example of a political landscape for Jackson. But he also saw the United States as the quintessential political landscape, calling to the reader’s attention the nation’s interstate highway system and the late eighteenth-century land ordinances that used a vast grid system to divide much of the United States into sections and townships.

The essays and reviews in this special issue of *Design Book Review* reveal how much of our world can be seen as a political landscape. Using a wide range of approaches and methodologies, the writers featured here show how politics plays a crucial role in shaping both monumental and ordinary architecture. In her examination of the history of bohemia in Paris, New York, and San Francisco, for example, Rebecca Solnit asks if the privatization and gentrification of our cities will prevent new bohemias from forming—and thus put an end to a fertile landscape where, as Solnit writes, “the young go to invent themselves and from which cultural innovation and insurrection arise.” Nicholas Adams, on the other hand, examines how Walt Disney created antibohemian urban landscapes that featured no sign of poverty or decay. In his review, Adams reveals the sources that Disney drew upon to create his “conventional middlebrow...fantasy” worlds that expressed the cartoonist’s love of nineteenth-century small-town life, medieval history, and technology.

The relationship between politics and the graphic arts is investigated in two contributions to this issue of DBR. In her essay, titled "In Our Own Hands: The Democratization of Graphic Design," Leslie Becker shows how faith in modernist graphic design unraveled in the 1960s and 1970s as designers began to question their work for large corporations. When members of this profession embraced political causes, many of them broke away from the strict aesthetic guidelines long associated with modernist graphic design. Reviewer Robin Greeley examines two new books that explore the ordinary street forms of graffiti that are visible throughout cities and suburbs. She argues that street graffiti—which has received far less attention from scholars than the more well-known and colorful hip-hop works—should be understood as a complex series of signs that allow gang members to control their neighborhood while communicating the artist's identity, pride, and political views.

Jackson's writings on the American landscape had a significant influence on the book *Hands on the Land: A History of the Vermont Landscape*, which is reviewed in this issue by William Lake Douglas. *Hands on the Land* reveals how politics, capitalism, and environmental forces shaped the landscape of Vermont. Douglas applauds the book because it reflects the most recent and sophisticated modes of landscape analysis, yet is engaging and lucid enough to be appreciated by the general reader.

The influence of the Second World War on architecture is explored by three writers in this special issue. Paul B. Jaskot, in his review of recent books on the architecture of Berlin, considers the German city as an ideal setting to study the relationship between architecture and politics and to show how monuments, buildings, and landscapes can clarify, legitimize, or negate administrative power. Timothy Butler, in his review of *The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919–1936*, examines the impact and teaching methods of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and the other German architects who emigrated to America following the rise of National Socialism. Finally, Jane C. Loeffler contends with the environmental consequences of the Second World War in her review of two books that address weapons manufacturing facilities. She posits that we should consider the devastating effect of bomb manufacture on such cities as Hanford, Washington, and Los Alamos, New Mexico, when we attempt to evaluate the overall success of the atomic weapons program.

Two books that examine the relationship between architectural practice and politics of gender are reviewed in this issue. *Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History*, reviewed by Lauri Puchall, considers the central role that female clients played in the design of many of the most important monuments of modern architecture. These women—including Edith Farnsworth, Gertrude Stein, and Vanna Venturi—helped create houses that redefined domesticity and symbolized their own lives as independent and creative individuals. In her review of *The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice*, Annmarie Adams addresses recent critical writing about the profession

that asserts that women are ideal figures to reform architecture because their work in such a male-dominated field compels them to develop a critical and skeptical approach to their own work and to the profession at large.

This year, with funding by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, we will continue to broaden the scope of the journal and include reviews of new books on material culture, industrial design, and landscape architecture. We also will increase the number of books reviewed in each issue and will institute a new feature, providing short reviews of notable books on architecture and design. As always, we welcome comments about DBR and suggestions for reviews, essays, and future special issues. ■

**Two views of
ammunition bunkers.**
(images from *Disarming
the Prairie*)



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Executive Editors
Mitchell Schwarzer
Barry M. Katz
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Editor
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Rita Crayon Huang

Copy Editors
Nancy Crowley
Ron Nyren

Designer
Tenazas Design
San Francisco

Editorial Office
Design Book Review
California College
of Arts and Crafts
1111 Eighth Street
San Francisco, CA 94107-2247
USA

phone: 415 551 9232
fax: 415 703 9537
e-mail: dbr@ccac-art.edu
www.designbookreview.com

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**Antigentrification poster
in San Francisco.**
(photograph by Susan
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**Cover and inside cover
photographs: © Christo &
Jeanne-Claude, *Wrapped*
Reichstag, Berlin,
1971–1995.**



REAL ESTATE

HISTORY

of the

AVANT-GARDE

by

Rebecca Solnit

A
LITERARY
EVICITION

The following essay is drawn from *Hollow City: The Siege of San Francisco and the Crisis of American Urbanism*, published last year by Verso. The text of *Hollow City* is by Rebecca Solnit; photographs are by Susan Schwartzberg. The photographic essay by Schwartzberg that follows "A Real Estate History of the Avant-Garde" is also drawn from *Hollow City*.

Bohemia begins with an eviction. *bohème*, the book that introduced the word and the idea into popular consciousness, does. "'If I understand the purport of this document,' said Schaunard rereading an order to leave from the sheriff fixed to the wall, 'today at noon exactly I must have emptied these rooms and have put into the hands of Monsieur Bernard, my proprietor, a sum of seventy-five francs for three-quarters rent, which he demands from me in very bad handwriting.'"¹ Henri Murger's stories about a quartet of starving Left Bank artists were published serially beginning in 1845, turned into a wildly successful play in 1849, and gathered together in 1851 as a best-selling book (on which Puccini's 1896 opera *La Bohème* is based). Murger's stories about bohemia succeed in making poverty and its accompanying hunger, insecurity, and occasional homelessness charming. The musician-writer Schaunard is a feckless garret-dweller who forgets about his eviction in a burst of inspiration. "And Schaunard, half naked, sat down at this piano. Having awakened the sleeping instrument by a tempestuous barrage of chords—he commenced, all the while carrying on a monologue, to pick out the melody, which he had been searching for so long."² On goes the romp; he sets out to borrow the seventy-five francs, finds instead some drinking companions, the philosopher Gustave and the poet Rodolphe, drunkenly invites them back to the home that is no longer his, and meets Marcel, the painter who has just moved in. More like the *Three Musketeers* than *Les Misérables*, the episode continues with the quartet forming the Bohemian Club and Schaunard becoming Marcel's roommate. Community has triumphed over capital. *Scènes* is an episodic book, each chapter a picaresque adventure about love, friendship, and scraping by. Murger concludes this first tale with the assertion that these "heroes belong to a class misjudged up to now, whose greatest fault is disorder; and yet they can give as an excuse for this same disorder—it is a necessity which life demands from them."³



The city is both the place where order, control, and hierarchy are administered and, traditionally, the place where they are subverted. This subversion is made possible by the free space of the city, in which people and ideas can circulate, and bohemia is most significant as the freest part of the free city, a place where the poor, the radical, and the creative overlap, where disorder seeps into the center of things.

Bohemia is not so much a population as a condition, a condition of urbanism where the young go to invent themselves and from which cultural innovation and insurrection arise.

As that cultural space contracts, the poor and individual artists will go elsewhere, but bohemia may well go away in cities across the country.

Artmaking has been, at least since bohemia and modernism appeared in nineteenth-century Paris, largely an urban enterprise: the closer to museums, publishers, audiences, patrons, politicians, other enemies, and each other, the better for artists and for art. This complex gave rise to the definitive modernisms of the Left Bank, Montmartre, and Greenwich Village. Being an

artist was one way of being a participant in the debate about meaning and value, and the closer to the center of things one is the more one can participate. This is part of what makes an urbanity worth celebrating, this braiding together of disparate lives, but the new gentrification threatens to yank out some of the strands altogether, diminishing urbanism itself.

Cities are the infrastructure of shared experience. Thirty years ago we worried that cities were being abandoned to desperate poverty and decay. Even five years ago the threat seemed to be redesign and new development that eliminated public space and public life, a suburbanization by design. No one foresaw that cities could be abandoned to the ravages of wealth or that public life and public space could be undermined by acceleration and privatization of everyday life, by spatial practices rather than the alteration of actual space. Something utterly unpredictable has happened to cities: they have flourished, with a vengeance, but by ceasing to be cities in the deepest sense. Are they becoming a city-shaped suburb for the affluent? Will the chaotic and diverse form of the city be preserved, but with its content smoothed out, homogenized by wealth?

The Black Cat restaurant in the 1930s.
(photograph by Sam Cherry)

1.
Henri Murger, *Latin Quarter*, trans. Elizabeth Ward Hugus (and retitled from *Scènes de la vie de bohème*) (New York and Hartford: Edwin Valentine Mitchell and Dodd, Mead and Co., 1930), 2.

2.
Ibid., 3.

3.
Ibid., 3.



These photographs of Paris streetscapes are by the photographer Charles Marville. In the 1860s, Marville captured parts of the city that were to be demolished to make way for Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's new monumental avenues and public spaces. (courtesy Robert Koch Gallery, San Francisco)

San Francisco could become a hollow city, a Disneyland of urbanism in which its varicolored Victorian houses and diversity of skin colors and cuisines cover up the absence of the poor, the subversive, the creative, the elderly, the free.

In San Francisco nowadays, homebuilders are obliged to set aside a certain number of units as low-cost housing; in nineteenth-century Paris, low-cost housing was built into nearly every building. Before elevators, the top floor of Parisian buildings was designed as a sort of residential hotel—the rooms were called *chambres de bonne*, maids' rooms, in my day, when poor students and African immigrants filled them; they usually had a cold-water sink and a communal toilet in the hallway (one cooked on a camping stove; refrigeration was the windowsill in winter). This building style created a sort of integrated housing: a famous illustration of the nineteenth century shows a cross-section of an apartment house with the bourgeoisie in armchairs just above the ground-floor concierge and with the inhabitants getting progressively poorer every floor of its ascent to the wretches huddled under the rooftop. Bohemia was the Brownian motion of urban life—it caused people of different classes to mix and jostle together and was the incubator for those who would rise through talent or sink through addiction, poverty, madness; was where the new would be tried out long before it would be found palatable in the mainstream; was where memory was kept alive as paintings, stories, politics.

PARISIAN VIEWS

George Sand's novel *Horace* gives a less prettified picture of bohemia at the time of the 1830 revolution; among the novel's characters are dedicated painters and dilettantes, a slumming law-student squandering his provincial family's funds, and a dedicated peasant-revolutionary with great sculptural talent, as well as a few sympathetically drawn grisettes. Grisettes were working-class women who formed liaisons of various durations with the varying classes of men who formed bohemia (because the grisettes were seldom participants in creative life, save as muses and singers, and because they were unable to move out of bohemia into the salons, receptions, and public arenas of the wealthy, bohemia's freedom was largely male freedom—though Sand herself as a novelist and a lover broke its rules to free herself). The excitement of Paris or of any great city is that of feeling one is in the center of things, a place where history is made, where things count. Paris perhaps has this sense to a greater extent than any other city, but Beijing, Prague, Berlin, Manila, Los Angeles, and Seattle have all had their moments.

Part of the fluidity of Parisian life comes from the way art has political weight, politics have aesthetic merit, and figures such as Victor Hugo or Jean-Paul Sartre manage to act in both realms (something San Francisco has achieved in a very different way). Murger himself, the son of a conservative tailor, had gone to school with Eugene Pottier, who would write the *Internationale*. He remained apolitical while many of his circle—Baudelaire, Nadar, Courbet—became far more involved in the revolution of 1848. “Bohemia is the preface to the Hospital, the Academy, or the Morgue,” Murger wrote after he had become a success.⁴ The consequences of his success seem strangely familiar now: The Café Momus he had made famous became a tourist trap that the artists vacated. Murger himself moved to a Right Bank apartment and then became a country gentleman in the forest of Fontainebleau. His partner opened an antique furniture store back in Paris. This general pattern of bohemia prevailed through the 1950s, at least. Bohemia moved around; at the turn of the twentieth century, it was in Montmartre more than the Left Bank; for a long time it was various versions of Greenwich Village; and it appeared in San Francisco, too, at various times and addresses.

Cities had a kind of porousness—like an old apartment impossible to seal against mice, cities were impossible to seal against artists, activists, dissidents, and the poor. The remodeling of Paris between 1855 and 1870 by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann under the command of Napoleon III is well known for what it did to people’s feelings, the poor, and the old faubourgs. As Shelley Rice puts it in *Parisian Views*, “One of his first priorities had been to cut through and destroy the unhealthy, unsightly, and economically underprivileged areas that had been growing wildly and, in their horrific overpopulation, overtaking the heart of the town. By so doing the prefect hoped to roust the poor (who posed, he felt, a threat to both the city’s health and the stability of its government) to the outlying banlieus.”⁵ Haussmannization encompassed urban renewal, but it did more; it sought to reinvent the relation of every citizen to the city. In modernizing the city, Haussmann and his emperor did some inarguably good things: they provided pure water and sewage systems. They did, with the building of boulevards, some debatable things: the boulevards increased circulation for citizens, commerce, and, occasionally, soldiers, making the city more accessible for all purposes. And they erased the sites of people’s memory and association: Baudelaire in “Le Cygne” and the brothers Goncourt in their famous journal entry bemoaned this architectural lobotomy. “My Paris, the Paris in which I was born, the Paris of the manners of 1830

to 1848, is vanishing, both materially and morally,” the latter wrote. “I feel like a man merely passing through Paris, a traveller. I am foreign to that which is to come, to that which is, and a stranger to these new boulevards that go straight on, without meandering, without the adventures of perspective, implacably a straight line, without any of the atmosphere of Balzac’s world, making one think of some American Babylon of the future. It is stupid to live in a time of growth; the soul is as uncomfortable as a body in a damp new house.”⁶

It was homogenization, a loss of complexity, rather than absolute removal that most complained of. One of the key residential sites of early bohemia was the Impasse Doyenne, a quiet cul-de-sac overlooking a ruined church and weedy land in a city that had not yet rationalized and exploited all its space; Haussmannization erased the ruin, the Impasse, and the weeds as it integrated this real estate into the Louvre and Tuileries that flank it. The new city was more rational, manageable, and commercial, but artists were more disoriented than displaced by Haussmannization. Many artists had private means—and though trust-fund artists are much denigrated nowadays, Baudelaire, Marcel Proust, and Gertrude Stein were among their ranks. It was, too, partly a matter of the city remaining porous even after Haussmannization. New apartment buildings continued to supply *chambres de bonne*, and the poor and working-class neighborhoods endured. Though rents in the center of the city doubled between 1851 and 1857, it was the poorest who were most dramatically affected—and yet, as T. J. Clark puts it, “Paris in 1870, for all Haussmann’s alterations, was still overwhelmingly working class.”⁷ The city remained a great capital for poetry and insurrection, and the boulevards and the smart new cafés and shops inspired painters, novelists, and poets as, say, housing projects and urban freeways did not in the era of Robert Moses, and as global capitalism’s chain stores and corporate logos probably will not (though skyscrapers had their moment early in the twentieth century). Perhaps it is that Paris under Haussmann could afford to lose far more than a modern American city, after so many cycles of erasure and homogenization.

4. Though Murger was largely apolitical, he tosses off expressions such as “He beat a quick retreat from the Luxembourg humming quietly a sentimental ballad, which was for him the Marseillaise of Love.” *Ibid.*, 44.

5. Shelley Rice, *Parisian Views* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 34–5.

6. Edmond de Goncourt, *The Goncourt Journals, 1851–1870*, trans. Lewis Galantiere (New York: Doubleday, 1937), 93. It’s worth remembering that the Goncourts were reactionaries who in an unquoted part of this passage objected to the expansion of the public arena and attacked Murger extensively, out of a sort of class loathing for this successful tailor’s son.

7. T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 51.



BOHEMIAN TERRITORIES

The idea of bohemia caught on quickly.

Before the end of the Civil War, Ada Clare, the "Queen of Bohemia," arrived in San Francisco from Paris via New York and stayed to become a local luminary and a contributor to the literary magazine *The Golden Era*.⁸ In 1872, San Francisco's Bohemian Club was founded by journalists and for the rest of the century included artists and writers. By most accounts, San Francisco was then indeed a marvelous city that had yet to produce great artists but that nevertheless provided a sense of great possibility. Diego Rivera writes of the enormous significance the place had for Frida Kahlo, whom he had married just before they embarked for San Francisco in 1930: "Frida told me she had dreamed for years about going to San Francisco....En route to San Francisco, Frida surprised me with a gift of a portrait of herself which she had recently completed. Its background was an unfamiliar city skyline....When we arrived in San Francisco, I was almost frightened to realize that her imagined city was the very one we were now seeing for the first time."⁹ Rivera and Kahlo arrived in 1930 and settled into the painter Peter Stackpole's Montgomery Block studio. Built in 1852, the Montgomery Block had once been the financial headquarters of San Francisco and, at four stories, the tallest building west of the Mississippi; when business moved away from the location, it was turned into dozens of cheap artists' studios at the center of a lively artists' community (in *Literary San Francisco*, Nancy Peters writes that more than two thousand artists and writers lived there over the years).¹⁰ By 1959, business had returned to the area, and the "Monkey Block," as it was nicknamed, was demolished to build the high-rise Transamerica Pyramid, San Francisco's most visible architectural mistake.

Rivera had come to paint murals commissioned by members of the Bohemian Club, which had already changed radically since its founding (though it was not yet the oligarchical fraternity it would become by the 1980s, when Ronald Reagan's California cabinet supplied its most visible members). The Bohemian Club and Rivera together illuminate some of the contradictions visual art has yet to iron out. At the Bohemian Club, as one artist put it, "In the beginning, rich men were absolutely barred, unless they had something of the elements of true Bohemianism....Things have changed; now the simply rich become members because it is fashionable....The poor artist or literary man gets in, by hook or by crook, because he thinks he may be able to sell some of his brains to the merely rich."¹¹ Gentrification of a sort had taken over the Bohemian Club, though some astute and daring patrons remained within its ranks, notably Albert Bender, an Irish immigrant turned insurance mogul, who obtained Rivera's visa and initiated Rivera's two commissions. One was for the California School of Fine Arts (now the San Francisco Art Institute); the other was for the Pacific Stock Exchange.

That a famously communist painter should go to work painting the lunchroom of a stock exchange says something about the blind spots of much visual art. Those who produce enormously expensive unique objects almost inevitably produce them for a premodern patronage economy. Medici or Vatican, Vatican or Medici, rich patrons and powerful institutions are the available choices for such artists, which often limit not only what they can say, but whom they can say it to. This is something that Rivera found out in 1933 when he put Lenin in the center of his mural commissioned by Nelson Rockefeller for New York's Rockefeller Center. When Rockefeller discovered Lenin's prominent place in the mural, he asked Rivera to replace the communist leader with another, less controversial figure. Rivera refused and the management team for Rockefeller Center responded by quickly dismissing the artist and destroying the mural.

Rivera's *Allegory of California* mural in the Pacific Stock Exchange can be seen as a political statement, if not a very dangerous one: It depicts the physical activities and material resources that were then the primary sources of the state's wealth—mining, agriculture, industry. At the California School of Fine Arts, the mural is titled *Making a Fresco, Showing the Building of a City*, and its side panels depict the industrial labors one might expect—a woman architect, steelworkers,

BELOW

Some of the key figures in San Francisco's fledgling avant-garde movement moved into houses in the Fillmore District in the 1950s. These nineteenth-century houses were later destroyed as part of an urban renewal campaign. (photograph by David Johnson)

OPPOSITE

A City Lights bookstore poster for poetry collections by Allen Ginsberg. (courtesy City Lights Books)



A PAINTER'S EVICITION

carpenters. But at the center, Rivera painted a scaffold on which artists were painting a huge worker, suggesting that though workers built the city, artists built the worker—that is, that they constructed the very ideas and identities on which class, work, and city life are based, a fitting assertion for an art school that has sent generations of subversives out into the world. Rivera galvanized the local mural scene, and during the New Deal several San Francisco sites—notably Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill—received overtly political murals and generated a fair-sized controversy (more recent mural projects tend to be supported by communities and progressive nonprofits, far more democratic patrons to deal with). Kahlo flourished in San Francisco and painted a number of portraits, including a marriage portrait of herself with Rivera that Bender donated to the San Francisco Museum of Art, where it is still on display.

If Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham, and other photographers of the Group f/64 embodied California's first progressive art movement in the early 1930s, then California's second significant avant-garde wave began in the 1950s when several visual artists tied to the Beat poets gathered in San Francisco. Bay Area Figurative painting, a revolt against abstract-expressionism that could also be counted as a significant movement, began about the same time, and figures such as Joan Brown and David Park had ties to both communities. My first book was on Bruce Conner, Jay DeFeo and her husband Wally Hedrick, Jess, Wallace Berman, and George Herms, six visual artists who were closely tied to the Beat poets and to the gestation of experimental film and alternative culture in California, and writing it in the already-lousy-for-tenants late 1980s, I came to appreciate how much a copious supply of cheap housing contributed to the era's sense of freedom. The artists of the era could live as they wished, for there always seemed to be some place to go when the money ran out or the landlord objected.

The literal and psychological mobility of those times is antithetical to the immobilizing effect of scarcity and fear nowadays. "San Francisco was a hotbed of liberalism and Pacific Coastal rim ideas and environmental consciousness at its early stages and a place where one could live in a lovely apartment with a view and low rent that an artist might be able to afford," recalls the poet Michael McClure, who was close to many of the artists.¹²

Those artists recognized that there was no art market on the West Coast, and many of them had consciously chosen to reject New York and any chance at commercial success in favor of the low pressure and wide-open possibilities San Francisco represented. Some recognized that in order to make art, they needed to make a culture in which their art was possible, and so the 1950s saw a succession of artist-run galleries, publications, and community-making endeavors. Walter Benjamin's comment "Rather than ask, 'What is the *attitude* of a work of art to the relations of production of its time?' I should like to ask, 'What is its *position* in them?'" is germane, for here artists made work that was sometimes overtly political—dealing with the death penalty and the Vietnam War, as well as divergent identities—but they also created a culture that was an alternative to the patronage economy and the passivity of those waiting for support.¹³ Jess and his partner Robert Duncan—poet, anarchist, and publicly gay man—ran the King Ubu Gallery for a year, and in 1954 the Six Gallery—run by four artists and two poets—took over Ubu's upper Fillmore Street site in what was not yet an upscale neighborhood. Later Conner was instrumental in launching the Batman Gallery and, with filmmaker Larry Jordan, an experimental film society, while Berman functioned as a publisher, exhibitor, salon host, and general fomenter of connections and provider of support. The most famous event of the era, the great watershed in American art, was Allen Ginsberg's 1955 reading of *Howl* at the Six—famous in part because it is a central scene in Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*. Less famous are the details that five other poets, including McClure and Gary Snyder, read, that those two read poetry that was already environmentalist, that Kenneth Rexroth was the master of ceremonies, and that it all transpired in the Six Gallery. An artists' collective had supplied the space in which poetry triumphed. Far more seriously than in *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, community had triumphed over capitalism.

8.

Franklin Dickerson Walker, *San Francisco's Literary Frontier* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1970).

9.

Diego Rivera with Gladys March, *My Art, My Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Dover, 1991), 105, 106.

10.

Nancy S. Peters and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Literary San Francisco: A Pictorial History from Its Beginnings to the Present Day* (San Francisco: City Lights Books and Harper and Row, 1980).

11.

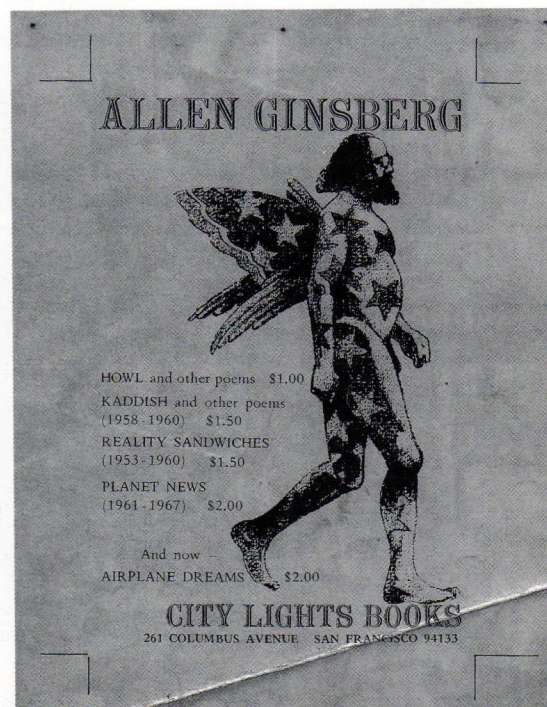
Anthony W. Lee, *Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco's Public Murals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 23.

12.

Rebecca Solnit, *Secret Exhibition: Six California Artists of the Cold War Era* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1990), 26–7.

13.

Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," *Reflections* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 222.





The 1950s saw both the "San Francisco Renaissance" in poetry and the so-called Beats open up the possibilities of American literature, both stylistically and politically, and while the trio of official Beats were Eastern, both Ginsberg and Kerouac found liberation and confirmation in San Francisco.

Conner's well-known black-and-white film *The White Rose* documents the 1964 removal of DeFeo's monumental one-ton painting *The Rose* from her long-term home by a group of unusually priestly looking moving men. The seven-minute movie is about many things: the painter's passionate commitment to this work, the mandala-like spiritual icon the painting had become, the melancholy end of the intricate relationships among artist, home, and art. But at a fundamental level the film is about eviction. In the mid-1950s, DeFeo and many other artists and poets had moved into the spacious flats at 2322 Fillmore Street in what was then the edge of the Fillmore District and is now called Lower Pacific Heights, but in 1964 her rent was raised from \$65 to \$300 a month and she was forced to move.

Conner has since become celebrated as a filmmaker as well as an artist; a huge exhibition of his work opened at the Walker Art Center in late 1999 and traveled to three other major American museums in 2000. When I asked him to recall his beginnings in San Francisco, he told me the rent he and his bride, Jean Sandstedt Conner, paid in their first place on Jackson Street, near Fillmore, was \$65 a month in 1957. But, he admonished me, coming up with that sum was "not so easy if you were making one penny over minimum wage. I was working as a movie usher and Jean was working at a concession stand. She was also getting paid a dollar and one cent per hour....We were living on Jackson Street in this three-room thing and Wallace Berman and Shirley [Berman] moved in down the street about three months after we moved in, about six or seven houses east of us on that block." Artists lived much more modestly then than now, he added. "We'd eat out once a month at the cheapest Chinese restaurant we could find and get about the least expensive thing that was on the menu. The rest of the time we were eating hot dogs and peanut butter sandwiches." As for housing, "It was easy to evict people but it was easy to find another place. My rent went up to \$85....I had to move out because we couldn't afford it, and at the same time Wallace and Shirley's rent went up from \$65 to \$125—they *really* didn't want them there. So I moved over to 1205 Oak Street and Wallace and Shirley and [their son] Tosh moved over to Alamo Square. Then we didn't have any real problems."¹⁴ They had moved from the northern to the southern edge of the Western Addition, near what would become known as the Haight-Ashbury.

Meanwhile, the 2322 Fillmore Building became a sort of latter-day Bateau Lavoir—the building in which Pablo Picasso and many of his peers lived during their starving-in-Montmartre phase. McClure and his family, gallerist James Newman, painter Sonia Gechtoff, and later the painters Joan Brown and Bill Brown lived at 2322 Fillmore as neighbors and friends of DeFeo and Hedrick. "We were enjoying the black stores, the black ambience, the black music," recalls McClure. "We had our faces toward them but our butts towards Pacific Heights."¹⁵ DeFeo had worked on her painting *The Rose* for several years, eventually installing it in the bay window of the front room of her flat, which she used as a studio. The painting and her commitment to it became legendary, and her peers speak of DeFeo with an awe no one else elicited. *The Rose* came to weigh about a ton as the paint built up to become several inches thick, and the floor around it was, recalls Conner, so layered with yielding, drying paint that walking on it was like walking on the back of a whale. The house had become magical and slightly sinister, an extension of the painting that was so much an extension of the artist. Conner's *The White Rose* documents the severing of each from each, with Miles Davis's "Sketches in Spain" as a soundtrack that underscores the melancholy of the moment. DeFeo, who died in Oakland in 1989, never lived in San Francisco again.

14.

Bruce Conner, conversation with the author, March 11, 2000.

15.

Michael McClure, conversation with the author, March 11, 2000.

OPPOSITE

Jay DeFeo painting
The Rose, 1962.

(photograph by Burt Glinn;
courtesy Magnum Photos, Inc.)

BELOW

Jazz club in the Hunter's Point
district of San Francisco.

(photograph by David Johnson)





AND A WAVE OF DISPLACEMENT

ABOVE

Many artists took rooms in the Montgomery Block building in San Francisco before the Second World War. Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo moved in to the building in 1930.

(courtesy City Lights Books)

OPPOSITE

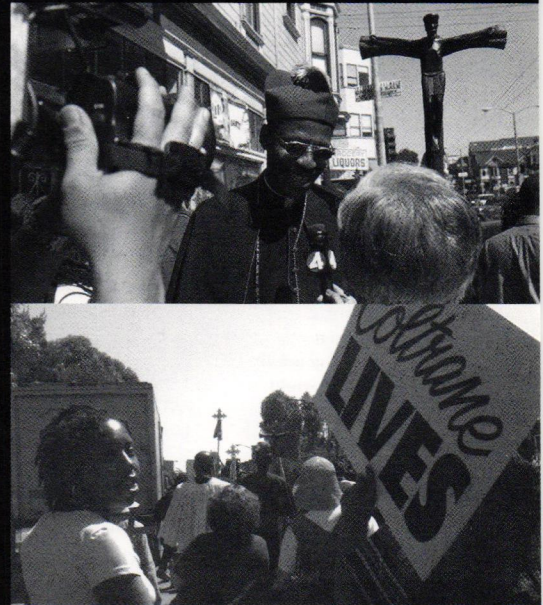
The Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church of San Francisco had to move from its storefront location of twenty-nine years after the owner doubled its rent. Last year, supporters of the church marched to their temporary new home, which is shared with another church. Members of the church revere the jazz saxophonist—who embraced Christianity in his later years—and the liturgy revolves around Coltrane's writings and music.

(photographs by Susan Schwartzberg)

Any accurate history of the urban avant-gardes and bohémias must be in part a history of urban real estate and economics generally. Several factors made the postwar era peculiarly encouraging for bohémias and countercultures. Postwar affluence was, unlike today's boom, widely distributed. Veterans were eligible both for home loans—which accelerated the expansion of suburbia, making cities even more available to artists—and for the GI Bill—which fueled, so to speak, the expansion of the intelligentsia. University of California, Berkeley, geographer Richard Walker writes, "Prosperity worked its magic more effectively as long as rents remained low enough to allow artists, refugees, and those outside the mainstream to survive, if not prosper, in the inner city. The long slump in central-city investment due to depression, war, and suburbanization had left property markets relatively untouched for two decades. The confluence of economic growth without property speculation through the 1950s was ideal for nurturing the countercultures that mushroomed in San Francisco. Conversely, the heating up of real estate in the seventies and eighties drove out many of the marginals; as old commercial space disappeared, the affluent crowded into gentrifying neighborhoods."¹⁶ DeFeo's eviction came ten years before the real-estate boom started changing the possibilities for artists in general, though urban renewal was in full swing not far south of her on Fillmore Street. Conner's film captures the melancholy of displacement of an individual, not the politics of mass displacement.

Between the eviction and the boom came the counterculture, and nowhere is the real estate foundation of culture more evident than in the Haight-Ashbury, circa 1967–71. Or so Calvin Welch, who was there then—and still is now—told me. I walked over from my home, not far from where Conner, Rexroth, and Berman settled, to the "409 House," a Victorian building a block and a half from the intersection of Haight and Ashbury Streets. The 409 House has been home to several progressive outfits, and from it Welch has operated as an affordable-housing activist since the 1970s, currently as director of the Council of Community Housing Organizations. Hippies, Welch told me, depressed housing prices when they arrived, and they chased out the African Americans who had relocated to the Haight from the adjoining Western Addition. Dozens of Haight-Ashbury households, he told me, paid no rent at all in that heyday—and this confirmed what I, born on the baby-boom/Generation X cusp, had always suspected: that the widespread revolutionary spirit of the sixties was underwritten by an economy so expansive that its bounty spilled over onto the middle-class kids who didn't participate in it; that freedom was, so to speak, more affordable then, the margins far wider and more inviting than ever before or since.

By 1977, everything was different. There had been a huge change in the economy; wages had started to flatten out as inflation skyrocketed, places like San Francisco had undergone huge increases in housing prices, and the fat of the land had been pretty much eaten up. Radical politics were washed up between the failures of sixties-style revolution and the 1980s surge of nonviolent direct action around nuclear issues, the wars in Central America, human rights, and the environment. As David Antin, who had flourished as a young artist in New York's easy 1950s housing climate, put it in a 1988 lecture at the San Francisco Art Institute, "Every city in the United States is suffering from real estate inflation, which means that young people going to the city to make it can't afford to live the way artists used to live....It contributes to an enormous anxiety for the young, who are the people who become artists in an environment where other people are artists. They go there and they can't survive there. The streets are filled with people who can't find places to live because it's too expensive to live....It seems to me this economic disaster of inflation and the disastrous, dire effect upon the young was being felt in the 1970s in every city that was a significant city where you could go to be an artist. I remember it as the appearance of punk—that is, the punk sensibility seemed to emanate from a lot of kids who wanted



to make meaningful things some way or another under conditions that were very unlivable, surrounded by other people who found it unlivable.”¹⁷

“No future,” sang the Sex Pistols from London. “We’re desperate,” chorused X from L.A. “Get used to it.” And from San Francisco, the Avengers shouted, “Ask not what you can do for your country but what your country’s been doing to you!” Punk rock took place among the ruins—among the ruins of postindustrial cities before the new consumer-and-capital booms, among the ruins of modernism’s faith in the future, among the ruins of the sixties’ hubris and idealism, among the ruins of an economy that had set an older generation free. South of Market in San Francisco were the aban-

doned Hamms beer vats where the performance art group Survival Research Labs, a group whose machines performed rites of violence and entropy, once performed—a huge cinderblock Costco now occupies the site—and another place just known as The Beer Vats housed rehearsal studios and artists then. Punk managed to revive anarchy as a political philosophy and to articulate an insurrection more akin to the Beats than the hippies, as well as to provide a musical medium for adolescent angst and revolt that soon pervaded the garages and college radio stations of the country. By the 1980s, squatting had become part of punk-rock culture, because affordable, let alone free, housing wasn’t what it had been in the hippie heyday. In the Reagan era, the apocalypse seemed near and the options seemed limited.

^{16.} Richard Walker, “An Appetite for the City,” in James Brook, Chris Carlsson, and Nancy Peters, *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1998), 9.

^{17.} David Antin, keynote talk at the San Francisco Art Institute’s annual summer criticism conference, August 1988. (tape courtesy of Bill Berkson)



ABOVE

Beat poet Bob Kaufman reads at San Francisco's Coffee Gallery in 1959. Photographer Imogen Cunningham (wearing a hat) can be seen at the far right. (photograph by C. J. Snyder, courtesy Shaping San Francisco)

OPPOSITE

City Lights Books in the 1970s. City Lights played a central role in the Beat movement in San Francisco, publishing the work of such writers as Allen Ginsberg, Bob Kaufman, Jack Kerouac, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. (photograph by Ira Nowinski)

The housing crisis hit New York hardest in the 1980s. Probably the first time artists had ever been involved in gentrification in any significant way was in SoHo, where hordes of artists had moved in the 1960s and 1970s, only to find it become first fashionable and then prohibitively expensive by the 1980s. It was the first time that class identities were so reshuffled that wealthier citizens wanted to live like artists in that neighborhood, rather than just buy their work, see versions of their lives onstage, or drink in their cafés. I am not sure that artists in general should be held responsible for gentrification; it is not necessarily their fault that wealthy professionals follow their lead. After all, creeps tend to follow teenage girls around, but teenage girls neither create nor encourage that population. Another way to put it is: Redevelopment is like an oil spill, with a single cause and a responsible party. Gentrification is like air pollution; a lot of unlinked individuals make contributions whose effect is only cumulatively disastrous. One can blame artists and drivers for those cumulative effects, but such effects are not their intention. Two of San Francisco's most significant artists—Jess and David Ireland—moved to the heart of the Mission District respectively thirty-five and twenty-five years ago and live there

still; it is clearly not talented individual artists but the widespread ambience created by cafés, nightclubs, galleries, and those who hang out in them—by a visible bohemia, along with “lifestyle” commodities—that seeds gentrification. This is why North Beach, with its cafés and bars, is famous for a Beat bohemia that was largely elsewhere and why the Haight is still selling psychedelia to kids born in the 1980s. What is the counterargument: Should artists and activists redline nonwhite and poor neighborhoods, and if so, what should they do about affordable housing? Perhaps the culpable party is the larger economic force that produces those able to gentrify and those who are most vulnerable when gentrification takes place, and perhaps the best form of resistance is alliances and analyses that address this force. Finally, the argument that artists are gentrifiers presumes that artists are white, middle-class people, and part of the vitality of the Mission District comes from the fact that this is clearly not so.

As SoHo and then the Lower East Side were gentrifying, some fought back. There were the famous battles of Tompkins Square over whether the homeless could continue to camp there, and a plethora of graffiti and antigentrification posters made the struggle more visible. In the early 1980s, other New York artists were fighting a different kind of battle to ensure their ability to stay. Various

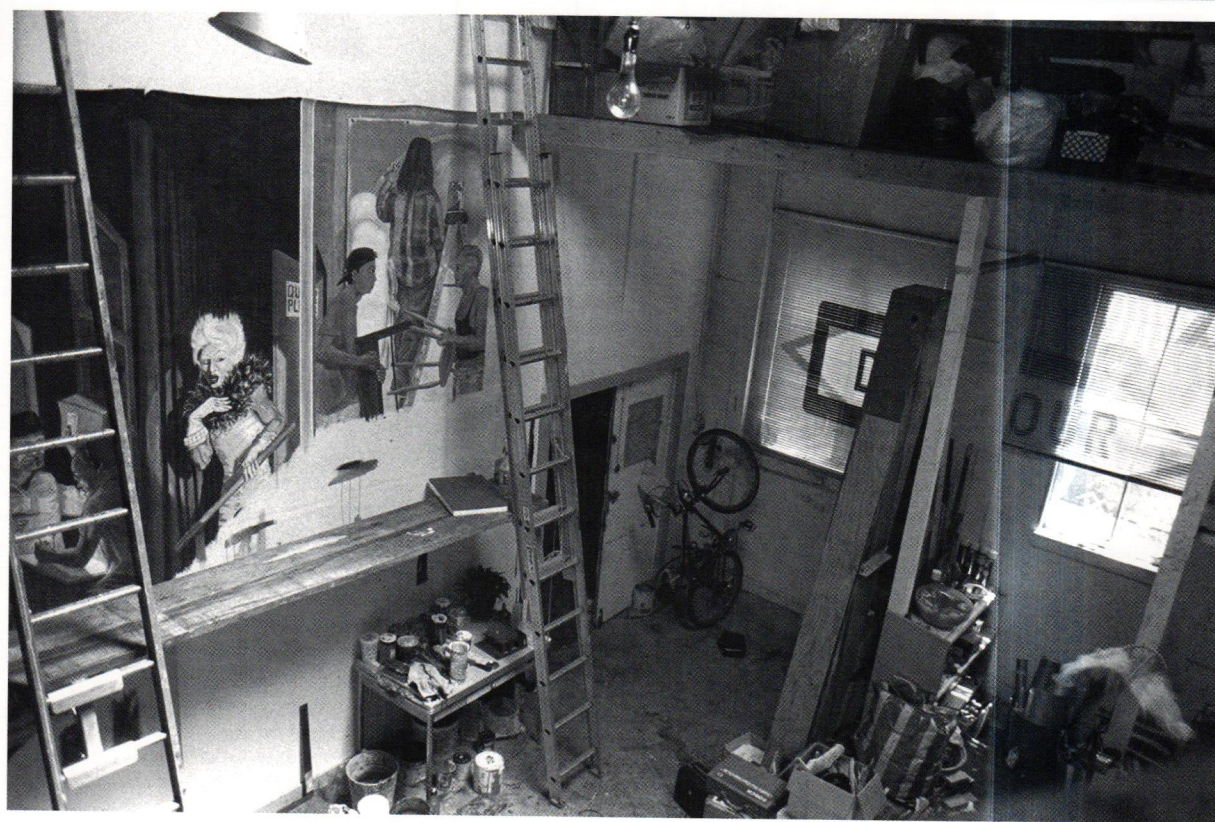


pieces of legislation gave artists special rights and roles—and raised questions about those roles. The Department of Cultural Affairs' artists' certification program legalized the conversion of industrial buildings into artists' living and working space, and the city started the Artist Home Ownership Program. By the late 1980s, the role of artists in gentrification and the merits of artists being given special status were under discussion in New York. In San Francisco, artists inspired by the Manhattan example fought for and won the "live/work" ordinance, the biggest Trojan horse artists ever dragged into a city. Like the New York certification program, it was intended to legitimize artists converting industrial space into live-in studios (and a whole other tale could be told about the industries that were leaving the inner city cores and about how a whole aesthetic and scale developed out of artists moving into those spaces). San Francisco artists managed to get a measure passed that allowed them to build or convert in regions zoned for industry, to circumvent building codes, and to avoid affordable-housing stipulations and a significant portion of school taxes. Once again some visual artists had become confused about their relationship to wealth and to poverty, and this time the results were practical and pervasive.

Other artists fought the measure. As Joan Holden of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Coalition on Jobs, Arts and Housing told me, "The affordable housing people said, 'Watch out—you're creating a bonanza for developers.'" ¹⁸ In its free outdoor performances, the Mime Troupe has been addressing gentrification issues for decades, and in the summer of 1999 Holden wrote the script for a piece about economic strife and displacement in the Mission. Debra Walker, an artist who has lived in a nonprofit-owned artists' building for fifteen years and participated in housing politics nearly as long, has harsher things to say about the 1988 live/work ordinance: "Artists in City Hall were adamant that they did not want to be defined, so not only did we not ask for special housing or special zoning, we refused to be part of any solution for enforcement. It really was the artists who screwed themselves on this, because artists didn't want to be defined." Had they allowed a definition to be created, live/work spaces might not have mutated into the rash of upscale loft-condominiums taking over San Francisco's industrial districts—but Walker doesn't think a definition was what was called for: "I don't think the answer is that you take a group of people and make special housing for them. If live/work spaces had to be affordable housing, it would've been a lot more

18.

Joan Holden, conversation with the author, March 2000.



successful and [the regulations] would've been harder to get around. You have got to take speculation out of things like this or you lose. In the mid-1990s, I noticed a lot more lofts going up and I went to look at them and said, these are not for artists....Shortly thereafter there was this proliferation of lofts and the prices were starting to go up and businesses were starting to get dislocated, and all of a sudden it was like this wild thing. Mortgage companies started giving residential loans for lofts. After that anybody could buy one, so that was really what created the whole big building boom, and plus there was a need. Multimedia was just starting to come in."¹⁹ Walker first noticed the loft problem because she paints cityscapes: looking at the city closely led her to recognize its transformation early and take political action.

Live/work spaces have become infamous as cheaply built condominiums at sky-high prices out of reach for artists but well within the means of the young men and women made wealthy (if only temporarily) from their involvement in dot-com-related industries. From near downtown to the city's poorest southern reaches, these angular modernist structures with glaring walls of glass pop up between industrial buildings, Victorians, and other older buildings, directly displacing numerous small businesses. According to the Coalition on Jobs, Arts and Housing, "The Planning Department's own studies show that not protecting industrial areas will cost the city 13,000–27,000 jobs in production, distribution, auto repair, garment manufacturing, delivery services, printing, and moving companies. These jobs must stay in the city to support industries like finance, multimedia, real estate, and tourism. The jobs at stake are stable, low-skill, high-wage jobs essential to a thriving economy."²⁰ Several hundred jobs already lost can be traced directly to the replacement of workplaces by live/work condos; many other small businesses have been forced to relocate or close because the new neighbors just wanted their neighborhood to *look* industrial, not smell, sound, or act industrial. The newcomer neighbors have objected to longstanding activities ranging from meat-packing plants to a school that funds teaching English to immigrants by holding big dances on the weekends.

Now the future is supposed to be bright, but gaining admission to that future is getting harder, and it is becoming all but inaccessible by the scenic bohemian detour. The United States, as Welch points out, has a housing crisis at least as dramatic as its health-care crisis. Bruce and Jean Conner's rent in 1958 represented 65 hours of minimum-wage work split between two people. At today's minimum wage of \$5.50 an hour, an apartment for two would have to cost \$357.50 a month to be equivalent; in fact, the average San Francisco apartment rented for \$1,861 by early 1999, representing instead five times as much work—324 hours at the minimum wage, nearly all the pretax earnings of two full-time minimum-wage workers.²¹ The postwar boom was radically inclusive, but the new boom is as radically exclusive.

A decade ago Los Angeles looked like the future—urban decay, open warfare, segregation, despair, injustice, and corruption—but the new future looks like San Francisco in its boom phase: a frenzy of financial speculation, covert coercions, overt erasures; a barrage of novelty-item restaurants, Web sites, technologies, and trends; and the despair of unemployment replaced by the numbness of incessant work hours and the anxiety of destabilized jobs, homes, and neighborhoods. Thirty-five percent of the venture capital in this country is in the Bay Area, along with 30 percent of the multimedia/Internet businesses, and the boom that started in Silicon Valley has produced a ripple effect throughout the region from south of San Jose to Napa and Sonoma in the north.²² San Francisco has had the most expensive housing of any major American city in the nation for two decades, but in the past few years housing prices—both sales and rents—have been skyrocketing, along with commercial rents. New businesses are coming in at a hectic pace, and they in turn generate new boutiques, restaurants, and bars that displace earlier businesses, particularly nonprofits, and the new industry's workers have been outbidding for rentals and buying houses out from under tenants at a breakneck pace. Regionally, home sale and rental prices have gone up by 30 percent over the past three years, but the rate of increase is far more dramatic in San Francisco (where rents rose 37 percent from 1996 to 1997, before the boom really hit, and nowadays can go up 20 percent in less than six months in some neighborhoods, vacancy rates are below 1 percent, and houses routinely sell for a hundred thousand dollars over offering price).²³

OPPOSITE TOP

The Hunter's Point Restaurant was a 1940s-era diner built to serve workers at the Hunter's Point Shipyard. When the shipyard closed, the diner became a club. It closed recently to make room for new development along the San Francisco waterfront.

OPPOSITE INSET

A studio in San Francisco reveals the crowded conditions that many artists experience when they try to remain in the city.

(photographs by Susan Schwartzberg)

19.

Deborah Walker, conversation with the author, March 2000.

20.

Coalition on Jobs, Arts and Housing Web site, March 2000.

21.

See, for example, Harper's Index for July 2000: "Number of U.S. counties in which a full-time minimum-wage earner can afford a one-bedroom apartment: 0," or countless articles on unaffordability of housing for greater and greater portions of the population. Again, San Francisco is only an extreme version of a pervasive problem.

22.

Bay Area Economic Forum, *Winning in the Global Economy* (September 1999): 13.

23.

Thirty percent is a very modest figure: according to Carol Emert, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 May 2000, "Median Bay Area home prices rose to \$358,000 in April, up 22.6 percent from April 1999 and 4.7 percent from last March, according to DataQuick."

Before he accepted a job at New York's Whitney Museum, Bay Area curator Larry Rinder described his vision of the arts in San Francisco in twenty years: "San Francisco in 2020 is going to become a city of presentation without creation—much on the model of what we see in a place like Washington, D.C., now, where you have really premier centers for presentation, the National Gallery, the Kennedy Center, and so on and so forth, but very little in terms of vital, grassroots creative practice. In Washington because no artist would want to live there, and here because no artist will be able to afford to live here. The large-scale organizations will survive by booking only the most high-profile exhibitions and performances, and I think there will be relatively little room for experimentation or innovation....I think you'll see very little of the very down and dirty and ground-level, grassroots creativity that you need for a city to feel like an active and vital cultural center. The small- and medium-sized arts organizations, I'm afraid, will have folded unless they retool to cater to segments of the tourist community."²⁴ A city of presentation without creation defeats the essential purpose of radical art, to make art an invitation to join in rather than just to look on, to give voice to the unheard, to engender conversation about the meaning of the lives being led all around us, to build a vital relationship between artists and the public. To have community murals in the Mission requires both muralists and a community.

In the future, there may be very few artists, not because the urge stirred up during the postwar era has died down, but because the circumstances in which art can be made are shrinking. Cities will no longer be porous; the dissenters will no longer have a niche in them. On my most cheerful days, I imagine an outmigration of artists to the small towns they can afford, a sort of unofficial artist-in-residence program throughout the nation's outback, one that will give rise to a populist art identified with the overlooked populations of small towns, reservations, remote places, resource-industry workers—something a little like 1930s regionalism (without the WPA to underwrite it, of course). On my least cheerful ones, I imagine a nation in which those who have something to say have nowhere effective to say it. Haussmann sent the poor to the politically and culturally ineffectual outskirts, and so does the new gentrification, but the outskirts keep getting further away from the vital center. The possibility of political participation, along with access to the main museum, library, and bookstores, is fading as the center evicts its chaos, and the Internet isn't going to make up for that.

It may be that the idea of a mass culture of bohemia was just possible during the period of postwar affluence, that the GI Bill and cheap rents and the fat of the land created a large-scale cultural community that is now being—like a white-collar workforce in corporate America—downsized. Or it may mean that art making will be like blue-collar American jobs—it'll be shipped out to places where it can be done more economically: Marathon and Marfa, Texas; Virginia City and Tuscarora, Nevada; Jerome and Bisbee, Arizona, to name a few remote places where artists have been migrating.

A curator at a major Texas museum tells me, quite cheerfully, that artists will no longer live in New York, just come there periodically to deliver to the market, and I picture artists like campesinas coming down from the hills with their burdens—but to a marketplace that is only a marketplace of objects, not of ideas.

Artists in small towns could become the equivalents of *maquiladora* workers, making goods for an economy they cannot afford to participate in (and writers like me who depend on large libraries are in a tighter bind altogether). It may be that cities have, so to speak, raised their admission fees—by obliging those who wish to stay in San Francisco, for example, to join the dot-com economy. But paying that fee may mean abandoning the values and goals one came with, and the loss of those idealists and impractical characters will be a loss to the life of the city and the culture as a whole. Cities may keep their traditional appearance while joining the suburbs and gated communities as places of predictability, homogeneity, and political inertia. Art won't die, but that old urban relationship among the poor, the subversive, and the creative called bohemia will. For a long time, we have imagined that the eradication of public space would kill off cities, but it may instead be the eradication of the affordable private space in which public life is incubated that will prove fatal. ■

24.

Lawrence Rinder in a July 23, 1999, panel discussion organized by the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which published his talk on November 15, 1999.

At the height of the dot-com economy, photographer Susan Schwartzberg interviewed Bay Area residents about the effect of the new economy on artists, architects, construction workers, and dot-com workers. The following essay features the residents' comments and photographs of the places in which they work.

PHOTO ESSAY BY

SUSAN SCHWARTZENBERG

White-collar workers earned
\$26.21
per hour last year
and were
63%
of Bay Area's workers

Blue-collar workers earned
\$16.55
per hour
and were
20%
of workers

"These get built all over the town,
and most are sold before they're finished being built.
I paint, day after day, always white.

Yeah, we build them,

**but we won't ever make
enough money to buy one."**

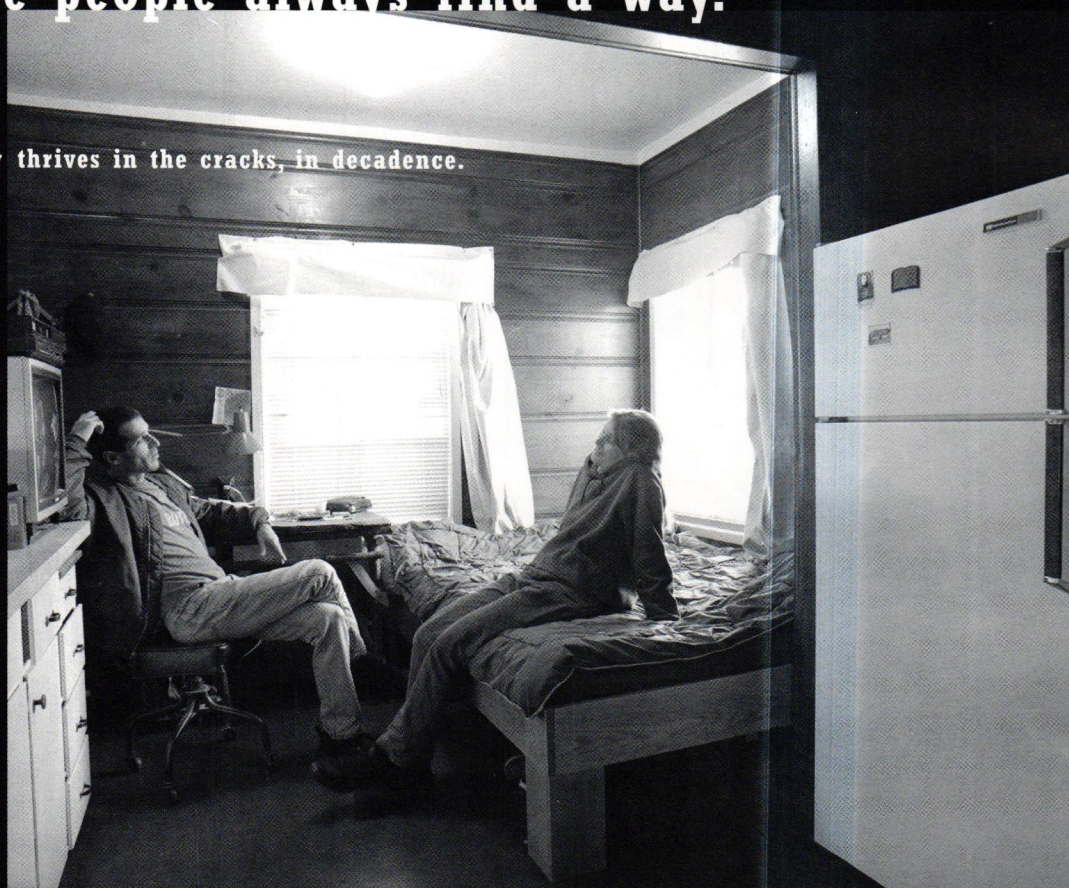
— Interior painter


"This profession is famous for not being able to make a living from it.

But creative people always find a way.

The moments when art, or 'bohemian' situations thrive are temporary....Creativity thrives in the cracks, in decadence. That's often where culture grows, like bacteria in unhealthy dark areas; you see that throughout history, but they don't last. If we get pushed out—where are we going to go? That's what everyone asks."

— Two artists





"There is so much work right now and not enough qualified people to do it."

Sometimes I feel like my head is about to explode—the intensity, the pace, the stress are just so great. It's all market-driven and client-controlled. People where I work routinely put in 40 to 50 percent in overtime hours. We're professionals so we don't get paid for it. Most of us probably can't even afford to live in the buildings we're designing."

— Architect

Rents for prime downtown
San Francisco office space:

\$74.16/sq. ft.

Midtown Manhattan:

\$67.75/sq. ft.
in February 2001

Median price for a San Francisco home:

\$524,000

**"Most of the people in this business are very young,
and they don't all have experience in communication."**

So you have to reconcile that with this space
we work in. There are lots of
places to sit and meet: couches,
outdoor tables, the pool table.
It's a casual environment."

— Financial systems analyst



Internet company layoffs
1998 to date:

77,000

Number of homeless who died
on streets of San Francisco, 2000:

155

1999-2000 SF office leases that
were to dot-com firms:

60%

"It was our boss, someone from HR, and these two goons—meatheads—you know, bouncers. They took us in a room. We got a termination letter, four weeks pay, and a benefits package we're still working out. They told us we had sixty minutes to get our stuff and leave. The big guys watched while my boss kept asking us, are you done? They gave us a number to call, but I would rather have kept my Internet access or had time to grab personal contacts off my computer—something useful to help find a job."

"I made phat money. We worked on a destination site—as content people we really put ourselves into it—but it was never launched; we were so close. We thought, come on, you spent all this money!"

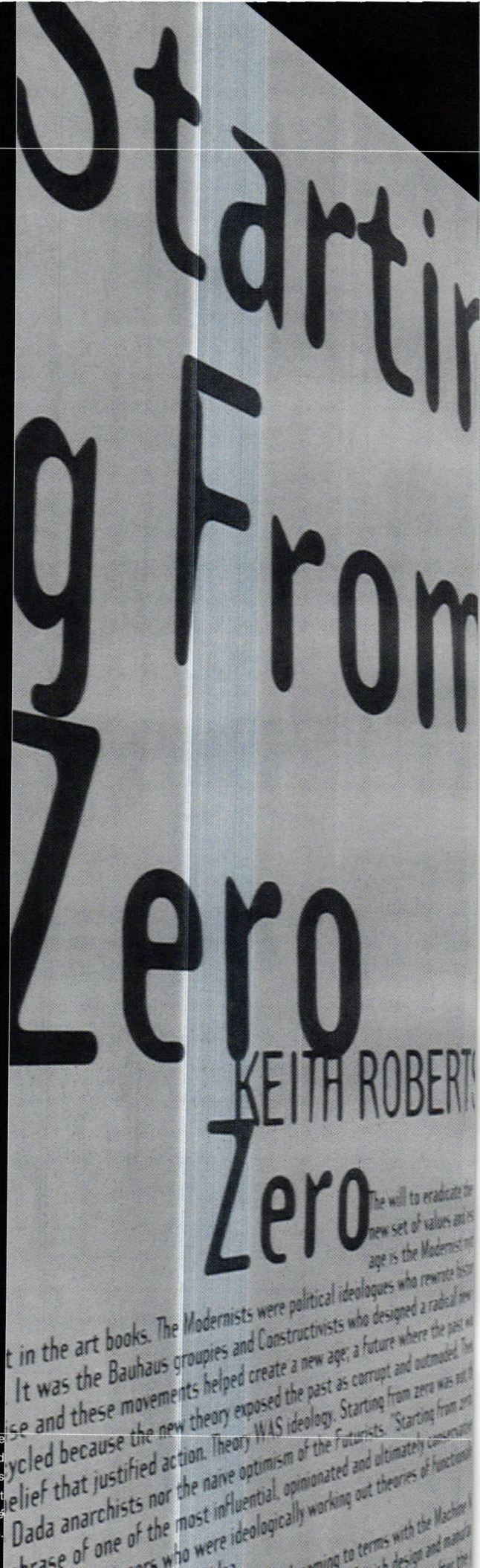
"This was a powerful company—I really believed that if you wanted to create something revolutionary you had to dismantle from the inside; I was naive. I guess the revolutionaries in this industry are the ones who are okay making a million, rather than selling out for two million."

— Two content providers

In Our Own Hands: The Democratization of Graphic Design

by Leslie Becker

Two pages from a 1991 issue of *Émigré* that were designed by Rudy VanderLans. Newly developed computer software helped VanderLans, and his partner Zuzana Licko, create numerous different type designs, and their innovative magazine *Émigré* played a key role in popularizing the new fonts.



and standardization. In the past, it had been claimed that the machine was used to express the foibles of fashion victims who chose historical motif for ornament. A truly utilitarian art, they argued, would be based on an accurate appraisal of mechanical production in order to develop the truest, purest mechanical aesthetic. Standardization and streamlining were the key to this approach.

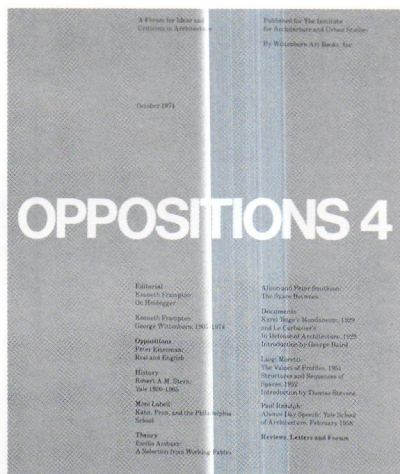
Towards a new order

In one of the small outdoor spaces between the lecture halls at the 1981 Aspen Design Conference in Colorado, two of the world's most influential graphic designers began to debate the effect of the computer on the graphic design profession. The Italian-born, New York-based designer **Massimo Vignelli** expressed his fears that the impending omnipresence of the computer would put the tools for making design into untrained hands, including those of secretaries and clerks. Vignelli believed that the power of design should remain with the professional, who could, through clean, unadorned projects, improve our visual world and provide an aesthetic counterpoint to the "vulgar" and commercialized images that bombard the ordinary person each day. The Swiss graphic designer **Bruno Monguzzi**, on the other hand, embraced the computer because it worked as a democratic leveler, expanding access to images and opening design to nonprofessionals. Monguzzi was less protective of the graphic design profession and believed that the computer would have a positive effect on designers and the world at large.

mathematical grid can be most clearly identified in the early designs of Theo Ballmer. The radical beginnings of the Modern movement started with the mad fruit salads of point sizes and faces of Gaudin and the bold asymmetry of Tschichold, Bayer and Moholy-Nagy. Slowly, however, there was a rationalization and ossification of the Modern movement, culminating in Switzerland after the war.



Two pages featuring graphic design by Bruno Monguzzi. (from *Bruno Monguzzi: A Designer's Perspective* [Baltimore: Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 1998].)



Graphic designer Massimo Vignelli designed the architectural magazine *Oppositions*. The issue above dates from October 1974.

As the subject of their argument became increasingly provocative, more and more designers at the conference stopped to listen to Vignelli and Monguzzi's debate. Their words seemed especially compelling at the particular time, for in the early 1980s, the computer was just beginning to make its way into graphic design offices, and designers had just gained a glimpse of a world in which vast numbers of an untrained and heterogeneous populace would be able to create graphic imagery.

The debate between Vignelli and Monguzzi quickly shifted away from technology and toward a discussion about the future of the design profession. Their words raised hard questions about the political responsibility of graphic design and about whether the profession was, at heart, an elitist institution. Vignelli's comments indicated a typically Americanized point of view, a preference for isolating design activity from a broader sociopolitical agenda. For decades, his work has remained in the modernist or International Style vein—containing unadorned images and objects that were pared down to their aesthetically pleasing functional essences. In contrast, Monguzzi produces work that is visually more complex, perhaps revealing a designer who acknowledges the existence of a more pluralistic society and a variety of viewpoints.

The brief exchange between Vignelli and Monguzzi in the rarefied air of Aspen triggered a larger set of questions about access to design tools and the role of technology in graphic design. Looking back on the event twenty years after the fact, their debate represented a larger division in the graphic design world—the unraveling of modernism in American graphic design and the rise of postmodernist graphic design that incorporated a wide range of styles and influences. Modernism yielded to a postmodernism that encouraged self-expression as a new form of honesty, included diverse voices, and posed a strident challenge to the single authoritarian point of view.

Modernist Design

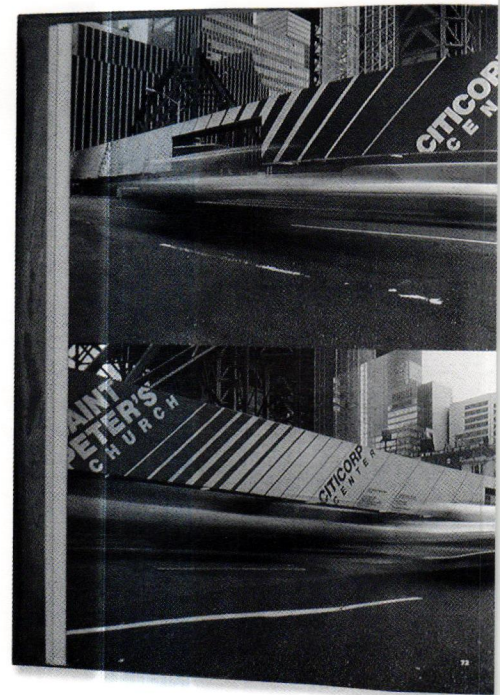
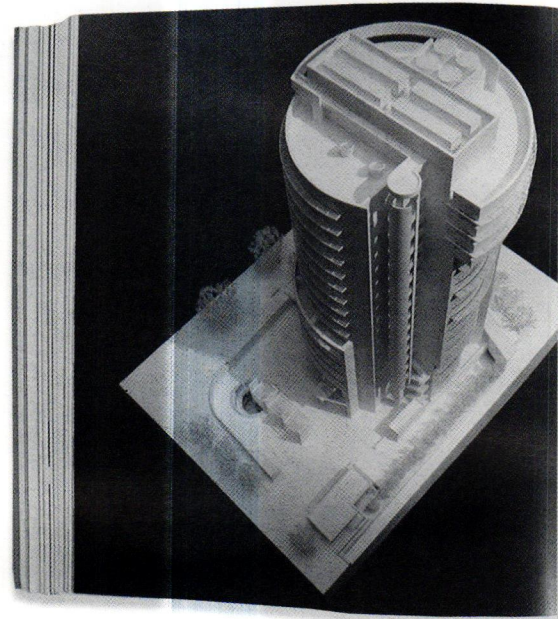
Modernist graphic design developed in western Europe at the turn of the century, led by such designers as **Peter Behrens**, who, along with other members of Germany's *Deutscher Werkbund*, hoped to renew industrial society through rational and nonhistoricist design. Behrens in particular, working in design disciplines as diverse as industrial design, architecture, and graphic design, symbolized a cohesive modernist vision of increased quality and production for industrial society. At the time of the First World War, **Walter Gropius** and other architects and designers founded the **Bauhaus** school, which similarly urged students to believe that the designer had the power to improve the life of consumers.

Bauhaus designers urged graphic designers to focus on creating well-made, functional, and unadorned mass-produced items, including books, posters, and product packaging. As it developed, the modern style of graphic design was a rule-bound system that precisely governed the use of words and images. Based upon orthogonal arrangements of precisely selected, hierarchically assigned typography and imagery, it was intended to deliver ordered, unambiguous messages to the viewer in an aesthetically pleasing way. Elegance and restraint became the central attributes of modernism's aesthetic canon. Design historian Paul Greenhalgh notes that the first phase of modernism in graphic design focused on how design might "transform human consciousness and improve material conditions."¹

He characterizes the early ideological stance of the modernists by a set of values that included moral imperatives such as "truth," which they believed could be translated into print. As Greenhalgh puts it:

Truth as a moral value was transposed into being simultaneously an aesthetic quality. Within the terms of the construction and appearance of objects, truth meant the avoidance of contrivances which created an illusion or false impression....The way an object was made had to be apparent and its visual attractiveness had to come directly out of those processes of construction. Truth as in ideal led, therefore, to a wholesale rejection of decoration, especially when it was perceived to be an element added after the major constructional work had taken place....Illusion or disguise of any kind in any of the visual arts was synonymous with a lie.²

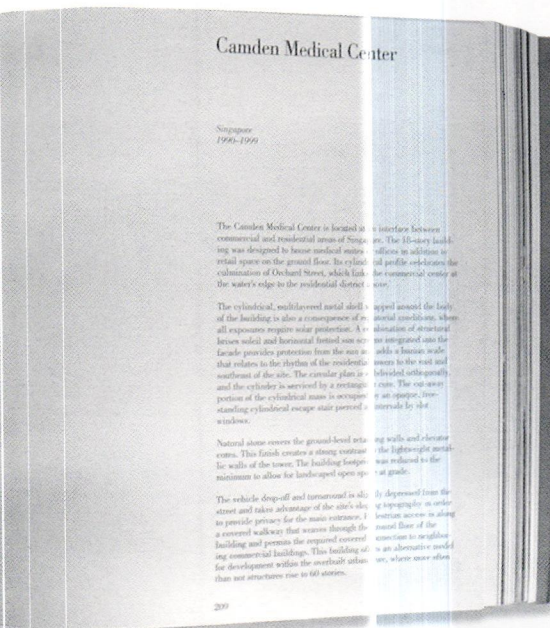
Refugees from the Bauhaus introduced American education to the formal traits of modernism, but with none of its ideological content. **Josef Albers** at Yale University and **Hannes Beckmann** at Cooper Union taught orderly, almost scientific approaches to design and fine arts students. Formal principles geared toward creating a careful, visually economic image were typical pedagogical messages. American graphic design never really embraced modernism as an ideology. There was no manifesto promising better living through good graphic design. Perhaps because Adolf Hitler closed the Bauhaus because he associated modern design with left-wing ideologies, when modernist designers like Gropius arrived in America, they abandoned public pronouncements of their political ideals. These practitioners, however, like most trained designers, clung to the formal aspects of modern graphic design, which represented for them a reliable mastery of their profession. In fact, graphic designers were largely apolitical during the



Dan Friedman helped redesign the Citibank corporate identification program in the mid-1970s, including the barricades surrounding the Citicorp Center construction site in New York and posters promoting the center to prospective tenants. Friedman also designed the book in which these photographs appear, which is titled *Dan Friedman—Radical Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

twentieth century. Only during times of enormous political tumult have designers become involved in social action. British design scholar Penny Sparke wrote in her 1986 book *An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century*:

There have been, throughout this century, a few instances when innovative design has been used to radical political ends. For example, the commitment of the Italian Futurists to fascism before the First World War and, in the case of graphic design, the work of the poster and propaganda artists in the Cuban Revolution and in the student uprisings in Paris in 1968 show how that medium can be used to support and promote a particular political ideology...With the exception of a number of Modern Movement protagonists and the designers associated with the Russian Revolution, relatively few designers have defined their role as politically active and have tended to work within the context of the political and economic framework which sustains them.³



International Style and Corporate Modernism

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Bauhaus aesthetic and contemporary Swiss graphic design remained powerful influences on American design education. Bauhaus refugees taught at American schools like Cooper Union and Yale and at Switzerland's Kunstgewerbeschule, which was a European hotbed for the study of graphic design. Swiss graphic designer Armin Hoffman and typographers Emil Ruder and Ruedi Ruegg influenced generations of design students, including many Americans, who read their texts and studied with them directly at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich or Basel. Under such graphic designers, the design studio became a laboratory for controlled experimentation, with resulting graphic design work looking to the untrained eye as if it had arisen from an authoritative scientific voice. By this time, modernism remained elegant and visually pleasing, but it was long disconnected from its political lineage, its social relevance, and the early modernist preoccupation with questioning and experimentation that was integral to both Bauhaus and Russian constructivist imagery of the early twentieth century.

In the 1950s, the most important movement within modernist graphic design was the **International Typographic Style**, or International Style. Like modernism, it developed in Germany and Switzerland and quickly became a significant influence on book design, posters, and especially corporate graphic identity. It introduced a minimalist aesthetic and resulted in the 1957 issuance in Switzerland of two (similar) sans serif type families: **Helvetica** and **Univers**, nearly perfectly homogenized fonts thought to be the answer to most future typographic needs. Failure to use one of these two type families during the 1960s and 1970s in print graphics was tantamount to sacrilege. But the International Style was what its name suggests: a style. Thus while the International Style's ascetic economy of means was the dominant aesthetic, it seemed clearly to have detached itself from notions of "truth" by the time it became a formal pedagogy in American design schools of the early 1960s.

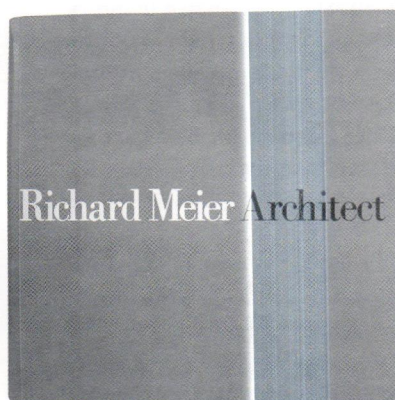
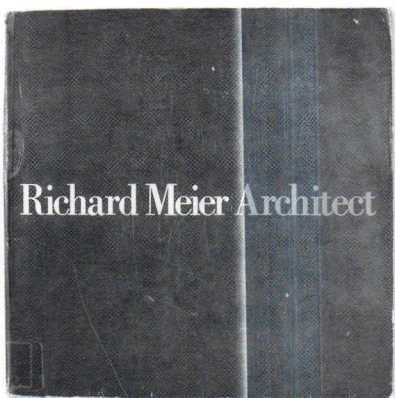
A tattered copy of *House X* by Peter Eisenman, which was designed by Vignelli and published by Rizzoli in 1982.



Within the graphic design discipline, this rationalist International Style almost could be generated with a set of rules. These rules include the following:

1. Choose one family of type only and take into account strong visual distinctions within members of the type family.
2. Assign a different typographic emphasis (such as **SIZE** or **boldness**) only to indicate different levels of importance in printed matter.
3. Ensure that each element remains discrete from all other elements.
4. Create an organized module for the page (a grid) based upon the specific content involved (photos, nature and quantity of texts, kinds of images).

Following such rules, those who embraced the International Style produced competent, though not necessarily engaging or evocative, graphic design. When design emerges from such constraints, there is little room for stylistic departure. Photographs, whether they are of housewares or chemical products, are deployed with rhythmic consistency on the page. To the devotee of the International Style, design is less a creative endeavor and more a skilled intervention. The designer makes order out of chaos by prioritizing the text and images through reasoned hierarchies. In this way, modernist graphic design was essentially an elitist act performed by designers most often trained in expensive private art schools under the influence of Swiss and Bauhaus curricula. The extreme restraint and minimalism of this acquired modernist design style looked cold to the average American.



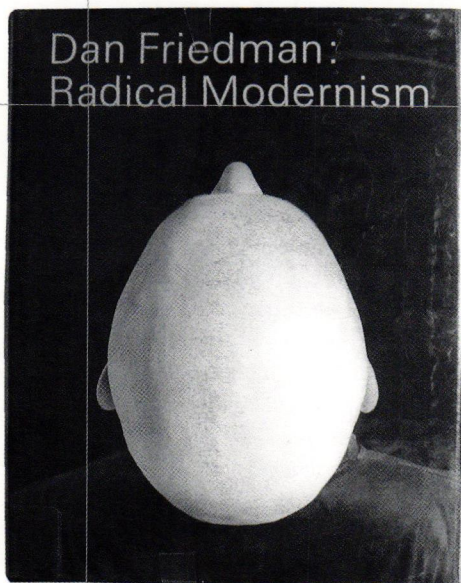
The marriage of International Style graphic design and corporate America was a long, happy, stylistic one that lasted from around 1960 to the early 1980s. Its influence remains evident today even in large, high-tech corporate graphics. During this time, consumers were bombarded by images of unquestioned dependability, consistency, and permanence. The International Style helped the corporate community create an ongoing consumer allegiance. Enormous sums of money went to graphic designers to produce corporate identity manuals that spelled out in great detail how and where to apply a corporation's modernist image with precision and consistency. **Vignelli** remains one of the high priests of modernist and International Style graphic design. During the 1960s Vignelli was a cult figure and the subject of numerous articles in the press. Photographs of Vignelli in the sixties often captured the designer in his standard costume of unadorned Nehru suits. When photographed for an article on designers' work space, his New York office revealed a pristine desk with a few strategically placed items. His work has always been as clean as that image of his desk: unadorned, succinct, intentionally hierarchical, and above all, perfectly under control. In the firm he cofounded with his wife, Lella, the designer has concentrated most of his professional attention on corporate and large institutional graphic design and product design.

Throughout Vignelli's career, he has maintained a faith in the power of graphic design to shape the reader's emotions. "We strongly believe," Vignelli stated, "in the permanence of the printed word as a witness to the culture of our time.... To design a book or a magazine means to control the emotions of the reader by manipulating the visual content, pacing the images, playing with the white space, choosing the most appropriate typeface and size, and scaling the pictures to obtain the desired effect."⁴ His comment reveals the modernists' dedication to control both object and reader, leaving little to interpretation. The Platonic shapes are clear and the various elements are perfectly aligned. Everything is visually resolved and tidy. There is no ambiguity in the object or the intent of its maker.

For the modernist, graphic design has a detached scientific quality, more an attempt to resolve a problem than an expression of the designer's creative personality. In the 1981 essay "Lella and Massimo Vignelli," design critic Germano Celant makes an observation about the graphic designer that helps define modernism itself:

[The] nothingness of "less is more"...that is the fount of total inspiration. The Vignellis never add anything when creating; rather, they remove, they subtract. For them, image and object exist once the designer backs off, forsaking his ego and emitting a sort of energy field that brings forth a figure, a typeface, or a table; a poster or a package; a logo or a book. Therein lies the secret: the designer must withdraw and restrain himself.⁵

Vignelli designed the Rizzoli books on Richard Meier. Pictured above, from top, are *Richard Meier, Architect: 1964/1984*; *Richard Meier, Architect: 1985/1991*; and *Richard Meier, Architect: 1992/1999*.



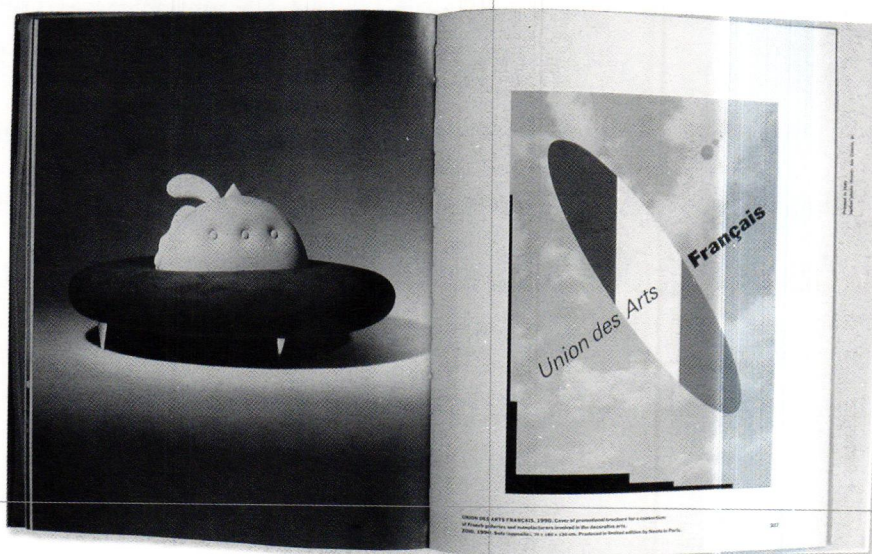
The cover of *Dan Friedman—Radical Modernism*, showing the top of Friedman's head.

Departures from Modernism: Four Examples

The political activism of the 1960s led many graphic designers to question the tenets of modernism. Younger, left-leaning designers began to have doubts about the field's relationship with hegemonic corporate firms and American capitalism. Many radical designers began to campaign about the adverse effects of industry and commerce on the aesthetic development of the field. At the same time, many European designers began to question the modernist belief that design should be handled by experts who had years of professional training.

The designers who embraced social causes, including **Sheila Levrant de Bretteville**, **Dan Friedman**, and **Tibor Kalman**, found that their political activism changed the appearance of their work. They found that the restrained and anonymous methods associated with modernism failed to offer the right tools to create politicized and activist work. Many adopted a style that drew from postmodernism, in that it was less hegemonic and more confrontational and unsettling, drawing from a wide range of different sources. **De Bretteville**, for example, is a designer, educator, and activist whose goal is to provide a voice to underrepresented members of American society, making public their alternate histories through permanent, site-specific installations. Although she was trained at Yale in the 1960s by Paul Rand, who was one of the twentieth century's major corporate designers, de Bretteville's work is fundamentally concerned with bringing significant social messages to the foreground.

By taking an activist stance, de Bretteville became less interested in formal style and more concerned with making tangible the voice of certain underpowered communities. Nevertheless, her training in the straightforward modernist style helped her in her role as a community organizer. In her recent project *At the start...At long last...*, which was installed at the end of the A-train line of the New York subway, she and her collaborators interviewed local community residents who leave from and return to this terminus. Her design for this project, including broken mirrors forming the title, is decidedly modernist: direct, simple, legible, unlayered. It is the visual language de Bretteville learned in school in the 1960s and perhaps still the best formal style to make evident messages in multiple languages. Because we can read the messages, there is no doubt about the engagement of community, the politics, the values, or the goals. The style used in this project is almost incidental as long as content is accessible. Although the graphic designer's approach can be loosely described as modernist, its content is decidedly postmodern and pluralist in intent.



Dan Friedman—Radical Modernism contained images of a couch Friedman designed in 1990 and a promotional brochure for a group of French galleries that dates from the same year.

While de Bretteville's use of modernism's clear, direct language was intended to achieve social justice, **Friedman** used modernist graphic design as a starting point from which to experiment with and reject the status quo. Though Friedman, who died in 1995, rejected the moniker of a particular style, his work always had a sense of exuberance and unpredictability. While his early work was elegant, formal, and even corporate, he increasingly experimented with unconventional effects and reflected the emerging pluralism of postmodern design. Beginning in the 1980s and through the remainder of his life, there was not a trace of formal modernism. His work was open to new possibilities and was almost frenetically inclusive. It borrowed from many different styles and methods to create unorthodox designs that often both challenged and delighted the viewer. Friedman acknowledged that his experimentation and approach to graphic design were profoundly shaped by the fact that he began his design career in the politically charged atmosphere of the 1960s. Friedman said the era "became my context for defining the role of design, reminiscent perhaps of the optimism of an earlier modernism."⁶

Friedman broke away from modernism as a style; however, he continued to express an affinity for the ideals of early modernism. In a criticism of the current state of the field, Friedman said in 1994:

Designers have dedicated themselves so entirely to the private sector that the public realm, cherished in other times and places, has languished....In the [1980s] and perhaps for much of the modern era, a correlation has become apparent between our quality of life and the powerlessness of designers to contribute to the public good. There is already evidence, however, that the 1990s may see a reemergence of designers with a more determined social conscience and an understanding of the words *pro bono publico*. Moreover, our marginalized position may inspire us, like artists, to function once again as cultural provocateurs.⁷

Although he did not receive professional training in graphic design, Hungarian-born **Kalman** emerged on the New York design scene as head of the influential design firm **M&Co**, in the late 1970s. Kalman's most edgy work was for Benetton's *Colors* magazine, which began in the early 1990s. Kalman, who died in 1999, conceded that he wanted to upset people in order to create social and cultural change. His work was pluralist and referential, and many designers and critics referred to Kalman as one of the nation's first postmodern designers. His now-classic doctored and editorially aggressive photographs creating a dark-skinned Queen Elizabeth and an Asian pope, and his advertising photograph of a devout Roman Catholic priest kissing a nun, have nothing to do with formal style and everything to do with biting editorial content, probing into assumptions about race, religion, and identity. Kalman's work, regardless of the media, startled readers into a new consciousness.

Monguzzi, an IBM fellow at the 1981 Aspen Design Conference, initially studied graphic design in Switzerland in the late 1950s and continued his studies in London. He then worked in Milan and returned to Switzerland to teach and work. The increase in complexity and layering in Monguzzi's work demonstrates an evolving view of the world gained through his international experience. Monguzzi himself refers to the personal duality of his Italian family name and his Swiss passport as a sign of the tug he feels between two very different cultures.

Monguzzi's work, like Vignelli's has an extraordinary precision to it. Unlike Vignelli's, however, type and image often collide in layers in Monguzzi's designs. His work shows the influence of Russian constructivism, with his typically two-color orthogonally rotated images; his more recent work also reveals the powerfully elegant layering and typographic finesse of late twentieth century Dutch graphic design. Monguzzi's work, though initially modernist, hints at a changing and diverse world and makes sense when viewed in the context of his comments in Aspen. It raises the possibility of interpreting graphic complexity as the visual record of cultural complexity, revealing a crack in the modernist canon. While complex surfaces acknowledge "otherness," they also signal a shift in the designer's emphasis away from perfectly controlling the object. His willingness to give up control and his interest in graphic intricacy are likely the key reasons that Monguzzi is so comfortable with the democratizing effects of the computer.

V. Fonts for All

The public embrace of the computer in the 1980s also helped wrest the graphic design profession from the control of modernism and trained designers. Before this era, design was off-limits to the average person, who had little conception about who made the images and trademarks that are constantly a part of everyday life. The Apple Macintosh, on the other hand, made graphic design a public amusement. Now our memos, invitations, and announcements contain far more than just words and instead are designed documents, with attention given to the location of blocks of text, images, and white space. No longer is the word "font" part of the restricted vocabulary of the school-trained graphic designer. Font is now a menu heading (albeit incorrectly used) on every computer, with the general public choosing fonts at will on a daily basis. Vignelli's fear that widespread availability of the computer would place design activities into untrained hands proved to be grounded in reality. Computer users began to understand how graphic design was made and that they could easily express their own personality, as long as they had the proper hardware and software. The rise of vernacular or personal design, though often considered "crude" or "untrained" by Madison Avenue professionals, helped drive a stake into the rule-bound elitist design promoted by the modernist wing of the profession.

Computer software emerged quickly, helping to create a huge proliferation of literally thousands of different type designs. In 1984 a dynamic Dutch designer named **Rudy VanderLans** began a small publication in Berkeley, California, called **Émigré**, which helped popularize new fonts. In the mid-1980s, his partner **Žuzana Licko** began to design new fonts for *Émigré* that reflected a new means of type production, free from the many constraints of early-to-mid-twentieth-century metal-type composition. VanderLans and Licko's deep understanding of the properties of this new medium allowed them to work fluidly within it, achieving a new aesthetic honesty. These two dug into the digital realm in a way that popularized the approach with designers. Their dedication to experimentation and the quality of the magazine made it popular with younger designers who had grown up with a proliferation of images through television and mass culture.



For a competition to design banknotes for the Federal Reserve of Switzerland, Bruno Monguzzi produced currency bearing the likeness of Le Corbusier and an image of the Pilgrimage Church of Notre Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp.

- 1 Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 3.
- 2 Ibid., 9.
- 3 Penny Sparke, *An Introduction to Design and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 92.
- 4 *Design: Vignelli* (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 105.
- 5 Germano Celant, "Lella and Massimo Vignelli," in *Design: Vignelli*, 17.
- 6 *Dan Friedman—Radical Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 30.
- 7 Ibid., 27.
- 8 Massimo Vignelli, "Long Live Modernism," in *Looking Closer: Critical Writings on Graphic Design*, ed. Michael Bierut, William Drenttel, Steven Heller, and D. K. Holland (New York: Allworth Press, 1994), 51.

The growing prominence of designers like VanderLans and Licko created a rift in the graphic design community between those who embraced both the aesthetic and inclusive possibilities of the computer and those like Vignelli, who continued to believe in the ideals of modernism and the authority of the graphic designer. Vignelli's rearguard ideas on the subject are worth quoting at length, for they sum up the division between modernist and postmodernist design:

I was raised to believe that, as a designer, I have the responsibility to improve the world around us, to make it a better place to live, to fight and oppose trivia, kitsch, and all forms of subculture which are visually polluting our world. The ethics of Modernism, or I should say the ideology of Modernism, was an ideology of the fight, the ongoing battle to combat all the wrongs developed by industrialization during the last century. Modernism was a commitment against greed, commercialization, exploitation, vulgarization, cheapness. Modernism was and still is the search for truth, the search for integrity, the search for cultural stimulation and enrichment of the mind. Modernism was never a style, but an attitude. This is often misunderstood by those designers who dwell on revivals of the form rather than on the content of Modernism. From the beginning, Modernism had the urgency of utopianism: to make a world better by design. Today we know better. It takes more than design to change things. But the cultural thrust of the Modernist belief is still valid, because we still have too much trash around us, not only material trash, but intellectual trash as well. In that respect, I value, endorse, and promote the continued relevance of the Modern movement as the cultural mainstream of our century.⁸

This illusion, that modernism in graphic design possessed the answer, contained the seeds of its own destruction. Modernism depended upon limited access to communications production and specialized knowledge of design. Contemporary design culture lacks the deliberateness of the mid-twentieth century. It is a culture of speed and easy access. The modernist ideology that functionalism best serves the public good was doomed by both public access to the technical means of production and the emergence of a large middle class whose functional needs had long been satisfied. Communication devices allow designers and nondesigners to produce their own images. We have returned, in a sense, to the political ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement with a twist: production by the masses instead of for the masses, with the tools of creation (graphically speaking) in the hands of the individual—but without John Ruskin's requirement for a thorough understanding of the elements of "beauty."

The stylistic departure of the relatively new, computer-influenced graphic design is the product of many intersecting factors. Much of the work being produced in graphic design today looks the way it does because it is inextricably tied to the ease and fluidity of its own production; the availability of images for appropriation; the contemporary need for superstars who enjoy their Warholian fifteen minutes of fame; and the fact that almost any surface, from public (branded stadiums) to private (tattoos), can carry and display images and personal expression.

Existing in erasable and easily mutable spaces, graphic design can indulge whim after whim in rapid succession without concern for public liability. Architecture and graphic design have parallel histories with respect to modernism and the International Style. Coming out of a European social idealism, both fields developed an aesthetic system for creating a better quality of life through design. Similarly, both architecture and graphic design underwent a dramatic change after 1980 as a result of technological advances. Thus one can compare Licko's use of the computer to create previously unfathomable typographic forms with Frank Gehry's use of the computer to transform a three-dimensional model into a set of working blueprints.

In a world of graphic overload, the modernist ideal of taking away everything that is nonessential only makes graphic design irrelevant to the general public. As American culture itself could no longer be neatly categorized, subordinated, and controlled, modernism came to be seen as far too exclusionary, too singular in its point of view, and too limiting. Modernism's collapse resulted from its inability to make room for the messiness of contemporary popular culture. ■



Back cover of a 1991 issue of *Émigré*.



Tags, Throw-ups, and Fresh Princes: Graffiti in American Art and Culture

by Robin Greeley

Wallbanging: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.

by Susan A. Phillips

University of Chicago Press, 1999

384 pp., \$73.00; \$25.00 (paper)

Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality

by Jeff Ferrell

Northeastern University Press, 1996

256 pp., \$20.00

A graffiti writer paints the wall of an abandoned mill and warehouse in Denver. In his hand is a sketch, which is used as a guide for the piece.

(from *Crimes of Style*)

Graffiti is everywhere these days; city walls throughout the country display its cryptic languages and fantastic forms in the most public of spaces.¹ The meaning, use, and design of graffiti have fascinated the general public for decades. Those in the fields of art and design in particular are interested in graffiti because of its highly visual, utilitarian, and cultural nature, which helps its makers and readers negotiate the daily exigencies of urban life and space.

Yet for both the general public and historians of visual culture, any understanding of graffiti has overwhelmingly remained at a superficial level and is often tainted by fear or disgust. Many see graffiti as an act by antagonistic and dissolute youth intent on trashing the clean, white walls of your (or your neighbor's) well-kept garage (corner store, park bench, civic center...). Part of our fascination derives from graffiti's ubiquitous and highly public nature, while another comes from hegemonic society's construction of it as a "senseless" act of "vandalism." The polite and censored version of the typical reaction to graffiti might be stated as: Why do these kids engage in what seems to be a meaningless and criminal desecration of beautiful city spaces?

Robin Greeley is an assistant professor of Latin American and Latino/a Art History at the University of Connecticut and is currently a Rockefeller Fellow at Rutgers University. She is the author of the forthcoming book, *Organizing Pessimism: Surrealism, Politics and the Spanish Civil War* and is working on her second book, *Gendering Mexican Cultural Nationalism, 1920–1970*.

Within the history of visual culture, a certain number of positive studies of the more brilliantly visual types of graffiti have emerged, with most focusing on hip-hop music.² Other scholars focus on certain forms of graffiti that can by now safely be labeled part of a canonical area of study.³ The most spectacular instance of art world attention to graffiti art is the case of Jean-Michel Basquiat, whose turn from hip-hop street writing to gallery production in the 1980s made him one of the most talked-about, richest—and tragically doomed—artists in the pressure cooker of the New York art scene. Part of Basquiat's tragedy, described so well by bell hooks, was that his acceptance into the ranks of "high art" was predicated precisely on his being a flyboy phenomenon, the one-off exception that proved the general rule: no street culture allowed, especially if made by someone African American or Latino.⁴ For the general public and for the New York art world, Basquiat—like graffiti writers everywhere—was fascinating but taboo; fascinating *because* he was taboo.

Nevertheless, art and design history, although lapping up hip-hop-turned-gallery-artist writers like Basquiat, has paid little serious attention to graffiti's street forms, especially gang graffiti. Still less has it distinguished between categories of gang activity (Chicano versus African American, for instance)—or between gang families and their respective sign systems. The use of color, for example, to distinguish between Bloods and Crips or between Norteños and Sureños is something most people know nothing about; yet such

knowledge is often of life-and-death importance for members themselves. Format, legibility, and typography are also of vital consequence; the ability to read such formal manipulations—quite apart from iconography—fundamentally affects how gang members move through their lives and communities on a daily basis. Through both its design and its content, graffiti allows gang members to regulate their neighborhoods, thereby avoiding person-to-person conflict and offering physical protection to members. It also provides a means of garnering respect within and outside those urban spaces, and of registering a community's history and ideologies. That is, like more conventional design production, gang graffiti provides a set of communicative symbols determined within the context of a set of actions and interactions. Unlike the traditional methods in which design is produced—or what design historians usually imagine as design production—graffiti is created outside the standard notions of consumption or the marketplace and against most of the official arbiters of design, including institutional structures (e.g., legality, private property, consumerism and corporate enterprise, education, trade publications, and scholarly journals, such as this one) that customarily legitimize design production.

Yet we know extraordinarily little about such issues. Any look at the existing bibliography on graffiti shows that art and design history, usually so conscious of the social context of visual production, ironically knows almost nothing about one of the most significant urban communication systems of our age. One result of this is that historians of graffiti tend to lump together all types of graffiti willy-nilly, despite major differences in form, content, and social function. Neo-Nazi swastika desecration of Jewish cemeteries is lumped in with “criminal” graffiti of gangs or hip-hop crews; adolescent bathroom scribbles are seen through the same lens as ancient Greek political discussions written on Athens's city walls; African American gang graffiti is confused with Mexican American or Asian American gang writing; and hip-hop graffiti is assumed to be gang-related.

Well, one might ask, so what? Why bother distinguishing? After all, graffiti is illegal no matter who does it; it is a desecration of public space and is deliberately made to be unintelligible and antagonistic to mainstream society, isn't it? Those in art and design circles, although relatively less negative about graffiti than the moralizing majority, tend nevertheless to divorce graffiti's social function and content from its aesthetic interest. It is no accident that hip-hop graffiti's “wild style” and colorful

mural tactics (known as “pieces”) make it the most famous sort of graffiti or that it is often taken to represent contemporary graffiti culture as a whole. Its visual splendor, its use of mass culture, its play with abstraction, and its “renegade” appeal make hip-hop easy to include in current notions of avant-garde production. Hip-hop graffiti writers such as RammelZee, Lady Pink, or Basquiat can thus be seen as the new Jackson Pollocks or Andy Warhols of our age (indeed, Warhol himself recognized this in his wish to collaborate with Basquiat, while Jenny Holzer has collaborated with Lady Pink). By contrast, the more functionalist graffiti of, say, the Bloods and the Crips is visually much less appealing in any normative sense (although no less packed with signification) and does not orient itself in the least toward a general public. Its ideologies have little to do with broader concepts of artistic quality, and it follows few of graphic design's standard rules of legibility or broad communication. In fact, this sort of graffiti adamantly rejects the lure of “avant-garde” status that is occasionally—and selectively—bestowed upon the hip-hop community. Blood and Crip writers refuse the category of artist; affronted, the art and design world in turn refuses to understand their production. Black gang writing, therefore, functions as a nonentity, a lack, an absence in art and design discussions on graffiti; hip-hop, on the other hand, is given the spotlight, becoming “graffiti” as a whole, rather than simply one very socially specific category thereof.



Two recent books challenge this reading of graffiti and, in doing so, offer remarkable and perceptive insight into the social and cultural worlds of the dispossessed youth who create graffiti. In *Wallbanging: Graffiti and Gangs in L.A.* by Susan A. Phillips and *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality* by Jeff Ferrell, the authors take up distinct aspects of the graffiti world—Chicano gangs, African American

Graffiti created in 1974 by the Black Stone gang of Los Angeles proclaims the group's alliance with several other gangs.
(from *Wallbanging*)

left

Graffiti written in the Old English style is particularly respected in the gang community because it is difficult to master and execute quickly. The words "Santa Monica" adorn a Thrifty's drugstore in Los Angeles, 1992.

right

Political graffiti in Los Angeles, 1974.

(images from *Wallbangin'*)

gangs, and hip-hop crews—to analyze the iconography and stylistics of wall writing and murals. Phillips and Ferrell turn to the visual aspects of the graffiti itself as a means of comprehending the seemingly alien world of gangs and hip-hop youth. Both note the crucial manner in which graffiti can alert both insiders and outsiders to a range of issues in ways that personal interaction and spoken exchange cannot. These issues, embedded in the visual nature of graffiti, include the communal aspects of hip-hop crews, the use of family structures as a model for gang structures, the importance of self-respect and self-protection, concepts of artistry, and issues of identity, politics, and above all, pride. Indeed, one of the most admirable qualities of both books is that the authors have proven highly sensitive to the strong sense of pride emanating from the communities they study—a pride against all odds, in the communities themselves, in their work, and in their visual production as these are registered in the graffiti itself.

Neither author is a historian of visual art; Phillips is an anthropologist, while Ferrell is a sociologist. Yet both examine in detail the visual aspects of graffiti and reveal clues to our current urban organization that are buried in this material. Art and design historians can learn much from these authors, especially as there is little significant scholarship on this important subject. Phillips's *Wallbangin'* is an amazing and courageous book. White, female, and middle class, the author belongs to a group that tends to read graffiti as a social "problem" generated solely by criminally inclined gang members. Yet Phillips has an all-too-rare combination of sensitivity and audacity that has enabled her to do productive fieldwork in poverty-stricken Chicano and African American communities, while thoroughly questioning her own subject position in relation to theirs. In so doing, she radically reformulates the framework within which dominant society constructs its image of gangs and their graffiti.

Phillips thus takes as her own the personally dangerous task of entering into worlds that deeply resent intrusion by the white middle class. But she also takes on the *ideologically* dangerous task of disagreeing with dominant images of gang members and graffiti writers as willfully, perversely criminal, intent on laying siege to "normal" law-abiding folks. Her story is full of personal anecdotes about both failed and successful efforts to read the graffiti, to communicate with gang members, and to be accepted into their circles. She relates a moment of euphoria, at securing the trust of Leo, a young Chicano gang member, who begins to help her unravel the symbolism and visual expressions of Chicano graffiti and tattooing. She tells of her deep sadness at learning of the violent death of this same man. She describes how gangs consider themselves "family," with all the love, trust, respect—and conflict—that permeate real family structures. She also recounts moments of sheer terror when she found herself in situations she did not (yet) have the skills to understand or mediate. More importantly, she continually narrates her own reactions, decisions, and uncertainties, as though her study were as much about herself as it is about gang graffiti.

Wallbangin' consequently reads very personally, easily, and with great clarity, even as it takes up complex theoretical models to analyze the material she has gathered. Phillips demonstrates that the chance of having such communication between groups—in this case, her own white, middle-class sphere and their nonwhite, lower-class sphere—who physically occupy the same city but socially live in "different world[s]" with "entirely different sets of concerns" is not only possible, but absolutely necessary to overcome the disintegration of our society as a whole.



Phillips puts the burden on herself and us to begin that communication, and to get it right. She does not valorize the violence inherent within gang life today. She does not praise gangs or their visual production unconditionally nor does she entirely ignore mainstream complaints about gang activity. But whereas both these constituencies tend to see themselves as completely separate and opposed to each other, Phillips sees them instead as two parts of a larger social system. Over and over, Phillips analyzes how gang graffiti is a defiant, if beleaguered and introverted, response to the nation's long history of not listening to the voices of its marginalized peoples. In pushing us to learn how to interpret gang graffiti, Phillips opens up a serious debate concerning our participation in determining the social conditions that make gang membership the only viable route for so many disenfranchised inner-city young people. This is an especially vital question for anyone involved in media that visually organize the physical city landscape—whether graphic design, architecture, urban design, or art.

What are the concerns of gangs? Given that they exist in the same city, even in the same neighborhoods and streets as the nongang majority, why do their concerns seem to differ so violently from ours? Phillips argues that the "street morality" of both Chicano and African American gangs revolves around the "Three R's": reputation, regulation, and respect. Graffiti is essential for giving these ideologies visual form, thus making them communicable and useful. Through interpreting graffiti, its location and style as well as its content and iconography, Phillips argues for it as a visual representation of gang morality—the strong code of ethics for which homeboys and homegirls will fight, even die. As one young man explains, "Pride, that's what most of us die for. Respect and pride." Graffiti is a matter of pride for those who make it; it marks a homeboy's sense of love and respect for his community and represents his neighborhood, his gang "family," when he is not

around to do it. Another young man talks about a combination of reputation and regulation: "You usually write graffiti to let people know where you're at. To let people know who's on the street at night. You see Clavo somebody, so and sos [i.e. nickname, gang affiliation], you know, that person is up there all the time, you know that person. I mean, that's a name. Now you know where you're at with style, with class."

Phillips also notes that, contrary to mainstream belief, gang graffiti is not merely about claiming territory. Rather, it defines a much more subtle, complex relationship between the writer and his or her community and an urban space. Through graffiti, homeboys "create a landscape full of social and historical references that bind them to their neighborhoods and give them a sense of place." Graffiti references "the fence they jump over every day, the abandoned house where they once hid booty from a robbery, the place where a fellow homeboy died," and so on. Some of the most moving graffiti one can see in East L.A. are the memorials, the "R.I.P.s" put up for gang members who died too young. R.I.P.s are ubiquitous—a sad tribute to the failures of society as a whole. In all these ways, then, graffiti can be understood as a physical manifestation of the constant hard work that such continually marginalized groups deem necessary to maintain the materiality of a locality that is ever-threatened and ephemeral. In this way, Phillips argues, Los Angeles gangs are not unlike small-scale societies throughout the world. As she notes, for those of us without the resources to commission buildings or art, other means of materializing a sense of community need to be found—most of which require constant human upkeep. For communities like the city's Chicano and African American gangs, the material resources available for such upkeep are scarce indeed, pushing the homeboys and homegirls to become ever more inventive.





The sitcom *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* showed actor Will Smith painting graffiti, suggesting that he might soon be involved with gang activity.

To explore examples of this inventiveness, Phillips includes a long section within the chapter on Chicano gang graffiti in which she traces a history of stylistic changes and constants in Mexican American graffiti. Working with her own observations, the photographic archives of Ben Lomas and of Leonard Nadel, and the archives of the California gang/lowrider magazine *Teen Angels*, she adds important elements to the extremely thin existing documentation of this type of wall writing. She links stylistic changes in Chicano graffiti to such factors as immigration histories, political activity during the rise of the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s (“Gringo Laws = Dead Chicanos” reads one 1970s example in classic block letters), or the cross-fertilization between graffiti writers and Latino performance art groups such as ASCO. We learn the importance, for instance, of the Old English typographic style for contemporary Chicano writers. It is the style usually used to write a gang name, while block letters or other, less complicated styles are used to register the clique name and the individual members involved in the piece. It is one of the most prestigious styles, largely because of its intricacy and the difficulty—even danger—entailed in getting it up on a public city wall. To write one’s gang name in perfect six-foot-tall Old English lettering on a busy public boulevard is to show pride in your neighborhood, so deep-seated that you are willing to risk imprisonment, even death to declare that pride. Different typographic styles thus signify social hierarchies: the communal nature of the gang, visualized in Old English, is valued over the individuality of its members, demarcated in other, lesser forms of script.

Old English is also one of the stylistic qualities that distinguishes contemporary Chicano writing from other types such as African American or hip-hop. For instance, African American gangs don’t write in Old English; when they feel the need to use it, they often will get a Chicano individual to do the lettering for them. In fact, in the section on African American gangs, Phillips contrasts the more “functionalist” quality of African American gang graffiti with Chicano graffiti’s attention to visual form for its own sake. Signing, word plays, and numbering systems take on greater importance, however, as they literally visualize and safeguard the complex systems of intergang alliances or tensions.⁵ And in another chapter, Phillips distinguishes all gang graffiti from the very different qualities of hip-hop graffiti. The latter, done by “urban nomads” working in an “ephemeral art form,” is characterized by tags (the quick writing of one’s nickname with spray paint or a marking pen), bubble-lettered throw-ups, and complex “pieces” painted with highly abstract lettering in intricate color palettes. One of its most

significant qualities is that it does not have the same tightly regulated territorial or neighborhood meaning as gang graffiti. Although there is the rare crossover, hip-hop crews are not gangs; their purpose is to achieve fame through their production, rather than protect themselves and their neighborhood.

Phillips notes that graffiti in general offers some of the strongest connections between graffiti artists and the realm of legitimate economics through cultural productions such as rap music, graphic design and signage production, city-endorsed mural projects, and urban fashion design. Although she does not push the point, these connections among gang writing, hip-hop, and more mainstream artistic endeavors tend, however, to defuse the political potency of gang graffiti. Commercial inventions of a hybrid gang/hip-hop graffiti, such as can be seen, say, in the opening credits of the popular television sitcom, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, capitalize on mainstream audience fascination with gang culture while trivializing the poignant situation of real gang members. (The credits show the police catching actor Will Smith as Fresh Prince spray painting hip-hop style graffiti—something that is hinted to be an extension of his burgeoning gang affiliations. To pull him out of gang life and “criminal” activity, his mother ships him off to his millionaire uncle’s house in the wealthy sector of Los Angeles.)

Like Phillips’s *Wallbanging*, Ferrell’s *Crimes of Style* also sharply distinguishes between types of contemporary urban graffiti, but this compelling and thorough study focuses on hip-hop in particular. And, unlike so many other studies of this type of graffiti, Ferrell examines in detail how and why hip-hop is produced in relation to mainstream campaigns to criminalize and suppress it. He sets these two interrelated strands within an even larger picture of “the circumstances of injustice and inequality in the United States today: the domination of social and cultural life by consortia of privileged opportunists and reactionary thugs; the aggressive disenfranchisement of city kids, poor folks and people of color from the practice of everyday life; and, finally, the careful and continuous centralization of political and economic authority.” Ferrell thus sets himself a very tall order, but fills it with conviction, erudition, and a clear love for his topic.

Crimes of Style investigates a kind of graffiti whose meanings are relatively more obvious to the outside world than the gang graffiti Phillips describes. This is due in part to our comparative familiarity with hip-hop as opposed to other sorts of graffiti. As I mentioned above, hip-hop graffiti can be slotted into existing categories of “art” more easily than other kinds of graffiti; in fact, the pursuit of well-defined aesthetic



standards is something hip-hop writers talk about constantly. In a long chapter titled "Doing Graffiti," Ferrell details the formal design complexities involved in the three main types of hip-hop writing, from pieces to tags. Throw-ups occupy the middle ground between these, both technically and aesthetically; they are larger, more sophisticated versions of tags made to look three-dimensional, but they take much less time than a full piece. The chapter also explores other aspects of writing, such as "biting" (the use of influences from other cultural areas, whether they be rap lyrics and B-boy style, other writers, or mass cultural figures such as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles), "going over" (painting over existing graffiti), and "dissin'" (disrespectful obliteration of other writers' work). Although the language writers use to describe their aesthetic endeavors differs from that used in design and art fields, there is nonetheless a solid sense that a similar pride in the aesthetic innovation of one's work is the ultimate goal of hip-hop writers.

At the same time that he argues for similarities between conventional notions of art or design production and hip-hop production, Ferrell discusses the complications that arise when hip-hop writing becomes intertwined with legal venues such as art galleries or commercial design commissions. In so doing, he taps into an ongoing debate within the hip-hop world as to the value of such connections. On the one hand, legal outlets often offer means of legitimating and defending the activities of crews; showing in a gallery can confer a mainstream status upon a writer and open up different audiences for the work. Art world publications and news media attention can also offer explanations of hip-hop's purpose and even advocacy in favor of the writers and their work. On the other hand, such interactions with the conventional realm of art and design often highlight class differences between the world of middle-class liberal gallery members (however well-intentioned) and the largely working-class graffiti writers. Doing design work, in which the patron rather than the writer dictates the theme, often brings up feelings of having sold out.

A 1991 drawing published in *Teen Angels* magazine represents "roll call" graffiti that lists all the members of a gang. (from *Wallbanger*)

below

Gang graffiti at the Ramona Gardens housing project in Los Angeles.
right

An example of the gang practice of "crossing out." The 38th Street gang crossed out the Old English-style graffiti of the Loco Park gang as an expression of disrespect. A Loco Park member later crossed out the small 38 at the bottom right of the wall and wrote "LP" below it.
far right

Author Susan A. Phillips befriended Trigger and Leo, two members of the 17th Street gang in Los Angeles. While Leo shows off a gang tattoo that reads, "Pardoname Madre Por Mi Vida Loca" (Forgive me mother for my crazy life), Trigger hides Leo's eyes to keep him from being identified.
(from *Wallbanging*)



Tensions around legal versus illegal venues, and how these tensions are negotiated, lead Ferrell into a discussion of another intriguing aspect of hip-hop graffiti: its relationship to mass culture. Here, hip-hop is both an innovator and a receiver. The front cover of Ferrell's book shows a piece by Denver graffiti king "Mac," offering a "self-portrait" B-boy figure (armed with the obligatory stylized can of Krylon spray paint) derived in part from Japanese cartoons. Although Ferrell does not say so, the relationship set up here between mass culture and the subculture of hip-hop graffiti replicates almost exactly an argument raised by Tom Crow in his seminal essay, "Modernism and Mass Culture in the Visual Arts." Crow argues that the systematic rationale for the domestication of every avant-garde movement (in our case, hip-hop) exists in the context within which such movements necessarily place themselves: "the shift within a capitalist economy toward consumption as its own justification." The existing production/commodification system is not able to produce the desires and sensibilities it exploits. The consistent novelty needed to produce such desires runs in contradiction to the stasis and standardization needed by this system. "This difficulty is solved by the very defensive and resistant subcultures that come into being as negotiated breathing space on the margins of controlled social life." Thus a cycle is instituted

in which marginal cultural forms are recuperated, stripped of most, but not all, of their subversive content into the center of mass culture. Mass culture, in turn, feeds into new fringe cultures as the material they critique. "Functionally then, the avant-garde serves as a kind of research and development arm of the culture

industry: it searches out areas of social practice not yet completely available to efficient utilization and makes them discrete and visible."⁶ Sound familiar? Thus on one hand, we have Mac taking inspiration from Japanese cartoons and getting arrested for it; and, on the other hand, the Fresh Prince confuses hip-hop with gang graffiti—a maneuver that paradoxically gains him wealth and respectability instead of the usual jail sentence. Without subcultural figures like Mac to provide stimulating, risky material, mass cultural figures like the Fresh Prince and his watered-down version of hip-hop could not exist. Like parasites, the Fresh Princes of the world, unable to invent on their own, sap the vitality out of resistant subcultures for their own commercial benefit. Nevertheless, this relationship is full of tension; resistant subcultures like hip-hop often put up



quite a fight, occasionally forcing the powers that be to reveal their internal inconsistencies and deadweight mentalities.

Ferrell does not simply explore the formal aesthetics of hip-hop, however, but also examines the motivations behind them, noting two significant reasons for its production. The first is the "rush one gets when piecing or tagging illegally—a rush more exciting and pleasurable than any drug they know." For crew members, it is a feeling that comes from "the intersection of creativity and illegality as the paint hits the wall." While this might in itself seem a counterproductive, even trivial motivation, it points to the class origins of the writers, the overwhelming majority of whom are not middle-class. Graffiti functions as a creative outlet counterposed against the tedium of the daily lives led by most writers; producing good pieces or attaining the status of "king" are matters of deep pride—a pride often not possible elsewhere their world. But hip-hop writing is more than this; it functions as a communicator of ideological tensions between classes. Indeed, hip-hop graffiti has effectively forced the dominant propertied class to bare its iron fist beneath the velvet glove in extremely self-revealing ways.

The second central motivation that Ferrell investigates is the communal nature of hip-hop production. The collective production of graffiti occurs on many levels, whether it be through



shared materials, ideas, money for paint, or piece-books (the sketchbooks in which writers design their pieces before hitting up a wall). Writers also share time both when painting and when organizing to paint. And, above all, piecing itself is a deeply communal process; because it is so complex, it often requires entire crews to complete. One of its structures is an apprenticeship system in which less-experienced writers learn from the "kings." (Ferrell himself relates anecdotes about being relegated to the bottom hierarchical or "toy" rung. His menial tasks included scrounging trash on the piecing site to be used as straight-edges in making crisp lines, filling in large areas of solid color, or going on beer runs.) Ferrell intriguingly argues that the communal nature of graffiti has much in common with the philosophical and political tenets of anarchism. Like the anarchist philosophies of Mikhail Bakunin, Nestor Ivanovich Makhno, or Pyotr Alekseyevich Kropotkin, hip-hop graffiti questions the structures of authority and who those structures really serve. The communities he researched, Ferrell concludes, offer an antiauthoritarian vision of justice and social organization.

Crimes of Style's systematic investigation of hip-hop's communal structures thus undermines our fantasy that hip-hop graffiti is the product of lone "outlaw" writers who are too "lazy" to care about their surroundings or get a "real" job. Such observations refute dominant constructions of hip-hop writers as "vandals," "criminals," or "psychopaths," and demand that we interrogate those who make the laws that govern our urban space as much as those who break them. Ferrell proceeds to do so with gusto. The chapter in which he documents the Denver government's fabrication of graffiti as a "crime" contains some of the funniest—and the most terrifying—parts of the whole book. Some of my favorite absurdities were Denver Mayor Federico Peña's argument that "No matter how good it looks, graffiti is ugly" and the strange fact that the public had to be taught that graffiti was a problem, before it would support funding Peña's campaign to eradicate the so-called problem. Ironically, one of the effects of Denver's "crackdown on graffiti" was to increase the amount of tagging—the "eyesore" the campaign originally meant to combat; as tagging is much quicker than piecing, writers are less likely to get caught by the police.

Ferrell makes a strong argument that Peña's antigraffiti campaign was more about getting reelected and manipulating public opinion than about getting rid of graffiti. He pithily concludes that the status of graffiti as a crime "results less from the nature of graffiti than from the enterprise of those [business interests and property owners] who stand to benefit from its obliteration." Even scarier, in a 1989 graffiti documentary aired on Denver public television, Valerie Purser, executive director of the antigraffiti Keep Denver Beautiful campaign, commented, "We feel like we've been raped," thereby comparing graffiti to one of the most horrific crimes imaginable. Ferrell handles the comment well, saying, "it is difficult to say whether such tactics are more offensive to rape victims or graffiti writers." Purser's comments are the most revealing of all. The traitorous behavior that the middle class will employ in order to maintain its economic hegemony, such as Purser's capitalizing on the trauma faced by so many women in order to preserve the clean whiteness of garage doors, never ceases to shock me.

Such mainstream reactions to graffiti are telling, and both Ferrell and Phillips use them well. They understand graffiti as a set of communicative symbols generated from a shared system of values—whether these be the values of the Denver hip-hop community or of Los Angeles gangs. But more than this, both authors see graffiti as produced out of a clash between value systems—between those of the dominant institutions of power and those of the disenfranchised. Thus, graffiti's aesthetic and utilitarian worth can and must also be measured by what it communicates to us concerning the apartheid-like situation of urban life under late capitalism in the United States. ■

Notes

- Both authors consider their use of "graffiti" (plural) versus "graffito" (singular); for convenience's sake, however, I will simply use the popular "graffiti."
- Examples include Henry Chalfant and Martha Cooper, *Subway Art* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984); Craig Castleman, *Getting Up: Subway Graffiti in New York* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982); John Dale, "Anarcho-Graffiti in New York City's Lower East Side," in Barbara Glauber, ed., *Lift and Separate: Graphic Design and the Quote Vernacular Unquote* (New York: Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography, 1993): 38–47; Glenn O'Brien, "Cream of Wheat Paste: Cost and Revs," *Artforum* 32 (March 1994): 76–7, 119; Steven Hager, *Hip Hop: The Illustrated History of Break Dancing, Rap Music, and Graffiti* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); and the 1983 film *Wild Style*.
- For example, Violet Pritchard, *English Medieval Graffiti* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), or Jack Lindsay, *The Writing on the Wall: An Account of Pompeii in Its Last Days* (London: F. Muller, 1960).
- bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995). By "street culture" I do not mean mass consumer culture, but rather subcultures using vernacular forms that resist consumption and are therefore marginal in our society. See also Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).
- Interestingly, Phillips includes a section on the Bloods' alliances, contrasting them with the Crips' chronic inability to form internal alliances among the larger Crip membership. Bloods as a whole, due to their ever-present sense of a menace greater than other Bloods sets, tend to avoid the endemic violence apparent in the larger, more powerful Crips. She provocatively argues that Bloods' consciousness of the need to unify against a common enemy demonstrates that "within the black gang community itself is a model for curbing never-ending cycles of violence and feuds that forever plague Crips."
- This essay is in Francis Frascina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 233–266. All Crow quotations are from this essay.

Where Bombs Were Born

by Jane C. Loeffler

Atomic Spaces: Living on the Manhattan Project

by Peter Bacon Hales
University of Illinois Press, 1997
447 pp., \$26.95

Disarming the Prairie

by Terry Evans
introductory essay by Tony Hiss
Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998

28 HOURS
VERTICAL

NORTH

100 METERS

Jane C. Loeffler, Ph.D., is an architectural historian and urban planner in Washington, D.C., and adjunct professor of art history at George Mason University. She is the author of *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998) and numerous other articles on design and public policy. She also wrote the introductory essay to *The United Nations* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), which features the collected photographs of Ezra Stoller.

Barely fifty years after World War II, the Energy Department is considering designating the Manhattan Project's former nuclear bomb factories as national historic landmarks. This unlikely turn of events is due, at least in part, to the work of historian Peter Bacon Hales, who chronicles those factories and related sites in *Atomic Spaces: Living on the Manhattan Project*. A key reason that energy officials and preservationists are even thinking of cleaning up and opening once top-secret sites (many still contaminated by radioactivity) to the public as museums is that scholars such as Hales have drawn attention to the historical and cultural significance of Cold War relics—including the makeshift communities and hastily constructed labs and production facilities where scientists and engineers labored to produce the atomic weapons that brought the war to its end in 1945 and launched us into the nuclear age.

As Hales makes clear, "atomic spaces" are not only those within the nuclei of atoms but also those surrounding the sometimes sprawling facilities where that energy is captured and converted. Those facilities are the focus of his investigation. Other scholars have documented the scientific challenge of atomic research and bomb production, but Hales explores the actual geography of the entity known as the Manhattan Engineering District (MED) and the strange culture that it produced—what Hales calls its "metaphysical geography."

Because of the haste with which the MED sites were surveyed and constructed, waste played a conspicuous role in their history. The waste that Hales identifies is more than the radioactivity that permeated the land and water, killing and injuring people and animals. The "poisonous legacy" of the Manhattan Project also describes for Hales the loss of trust between citizens and their democratic government. Thus, as Hales ironically notes, in the Cold War era's attempt to protect the nation's values, the Manhattan Project helped erode the nation's faith in the government and its ability to protect its citizens.

Late in 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt made the decision to support research that could produce atomic weapons. The National Defense Research Committee began the effort by attracting academic scientists to the research and by establishing ties with other government agencies and private industries. Soon the Office of Scientific Research and Development took over as the military assumed control of production. It was not long before the army won complete control of the project and General Leslie R. Groves took command of the entire undertaking.

According to Hales, the “shadowy” Groves was then “possibly the most powerful man in the [Army] Corps of Engineers,” the man also responsible for construction of the Pentagon, the epitome of what Hales calls “bureaucracy as fortress.” Groves was the man who assiduously applied a military model to a program that employed 125,000 workers at its peak in 1944, a labor force that was largely nonmilitary. And he was the one who approved the three MED sites and applied the name “Manhattan” to them all to divert attention from the actual locations of research and production facilities at Oak Ridge, Tennessee; Hanford, Washington; and Los Alamos, New Mexico. The three MED sites were all part of one project. At Oak Ridge, scientists converted uranium to enriched uranium. Some of the enriched uranium traveled to the desert at Los Alamos, where it was used in production and testing of the uranium bomb, and some went to Hanford, where the cold waters of the Columbia River helped cool an atomic reactor pile that produced radioactive products, including plutonium. The plutonium then traveled to Los Alamos to be used in production and testing of a plutonium bomb.

As he has so superbly done before in earlier pathbreaking work on landscape and photography, Hales examines sites as narratives, using photographs, plans, memoirs, and a huge array of artifacts and additional historical records to assess and interpret the atomic landscape and its history.* It is a grim tale, but one of unsurpassed importance, and to have it laid out in such stark terms is good. At times, however, it is difficult to keep track of the chronology of the complex series of events Hales outlines. The author may have intentionally chosen to ignore the element of time, because within the MED itself, ordinary time had lost its meaning. All that mattered was the ultimate goal. Still, it is important to realize that nearly all of the action examined in this 447-page book occurred between 1942 and 1945. During that brief period, thousands of family farms and houses were condemned; people were displaced; millions of acres were taken by eminent domain; and factories, research facilities, and houses were built, along with the few additional facilities intended to support a modicum of community life.

With security the top priority and no widespread support by the government for regional planning or other utopian components, the three MED sites became nothing more than minimally utilitarian wastelands, virtual slums, Hales says, constructed with no heed to personal comfort or social good. It may be profoundly dismaying, but it is no surprise that the initial impetus to create well-designed and well-built villages, such as Skidmore, Owings & Merrill’s early schemes for Oak Ridge, fell by the wayside as nearly all “amenities” were sacrificed to the war effort.



What readers may wonder is whether or not certain government programs (public housing, for example) carry with them an imperative for deprivation. Certainly, that is what we see here.

Using language (particularly the future conditional tense) that conveys an ominous and fatalistic tone, Hales paints a devastating picture of lost opportunity and common misery, a picture of ruined land and failed hopes. He illustrates this scene with sixty black-and-white photographs, some old and some recent. It is likely that the publisher limited the number to reduce cost. After all, Hales is an art historian and he writes from a visual perspective. Surely he begged for more images, including maps. Any book about geography, even the metaphysical sort, calls for good maps to help readers grasp size, shape, and distance—especially when regions are remote and so little known.

opposite

Aerial photograph of the crater left by the first atomic explosion in Alamogordo, New Mexico, in 1945.

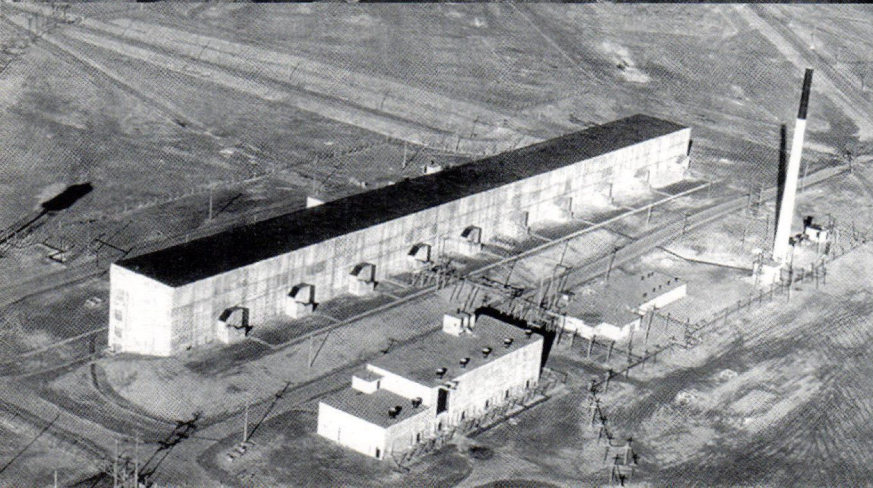
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A prefabricated house for workers at the Hanford, Washington, nuclear facility.

(images from *Atomic Spaces*)

Describing how officials flew over land in and around Hanford, Richland, and White Bluffs, Washington, in search of a suitable MED site, Hales explains how aerial photography shaped perception (or misperception). Surveying farmland in the bleak days of winter and studying terrain via aerial photographs, they saw only “a wasteland”—no crops, no animals, and no people; just a site perfect for plutonium production. Hales suggests that their use of aerial photographs limited their awareness of the human landscape and contributed to the perception of emptiness. This raises the interesting question of whether such images distort the reality that exists below, or whether they add a new and revealing dimension to our understanding of it, as J. B. Jackson argued in the earliest issues of *Landscape* magazine, a publication he launched in 1951 to stimulate interest in the very subject of aerial photography. Trained in aerial surveillance during the war, Jackson knew how to read the land below and was convinced that the birds-eye view helped define the interrelationships between man and nature. Hales’s comments underscore the fact that people see what they want to see from whatever distance.

top
Housing development for workers at the uranium production facility, Oak Ridge, Tennessee.
 bottom
A chemical separation building at the Hanford, Washington, site. The facility at Hanford was used for the large-scale production of plutonium.
 (images from *Atomic Spaces*)



Terry Evans is a photographer who used aerial photographs to document a landscape only slightly less devastated than those that Hales looks at. Her subject is the Joliet Army Arsenal, once the world’s largest TNT factory, forty miles southwest of Chicago. In *Disarming the Prairie*, she presents a compilation of fifty photographs (all of them square in format) depicting a place that once produced the firepower that fueled most of America’s nonnuclear bombs. To understand such a space, 25,000 acres in all, Evans writes that she “needed to see it from above.” She flew over the site at seven hundred feet and then explored it by foot, photographing it in all seasons between 1995 and 1997. Her images range from close-ups of a red-winged blackbird’s nest to aerial views showing roads, pipelines, railroad tracks, and acres dotted with magazines (the sort in which munitions were stored).

In *Disarming the Prairie*, Evans’s photographs themselves provide the narrative, but author Tony Hiss also provides a fine introductory essay that succinctly explains the site and how it is being restored as the nation’s first natural prairie park—a nineteen-thousand-acre area that will adjoin 62.5 square miles of additional parkland. Like Hales’s much longer story, this one is a portrait of sadness, but unlike *Atomic Spaces*, it is also a portrait of hope, because the arsenal site will assume a healthy and humane identity when it reopens as the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Park. Part of the hope is conveyed by color photographs showing new green growth and suggesting that tall grass may someday conceal the remaining man-made ruins.

The photographs are elegant and evocative. It is hard to assess such images as art when they are so purposely intended as documentation, but there is little point in separating the two when propaganda is such a matter of perception. There is nothing beautiful about a bomb factory, nothing that I can find beautiful, but man’s impact on landscape is not always negative. Photographs of stone walls, old signs, and even abandoned office furniture are informative—and, in Evans’s book, handsome as well.

In his essay, Hiss touches upon key issues: President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s prescient fear of the postwar military-industrial complex and the largely unexamined problem of “military sprawl.” And Hiss reiterates a theme that Hales also addresses: how the search for protection from outside enemies led Americans to invade themselves. This is, in fact, the most troubling theme of all, because there are so many ways in which today’s fears translate into future toxic waste—the sort that is toxic aesthetically, culturally, and also radioactively.

It is impossible to reconcile these two books' portraits of ruin with the evident "success" of America's wartime weapons production program. The Manhattan Project and other munitions production, of course, had enormous strategic value to the United States government. There is, and always will be, debate as to whether or not it was necessary to build bombs and drop them on Japan to end the war. Moreover, there is the separate matter of whether or not it was or ever will be right to use such weapons for any purpose. Suffice it to say, Hales's book is not about the rightness of the bomb, but about how making a bomb undermined culture here at home. Hales forces us to reexamine the very notion that the arms project was successful. His most damning data document the lack of commitment to public health, both human and environmental, and the geography of fear that sustained the effort. He rightly laments the outcome of the Manhattan Project in language that reflects his own disgust—leaving readers to ponder why it had to be that way and why we continue to pollute our own backyard with waste that will never leave us.

Moreover, this carefully researched history is a cautionary tale for those who think that the military model is the only right response to security needs today—and for those who advocate a "fortress philosophy" for embassies overseas, for example, and for federal buildings here at home. Faced with an increased security risk from terrorists, embassy compounds are distancing themselves more and more from their surroundings, becoming more isolated as they become more fortified. Architects are quickly learning how to design such structures to be maximally blast-proof and practically permanent. Federal courthouses and other major federal facilities are following closely, taking a cue from the White House, which now fronts onto a Pennsylvania Avenue that is closed to traffic and cordoned off by steel-reinforced bollards. Hales's work helps us to read these developments as the political and cultural statements that they are. It is some turn of events when our new public buildings come to resemble yesterday's bomb factories. ■

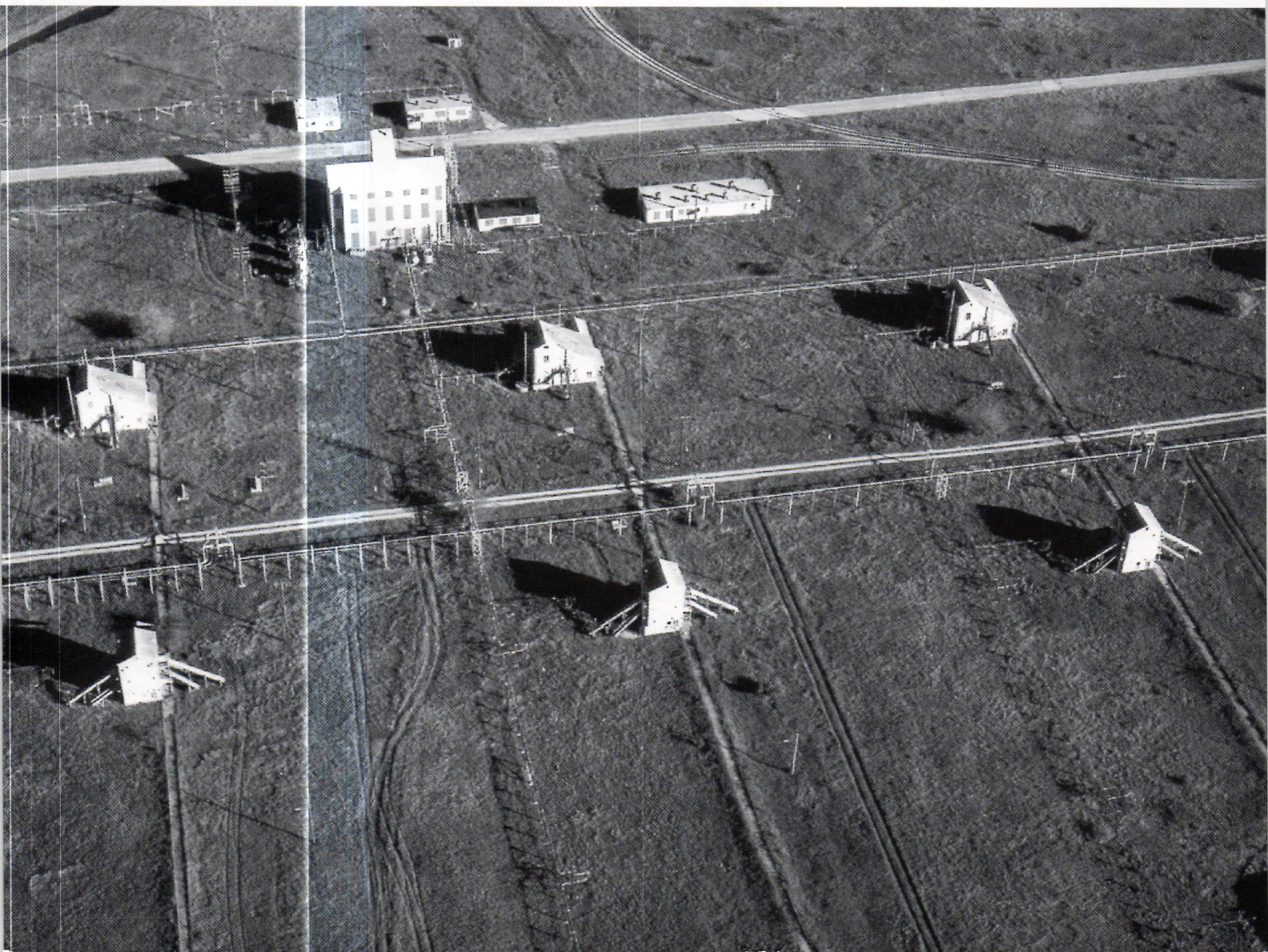
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Aerial view of the Joliet Army Arsenal, once the world's largest TNT factory. The arsenal is located forty miles southwest of Chicago.

(from *Disarming the Prairie*)

Note

- * Hales's books include *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization, 1839–1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984) and *William Henry Jackson and the Transformation of the American Landscape* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

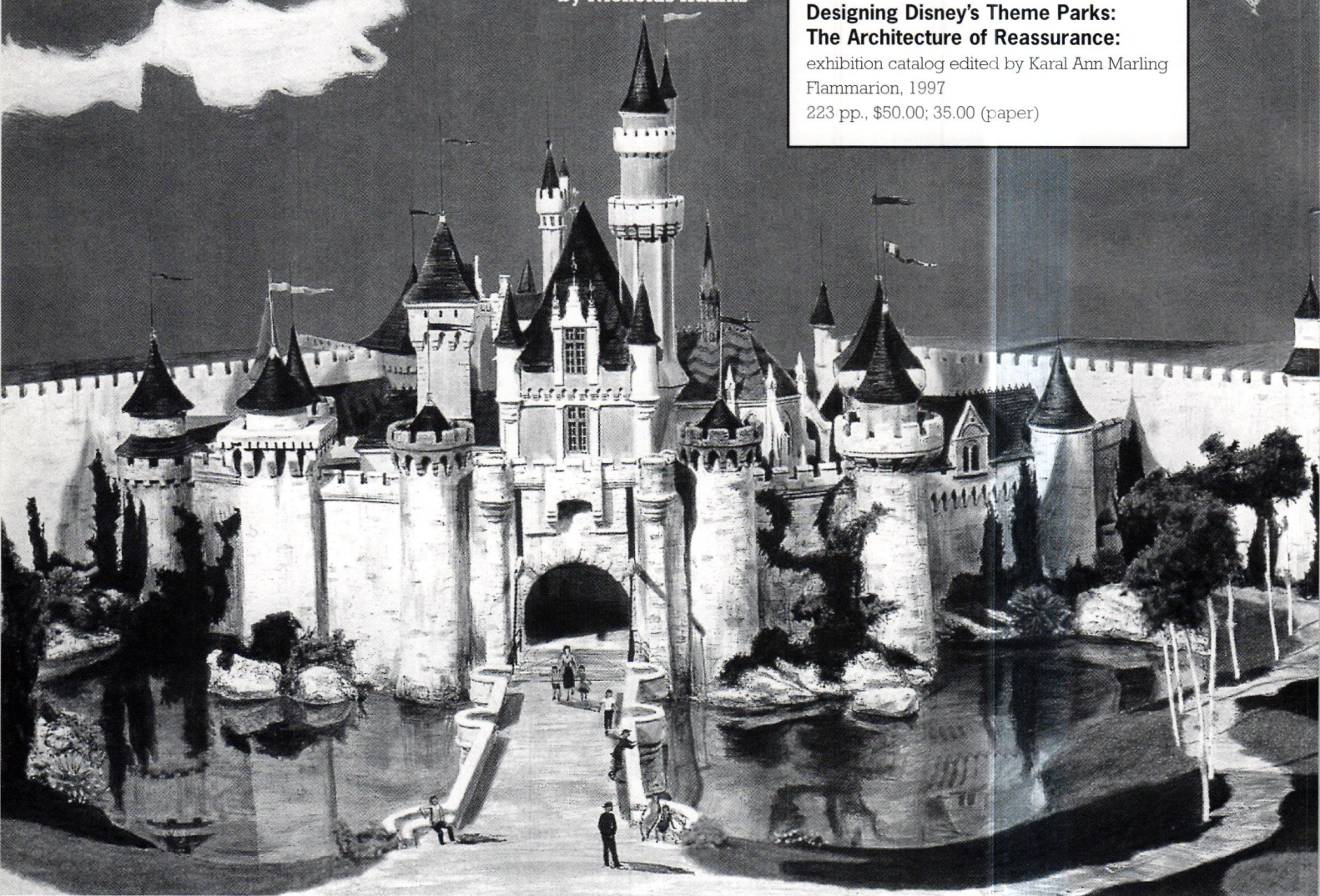


Searching for the Wienie in the Architecture of Reassurance

by Nicholas Adams

Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance:

exhibition catalog edited by Karal Ann Marling
Flammarion, 1997
223 pp., \$50.00; 35.00 (paper)



Few are the architectural exhibitions with lives so charmed as *The Architecture of Reassurance: Designing Disney's Theme Parks*. It opened in Montreal in June 1997 and it is still going strong, making appearances in Minneapolis, Los Angeles, New York, Fort Worth, Pittsburgh, Kansas City, and now the Building Museum in Washington. It is unstoppable, already seen by over two hundred thousand people and counting. The record attendance was in Kansas City, where it closed after nine weeks and 56,687 visitors. Like some perky little plastic Disney bath toy it just keeps turning up. You couldn't lose it even if you wanted to.

And why would you want to lose it? It has brilliantly steered a chaste line across dangerously promiscuous ground. Marxists, semioticians, and gender and transcultural analysts have all laid their traps for this exhibition, but *The Architecture of Reassurance* falls for none of them.

The Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) and its guest curator, Karal Ann Marling, professor

of American studies and art history at the University of Minnesota, set themselves a very difficult goal: tell the architectural history of the Disney theme parks straight. What happened, who did it, when did they do it, and, to some extent, what did they have in mind. And they have done that brilliantly. We visit Disneyland in Anaheim, California (1955); Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida (1971); Tokyo Disneyland (1984); and Euro Disney (now Disneyland Paris) in Marne-le-Vallée (1992). The objects are interesting, the techniques used to realize them are remarkable, and the final form of the design is sufficiently well known to make it possible to tour the exhibition without ever leaving the world of the familiar. The similar titles for the exhibition and its accompanying catalog are aptly chosen, for part of the appeal has surely been that it left the viewer alone to marvel at what Disney wrought, unmolested by all the problematic issues of Disney culture. Does an exhibition that has traveled so widely, been seen by so many, and about a subject so familiar still need a critical introduction? Here is a first pass.

Nicholas Adams is the Mary Conover Mellon Professor in the history of architecture at Vassar College. He has recently edited, with Bonnie Smith, a selection of essays by the historian Lucy Maynard Salmon (1853–1927), to appear under the title *History and the Texture of Modern Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

The early history of Disneyland and Walt Disney's own disenchantment with traditional children's park entertainment is well known. As a father in the 1940s he was unable to find "wholesome" entertainment for his daughters that was amusing and yet educational for the family together. Parks with their swings and jungle gyms left father and mother bored on the park bench; fairs with their overtones of the carnivalesque were vulgar and lower class. (Disney called them "dirty, phony places, run by tough-looking people.") With little education and with only his own money to draw on, he began to develop ideas for new kinds of amusements. At first he tried puppet automata that would be set up in a train car and carried around the country; these creations are brilliantly shown in the exhibition. Later he began to conceive of a park built around a model railway (he was a keen amateur railroad hobbyist). This soon developed into a park called Disneyland, with, as everyone knows, a series of themed zones where children and their parents could explore American history (Frontierland), world geography and nature (Adventureland), the promise of science and technology (Tomorrowland), and a place for play (Fantasyland). At the heart of Disney's new theme park was Main Street, a partial recreation of his own childhood town of Marceline, Missouri.

Disneyland was burned into the consciousness of American youth by the *Mickey Mouse Club*, the television program that ran for a year before the park's opening in July 1955 and for another decade thereafter. In the year before the park's opening, Disney told his young television audience all about his plans, so that by the time Disneyland opened, children across America knew its contents. Many, even, had plans of Disneyland pinned to their bedroom walls. Disneyland was a magic place of fun, a place you wished to go to "when you wished upon a star," as the opening theme for the Disneyland sequence of the *Mickey Mouse Club* reminded its little viewers. In its first year of operation there were three million visitors, and many millions more knew it from television. For those little viewers, now grown up to be consumers of culture, the exhibition itself offers a chance to recall a not-unpleasant slice of childhood.

Though the park made abundant use of architecture to represent the thematic provinces of greater Disneyland, what emerges most clearly from the exhibition is that the architectural culture of the 1950s barely interested Disney himself. He started with architects; that was a matter of course. His neighbor, Welton Becket, the designer of notable Los Angeles buildings, including the Pan-Pacific Auditorium, Bullock's Department Store, and the Capitol Records Tower, had first crack at the design. Becket's concept of "total design" was appropriate for the overall effect that Disney wanted, but the results did not measure up to Disney's fantasy. Charles Luckman and William L. Pereira were also briefly engaged and then

fired. (Luckman and Pereira were also responsible for the first design of the Seagram Building in New York in 1954—the design that provoked CCA founder Phyllis Lambert into pressing her father to hire Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.) Disney had no patience for staff he thought were trying to express their ideas rather than his. One architect was fired because Disney, whose insight into architectural practice was acute if one-sided, thought that the "fellow was attempting a monument to himself rather than designing something for people." Thus he turned to the set designers and animators who had been responsible for his cartoons and films, men like Ken Anderson, Harper Goff, and Marvin Davis. Of the three, only Davis had a degree in architecture. These men became what Disney quickly called his "imagineers," a conflation of the words "imagination" and "engineer." Animators and scene designers, not modernist architects, could better evoke a nineteenth-century main street, a fantastic medieval castle, an African village, or a frontier log cabin. This was the prevailing climate in Disneyland, and it is hard to imagine a poorer match than 1950s corporate modernism and a fairy-tale theme park.

Disney was probably right to ignore contemporary design trends. And yet in these early years Disney created circumstances to which architecture might have contributed much. Disney's love of futuristic transport systems (monorails, rocket ships, and cable cars) may have been the basis for an architecture in Tomorrowland, for example. Yet any role architecture may have played was blunted by the connection to corporate America (which was needed to help pay for the park) and by Disney's own naive cornfield optimism. Starting with Disneyland, Disney constructed a narrative of progress in which technological change was always and everywhere for the benefit of mankind, in which corporations were the leading agents of change, and in which our job as consumers and citizens was merely to sit back and take advantage of the improvements. Tomorrowland's vision, as

left

This 1954 sketch of the Disneyland castle was to be shown to potential investors in the amusement park. The castle served as the vertical "wienie" of Disneyland that helped visitors orient themselves in the park.

below

Catherine Wagner's photograph, *World Bazaar*, shows the main shopping street of Tokyo Disneyland. (images from *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*)

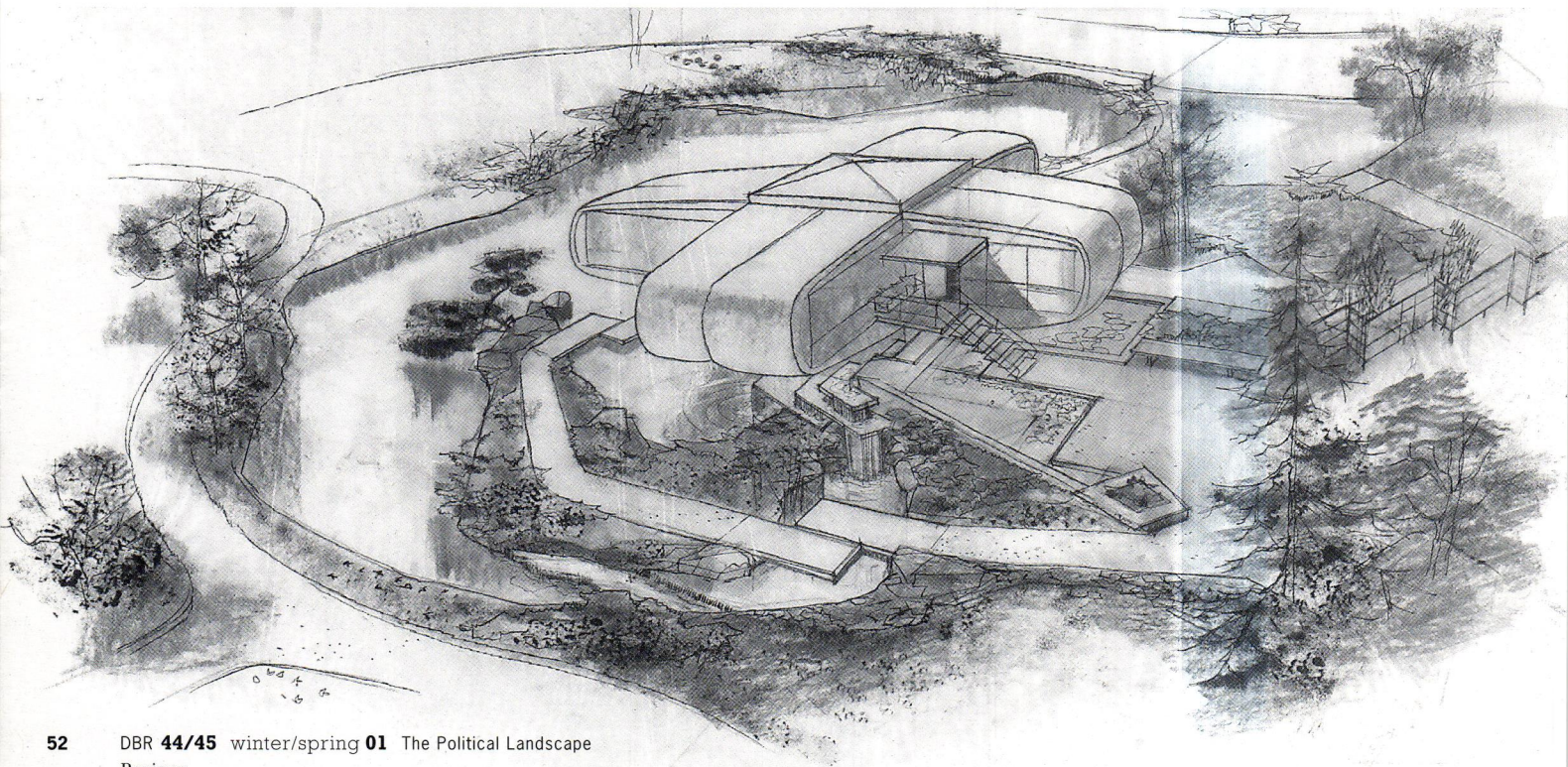


Marling notes, was as frozen as 1950s corporate modernism. A 1957 exhibit sponsored by Monsanto for a Home of the Future, for example, showed all the advantages that technology could bring: push-button phones, pole lamps, and lighting panels; things that ten years later were commonplace or even quaint. Tomorrowland was just a nice day in Southern California “plussed,” as the Disney people described it, more and better, rather than a place to display the social and technological experiments of twentieth-century architectural visionaries. And it certainly was not the potentially dark world of the science-fiction futurists.

Like a California surfer, Disney rode the waves of collective public nostalgia about place, neither leading nor following, just going with the flow. It is a commentary on architecture’s own distance from its public, unarticulated in the exhibition, that Disney could not find a way to use this nostalgia. The products of his imagineers were deeply ordinary. Tomorrowland was as fantastic as a corporate report; Main Street was like any early-twentieth-century main street; the castle recalls a travel brochure. The brilliance of Disney’s architecture consists in the fact that he voiced a conventional middlebrow collective fantasy largely derived from popular films, with heightened effects to give buildings a storybook quality.

Although the unbearable banality of Disney’s early imagery has little connection to architecture, some of the methods he used are architectural in nature. Disney both borrowed some of his techniques from architecture (possibly unknowingly) and supplied architecture with new techniques. And it is in that exchange that Disney’s relation to the architecture of his time lives and later came to thrive. Take, for example, the techniques Disneyland employed to make visitors feel like actors on a theatrical set, to give them the giddy sense of being important without the fear of being the center of attention. In Disneyland, the upper stories of the houses on Main Street were designed with forced perspective to seem taller than actuality. The variable scale gives a sense of greater authority to the visitor: grown-ups can see effectively into the distance, yet children are protected from being overwhelmed by such a view. One might relate this kind of adjustment to the work of someone like Morris Lapidus, who well understood the power of the scale shift, as he demonstrated in those silly three stairs up and three stairs down on the way into the dining room at the 1954 Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami of which he was so proud. Indeed, the standings of both Lapidus and Disney—both exiled from architecture in the 1950s and rehabilitated in the 1970s—should be scrutinized together for what they tell us about the imaginative interpretation of the everyday. What they both offered was a way to keep visitors engaged with the experience of the building by emphasizing personal experience. It is no accident that both the Miami hotel and Disneyland were conceived as entertainments.

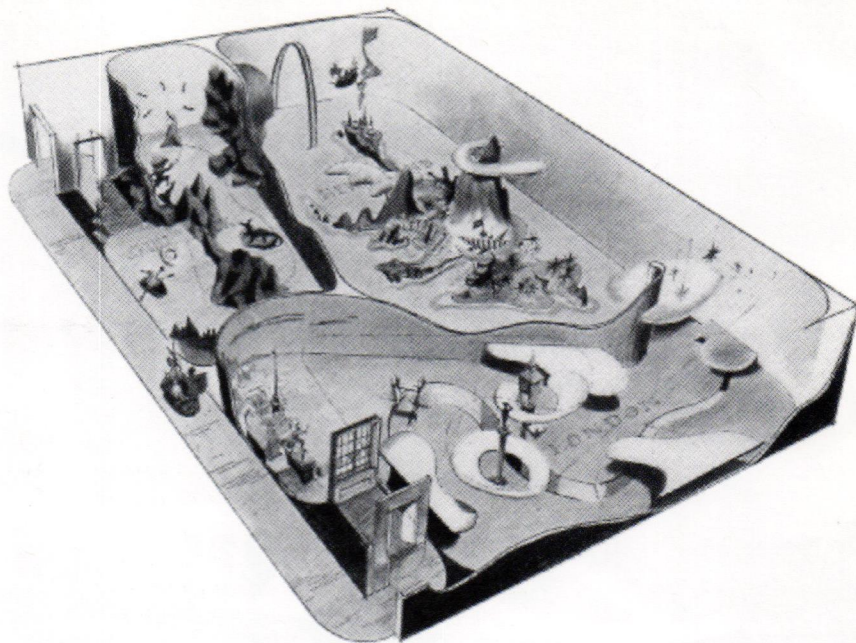
The Monsanto Home of the Future at Disneyland.
(from *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*)



One of Disney's great discoveries was that it was better to move people through a series of scenes, like human cameras, than to let them walk, stumbling and chatting, bunching up, and slowing traffic. Thus the rides in Disneyland were all designed around forms of transportation, either conventional, such as the paddle-wheel steamboat and the Jungle Cruise, or fantastic, such as the Doom Buggy in the Haunted Mansion. This last ride was especially favored by the architect Charles Moore, who called it one of the "most skillful, sophisticated, and engrossing spatial sequences on the planet." What was important about these rides is that they functioned not on the principle of the Renaissance camera obscura, or even as a sequence of stages like a freeze-framed bubble diagram, but by constructing the visitor's path kinesthetically, an adaptation of the modernist "I am a camera" in which the experience is transformed so that each viewer became a camera, breaking and reforming the picture plane. Moore called it a "spatial sequence," which is true from an analytical point of view. But from the experiential point of view, the rides were something more, with their heart-stopping drops and tortuous climbs. Indeed, with their free-fall acceleration and deceleration, they resembled just the kinds of spatial experiences that John Portman was to offer a little later in the elevators of his Hyatt Regency in Atlanta (1967). Disney's early insight into spatial experience (weaned on films) has surely been his most lasting innovation for architecture, as anyone who steps into Times Square today can register.

In 1964, with Davis as a lead designer, Disney began work on a new city, to be called EPCOT (Experimental Prototype for the Community of Tomorrow). In the context of the theme parks, EPCOT is truly bizarre. The idea was to build a radial-plan city of twenty thousand inhabitants, with a towering hotel and convention skyscraper at the center and low-rise corporate palaces nearby. Residents of EPCOT would live outside the core and be brought into the center by a people mover of the sort experimented with at Disneyland and later used in Walt Disney World in Orlando. The idea was to realize Tomorrowland, harnessing what Disney himself described as "the new ideas and new technology...now...emerging from the creative centers of American industry." It would be a city that was always in "a state of becoming," continually adapting to new ideas.

Yet, in reality, the plans for EPCOT—the closest Disney ever came to a truly futuristic vision—were an old-fashioned pastiche cobbled together from bits of future-babble. It is almost as if the architects at U.S. Steel held a charrette to assemble a utopia from Ebenezer Howard's Garden City for Tomorrow, Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, Antonio Sant'Elia's Città Nuova, and Le Corbusier's Radiant City. Disney himself



described EPCOT as "a showcase to the world for the ingenuity and imagination of American free enterprise." EPCOT, in this crazed, late-1960s form, subsided with Disney's death in 1966, only to be reborn as a theme park dedicated to science and technology called EPCOT Center, attached to Walt Disney World at the moment that Disney finally entered the architectural mainstream.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the architect of choice for Disney and the imagineers as they worked on EPCOT was Victor Gruen, who had begun the construction of the first enclosed suburban shopping malls in the late 1950s and mid-1960s. That selection marked a radical change in the architectural climate, both within architecture and within the Disney Corporation: not only did the imagineers now begin to look directly at architecture, but architectural culture began to take note of Disney. But here, at the critical moment of positive attraction between Disney and contemporary architecture, the catalog and exhibition fall silent.

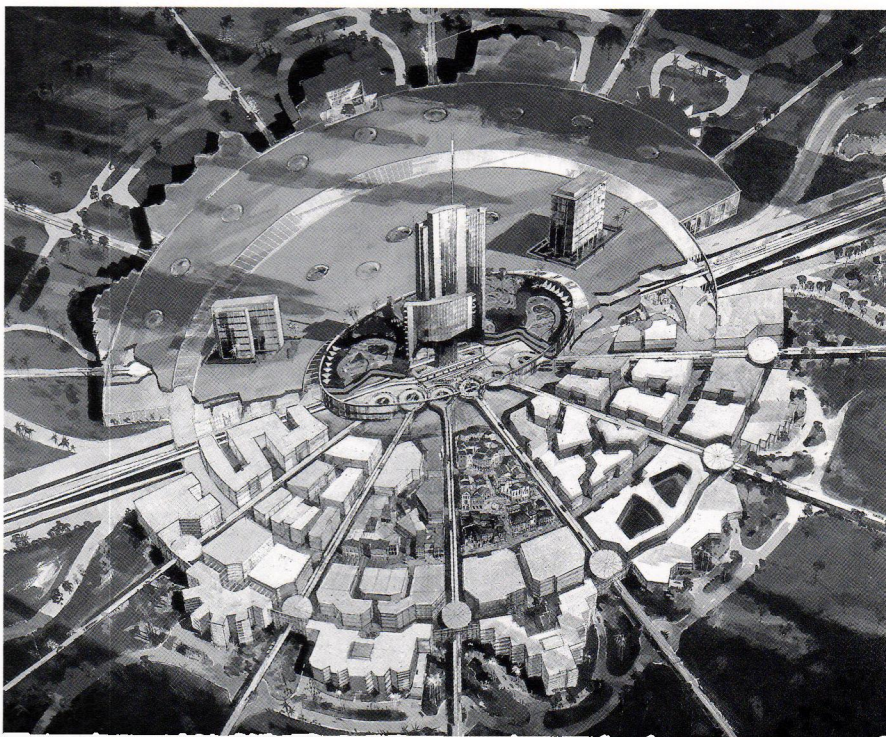
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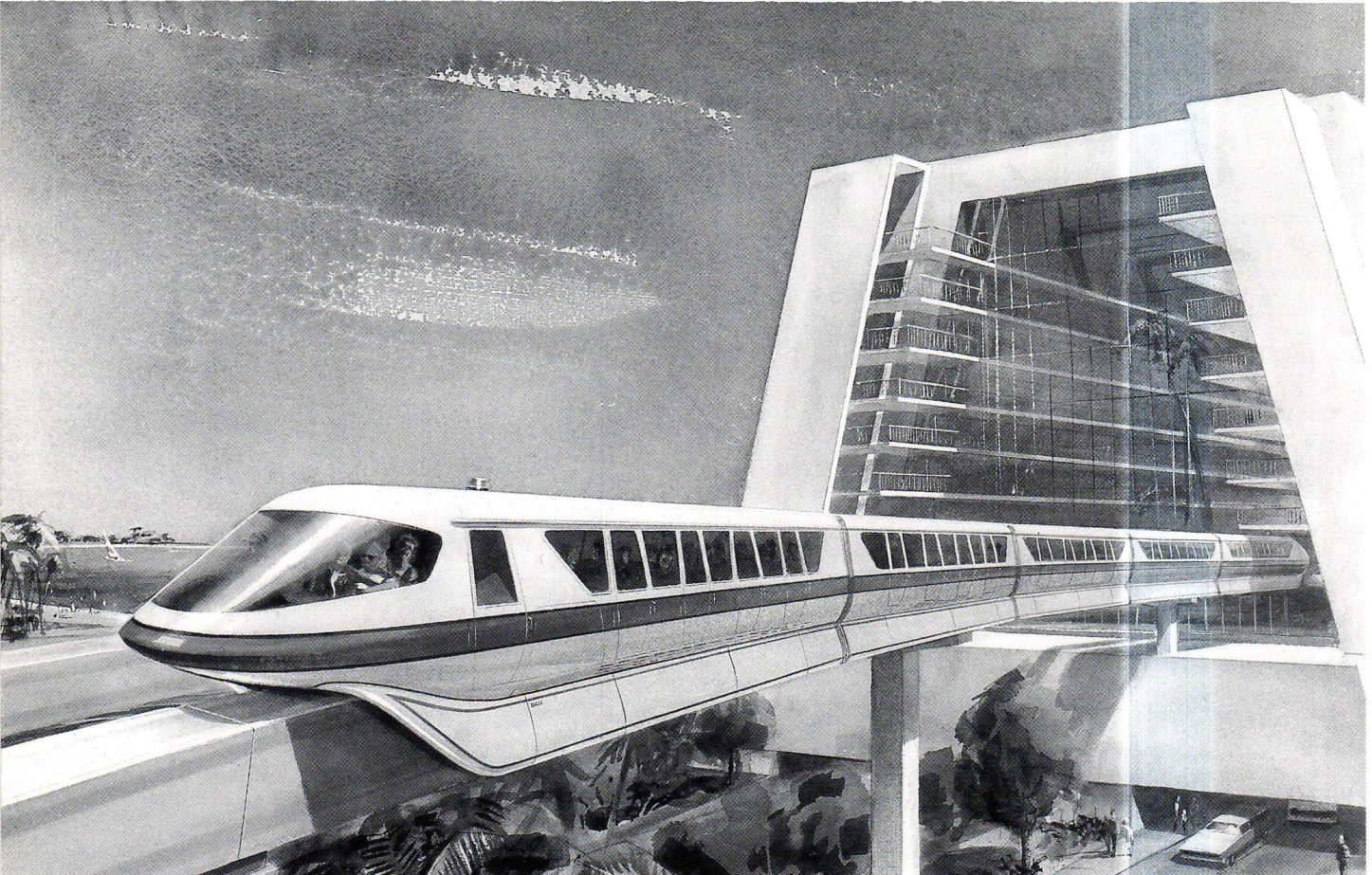
A design for the Peter Pan ride, created in 1954–55.

below

An aerial view of the shopping district for "Project X," Walt Disney's unrealized utopian city in Florida. Though the city was never built, many of its ideas were realized in Orlando's Walt Disney World.

(images from *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*)





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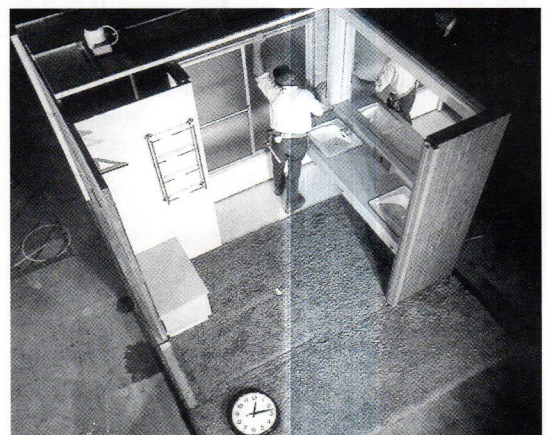
A 1968 rendering of the Contemporary Hotel at Walt Disney World.

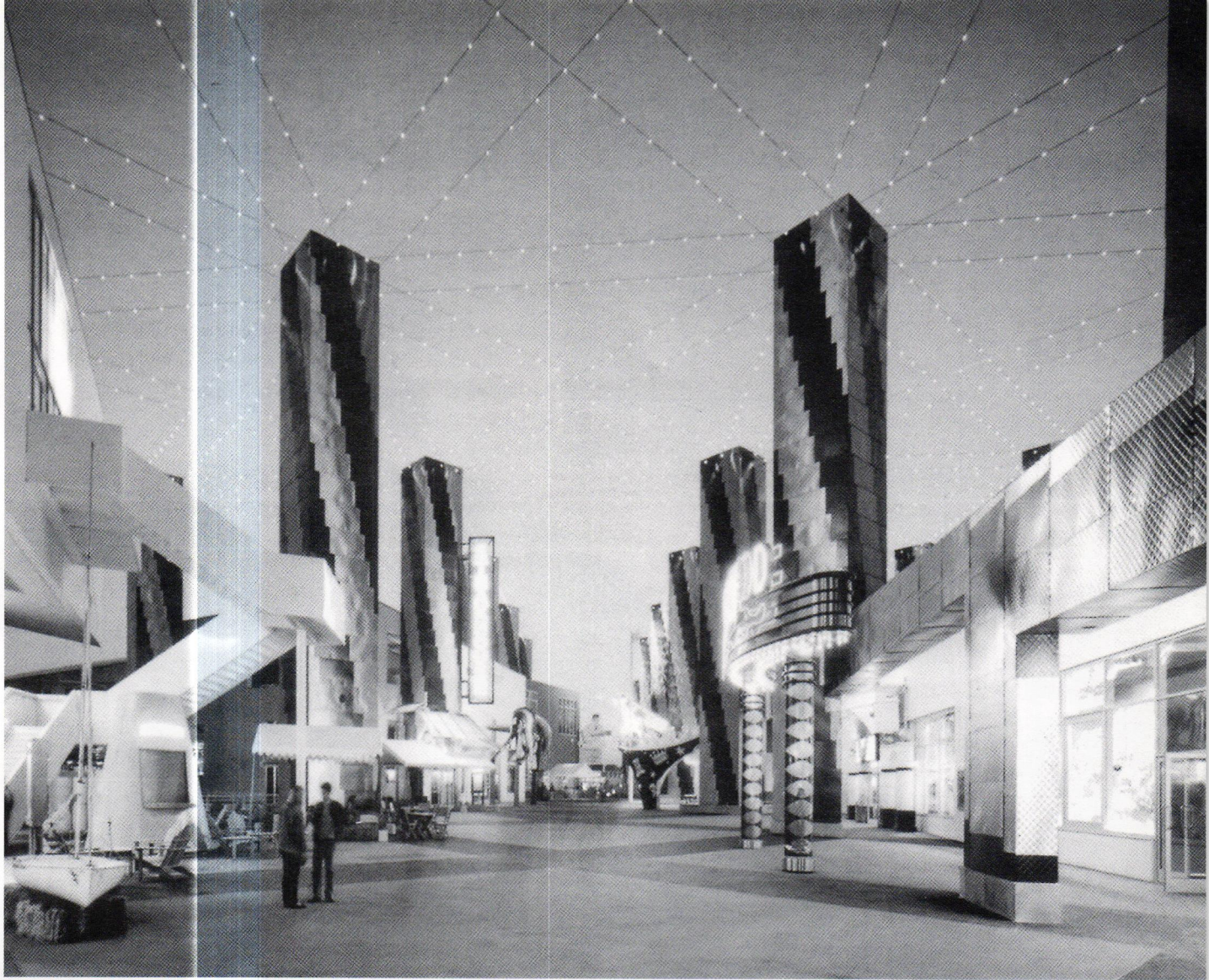
right

A modular hotel room under construction and its insertion into the hotel at the park.

(images from *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*)

In the 1950s and 1960s one reads nothing at all or nothing but criticism of Disney from architects. But beginning in the 1970s, architects and planners begin to take the Disney theme parks seriously. Peter Blake, in *Architectural Forum*, describes Disneyland and Walt Disney World as model cities, and cites the enthusiasm of Charles Eames for Disneyland.¹ And Paul Goldberger, in a 1972 *New York Times* article titled "Mickey Mouse Teaches the Architects," recounts how Charles Moore and Robert Venturi find much of interest in Disneyland. "In an uncharted sea of suburbia," said Moore, "Disney has created a place, indeed a whole public world, full of sequential experiences, of big and little dramas, of hierarchies of importance and excitement." Quoting Philip Johnson ("architecture is not the design of space but the organization of procession"), Goldberger concluded that Walt Disney World was "a place for serious study." Venturi had made the point about the Las Vegas strip a little earlier, in 1968, that "the sign is more important than architecture"—something Disney himself had well understood when he argued that all park exhibits needed what he called "a wienie," a vertical symbol visible from afar to draw in the spectator.² What Disney was offering now was not just a way of experiencing architecture but the power of the popular icon. It is clear, in hindsight, which came first, but how those two aspects of architectural experience translated themselves into the mainstream is worth further thought.





The transformation of Disneyland from play park for middle America to authoritative architectural exemplar is barely addressed by the catalog or exhibition. This is a shame, for isn't the discovery of the Disney theme park by architects in the early 1970s the intellectual "wienie" for a history of Disney architecture? In an illuminating interview with Frank Gehry published in the catalog, Marling and CCA director Lambert talk about the power of Disney imagery and theme architecture, but their focus is on the mid-1980s and 1990s, when Robert Stern, Michael Graves, Arata Isozaki, and Moore were first employed by Disney. By then the change in taste had already slipped by; theming had become the most marketable Disney commodity. Gehry makes plain the risks of being overwhelmed by imagery with the power of Mickey Mouse, but how and why architects came to play with that commercial fire and how it changed the way we see architecture is still open. A history of our romance with the spectacle, with Disney at the center, remains to be written.

In the end, an exhibition interested in documenting the Disney phenomenon cannot take on all these issues; as anyone who has dipped a toe in the Disney literature knows, as do the author, Marling, and the CCA, it is a roiling cauldron. Still, one feels that more attention could have been paid to the relationship with architecture. By not historicizing the notion of architectural theming and theme parks, for example, the exhibition leaves the erroneous impression that there was a tabula rasa before Disney. Equally, by dividing the exhibition into Disneyland categories (the famous-lands), it becomes complicit with its subject. Rather than trying to defamiliarize the familiar, the exhibition endorses it. From the point of view of someone interested in architecture, there is no central thematic idea in the exhibition, no intellectual "wienie" to return to—that essential Disney requirement. In that sense, the exhibition is a product of the design culture it seeks to represent. No wonder the exhibition has been so popular. 🐻

A perspective view of the Frank Gehry-designed Festival Disney at Disneyland Paris.
(from *Designing Disney's Theme Parks*)

Notes

- 1 Peter Blake, "Walt Disney World," *Architectural Forum* 136 (June 1972): 24–40.
- 2 Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972).

Exiles on Main Street

by Timothy Butler

The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919-1936

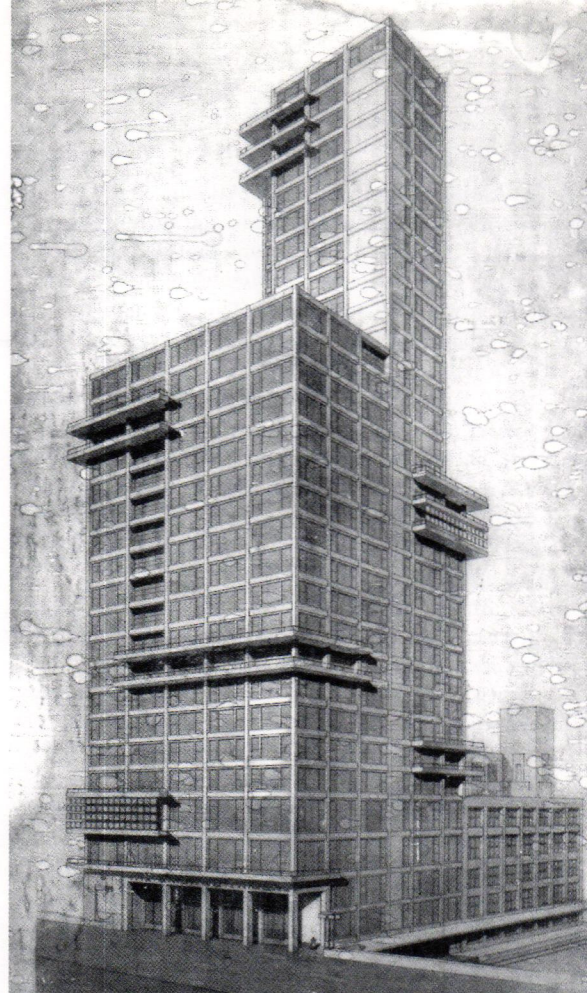
by Margret Kentgens-Craig
MIT Press, 1999
288 pp., \$40.00

Timothy Butler is an architect
in New York City.

The institutionalization of modernism in American architectural education did not come easily or without resistance. Well into the 1950s, the introduction of modernist design principles—such as expressed structure, function-driven composition, and, above all, an unadorned formal language reliant on detailing and assembly rather than the classical orders—was often met with hostility and outright rejection from established faculties.¹ Today the absence of classicism and an emphasis on individual creativity are taken for granted in most schools, as natural to the educational environment as the air students breathe. In this respect, the impact of the historical avant-garde, and in particular the pedagogy of the Bauhaus, remains strong.

The commitment today of many American architecture schools to the maintenance of an ongoing, self-rejuvenating “avant-garde” has its origins in the curricula instituted in the United States just before World War II by Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, both former Bauhaus directors who emigrated from Germany after the rise of National Socialism. The arrival of two of the leading lights of the European avant-garde is a well-documented, key episode in the history of modernism and architectural pedagogy in the United States. It represented not so much a storming of the barricades of the American academy as a hopeful step taken by American institutions to find a compelling alternative to the entrenched Beaux-Arts curricula. By the interwar period, the Beaux-Arts approach seemed out of step with the industrialization and labor specialization that had come to dominate the American building industry. As Margret Kentgens-Craig points out in her book, *The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts, 1919–1936*, which revises and translates a German edition published in 1993:

[T]he appointment of Bauhaus protagonists to positions at prominent American universities, not to mention their subsequent influence, can only have been predicated on a great degree of prior acceptance. This acceptance did not arise *ex nihilo*, but rather had to be cultivated. In fact, the basis for this acceptance was created between 1919 and 1936. The key to understanding the American reception of the Bauhaus therefore is not to be sought in the émigrés’ success stories...[but instead] in the course of America’s early contact with the Bauhaus, which itself was a vital, developing movement within classical modernism.



That the former Bauhaus directors and teachers did not arrive in America until a receptive climate had been cultivated for them is not a controversial thesis. But this is not a book with a revisionist agenda; the familiar pantheon of modern masters and their canonical works remain firmly in the foreground, and in this respect not much here would contradict earlier, more hagiographic accounts by apologists for modernism like Sigfried Giedeon or Peter Blake. Rather, the author attempts to fill in the particulars of a series of developments that have tended to be recounted in the blocky, outlined form of myth, to add a middle and background to the familiar foregrounded events and personalities. The specifics unearthed do not so much alter those myths as ground them in a context.

The Bauhaus as conceived by Walter Gropius in 1919 was designed to nurture a new *Gesamtkunstwerk* or “total work of art,” with architecture situated at the center of a range of cultural production, including industrial design, photography, graphic design, and textiles. The contributions of Bauhaus figures to all of these fields were considerable, but Kentgens-Craig notes “the increasing concentration on architecture” that came to dominate articles on the Bauhaus in the American media in the 1930s, and the “fame of Gropius and Mies as leading figures.” This was often as much a function of what the Bauhaus

top
Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, entry for the Chicago Tribune tower competition, 1922.
 opposite
This 1928 portrait of Walter Gropius was taken during the architect’s visit to the United States.
 (images from *The Bauhaus and America*)

was broadcasting across the Atlantic as it was America's choice of reception, and the author surveys a wide variety of contemporary media to give a sense of the full bandwidth of ideological currents in play at the time. This emphasis on breadth rather than depth yields a wealth of information, sometimes at the expense of assessment. While often lamenting the fact that many figures affiliated with the Bauhaus were forgotten or ignored despite important contributions, the author limits her efforts at redressing this mostly to brief mentions and often makes no strong case for why many who fell into obscurity should not remain there.

Among the exceptions who especially benefit from reassessment is Hannes Meyer, the Swiss architect who succeeded Gropius in 1928 as director of the school. Meyer was not only mostly ignored in the American press, he was usually maligned whenever he did receive a mention, mostly due to his terse statements advocating an antibourgeois, antiformalist stance toward design. Kentgens-Craig emphasizes that it was in fact Meyer who realized Gropius's plans to establish a department of architecture at the Bauhaus and to market furniture prototypes to industry for mass production.

The buildings that came to be widely perceived as representative of a "Bauhaus esthetic" were chiefly attributed to Gropius, and later also to Mies, although, as is usually the case in architecture, many assistants and collaborators made substantial contributions. Kentgens-Craig cites Gropius's longtime associate Adolf Meyer for his role in the design of the seminal Fagus Shoe Factory of 1911 and for the famous entry to the Chicago Tribune tower competition of 1922. She gives the architects Carl Fieger and Ernst

Neufert their due for sizable contributions to Gropius's oeuvre, in particular to the canonical Bauhaus building in Dessau (1926). She also acknowledges Lilly Reich for her significant influence on Mies's work, particularly his interior designs. But just as many in the media did during the period under consideration here, the author gives the lion's share of attention to Gropius and Mies themselves. Since their places in history are the products of strenuous mythmaking, much of it encouraged by themselves, it is worth looking at just what it was they brought to American academia between the two world wars.

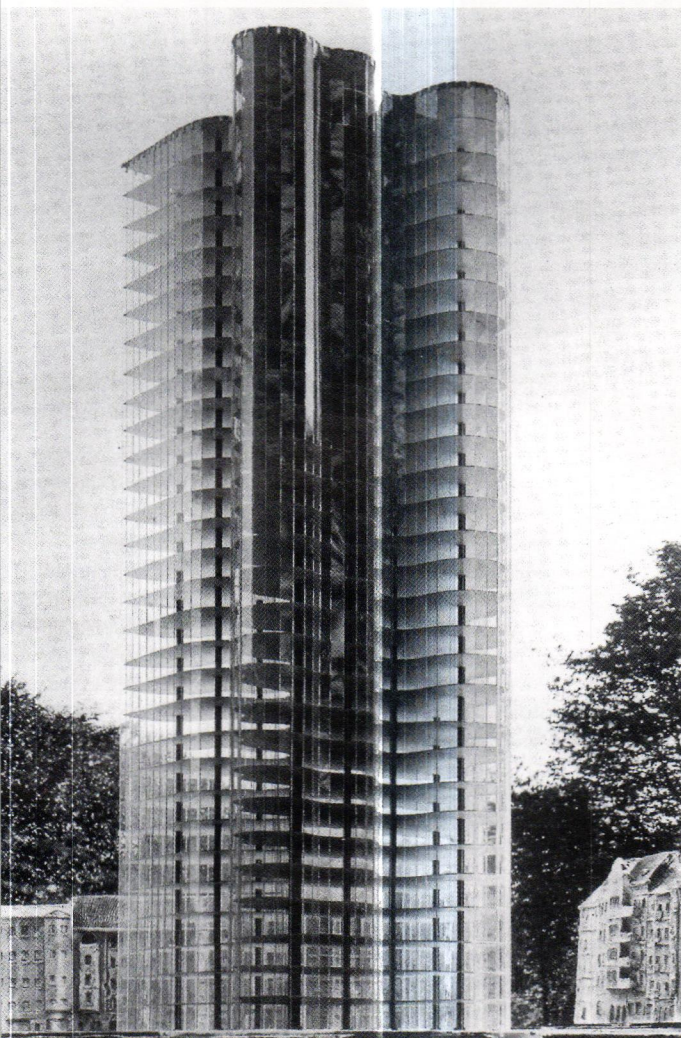
Gropius was hired as a professor at Harvard University in 1937 at the invitation of the dean of the school of architecture, Joseph Hudnut. As the founder of the Bauhaus and the architect of its building in Dessau, Gropius was the person most closely associated with the Bauhaus's image. As Kentgens-Craig points out, however, "Hudnut saw himself in the role of reformer and Gropius as the ally he would need to realize his ambitions... [and] had already conceived a detailed curriculum" before Gropius's arrival. Therefore, "it would be wrong to speak of a 'transplantation' of the Bauhaus to America, as has often been done." Gropius soon exercised more freedom at Harvard when in 1938 he assumed the chairmanship of the architecture department and began to exert greater control over the curriculum.

Although he jettisoned his original socialist and utopian agendas, the core constant that Gropius carried over from the Bauhaus was the teaching of architecture as a network of spatial and technical relationships, which drew their organization from economic and social ties. His promotion of design as a collaborative rather than an individual endeavor, his encouragement of hands-on exploration of a wide range of materials for their visual and tactile potential, and his advocacy for experiencing the construction of buildings firsthand through work at actual sites were all designed to overcome the specialization of knowledge and labor that had fractured the organic unity of the medieval guild systems.² Direct exposure to the productive forces brought to bear in creating the built environment was meant to produce graduates who could master them in society; Gropius maintained that "the more the collaboration between teachers and students resembles office practice, the better."³

One of the salient characteristics of Gropius's teaching method was an emphasis on finding design solutions based on the facts alone, without the use of historical precedents. Although the claim has often been made that Gropius banished the teaching of architectural history altogether, history courses were required at Harvard, though Gropius felt that "history studies are...best offered to older

Advertisement from the catalog for the "International Exhibition of Modern Art" at the Brooklyn Museum, 1926. (from *The Bauhaus and America*)





students who have already found self-expression” and “started in the third year rather than in the first, to avoid intimidation and imitation.”⁴ Implicit in this attitude is the belief that only the individual’s inherent creativity, uncorrupted by preconceptions, could contribute solutions to contemporary problems, and that these problems sufficiently differed from those of the past as to be without precedent.

The nurturing of individual creativity alongside an emphasis on team design perhaps posed a contradiction. But the fact that many Harvard graduates who went on to enjoy international reputations did so as individual “stars” indicates how this was often resolved. Gropius’s most ambitious students aspired not to his academic model, but rather to his professional example, in which his fame was the real marketing tool, regardless of his office’s “team” approach to design.

Mies came to the Department of Architecture at the Armour Institute, later known as the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), in 1938. Unlike Gropius, he was hired as director of the department and was immediately given free reign to restructure the curriculum. At his inaugural address he exhorted, “let us guide our students over the road

of discipline from materials, through function, to creative work.”⁵ This statement outlines the structure of his curriculum, which began with courses in basic materials such as wood, steel, and concrete, then progressed through a series of planning exercises, beginning with single domestic spaces and moving through floor plans and on to arrangements of multiple buildings. Students then undertook design problems with programs that echoed the master’s own commissions, such as art museums and apartment complexes, or his self-generated exercises, such as the courtyard houses.

Much of the students’ work was virtually indistinguishable from Mies’s own. He himself insisted that the work was essentially impersonal, as borne out by his response to the student who complained, “you don’t leave any room for self-expression.” Mies told the student to sign her name on her project, telling her, “that’s what I call self-expression.”⁶ This emphasis on apprenticeship over exploration distinguished his curriculum from Gropius’s and was reinforced by a general disinclination to associate himself publicly with the Bauhaus, although his teaching at IIT was essentially an extension of the Bauhaus curriculum under his tenure there as the third and last director.

left
Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, model for a skyscraper in glass and iron, 1921–22.

right
Mies van der Rohe, entry for the Berlin Friedrichstrasse competition, 1920–21.
(images from *The Bauhaus and America*)



The United States Postal Service honored German Bauhaus architects in 1982 by putting Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall and Walter Gropius's own house on commemorative stamps.
(from *The Bauhaus and America*)

Mies's insistence that architecture was the product of the particular circumstances of a given era, rather than the willful creation of an individual, was reinforced by the position of history in his curriculum. The history sequence as it evolved under his tenure at IIT was an important component and occupied the first three years of the five-year program, considerably more credit hours than at Harvard. In addition to attending lectures, students produced inked drawings of historical structures, usually in the form of sections through buildings such as Notre Dame Cathedral, the Pantheon, and the Hagia Sophia.⁷ Rather than serve as a source of precedents or models to be applied to present problems, history courses focused on the technology of previous eras. Students were taught that building technology was as unique and unrepeatable as the particular time that nurtured it. This approach served an important ideological function by demonstrating Mies's conviction that an era's best design achievements are those that represent the maximization of technique, by making visible the limits of available technology. An emphasis on section in the students' drawings of historical buildings revealed a progression of structures for spanning increasingly larger spaces and reflected his own growing preoccupation with long-span roofs, which aspired to a place alongside the great domes of the past as cultural achievements.

Near the end of *The Bauhaus and America*, Kentgens-Craig offers a photograph of Mies's Seagram Building in New York (1958), along with the simple caption, "Fulfillment of expectations." Given Gropius's and Mies's commitment to a long-term vision that would require new generations of architects for its realization, this caption comes across as an overstatement. While mentioning that "[t]he initial successes of the [Bauhaus émigrés] could not be maintained," she concludes with a victorious tone that is at odds with the dispassionate recounting of events that makes up the bulk of her book: "[E]ven in the seventies, during the massive and continual attacks on modernism...[t]he reproaches made against the Bauhaus, such as its inhumane dogmatism, excessive abstraction, arrogant blindness to historical and local conditions, and its stereotypical glass boxes, were nonetheless unable to halt discussion of it," she maintains. "Not even postmodernism succeeded in doing that." The issue of exactly why discussion of the Bauhaus should continue, however, is not pursued, and the evidence offered in support seems curiously to reiterate the accusations against: "[W]hat remain relevant are the design potential and universality of [the Bauhaus's] formal vocabulary, its artistic and productive achievements, the didactic and methodical conception of its transdisciplinary pedagogy, and its readiness to ask the difficult question of what the era demanded of education."

What is the difference between the universal "formal vocabulary" that Kentgens-Craig identifies with the Bauhaus and the "stereotypical glass boxes" that its critics see? Which do we have—inhumane dogmatism or progressive pedagogy?

Kentgens-Craig's glib conclusion is surprising in a book that generally works to substitute complex particulars in place of simplistic generalizations. Architectural postmodernism did not halt discussion of the Bauhaus, but it did succeed in making the kind of aforementioned accusations stick in the first place, even when they were often contradicted by the evidence. The Seagram Building is a case in point. Mies's design solution was first and foremost an urban one, using the plaza to create a relatively traditional public space bounded by the street walls of the existing buildings to the north and south, along with his own symmetrical façade, which continued the axis of the neoclassical Racquet and Tennis Club across the street.⁸ That his design intentions were little understood is borne out by the proliferation of windswept plazas, some sited at street corners, others sunken below grade, that came to dot New York's cityscape—the unhappy confluence of zoning laws and architects eager to emulate Mies's example, while lacking an understanding of the motivations evident in his design.

In fact, the pedagogies of both Gropius and Mies are marked by a failure to transmit many of the guiding principles that animate their own best works. Gropius's seminal building in Dessau (1926), built to house the Bauhaus, derives much of its expressive power from sometimes very subtle modulations and inversions of classical devices such as bases and cornices, originally devised to convey a sensation of weight and now transformed into something quite the opposite. Mies's lifelong interest in the column as a carrier of meaning culminated in his abstracted variation on the Doric order at his Berlin New National Gallery (1967), complete with subtle entasis and a capital consisting of the expressed pinned connection.

Neither Gropius's pedagogical emphasis on invention, nor Mies's teaching of his own idiosyncratic language as an "industrial vernacular," could fully equip students so that they in turn might use and transform historical solutions to create buildings of this caliber. As a result, the work of Gropius's and Mies's graduates and disciples, especially those who achieved international prominence, was often the real target of the wrath of organized opposition to modern architecture, though the opposition itself seemed enfeebled by similar weaknesses.

At the heart of *The Bauhaus and America* is a story chronicling the beginnings of the triumph of image over substance in American architectural culture. In Kentgens-Craig's portrayal of the period and its major designers, Gropius and Mies appear as two of the earliest beneficiaries of the nascent "star system" in which "[t]he concentration on the big names reflects a shift from a mode of reception focused on the Bauhaus's content to an emphasis on personalities." *The Bauhaus and America* helps us see through this trend, to see the less famous or hidden figures who played a major role in the Bauhaus curriculum and its impact in the United States. Although the book's organization by topic leads to a good deal of repetition and overlap, it also serves Kentgens-Craig well in her mission to lay out facts.

The book is well suited for use as a reference, and the copious footnotes alone are far in excess of those needed for attribution, serving as generous aids for further research. Kentgens-Craig's language is straightforward and jargon-free and gives the impression of having been written to include a lay audience. Today's crop of students would do well to keep it handy for their own research into the Bauhaus, keeping in mind that they are really researching the origins of their own experience in the peculiar institution known as architecture school. ■

Notes

- 1 For a particularly colorful example see Alexander Caragone, *The Texas Rangers: Notes from an Architectural Underground* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), reviewed by John A. Loomis in *Design Book Review* 40 (fall 1999): 62–9. Caragone documents the struggles of the new faculty hired by the University of Texas at Austin in the 1950s, which included Bernhard Hoesli, Colin Rowe, Robert Slutzky, John Hejduk, and Lee Hirsch.
- 2 Klaus Herdeg, *The Decorated Diagram: Harvard Architecture and the Failure of the Bauhaus Legacy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 87–9. Herdeg singles out Gropius's encouragement of students' pursuit of "pseudotactile" qualities in their designs as a prime cause of the scaleless and antiurban qualities of much postwar modernism.
- 3 Walter Gropius, *Scope of Total Architecture* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 52.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 56.
- 5 Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, inaugural address as director of architecture at the Armour Institute, November 20, 1938. Reprinted in English in Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless Word: Mies van der Rohe on the Building Art*, trans. Mark Jarzombek (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 316.
- 6 This anecdote is related by the composer John Cage in his book *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 269.
- 7 For examples of student work produced at IIT under Mies's curriculum, see Alfred Swenson and Pao-Chi Chang, *Architectural Education at IIT, 1938–1978* (Chicago: Illinois Institute of Technology, 1980).
- 8 For a discussion of Mies's treatment of context in his Seagram Building and Lake Shore Drive Apartments, see Franz Schulze's interview with James Ingo Freed, "Mies in America," in Franz Schulze, ed., *Mies van der Rohe: Critical Essays* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1989), 175–9. For an investigation of context-driven aspects of his Barcelona Pavilion, see Wolf Tegethoff, *Mies van der Rohe: The Villas and Country Houses* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1985), 86.

Berlin, Capital of the Twentieth Century

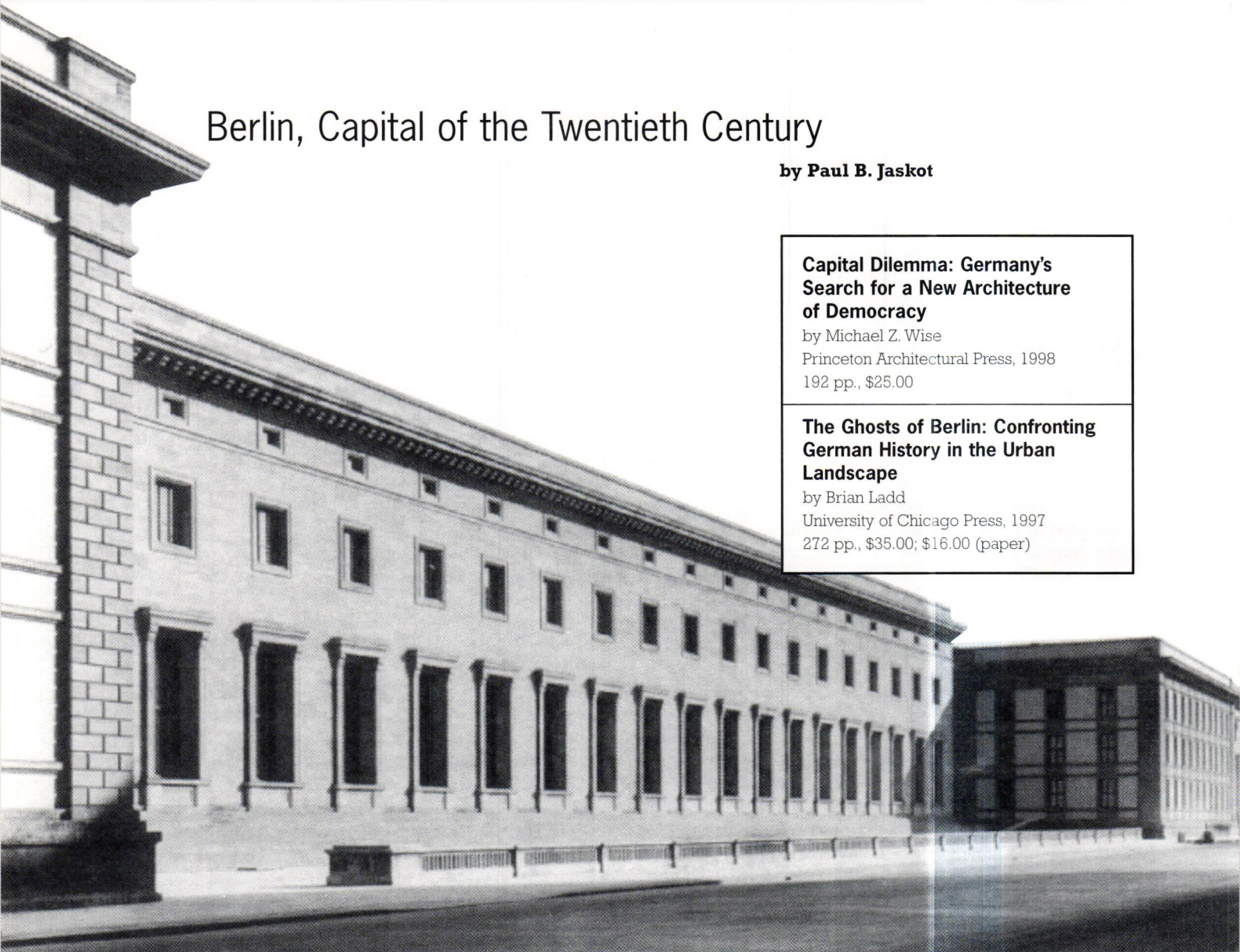
by Paul B. Jaskot

Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy

by Michael Z. Wise
Princeton Architectural Press, 1998
192 pp., \$25.00

The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape

by Brian Ladd
University of Chicago Press, 1997
272 pp., \$35.00; \$16.00 (paper)



In Walter Benjamin's now famous 1935 sketch for the arcades project, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," he attempted to describe the rise of industrial Paris, and with it, the modern bourgeois state, by pairing key cultural figures with new types of architectural expression. Thus, for example, Benjamin linked Charles Fourier with the city's arcades, Charles Baudelaire with urban streets, and Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann with the barricades. In his view, Paris, its changing environs, and its culture mark the spectacular and simultaneous appearance and mystification of bourgeois dominance, a dominance that struggles for power and must ultimately be undone. "In the convulsions of the commodity economy we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled."¹ If one is to characterize the modern industrial world as part and parcel of the rise of the bourgeoisie as an oppressive class, then Paris of the nineteenth century is the place to search for the classic model of that development and the means for its critique.

Benjamin wrote his essay in exile from Adolf Hitler's Germany. The rise of fascism, the consolidation of a Popular Front between Communists and republicans, and the crisis of capitalist democracies in the Great Depression formed the conditions for his attempts at dialectical thinking. This moment of international political-economic instability would, of course, crystallize in the mounting aggression of the National Socialist state and its allies in the battles of World War II and the grotesque policies of the destruction of the European Jews. If Parisian bourgeois politics, economic crises, and social patterns characterized the nineteenth-century industrial city, then the political economic developments leading up to World War II and the war's influence on the structural realignment of the postwar period in many ways define the twentieth. At the heart of these changes, and emblematic of key factors that characterize twentieth-century industrial society, is the once and current capital of Germany: Berlin. This city—ruled over alternately by

Paul B. Jaskot is an associate professor of art history in the Department of Art and Art History at DePaul University. His areas of research include modern German art and architecture, the political history of art, and Marxist art history. He is the author of *The Architecture of Oppression: The SS, Forced Labor and the Nazi Monumental Building Economy* (London: Routledge, 2000).

aristocrats, democrats, fascists, and Communists—has had a changing political geography unlike any other in the century, making it a clear example of how Germany has developed in contrast to its neighbors and the world. At the same time, however, it is precisely Berlin's position as a site for many of the common conditions found in other industrial states that makes its history—and its architecture—emblematic for analyzing the relationship between politics and culture in the last century.

In many ways, this is the analytic challenge taken up by both Michael Z. Wise in *Capital Dilemma: Germany's Search for a New Architecture of Democracy* and Brian Ladd in *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. Wise, a journalist, and Ladd, a historian, adopt what is by now a standard method in social art history. They explain the development of historical and contemporary postreunification Berlin by examining the relationship of architectural and urban form to political history. In each book, the point is to clarify how the contradictions of past political forces are both hidden and revealed in the troubling architecture of contemporary Berlin. While Ladd goes further by exploring the remains of medieval and aristocratic eras, the authors' shared focus on the period after reunification make the comparison of the two particularly telling. These books see the political developments of the past as a means of teaching us not only about contemporary architecture, but also about our own modern society. Yet it is precisely in how each defines politics and uses that political history that distinguishes the authors' arguments most clearly.

The importance of modern architecture in Berlin has been well established in architectural history by such examples as the experiments in housing design by Martin Wagner and Bruno Taut, the massive-scale projects of Albert Speer, and present-day construction on the Potsdamer Platz. Similarly, the political importance of the various regimes that governed from or over Berlin in the past century made Berlin an unquestionable component of any history that tries to make critical sense of the modern world. Yet bringing together political history with architectural analysis has proved to be a tricky business. The tendency is simply to project the ideological goals of a specific state onto the built forms of its architects, an approach that seems problematic when discussing Nazi structures or Walter Gropius and the Hansa Quarter.² In these cases and in all work addressing politics and architecture, careful attention to the complex internal conflicts of a political system is crucial if one is going to establish a meaningful relationship between art and politics. By evaluating the extent to which

Wise and Ladd successfully achieve such a subtle analysis—based on agency, structural conditions, aesthetic forms, and institutional policy—we can better understand the multiple functions of architecture in the construction of Berlin and, more generally, crucial aspects of the development of modern industrial society as a whole.

Both books are written with a popular audience in mind. Footnotes are kept to a minimum and most often reserved for direct or indirect quotations. In harmony with the authors' interest in bringing clarity to the significance of postreunification Berlin, the contemporary subject, and the informal writing style are meant to attract both the specialist and the nonspecialist. In addition, Wise's book includes a helpful bibliography, while Ladd relies on a bibliographic essay; Wise's book tends to have more information based on primary source material, while Ladd limits himself to basic secondary sources, most of which will be no surprise to scholars of modern German architecture.

Nevertheless, there are some odd absences in each book (such as the 1990 work by Alex Scobie, *Hitler's State Architecture: The Impact of Classical Antiquity*, which features a substantial section on Berlin). Also, neither really makes much effort to place Berlin architecture in the context of wider cultural movements and political developments, either in Germany or in other parts of the world, with the exception of Wise's discussion of postwar Bonn. I would think, for example, that the work of Manfredo Tafuri on modern architecture and politics or that of Winfried Nerdinger on southern German architectural traditions might provide useful comparative information here. In sum, Wise's and Ladd's focus on Berlin is the solid but limited base upon which the authors build a discussion of architecture and politics.

Central for the authors in regard to political history is the impact of the National Socialist era on the urban fabric of Berlin and the meaning of its political geography. While naturally examining the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) as well as the Federal Republic of Germany (pre- and postreunification), Ladd and Wise trace many of the key conflicts surrounding the built environment back to the architectural ambitions

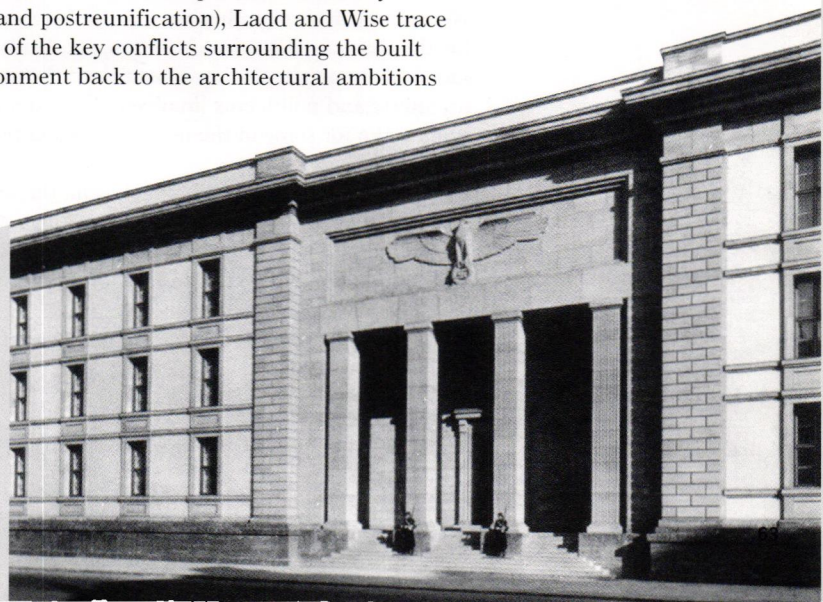
opposite

Adolf Hitler's architect, Albert Speer, designed the Reich Chancellery. The overscaled and marble-lined structure was completed in 1939. Authors Brian Ladd and Michael Z. Wise dedicate significant portions of their books to the architectural schemes of Nazi leaders.

below

Façade of the Reich Chancellery.

(images from *Capital Dilemma*)



of Hitler as well as the brutality of state policy in his regime. Hitler is the first politician mentioned by each author, and they spend significant sections of their books discussing the National Socialist past and its postwar resonance. This certainly should surprise few people, as in many ways the entire postwar social, economic, and political development of Europe has been influenced by the ramifications of Nazi policy. Coupled with the Communist reign in East Berlin, the shadow of Hitler looms large in these analyses.

To summarize the scope and argument of each book, it is perhaps best to begin with Wise. In *Capital Dilemma*, Wise starts out with a clear premise and purpose: the political shifts in both postwar German states and the new politics of reunification have greatly affected the construction and meaning of the Berlin built environment, past and present. Wise claims that his book is the first overview of the relationship between architecture and politics in the varied periods under discussion. For Wise, the debates about preserving buildings from the Wilhelmine era through the Cold War are as important as the new architectural projects of the postwar and reunification eras. His understanding of the current German "anxiety about architectural symbolism" is derived from both the historical context as well as the context of contemporary internal and international debates about the status of a unified Germany. In spite of some efforts to hedge his claims about architectural symbolism—it is "difficult to sustain an automatic congruence between architectural form and ideological content"—the majority of the book follows from the thesis that there is such a congruence (or at least a perceived congruence). Hence, for Wise, politics is a matter of how buildings and urban forms get interpreted or imbued with meaning over time, and not really about policy per se. The chapters make this clear as he analyzes briefly the structures of postwar Bonn and East Berlin, then moves directly to postreunification plans for specific Berlin monuments—the new Chancellery, what to do with Goering's old Luftwaffe headquarters, the fate of the Stalinallee, Norman Foster's new Reichstag, I. M. Pei's designs for the German Historical Museum, etc. With each monument and site, he has interviewed the many architects and politicians involved. Their quotations make for some of the most interesting reading in the book.

As he makes clear in his conclusion, the unreliable but ever present association of ideology and architecture is something that architects and the German public will be dealing with for some time:

The younger architects understandably decry a direct equivalency between a glass-enclosed parliament and government openness and accessibility [as was the case with Günter Behnisch's claims about his Bonn Parliament]. Less inhibition and a greater willingness to experiment could provide more compelling designs. Already with his new Chancellery, Axel Schultes is attempting to devise fresh imagery for a liberal democratic state. Such ongoing emphasis by Germans on the importance of architectural symbolism—their search for an architecture of democracy and a resolution to their capital dilemma—does matter since it arises not just from preternatural anxiety but also from a genuine desire to avoid past mistakes.

Wise's confidence in democratic capitalism as well as his preference for specific architects like Schultes lead him to a seemingly contradictory historical argument: when buildings are politically suspect, he is against reading an inherent relationship between architecture and ideology; conversely, he writes in favor of just such a relationship when the "fresh imagery" of the architecture is suitably apparent. Wise's own ideological position complicates his historical assessment by offering an uneven evaluation of political patronage and architectural aesthetics.

In *The Ghosts of Berlin*, Ladd takes a very different tack, even if many of the monuments and sites he discusses overlap with Wise's account of Berlin. (It should be noted that Ladd's book came out a year before Wise's, and the latter cites Ladd once in his own book.) In some senses, Ladd, like Wise, wants to give an account of how the varied political past of modern Berlin has expressed itself—and continues to do so—in the built environment. Although Ladd also aims at a broad audience, he attempts in his text to break down the complicated relationship between architecture and ideology. For Ladd, architecture is about spaces and activities; thus, its meaning resides not in its form but in its use and the collective memory of that use. So, for example, in the chapter on the Berlin Wall that begins his analysis, he states:

A historic city is not Disneyland, and it is indeed as an authentic site that Berlin fascinates visitors: here stood the Wall; here walked Hitler; here spoke Bismarck; here rolled the tanks. Berlin will long remain the city of the Wall, even if the concrete ends up in Florida, because the Wall, as an unintentional monument, came to define the urban space of Berlin. It was thus an exemplary, if by no means typical, case of a monument giving form to collective identity.³

This is a broader and more complex understanding of the built environment than that offered by Wise.

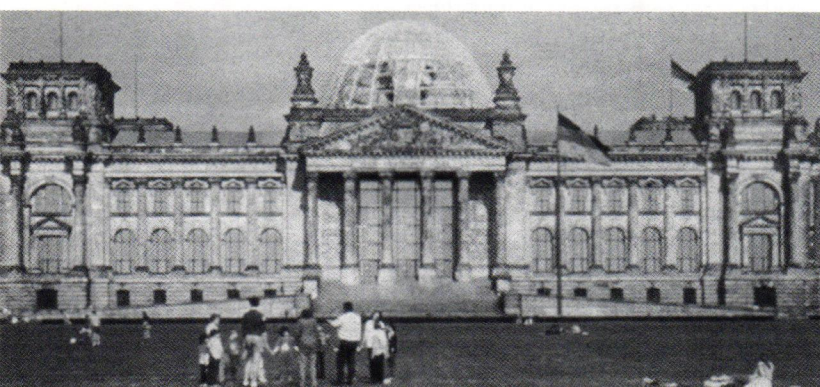
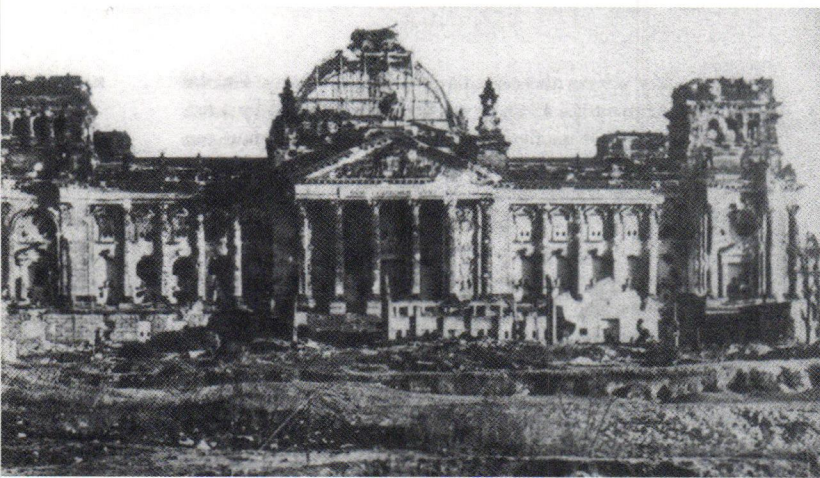
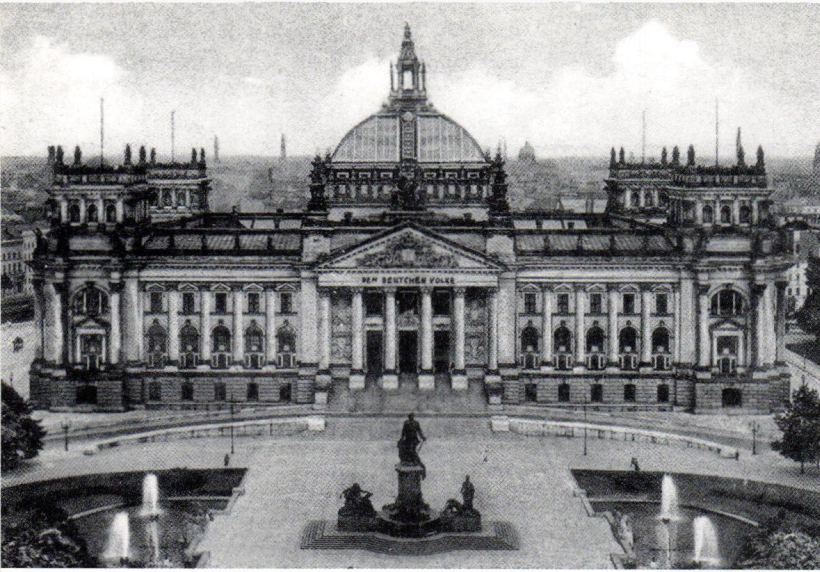
Ladd also has a strong interest in the political in his book. His chapters are divided according to the various epochs that mark the political shifts in the history of Berlin, and in relation to each period's particular relevance to contemporary urban debates. After discussing the Wall, he moves from the medieval city up through Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Berlin then to the monuments of the Wilhelmine, Weimar, Nazi, Cold War, and reunification eras. He discusses the relevance of debates surrounding monuments as diverse as the famous Mietskaserne (the large apartment blocks with multiple interior courtyards) of Wilhelmine Berlin, the Lenin monument in the GDR, and the fate of Schinkel's Neue Wache in the hands of Chancellor Helmut Kohl. For Ladd, the interplay between the historical significance of a site and its contemporary use is crucial. "My focus is...on buildings and sites that have attracted recent attention and controversy, places whose beauty or ugliness is more political than aesthetic." History here is a structuring principle for contemporary ideological projections onto, and political uses of, the built environment.

The depth of Ladd's historical understanding makes his volume more satisfying than Wise's, which remains rather thin in its analysis and unresolved in its conclusions. Surprisingly, these limitations reveal themselves particularly in Wise's own chosen subject, i.e., the political significance of monuments. Because Wise is unrelenting in his interest in the ideological significance of form, the political development of Berlin as a product of particular individuals, institutions, and conditions is flattened out in his account. The reader is somewhat mystified, for example, by Wise's unwillingness to name the political parties and individual policies often responsible for architectural projects. Considering Wise's contemporary focus, it is odd that he mentions the current ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD) in passing only twice in the book, and Kohl's party of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) only once. The Communist party of East Germany, the Socialist Unity Party (SED), receives somewhat more attention as a patron, but its policies are not described in great historical detail. One is left instead with a series of buildings that are only vaguely related to a generic notion of politics. Further, Wise uses the category of the "Germans" as an undifferentiated and loose term that obscures his failure to discuss agency and policy. By extension, architects are mostly treated as influenced by politics rather than as actively participating in state and city policy decisions. His history is thus inexact. So, for example, he describes Ludwig Mies van der Rohe as taking a "flight into exile" from Hitler's government, rather than taking the time to clarify that Mies was never forced to flee and, therefore, technically, he was not in exile. Too often, this kind

of imprecise language undermines Wise's goal of connecting politics with the built environment and leads to the promotion of some rather stock clichés. These generalizations leave the reader feeling vaguely as if she or he has read this all before, perhaps in an old issue of *Der Spiegel*. One wonders about this editorial decision, especially as Wise has proven in other contexts that he is quite interested in a critical and precise account of political agency and party politics.⁴ Leaving them out of this book seriously limits its usefulness as an account of the relationship between architecture and politics in the postwar German states.

Conversely, Ladd bestows much greater attention to the different political agents and policies that have shaped Berlin. He traces, for example, the competing architectural developments of East and West Berlin during the Cold War, placing specific emphasis on how local competitions and sites were related to developing international policies. Hence, the International Building Exhibition (IBA) in the west is highlighted as a response to Communist Party chief Walter Ulbricht's interest in city planning and the construction of the massive housing project of the Stalinallee under the guidance of architect Hermann Henselmann. Building from this, Ladd offers a particularly interesting section on how East and West Berlin officials used the naming of streets in a mounting propaganda campaign of claiming specific sites. Ladd notes that this process resulted in postreunification renaming of many "communist" streets; he also mentions that the names of militarist leaders from the Wilhelmine and Nazi eras remain to this day as markers of the political geography. From streets to sculptures to massive building schemes, the built environment is both historically loaded and politically instrumentalized in specific ways. Ladd identifies the significance of these sites by naming political names and carefully reconstructing local policy decisions in relation to the varied history of the city.

We can see the strengths and weaknesses of this attention to politics by exploring a particularly important example: the Reichstag. The Reichstag had a difficult history even before it was constructed. After unification in 1871, the German parliament needed a site for its sessions. The first competition in 1872 produced a winner, but no building. Another competition in 1882 led to a winner, the Frankfurt architect Paul Wallot, and, finally, to the political support for construction of the project. In Wilhelmine Germany, neither Bismarck nor Kaiser Wilhelm I had much interest in the building, and Kaiser Wilhelm II particularly ignored much of the policy debates happening within its halls. Even its location north of the Brandenburg Gate and far from the center of power—the imperial residence at the other end of Unter den Linden—seemed to



represent the weakness of democratic forces in this particular constitutional monarchy. Such political insecurity was certainly a contributing factor to its slow rate of construction. The completed structure was a modified beaux-arts building with the famous iron and glass dome over the central portion. After World War I and the establishment of the Weimar Republic, the building took on more importance as a center for the new democracy. When Hitler came to power in January 1933, he used a fire in the building as an excuse to mount a ban on the Communist Party, although the evidence for a Communist plot proved thin indeed. The Reichstag remained in the Third Reich as a relic of the past, a monument to be preserved but also to be firmly overshadowed by the monumental plans for Speer's North-South Axis, into which it was incorporated. After the war, it was restored as an exhibition space in West Berlin, while the parliament center moved to Bonn. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the building was once again cast in its original role, as the parliament returned to a unified Berlin. It was with reunification that plans began to reconstruct the building and its dome, which had been torn down after World War II.

Given the fact that the Reichstag had been the site of the collapse of democratic forces in both the Wilhelmine and Weimar eras, it was uncertain whether it would be a suitable building for Kohl and his return to Berlin. For Ladd, this point is important particularly because the building was a focus of specific policies and individuals throughout the last hundred years of German history. So, while he discusses the Reichstag in detail in his section on the Wilhelmine era, he also chronicles the multiple stages of its changing meaning through the subsequent epochs up to the wrapping of the structure by Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 1995. (Note that Ladd's text goes only as far as Foster's winning of the competition to rebuild the structure in 1993, but does not extend to the recent completion of the project.) The ambivalence of this history, and the politicization of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's project within the CDU and SPD contribute to the point of intersection for Ladd's understanding of the building as a site in which the past plays a significant role in determining current policy decisions that govern the built environment.

Conversely, Wise's account breezes through the history of the building rather quickly, focusing instead on Foster's proposed dome and the architectural competition for the new redesign. For Wise, what is crucial here is the variety of architectural opinions about the competition and

The Reichstag in Berlin, designed by Paul Wallot and completed in 1894. From top to bottom: The structure in 1901; the burned-out building in 1945 after it was shelled by the Soviet Army; in 1995 artists Christo and

Jeanne-Claude wrapped the Reichstag in aluminum-coated fabric; photo montage by Sir Norman Foster of the Reichstag with a dome. (all images from *The Ghosts of Berlin* except for the bottom image, which is from *Capital Dilemma*)

the subsequent dome design, particularly as those opinions reveal the contemporary Germans' diverse projections of ideology onto the structure. Unlike the rest of the book, his discussion of the Reichstag does give us some sense of the partisan debates that arose over the issue of the reconstruction of the dome. He also carefully lays out the context for the iconographic meaning of a domed structure for a seat of government. Yet his conclusion about the significance of this debate is inconclusive. Furthermore, he seems to see Foster's dome as a project that was an aesthetically unsatisfactory compromise resulting from political or bureaucratic influence. One is tempted to draw the conclusion that, if the architect could just have been left alone, maybe we would have a really democratic building. "It [the Reichstag] was not so much the clear conception of one architect, backed up by a team of several dozen others, as the partly muddled outcome of conflicting crosscurrents of the democratic political process," Wise writes. As a reader, I was wondering when, in history, any major architectural commission has not been influenced by and part of such a process of consolidation and compromise, democratic or otherwise. Architects, after all, work with clients and with expensive resources that require a much broader input than, say, a painter, a case that Ladd makes clear in several instances. Their monuments are by necessity social in conception, construction, and significance. Wise gives us compelling information about the competition, but the conclusion seems itself to be subject to romantically ideological definitions of the architect and her or his relation to politics.

In spite of its limitations, Wise's text provides information about and an overview of many of the major politically patronized structures in the last fifty years of Berlin history. Ladd goes further in his historical scope and complexity, and his text would provide a strong complement to any study of modern Berlin. Still, the specialist will be left wanting more from each book. In the case of Wise, a more differentiated understanding of politics would engage the text with wider debates in architectural and urban history. With Ladd's text, specialists will glean useful and new information on particular debates and sites, but it never directly addresses the broader implications this study holds for an understanding of the "power of place" and the function of politics. Ladd's analysis is thoughtful and careful, but here, too, the conclusions need to be extended.

The call for an expansion of the arguments of these books and the need to define a clear functional concept of politics returns us to Benjamin and his text on nineteenth-century Paris. When Benjamin sent the essay to Theodor Adorno, they engaged in a correspondence in which Adorno

tried to lay out what he saw as the idealist and hence undialectic basis of Benjamin's analysis.⁵ While this exchange is outside our area of interest here, I would suggest that the terms of critique are useful to bring up with Wise and Ladd. Wise, in his flattening out of political history and in his interest in a notion of ideological architecture, is in many senses making an idealist argument: architecture and architects are not as much part of the historical process as they are influenced by or subject to that historical process. These idealist tendencies tend to obscure the critical points about contemporary Berlin that Wise wants to make.

So, too, Ladd's focus on Berlin's "uniquely politicized" landscape leaves his conclusions limited, tentative, and particularly undialectical in relation to exposing the work of contemporary political economy in the modern industrial city. His last sentence is evidence of this tentativeness: "Politicians and architects who want to put to rest the ghosts of Berlin are probably doomed to failure." This is a text that is interested in memory and the resonance of memory in contemporary culture. However, dialectically speaking, to invoke memory is to understand agency, and to understand agency is to see its relation to broader structural and historical conditions. Ladd addresses these points admirably on a local scale. But missing is the fact that little of Berlin's most recent history can be characterized as specifically local in origin or significance. Ladd certainly acknowledges and incorporates some of this history; but without a systematic integration of these policies, people, and events, it is hard to draw the broader historical conclusions with any certainty. Although to a lesser degree than Wise, Ladd nevertheless leaves the reader wanting a more rigorous argument and a more complete presentation of material evidence.

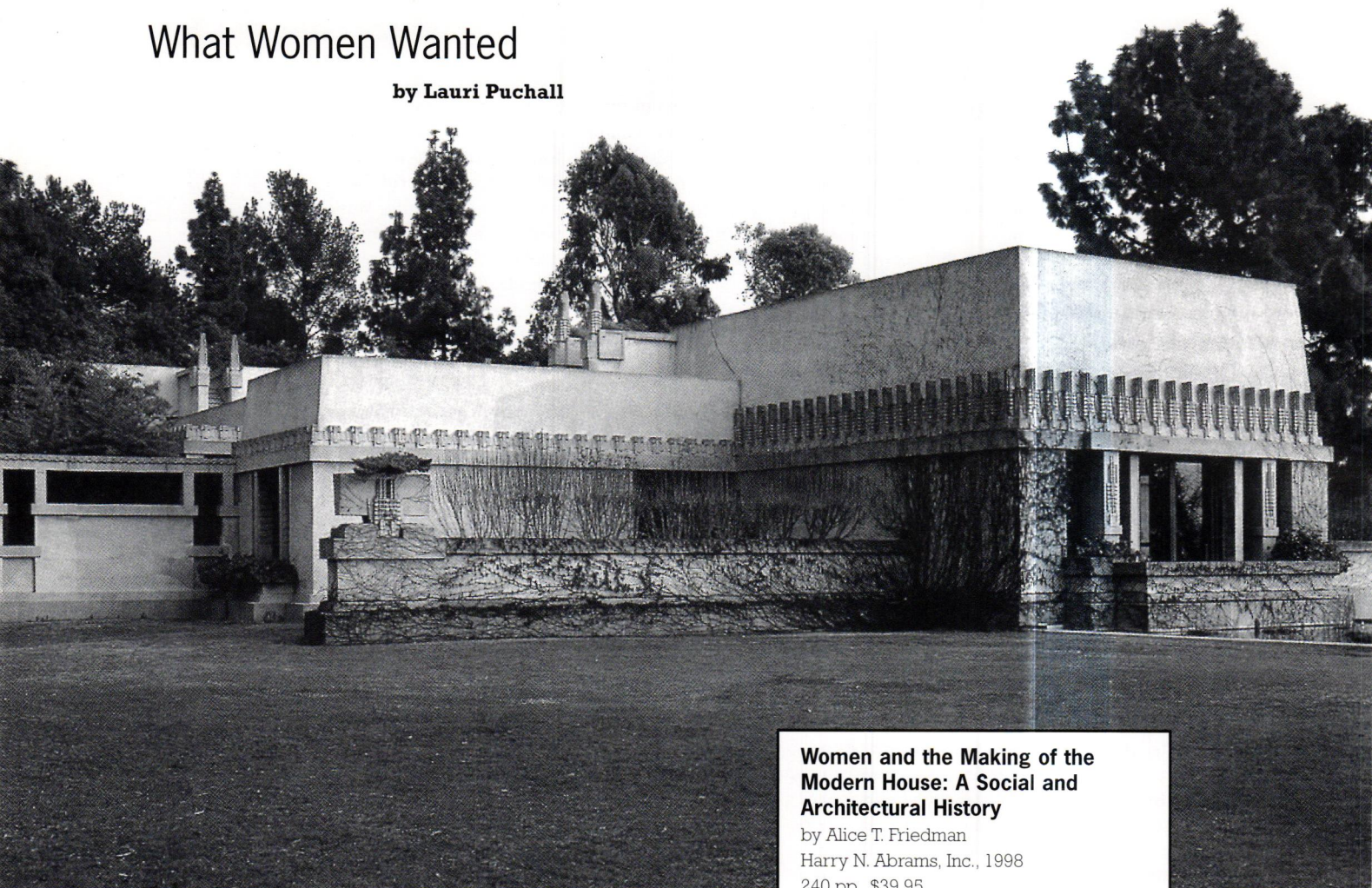
Which leaves us with a question: Is Berlin to be taken as the capital of the twentieth century? These texts present evidence to raise this as a distinct possibility. That is to say, the politicization of architecture and urban planning in modern Berlin encompasses major structural political-economic and social changes that marked the modern industrial centers of the last century. Like Benjamin's view of Paris, analyzing Berlin and its monuments leads to an understanding of the multiple ways in which culture is a central means of clarifying the development and legitimization of power. This investigation into the nature of power is as important to interpreting the distinctive rise of the bourgeois nation state as it is to the comprehension of the differentiation of political struggles and models of government in the twentieth century. Such is the project of a critical history, one that must include the architectural and urban environment of contemporary Berlin. ■

Notes

- 1 Walter Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century," *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 162.
- 2 In the first notable analysis of Nazi architectural practices (and still a standard in the field), Barbara Miller Lane made the crucial point concerning the variable forms National Socialist patrons used—from Bauhaus to neoclassicism—and how, therefore, a monolithic notion of Nazi ideology as transparent to architectural form could not be maintained. See Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany 1918–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 147–216.
- 3 In passages such as this, Ladd's work seems to rely on the notion of the "power of place," as argued by Dolores Hayden, concerning the way monuments and sites become meaningful because of their use and history. However, Ladd does not cite Hayden's work or others who have worked on similar problems in different industrial metropolises. Cf. Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place, Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995).
- 4 See, for example, the careful overview of the political debates surrounding Peter Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial in Michael Z. Wise, "Totem and Taboo: The New Berlin Struggles to Build a Holocaust Memorial," *Linguafranca* (December/January 1999): 38–46.
- 5 See the analytic summary of the Benjamin/Adorno debate in Richard Wolin, *Walter Benjamin, An Aesthetic of Redemption* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 163–212.

What Women Wanted

by Lauri Puchall



Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History

by Alice T. Friedman

Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998

240 pp., \$39.95

Women and the Making of the Modern House: A Social and Architectural History is an engaging history of modern architecture in which the author, Alice T. Friedman, reconciles two ordinarily disparate enterprises—formal spatial analysis and social history. Although the book is indebted to Dana Cuff's *Architecture: The Story of Practice* in the way that it examines how projects are influenced by historical, interpersonal, and cultural conditions, it breaks new ground because Friedman shows how the client, not the architect, holds the key to deciphering the home.¹

As a feminist writing about the relationship of gender to domestic design and the murky arena of attribution in architecture—who gets credit for what—Friedman uncovers tales of little-known female patrons of modernism. She relates their personal philosophies and lifestyles, which helped shaped five major monuments of modern domestic architecture. In a strategic twist, Friedman selects case studies straight out of the high design canon but hinges her in-depth analysis on the clients' pre-occupations and contributions. She argues against seeing architects as independent artists operating in isolation, and instead portrays them as team players and consensus builders—a particularly feminine role.

The women Friedman brings to life in *Women and the Making of the Modern House* were atypical for their time. None of them were solely housewives, although many worked from home; they were unconventional to varying degrees, overwhelmingly single, and involved in their communities and endeavors outside the house. They had strong passions and well-formulated ideas about how to best organize their houses and thus direct their lives. Some were independently wealthy heiresses to their fathers' or husbands' fortunes, with the means to commission great works of architecture. Yet two of the most provocative chapters of Friedman's book deal with professionals who made their own way in the world: Edith Farnsworth, a Chicago doctor, and Constance Perkins, who was an art professor at Occidental College in Los Angeles. Perkins, Richard Neutra's client, lived alone on a modest teacher's salary. Friedman, a professor of art and codirector of the architecture program at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, adeptly combines interviews with clients with other primary-source documents to create an accessible and believable story about how women shaped modern architecture through individual house commissions.

Lauri Puchall is a designer and writer working in Berkeley, California. She is the managing editor of *Line*, a journal published by the San Francisco chapter of the American Institute of Architects. She recently contributed to *William Turnbull, Jr.: Buildings in the Landscape* (San Francisco: William Stout Publishers, 2000).

The power an architect exercises in domestic projects is the power to influence how one lives. Clients can either help the architect shape the space or accept that which someone else creates for them. For the most part, the architects in *Women and the Making of the Modern House* collaborated with their clients to accommodate particular needs and desires. The exception to the rule was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who refused to relinquish his power by collaborating with Farnsworth. Farnsworth may have been included in the design process as an observer—she had seen plans and models of her house before it was built, and ardently supported modernism in theory—but the trouble was that she did not fully understand the implications of Mies van der Rohe's minimalism. The glass box—his interpretation of a desirable home for an unmarried woman who, in his eyes, could have no perceivable private life, and thus no need for privacy—was ultimately troubling to Farnsworth. The architect's unyielding modernist vision conflicted with her own domestic sensibilities. What she really wanted was a quiet weekend retreat where she could comfortably spend her Sundays. Instead the project resulted in the construction of, in her words, an over-budget fishbowl, lawsuits, and hard feelings toward Mies van der Rohe, whom she had considered a friend. In an interview for *House Beautiful* in April 1953, Farnsworth confessed, "The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on [the] alert...I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night."² Still, as Friedman points out, Farnsworth remained in her home for twenty years, even though she could have sold it and found a house more compatible with her needs.

Unlike Farnsworth, the other clients discussed in *Women and the Making of the Modern House* should be acknowledged as contributors to the artistic and functional success of the houses addressed in the book. The architects took full advantage of their clients' well-honed ideas and philosophies as raw material to be mined and skillfully rendered into three dimensions. These women, in addition to selecting their own architects, provided strong conceptual foundations for design and were tenacious enough to insist that their architects follow through on their directives. For example, ideas about modern living espoused in Le Corbusier's 1923 *Vers une architecture* dovetailed nicely with Gabrielle de Monzie's and Sarah Stein's strong belief in Christian Science, and both women influenced the design of Villa Stein—de Monzie. Occasionally, as with Truus Schröder—who, with Gerrit Rietveld, designed the Schröder House in Utrecht—the client had a hand in the actual design. Schröder had progressive ideas about modern living, education, and flexible spaces.

She wanted to live in close proximity to her children and be involved in their daily routines to a degree exceeding that of other upper-middle-class mothers in 1920s Utrecht. Together she and Rietveld designed the upstairs of her house—one large, sun-filled open area—to include sleeping spaces and a living/dining room that also served as a common study for adults and children. Removable sliding partitions provided a variety of adaptable spaces, privacy, and openness. Schröder's own house was one of her many design collaborations with Rietveld, with whom she maintained a long-term romantic and professional relationship.

Friedman offers a vivid depiction of Perkins's involvement in the design of her 1955 home. During design development, Perkins gave Neutra an exhaustive forty-item list of questions and suggestions. She wrote her own detailed program based on her fond memories of the jungles of New Guinea, where she had volunteered for the Red Cross during World War II. Perkins's attitudes toward work, domesticity, and nature were carefully spelled out in her program. She wanted "the definition of indoors and outdoors almost obliterated with a pool and continuous planting areas establishing the dominant background feeling." Obscuring the boundary between indoors and outdoors was not a new idea, especially in Southern California, where the climate is conducive to outdoor living, but the Perkins House is a particularly elegant solution because of its simplicity and small scale. After rejecting Neutra's original scheme, Perkins designed the innovative curvilinear reflecting pool herself. The curvilinear pool begins in the living room of the house, then passes underneath a glass wall, and concludes outside in the lushly planted yard. The program also called for an intimate-feeling space inside the house in which Perkins could entertain as many as twenty students

opposite

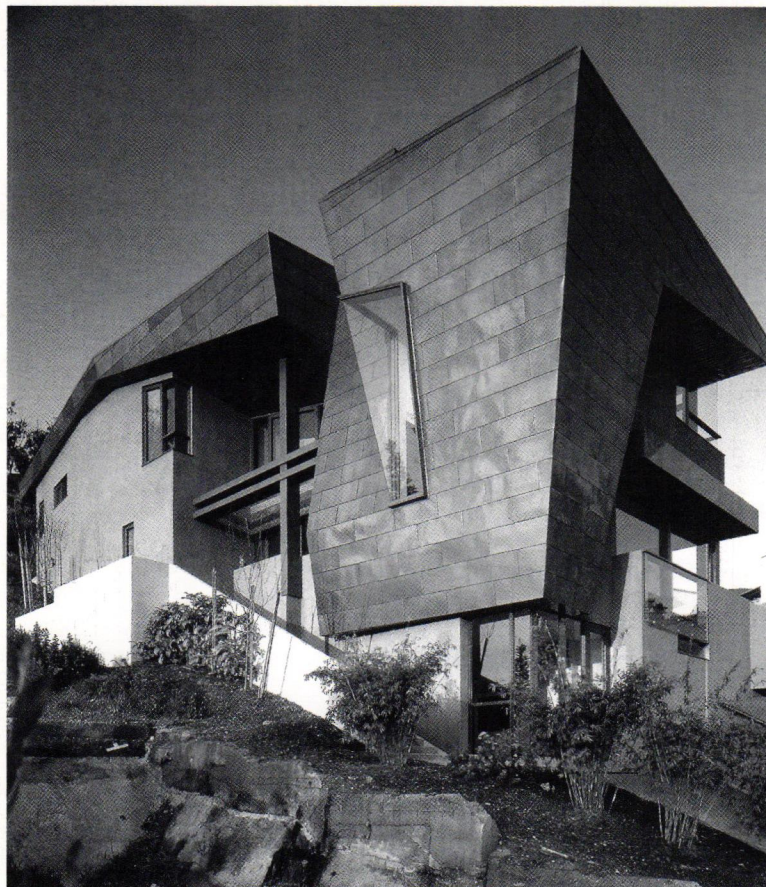
Aline Barnsdall and Frank Lloyd Wright collaborated on the design of the Hollyhock House in Los Angeles between 1915 and 1923.

below

Constance Perkins designed this curvilinear reflecting pool after rejecting Richard Neutra's design.

(images from *Women and the Making of the Modern House*)





Franklin D. Israel,
Drager House,
Berkeley, California,
1994.

(from *Women and
the Making of the
Modern House*)

and give slide lectures in the evenings, a request that is fulfilled in the open living room plan. As per Perkins's specifications, her bedroom doubled as a studio. Here she could read or work on art projects during the day. In describing her ideal work space, she wrote, "This I would also like to have open to the outdoors for I will not work when I am closed in." Perkins was quite happy with the final product and remained in her home until she died.

Friedman's research encompasses homes designed after the modernist period as well. Initially, one might question her decision to devote space to postmodernism and conclude with a discussion of contemporary works, for it seems an anomalous ending to the book. Yet Friedman's analysis of more contemporary projects proves the value of her methodology, one that may be applied to old and new houses alike. Friedman relates space to lifestyle, showing that departures from the nuclear family, such as female-headed households, require unique spatial configurations. In this regard, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* contains revealing social commentary on how women living and working today combine career and family. Throughout her book, Friedman asserts that homes must be evaluated by how well their design facilitates or hinders the occupants' daily routines. To assess a home, one must start by looking at the client or the owner.

In the conclusion of her book, Friedman explores the Drager and Bergren Houses commissioned by female-headed households in the 1980s and 1990s, and discovers that these single women—Sharon Drager is a doctor, Ann Bergren is a professor like Farnsworth and Perkins—bring work home from the office. They need both privacy for work and proximity to their children. The doctor's upstairs study is open to the hallway so she can monitor the comings and goings of her family. The professor's study is belowground in a new wing, removed from common areas and children's rooms. Drager's goal, according to Friedman, "was to provide a series of linked spaces for work and leisure that enhance and order the daily activities of the individual and household." In effect, she has created a separate home within her home for herself only. The doctor's dining room and living room are minimal. Her study, rather than the kitchen, is the hub. The implication is that her life is filled with juggling family, work, and private life, with little time left for entertaining.

Women and the Making of the Modern House expertly illustrates how the creation of architectural monuments is inextricably linked to social factors. Friedman knows the language of architecture as well as, if not better than, most architectural historians and architects. And she delves deeper into the canon than most historians are willing to venture to illuminate the familiar, forever altering how we view the selected works. She invites us to ponder fundamental questions about architecture: how it relates to gender, how it affects the fabric of our daily lives, to what extent it is a collaborative endeavor, and what is gained from a socially based inquiry into form. While Friedman reveals modernism's silent collaborators—women clients—she also guides us in analyzing domestic architecture of any period, for either gender. Her approach is historical, but it also has important implications for how contemporary architects and designers work. She uncovers new information about houses we thought we knew inside and out and, while doing so, supports the notion that the most successful works of architecture are likely to be intricate joint ventures between client and architect; that consensus building in architecture—long viewed as a less effective, feminine way of conducting business—produces not only high art but highly livable spaces, and, not least significantly, satisfied clients. ■

Notes

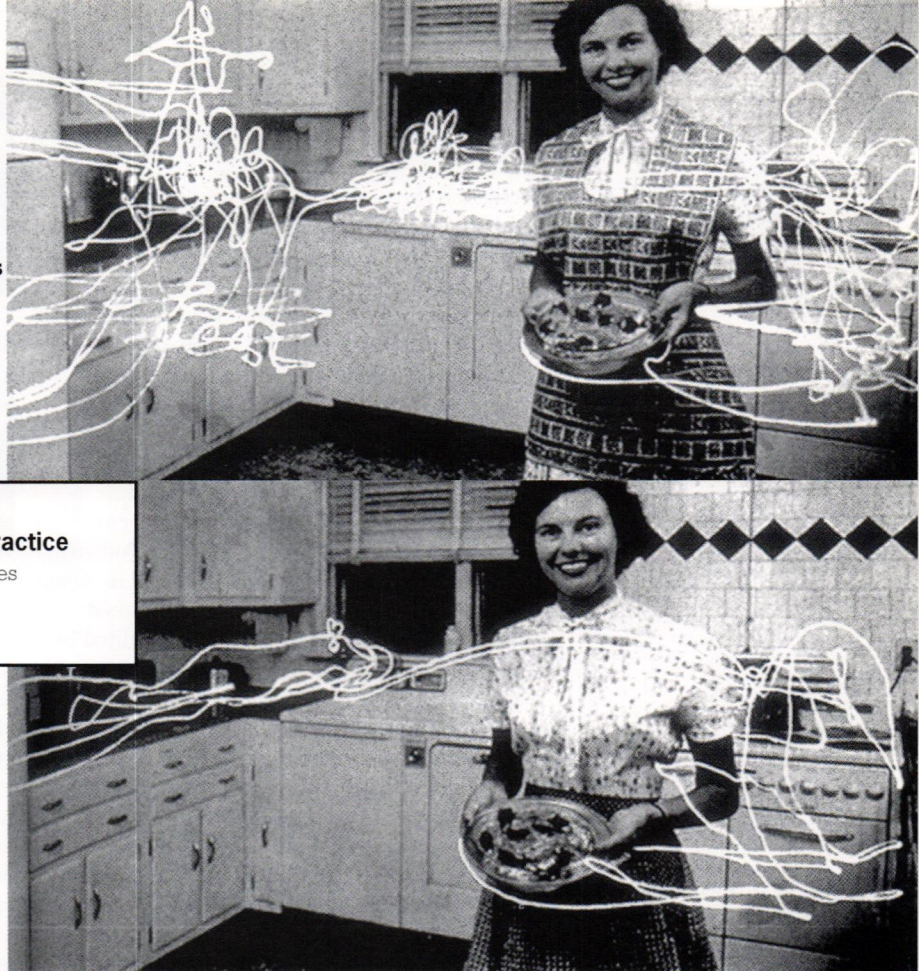
- 1 Alice Friedman reviewed *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) in *Design Book Review* 25 (summer 1992): 17–18.
- 2 The original quotation was published in Joseph A. Barry's article, "Report on the American Battle between Good and Bad Modern Houses," *House Beautiful* 95 (May 1953): 270.

A Firm of One's Own

by Annmarie Adams

The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice

edited by Francesca Hughes
MIT Press, 1996
288 pp., \$19.95



A classmate in architecture school once told me that an architectural education teaches women to think like men. "It wipes out all our female instincts," she confided in a hushed, nearly conspiratorial voice during a review of student work at the University of California, Berkeley, "and forces us to value what they [men] do." This notion that architecture school erases "women's ways of knowing" has haunted me for the last fifteen years, returning with particular intensity during design crits. Is architectural education really a form of gender deprogramming? Do I, as a woman and feminist critic, encourage women students to think like men? I hope not.

The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice, edited by Francesca Hughes, puts an optimistic spin on the premise that female architecture students learn to think like men. In the book's introduction, Hughes suggests that women architects are ideally located to reform the male-dominated profession precisely because they have undergone a process of gender indoctrination. "Insider by her education, her adoption by and of certain professional institutions; outsider by her difference, her gender-related experience contains grounds for a resistive reading of certain architectural operations," states Hughes. The editor then explains that this liminal position of women architects as both mainstream and marginal forces them to "invent" a critical practice. This is a fascinating idea. Architecture school turns us into honorary men, but then we supposedly bring our womanly ways to the office, making the profession a much better place in the end. These

same conclusions, in fact, were reached by Sherry Ahrentzen and Linda Groat in their study of women faculty members in professional programs of architecture, whom they saw, like Hughes's architects, as both peripheral and central and thus in positions of relative power.¹

It is unfortunate that few of the women who were asked to contribute autobiographical essays to *The Architect* seem interested in Hughes's hypothesis. The twelve essays in Hughes's book, in fact, comprise a rather eclectic scrapbook of contemporary architectural "practice." The authors include well-known architectural theorists—such as Beatriz Colomina, Catherine Ingraham, and Jennifer Bloomer—and practitioners like Merrill Elam and Françoise-Hélène Jourda. Many of the contributors are architects from the "real world" who maintain strong links to academia: Diane Agrest, Elizabeth Diller, Christine Hawley, and Dagmar Richter, among others. This choice of contributors, if nothing else, is testament to the profound impact women had on architectural education in the 1980s and 1990s.

The essays display a wide range of comfort on the part of the authors in the exercise of autobiography. The full-time academics, not surprisingly, seem most at home in articulating their various positions, although some are extremely reticent about divulging any personal information. Colomina, for example, makes an interesting start to the book by discussing the sheer difficulty of

Efficiency expert
Frank Gilbreth used photographs of men and women at work to demonstrate the quickest way to perform ordinary tasks. In the 1950s, to show the benefits of using prepackaged meals, Gilbreth attached lights to a woman's wrists and photographed her as she worked in the kitchen. The above photograph shows the woman making a meal from scratch; the bottom photograph captures her preparing a precooked meal.
(from *The Architect*)

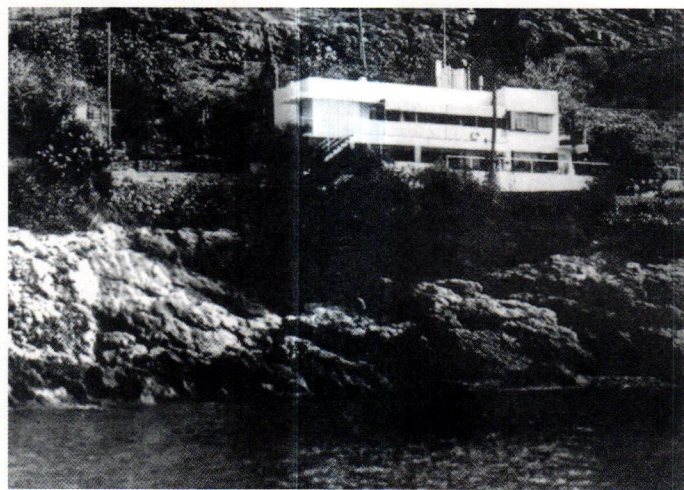
Annmarie Adams is an associate professor at the School of Architecture, McGill University. She is the author of *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses, and Women, 1870–1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996) and coauthor (with Peta Tancred) of *'Designing Women': Gender and the Architectural Profession* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

**Eileen Gray, E.1027,
Roquebrune, France,
1926–29.**
(from *The Architect*)

reflecting on the practice of history: “If you think about how you ride a bicycle,” she says, “you may fall off.” She then changes gears, writing a very engaging paper about Le Corbusier’s “occupation” of Eileen Gray’s E.1027 house in Roquebrune, France. The essay, she explains, “grew out of an uncontrollable footnote in [her] earlier book *Privacy and Publicity*.” To readers familiar with this genre of literature, however, it may also seem familiar. Beginning on the sixth page of her piece, Colomina’s contribution to *The Architect* is identical to her chapter in *The Sex of Architecture*, edited by Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway, and Leslie Kanes Weisman, also published in 1996. And it appeared in a third collection published that same year, *The Critical Landscape*, edited by Michael Speaks.

Ingraham and Bloomer, on the other hand, focus on the “how to” of bicycle riding as women. Their two essays are not only bold testaments on the current relationship of architectural theory and practice, but are peppered with fascinating personal anecdotes, which make clear that their femaleness matters. Beginning with the aphorism “a picture is worth a thousand words,” Ingraham responds directly to Hughes’s challenge, in her contribution, “Losing It in ArchITecture: Object Lament.” She states, “Whenever we find a specific group of people almost entirely excluded—in this case, women from the profession of architecture—we might suspect that there is some kind of identification crisis.” Ingraham then links the “object loss” experienced by architects, most of whom never construct the buildings they design, to a number of other gender-rich situations: the multiple relations among words, women, and things; the film genre of the western; the settlement of the American West; and the marginalization (and the field’s subsequent embrace) of architectural theory. Both Ingraham and Bloomer address the great divide between architectural theory and practice, implying that this gulf is as significant to them as the gender gap. Ingraham describes the (paternal) chill she feels when asked repeatedly what her largely theoretical work has to do with architecture:

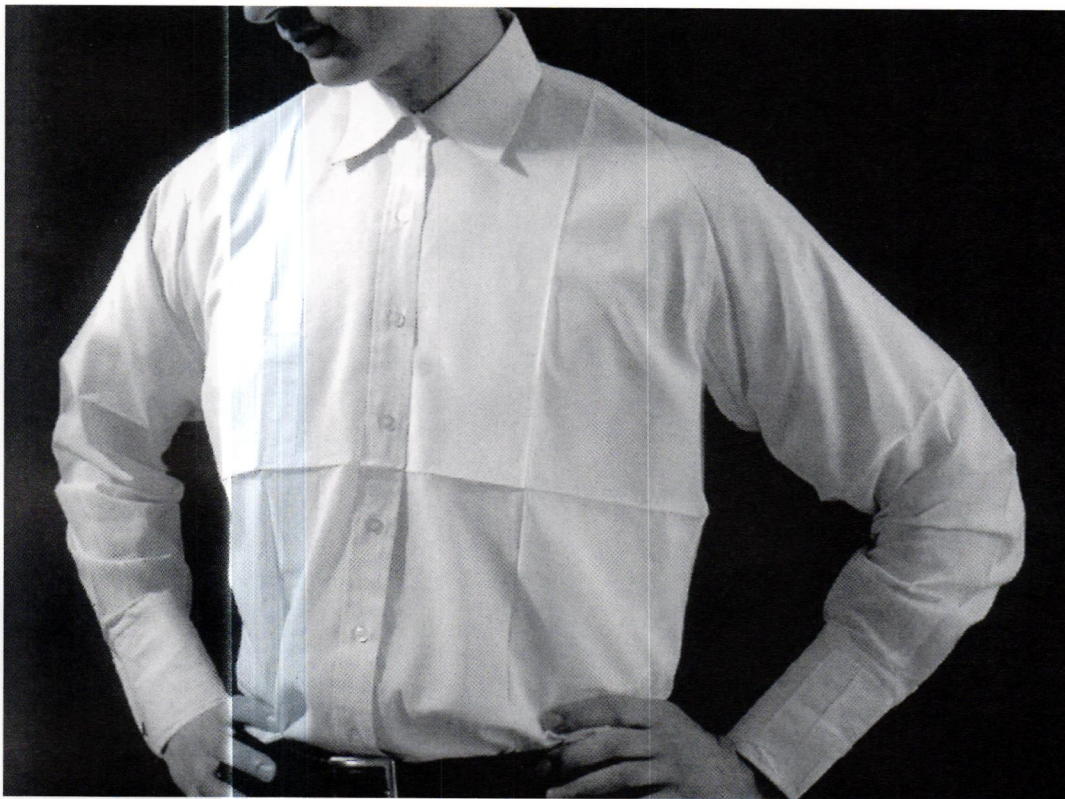
This new form of anxiety, building up around the building and its absence, is the one that most bedevils the architect who is separated from the other architects by the name of theorist or critic. This is not about simply wandering away from the subject at hand but about being in the wrong medium altogether, like trying to breathe air if you are a water animal, or the difference between having blood and chlorophyll. This is species and kingdom anxiety.



Bloomer suffers the same trepidation. She cites accusations of dealing with other-than-architecture as inspiration to move beyond the written word. “I felt challenged to get beyond the judgment of conventional wisdom on the outward form of the work—writing—and explore similar spaces using materials that could be recognized as more clearly architectural.” Her essay, titled “Nature Morte,” highlights four of her own drawings, in addition to one of Giambattista Piranesi’s.

Bloomer’s contribution also includes personal anecdotes, which will undoubtedly ring true for many women architect readers. Such stories are ubiquitous in the “ladies’ rooms” of architecture schools: male professors who assume female students are there looking for husbands; male design critics who comment on women students’ clothes, rather than their projects; male classmates who get better jobs, even when they don’t win the big prizes; firms that limit their female architects’ responsibilities to running prints and detailing interiors. We were actually called “color girls” in an office I worked in as a student in the mid 1980s, because of our supposedly innate ability to render elevations with Prismacolor. For Bloomer, her gender is an inescapable container, akin to a fishbowl:

My work is the practice of a sapient primate who lives in a woman’s body and who works with an awareness of that perspective. I am a woman who grew up in small towns in the South. I have fixed my hair, worn makeup, and worried about what I was going to wear every day of my life, including the days my children were born, since I was thirteen. I know what it means to be constructed as a thing and to be a container. I am convinced that this has to have an influence on the way that one sees things and containers, a taxonomy of objects into which architecture neatly fits, both in the sense of being a material mass with voids inside for holding people and furniture and in the sense of being a vessel of cultural and social signification.



In her contribution to *The Architect*, titled "Bad Press," Elizabeth Diller addresses the proper way to iron a shirt as well as dysfunctional approaches to the same task. (from *The Architect*)

The essays by Martine De Maeseneer, Jourda, Nasrine Seraji-Bozorgzad, Hawley, Elam, Agrest, and Margrét Hardardóttir highlight their various design projects, with few references to the fact that they are women. Gender seems almost coincidental. Hughes apparently sent each participant a letter asking her to comment on the suggestion that women are more likely to invent a practice in architecture, and perhaps as a result, several of the essays are written in a surprisingly informal way. Some even read like letters (two include postscripts, for example). Is the suggestion here that the subject of gender or perhaps of autobiography demands a less formal tone?

Unevenness, however, is the bane of the collection, and two essays by practitioners are models of outstanding writing. Diller's piece, "Bad Press," is a titillating work that includes instructions for ironing a man's shirt. Richter's "A Practice of One's Own" is a well-structured how-to guide to critical practice. Had all the contributors followed her lead, *The Architect* might be a true manifesto for a new approach to practice.

In general, *The Architect*, like all collections, would have been more meaningful for readers had Hughes attempted in her introduction to make direct links between the essays or to set them in some sort of historical context. Even the inclusion of an index may have helped readers to make some of these connections for themselves. Is the general message of this book that women have tended toward "wordy" practices? Why does Hughes see the 1990s as a moment of great change? Other

themes that emerge between the lines of several essays would have made poignant topics for the introduction, too: the notion of boundaries is articulated by several authors; the division of public and private in new design and in the feminist analysis of architecture, the exclusion of women from the building site, and the relationship of modernism and feminism, to name only a few. Almost every essay begins with some sort of disclaimer to the title of architect, suggesting that each author senses her "otherness." This pattern in itself harkens back to the lesson of Carolyn Heilbrun's 1988 *Writing a Woman's Life* and what she called "women's autobiographical disabilities."²

The Architect: Reconstructing Her Practice is an attractive and provocative book, despite these weaknesses, which will no doubt appeal to architects and others interested in the broader topic of gender and the professions. I hope it will convince women architects of their unique position so they will continue to reform the practice of architecture, in both words and buildings. Even from here on the edge of the profession, it's clear that the job has just begun. ■

Notes

- 1 Sherry Ahrentzen and Linda Groat, "Women Architects in the Academic and Professional Context," *Design Book Review* 25 (summer 1992): 10–11.
- 2 Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Norton, 1988).

The Hands that Shaped Vermont

by William Lake Douglas

Hands on the Land: A History of the Vermont Landscape

by Jan Albers
MIT Press, 2000
352 pp., \$35.00

William Lake Douglas
coauthored *New Orleans Gardens: Exquisite Excess* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001) and has written a practical handbook on public art administration for Louisiana's Division of the Arts.

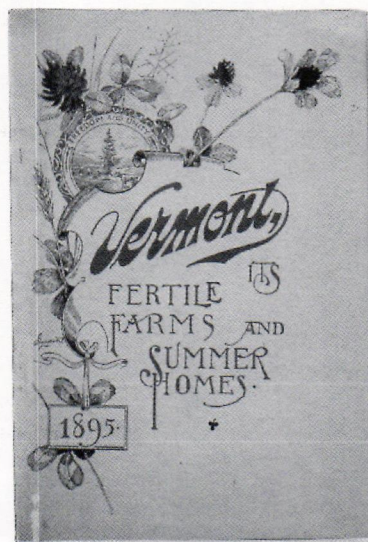
Jan Albers's *Hands on the Land: A History of the Vermont Landscape* strives to be a "natural, environmental, social, and ultimately human" examination of Vermont, which she calls "one of America's most cherished landscapes." Her work seeks to identify all the relevant threads that make up the state's development and to show the impact of each one on the state's landscapes, from prehistoric times to the present. It is an ambitious undertaking, funded by the Orton Family Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping "the citizens of rural America define the future, shape the growth, and preserve the heritage of their communities."

To the casual browser, *Hands on the Land* may appear to be of interest more to Vermont residents, cultural tourists, social historians, or "special interests" rather than to architectural historians. This work has the look of a Chamber of Commerce coffee-table book or an undergraduate textbook: every double-page spread includes at least one archival or contemporary illustration, and the layout features frequent sidebars of insightful vignettes related to specific topics or examples the text mentions in general (incidentally, there are no footnotes). Yet this is not just another "pretty picture" book, with little academic substance or intellectual weight. Any concerns about its evolution or purpose quickly dissipate upon reading the engaging and intelligent text. *Hands on the Land* is remarkable for its research concept, the breadth of its content, and the success with which its mission is accomplished.

In recent years, landscape and architectural historians have expanded their use of methodologies from different historical disciplines. Investigations today are less about objects, men, and events isolated from their surroundings, and more about the broadly defined social and cultural context of a chronological period or a community. Many contemporary architectural historians now avoid writing about buildings as objects detached from their context and concentrate more on social, economic, urban, and political history. Studies in decorative arts are less object-oriented and focus more on understanding material culture and the people who created and used objects. Even landscape history has evolved into what Tom Williamson calls “new garden history,” as recently articulated by Dianne Harris in her survey of the field published a year ago in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*.¹ Those acquainted with these new approaches to understanding our environment will immediately see the realization of these theories in *Hands on the Land*.

Gaining an understanding of human responses to a landscape through an interdisciplinary approach of component parts is not a new concept. This approach dates to the 1920s with the Annales School in France. In her survey, Harris suggests that as new methods of examination, such as poststructuralism, gender studies, postcolonialization theories, and Marxism, are applied to landscape subjects, insights will emerge that will inform observations and lead to deeper understandings of environmental history. She points out that approaches to date have focused on rather isolated, specific landscape developments, many of which are the products of a single man or cultural influence in Renaissance Italy, seventeenth-century France, and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and United States.²

Hands on the Land advances Harris’s “post-modernization of landscape” discussion to the next level in two important ways, spatially and chronologically. The focus of Albers’s study is not the isolated example of a single development or an individual, defined by either personal property or a single lifetime. Rather, *Hands on the Land* investigates the contents of an entire state (whose boundaries, granted, are arbitrary accidents of both geography and politics) and the environmental responses of all who have lived there from the times of pre-European settlements to the present. By observing how multiple factors—geological, environmental, agricultural, social, cultural, political, and economic—within the state’s boundaries have influenced its residents and, in turn, by defining how the state’s inhabitants have had significant impacts on environmental and cultural systems, we see the evolution of much larger networks of economic consequences and environmental attitudes. Clearly Vermont is succinctly captured in the slogan “Vermont is a way of life.”



Hands on the Land is divided into five chapters that roughly coincide with significant environmental attitudes or political changes in the state’s history: “Native Vermont”; “Claiming the Land, 1609–1791”; “The Classic Agrarian Landscape, 1791–1860”; “Creating Vermont’s Yankee Kingdom, 1860–1945”; and “Choosing Vermont, 1945 to the Present.” Each chapter is infused with general national trends and informed with specific examples (often in sidebars) and statistics. Spinning these various threads into discussions of economic and environmental consequences, Albers skillfully describes how Vermont residents responded to different environmental, social, and economic realities, and by doing so, created (and sustained) a unique environment. In short, she explains why the landscape of Vermont looks the way it does.

In chapter four (“Creating Vermont’s Yankee Kingdom, 1860–1945”), for instance, the author begins with a description of the life and influential environmental attitudes espoused by Vermont native George Perkins Marsh in his work *Man and Nature* (1864). Albers tells us that, having witnessed firsthand radical modifications of Vermont’s landscape (the clearing of forests for agricultural purposes), Marsh presented a national audience with evidence that “Cutting the trees had led to climatic warming, soil erosion, and a cycle of flash flood and drought in mountain streams. The more technology man developed, the greater was his capacity to destroy the environment.” Marsh’s observations coincided with difficult agrarian times in Vermont: in the years after 1860, “the landscape reached its lowest point as the state’s fragile soils gave out, deforestation ran rampant, the economy struggled in the face of competition from the opening West, and the population was hard-pressed to maintain itself.”

opposite

A dairy barn and church in Peacham, Vermont.

above

The Vermont Board of Agriculture produced this pamphlet in 1895 to attract tourists to one of the nation’s most rural states.

(images from *Hands on the Land*)



Developers carved this housing tract out of farmland in Williston, Vermont. (from *Hands on the Land*)

Sheep gave way to cows, and soon Vermont dairy farming became popular as new attitudes about farming ("scientific farming") took hold. These new attitudes were not so much environmentally oriented as they were morally based, according to Albers: "A moral landscape was a rational, productive and well-maintained landscape, with a proper mix of elements presented in an attractive form. The tidiness of the classical villages of the previous ages was now making its way into the countryside." Albers describes mid-nineteenth-century American attitudes about rural life ("The whole farm must, in a sense, come under the moral sway of an American version of the Victorian cult of domesticity, where the home and family lay at the heart of good citizenship") and then discusses the decline between 1850 and 1900 of the percentage of the state's population engaged in agricultural activities—from 52.2 to 36.6 percent. This decline resulted in the rise of extractive activities such as logging, stonecutting, and mineral mining; the abandonment of farms; and the subsequent deforestation of much of the state. Yet the scale of industrialization was small, and urbanization did not happen; from about 1870 onward, Vermont was possibly America's most rural state. Looking to develop new economic opportunities, enterprising residents and elected officials from the nineteenth century's end until World War II realized the value of marketing their rural, nonindustrialized state to tourists and implemented strategies that capitalized on the state's environmental character and the collective personality of its residents. In the space of this one chapter, covering less than a century, the author identifies and explains a broad range of topics, trends, and themes that illustrate how changing human values, economic realities, and agricultural attitudes have altered the Vermont landscape. Other chapters are similarly successful.

Hands on the Land should certainly have broad appeal. The text is easy to read and informative, even without footnotes, and the format is engaging (some may find the constant appearance of sidebars distracting, but I did not). The illustrations are varied and numerous, though more maps of the state, from the USGS or a good atlas, would be welcome additions (if there is a glaring omission, this is it). Production qualities are excellent and, thankfully, there are no strident diatribes or militant calls for action at the text's conclusion, though dire consequences are implied for the "Vermont way of life" without the informed decisions this book aims to facilitate.

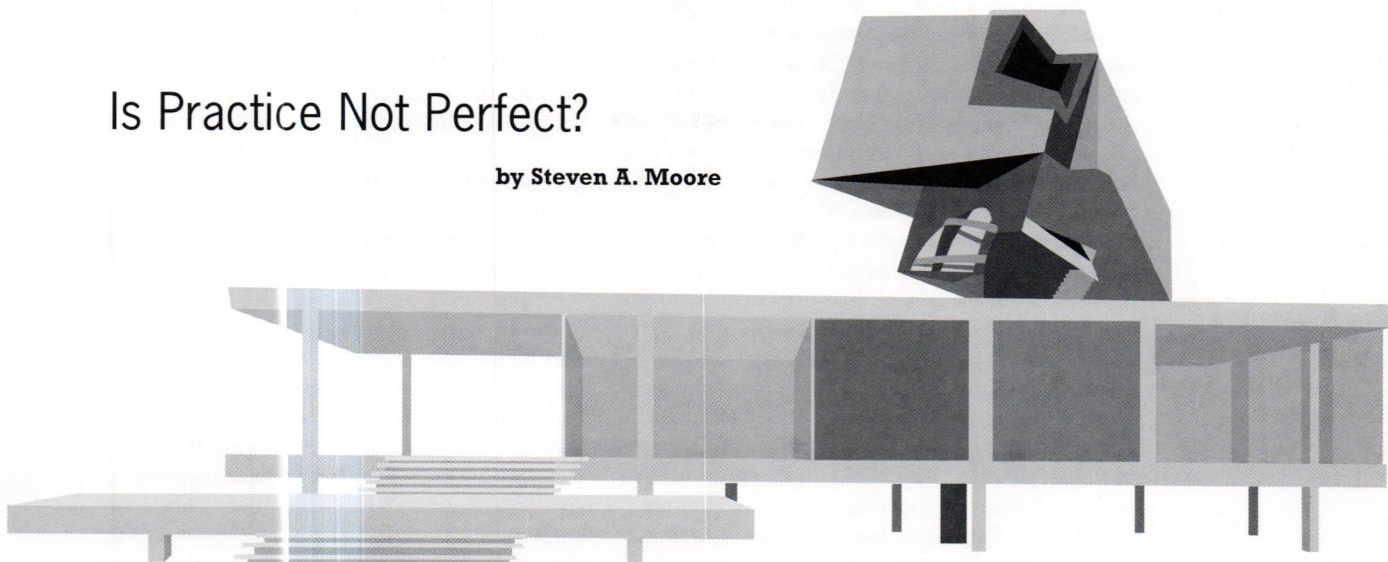
But with the potential of such a broad appeal, does *Hands on the Land* lose its effectiveness among specialized audiences? It would be unfortunate if that happens. Albers identifies and examines topics that have informed land-use patterns and environmental attitudes over the past four centuries in Vermont. In concept and realization, the book is like a big tent under which many can stand, regardless of individual interests, economic or social status, age, academic background, or professional discipline. In fact, that broad appeal may be the most important thing about *Hands on the Land*. Members of the general public will be enlightened by what is here and even motivated to examine other states and environments using the book's innovative format. The book's concept and format may inspire academics to take their research in new directions. Vermont residents, better informed about relevant land-use issues than their predecessors, are now equipped to make more informed decisions. Ultimately, the impact of *Hands on the Land* should be felt not only in Vermont, but throughout the country as well. ■

Notes

- 1 Dianne Harris, "The Postmodernization of Landscape: A Critical Historiography," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 58 (September 1999): 434–43.
- 2 Though Harris offers a comprehensive survey of the published milestones of landscape studies, she could have added to her list the work of environmental historian William Cronon and studies of vernacular landscapes by John Brinkerhoff Jackson and his intellectual heir, John Stilgoe.

Is Practice Not Perfect?

by Steven A. Moore



Reflections on Architectural Practices in the Nineties is a collection of short essays by forty-two authors who participated in a year-long symposium convened at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design (GSD). The symposium might best be understood as a summit of architectural practitioners, critics, and theorists who were charged with the examination of a perceived crisis in architectural practice. The perception shared by many is that the discipline of architecture, as distinct from the profession, has reached a new low in cultural relevance and authority.

Reflections is a welcome contribution to architectural discourse in two regards: First, the conversational format of the text is itself a thoughtful critique of contemporary publishing formats. Second, these competing views of contemporary architectural practice offer a much-needed platform from which to consider both the role of the profession within society, and the ever-widening rift between the theory and practice of architecture. Practice, in the authors' collective view, is the principal lens through which architecture should be theorized. The implicit argument is that, rather than import values from other disciplines such as philosophy or cultural criticism, architecture might construct values by critically reflecting upon its own experience.

The symposium, which culminated in four public colloquia, was conceived and organized by a group of ten GSD faculty and alumni. These same contributors subsequently collaborated in the publication of the text under the editorial direction of William S. Saunders. Saunders and his collaborators have done an exceptional job of editing what was originally, I suspect, a very diffuse conversation. The format of the book is neither a conference "proceeding"—which would generally reproduce scholarly papers without editing—nor a traditional compendium of essays—

Reflections on Architectural Practices in the Nineties

edited by William S. Saunders
Princeton Architectural Press, 1996
272 pp., \$18.95

which would edit contributions in response to an editorial theme. Compendiums are not fully discursive texts, because contributors get only one chance to speak. In contrast, this book is a hermeneutic construction in itself, in that the editors attempt to reconstruct the conversational nature of the original symposium. This conversational structure resembles that of the Torah, in which successive generations of rabbinical scholars pursue a conversation that leads them toward a common interpretation of reality.

Readers of DBR certainly appreciate the recent historical changes that have occurred in the publishing industry. Economic conditions have most recently spawned a variety of new publication formats. For example, the distinction between the monograph and the firm brochure has been blurred by the narrowing distinction between authors and writers for hire. Many have argued that these structural changes in the publishing industry reflect the general postmodern shift away from authorship and master narratives. Others have argued that this blurring of interests reflects only the increased influence of flexible capital on what gets published. In the case of the Harvard text, however, the innovative design of the book succeeds as a convincing, serious attempt to reflect the hermeneutic possibilities of public conversation.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois, 1945-51 and Eric Owen Moss Architects, The Box, Culver City, California, 1994. The authors in *Reflections* consider the rift between theory and practice and call on the profession to develop values by critically reflecting upon its own history.
(illustration by Zaldy Serrano)

Steven A. Moore has practiced architecture in New England and is currently an associate professor of architecture at the University of Texas at Austin, where he is director of the Design with Climate program. His writing has appeared in *Design Book Review*, the *Journal of Architectural Education*, and *Center*. Moore's book, *Technology and Place: Sustainable Architecture and the Blueprint Farm*, was published this year by the University of Texas Press.

The editor of *Reflections on Architectural Practices* uses a subtext format to supplement the voice of the principal speaker, by entering related comments by another symposium participant on the bottom quarter of the page. This format is, of course, similar to the traditional design of a foot-noted text, except that each essay in the Harvard book also includes endnotes. Many of these essays, then, come with two layers of subtext—one layer is derived from the immediate oral discussion and the other from the general literature. The resulting intertextuality feels more convincing than in recent other attempts to use subtext, or supertext, as a graphic convention. Lucy Lippard, for example, uses the supertext format in her 1997 book, *The Lure of the Local*, to distinguish between description (which runs along the top third of the page) and analysis (which runs along the bottom two-thirds).¹ Whereas more than one person was speaking at the Harvard colloquia, in Lippard's book, both voices are her own. As a result, Lippard's text is contrived because all the voices are in her own head.

The use of images in the Harvard book is less successful than in Lippard's. The designer seems more interested in the graphic impact of the page than in amplifying the text with salient visual information. In many cases, photographs of buildings are used only to identify the speaker with an architectural product. In these cases the images are distracting because they tend to reify the ideas presented. In other words, the insertion of images unrelated to the conversation at hand tends to subvert ideas by linking the contributor's authority to well-known architectural objects. This is a small complaint, however, for a book that is otherwise very well edited and designed. A brief review of the book's content would be more helpful than a line-by-line critique.

In the introduction, GSD Dean Peter Rowe tells the reader that architects themselves observe a crisis in the conditions of contemporary practice. That crisis is evoked, first, by the ever more rapid cycles of economic boom and bust. Architects are either overemployed, with too little time for critical reflection, or underemployed, with too little social authority to alter conditions. These cycles are, of course, only symptomatic of structural changes occurring in the global economy that architects serve. The Harvard summit therefore sought to engage the profession in speculation about the future of practice and the corresponding challenges to

be faced by education. However, as the sociologist Magali Sarfatti Larson makes clear in her contribution, "Patronage and Power," the very idea of professional self-examination is impossible because practice is always already "heteronomous." She means by this invented term that architectural practice is a public, rather than a self-serving or autonomous, discourse. In her view, then, critical examination of practice must emerge from heterogeneous sources.

To the credit of the symposium organizers, of the forty-two contributors, at least ten are neither architects nor planners. Geographer David Harvey, sociologists Larson and Sharon Zukin, historian Margaret Henderson Floyd, economist William Lazonick, and literary critic Bruce Robbins consistently offer the most incisive critiques of architecture's condition. This is so, one suspects, because outsiders are better able to appreciate the conditions of professional practice from a historical perspective.

The book is organized into four general themes: "Overviews of Architectural Practice and Education," "Professional Responsibilities and Ethics," "Forms and Frames of Practice," and "The Global Economy and Architecture." There are, predictably, too many streams of discussion in these four sections to document in a short review. Nor does Rowe's conclusion offer a consensus as to how the profession might be salvaged. There is, however, a recurring theme in the texts by Roger Ferris, Thomas Fisher, George Baird, Carl Sapers, John Morris Dixon, and Rob Wellington Quigley, as well as nearly all the nonarchitects. These contributors argue that the profession has lost its authority in society because it has lost its "public purpose." According to this view, architects are granted the status of professionals by society—which is a kind of privilege in the marketplace—in return for accepting a fiduciary responsibility to guard public health, safety, and welfare. These contributors also observe that the willingness of society to grant architects a virtual monopoly in the design of the built world wanes to the degree that architects are perceived to be serving their own interests, or those of their greedy clients, rather than those of society. Larson argues most cogently that the profession of architecture emerged within the historic structure of patronage as a contradictory social practice: "On the one hand, designers are free to develop a discourse in which two-dimensional drawings (and the words that explain them) prefigure a building. On the other hand, the three-dimensional building embodies the designer's dependence on the patron's power as well as on the executants' technical skills." In other words, architects may control the discourse of expressive intent but are helpless in the world without the money of patrons and the material techniques of builders.

According to Larson, architects have historically tried to subvert this contradiction by assuming the stature of artists. The delusion has been to imagine that the fame of an architect as an image maker might eclipse the power of the patron. The historical reality has demonstrated, however, that not only have the patrons retained control of the cash flow, but in the process of becoming artists, architects have lost control of the material processes by which their drawings are realized. They have lost ground on both fronts: architects are seen by society as both self-indulgent and powerless to protect public interests.

If there is modest agreement among some of the Harvard authors regarding the cause of the profession's decline, there is a slimmer agreement regarding strategies for its salvation. Larson identifies four alternative courses available to the profession: First, architects can continue to claim autonomy by asserting the superiority of art over technology. Second, the profession might try to legitimize itself by appropriating the methods of science. The research-based projects of those who are affiliated with the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) are an example of this strategy. Third, architects might again become the directors of technology—a path that is increasingly blocked by engineers. And fourth, architects might attempt to become their own clients. Larson clearly favors a path that would reject the first alternative and demystify the structure of patronage. In the place of contemporary artistic practice she recommends the development of an empirical science that is implicitly required by alternatives two and three. In this recommendation she shares the position argued by Fisher and by Sapers—that architects should embrace, rather than avoid, responsibility for material production. These authors observe that in a free-market society, one is valued and rewarded in proportion to the risk one is willing to accept. Sapers further argues that architects should “see the legislative process as an ally, not as an oppressor” and that the AIA (or its successor) should be held more accountable for the well-being of its members. These legal strategies smack, however, of the professional chauvinism that has earned lawyers such public condemnation.

In contrast to Sapers, Fisher argues that architects might adopt the medical model of practice in which, as “general practitioners,” architects would assemble teams of specialists to solve our clients’ problems. This paradigm, which has a consortia of specialized independent practitioners become partners for individual projects, reflects the demand for structural flexibility under market pressures that Harvey documents in his contribu-

tion. Harvey, among others, observes that the bureaucratized structure of large service corporations lacks the leanness and diagnostic depth to quickly respond to rapidly changing conditions in the global market. Harvey is not proposing, however, that architects simply become the plumbers of flexible capital by increasing the rates at which information and money flow. Those architects who specialize, for example, in the design of “smart buildings” best demonstrate that path of compliance. Saskia Sassen argues that such new building types facilitate the increasing centralization of economic power by channeling the flows of information and capital through specific corporate locales. Like Sassen, Harvey holds out for a more critical, and public-minded, position for the profession.

Harvey’s hopes for critical practice are echoed in Lazonick’s observation that, since the 1960s, the economy of the United States has been engaged in the transition from an era of “value creation” to an era of “value extraction.” Sadly, conventional architectural practice has been fully complicit in the corporate investor’s project of value extraction. K. Michael Hays reminds us, however, that by developing a political conscience, architects may ironically subvert their own position. Hays argues that as long as architecture is practiced as a service profession, meaning that it responds only to the value-creating forces of progressives or, conversely, to the value-extracting forces of capital, architectural knowledge will dissolve in the acidic solutions of economic and political ideologies. This logic suggests that, while architecture cannot be autonomous, as Larson astutely observes, neither should architecture allow itself to be subsumed by other discourses. If the profession is to survive, architects must make a compelling case that they produce knowledge that is uniquely valuable to the interests of society.

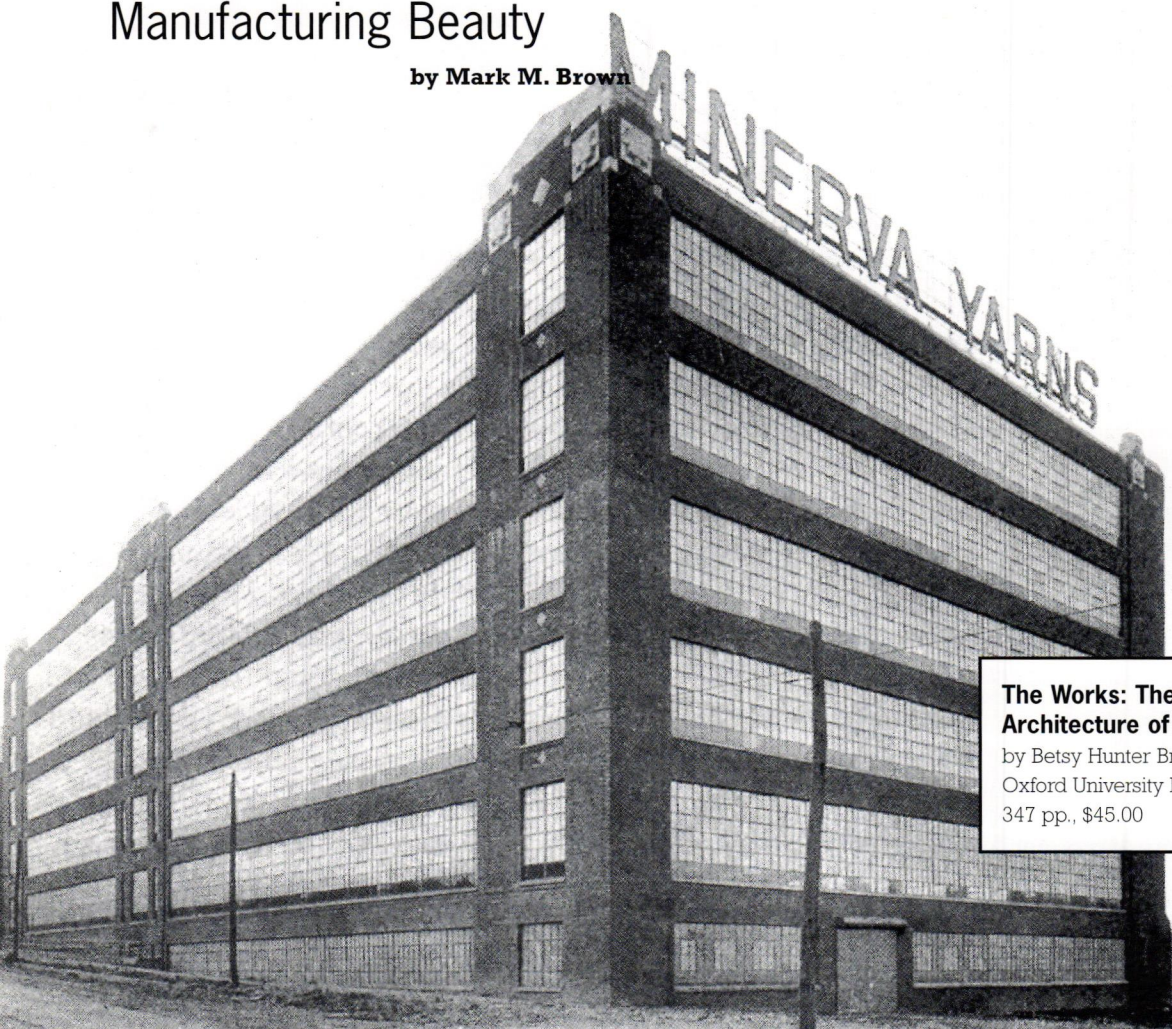
The reader leaves this conversation with some hope that the profession has begun to identify a common horizon that might carry us forward in a truly public discussion regarding the social value of architectural knowledge.² At the very least, Harvard should be congratulated for making their own conversation available to a broader audience. ■

Notes

- 1 Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997).
- 2 Readers interested in pursuing the discussion of value in architecture will want to see the compendium of essays edited by Michael Benedikt, *Center 10: Value* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997).

Manufacturing Beauty

by Mark M. Brown



The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States

by Betsy Hunter Bradley
Oxford University Press, 1999
347 pp., \$45.00

Mark M. Brown is a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow at Pennsylvania State University. He has spent more than three years documenting heavy industry and transportation for the Historic American Engineering Record. His 1994 dissertation, completed at the University of Pittsburgh, is titled "The Architecture of Steel: Site Planning and Building Type in the Nineteenth-Century American Bessemer Steel Industry." His article, titled "Nineteenth-Century Cable-Stayed Bridges in Texas," was published in the *Proceedings of the Fifth Historic Bridges Conference* (Columbus, Ohio: Burgess & Niple, Ltd., 1997).

With the publication of *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States*, Betsy Hunter Bradley and Oxford University Press have made an important contribution to the study and preservation of industrial architecture. In her survey of American industrial building, Bradley clarifies confusing and contradictory terminology, traces the development of the structural elements and the production systems of industrial buildings, examines aesthetic ideas, and raises provocative issues for future exploration.

The recent flurry of research on industrial architecture has its origins in the 1960s.¹ Many of the current generation of scholars, including Bradley, had their first serious intellectual encounters with industrial architecture while conducting surveys and writing landmark nominations for the National Register of Historic Places. Efforts to save American industrial buildings came late in the historic preservation movement. Forty years ago, historic preservation gained momentum in the United States as Americans saw the wanton destruction of the urban renewal and interstate highway projects of the early 1960s. The motiva-

tion for the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was not the loss of textile mills, foundries, or vibrant ethnic communities, but the destruction of such "high" architectural monuments as New York's Pennsylvania Station. Only after preservationists had challenged postwar modernist architecture, affirming the legitimacy of the endless styles of American eclectic architecture, did they turn their attention to the rest of the built environment—one rife with the infrastructure of America's industrialization. Indeed, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), which specializes in the documentation of industrial sites and engineering structures, was the last of the "new preservation" programs created in the 1960s.²

If we may see the historic preservation movement reacting to the excesses of post-World War II expansion, then the recent interest in industrial architecture largely responds to the industrial collapse of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Much current underlying research and activity springs from efforts to redevelop abandoned industrial sites or from the documentation of buildings scheduled for demolition. Ironically, it took the wholesale loss of

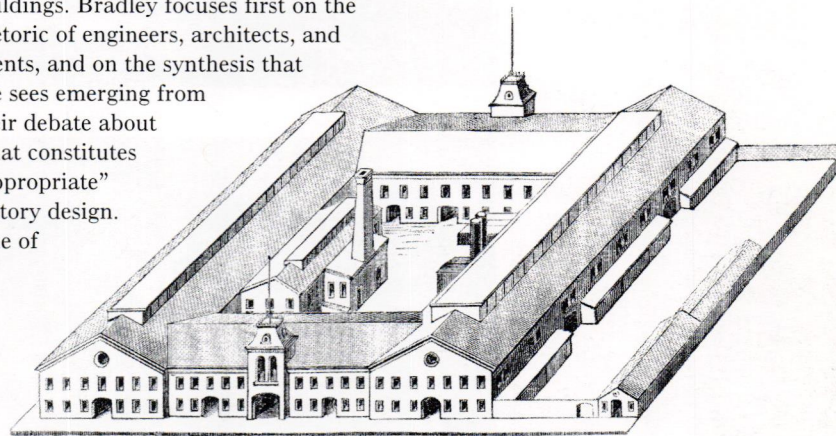
our industrial heritage to overcome the preservation movement's deeply rooted anti-industrial nostalgia. For some, the attraction of industrial architecture is neither an interest in the social construction of industrial spaces—an approach related to vernacular architecture—nor a sense of nostalgic loss. Instead, many are attracted by the formal aesthetic qualities of the often stark industrial structures. This is a complicated issue that Bradley seeks to address at the end of her study. Such aesthetic responses may well relate to the emergence of minimalist art in the 1960s and to the precisionism of Charles Sheeler.

Bradley's *The Works*—named after the term used to describe nineteenth-century industrial complexes—is organized into three major topics: terminology and typology, factors governing design, and aesthetic issues. As is appropriate for a standard reference work, Bradley spends considerable effort in the first section clarifying such vague terms as “mill” and “factory,” which can be problematic for both the general reader and the specialist. She furthers this enterprise with a sizeable, if not exhaustive, glossary that deserves widespread adoption. The second and most substantial section of *The Works* expands Bradley's encyclopedic approach to the development of various components of industrial buildings. Examples include power distribution, and wall, roof, and fire-suppression systems, which together formed what Bradley calls the “engineered factory.”

Bradley proposes the term “engineered factory” in opposition to the recent work of Lindy B. Biggs, although she does not explicitly state this. In her 1996 book, *The Rational Factory: Architecture, Technology, and Work in America's Age of Mass Production*, Biggs featured two provocative ideas: the “master machine” and the “rational factory.” For Biggs, the “new” profession of industrial engineering emerged in the early twentieth century. For such engineers, industrial buildings were the master machines controlling and facilitating production by equipment and workers. One goal of these industrial engineers was a self-contained works that produced a finished product from raw materials. This goal required close integration of the factory building with systematic improvements in production layout, material handling, specialized machinery, and a reorganized labor force. According to Biggs, such rational factory planning came to fruition during the decades around the turn of the century in the collaboration between the Ford Motor Company and Albert Kahn's architectural-engineering firm. Such planning also drew on the scientific management ideas associated with Frederick W. Taylor.

Bradley, however, has assembled much evidence clearly showing that industrial firms had a long tradition of such innovation and deliberate planning. From this perspective, the only innovation concerning the “rational factory” was the term itself. The term originated in the marketing goals of industrial engineers seeking to depict themselves as having a distinctive expertise that manufacturers needed to build a profitable factory. But while Bradley avoids the term “rational factory,” she expands the term “master machine” to include the close integration between line shafting used in preelectricity-era textile mills and between overhead traveling cranes in the metal-framed sheds of foundries and steel works.

The Works concludes with a discussion of the aesthetic component of American industrial buildings. Bradley focuses first on the rhetoric of engineers, architects, and clients, and on the synthesis that she sees emerging from their debate about what constitutes “appropriate” factory design. One of



Bradley's most important accomplishments is assembling an extensive body of writing on aesthetics by American factory (and bridge) engineers. These writings, she suggests, document a shared concept of “functional beauty.” Engineers considered this a new category of beauty, which belonged with such established aesthetic concepts as “elegance,” the “sublime,” the “picturesque,” and the “beautiful.” Functional beauty is “the perfect adaptation of means to an end.” Or in more familiar terms, the engineers combined the Vitruvian ideals of *utilitas* and *firmitas*. On the other hand, the rhetoric of American architects more closely followed the Albertian focus on architectural beauty as ornament. In 1943 Sir Nikolaus Pevsner expressed a similar view in his famous quote: “A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture.” The schism between the professions would not have been an issue were it not for their shared view that the vast scale of industrial buildings and new materials—the most problematic being reinforced concrete—required an agreeable appearance.

opposite

The Ballinger construction firm called this 1922 reinforced concrete mill in Bridgeport, Pennsylvania, an “All-Window ‘Daylight’ Building” and claimed it admitted more light than the ordinary concrete building.
(from *The Works*)

This 1875 proposal for a factory for architectural ironwork featured the popular hollow-square arrangement for industrial buildings.
(from *The Works*)

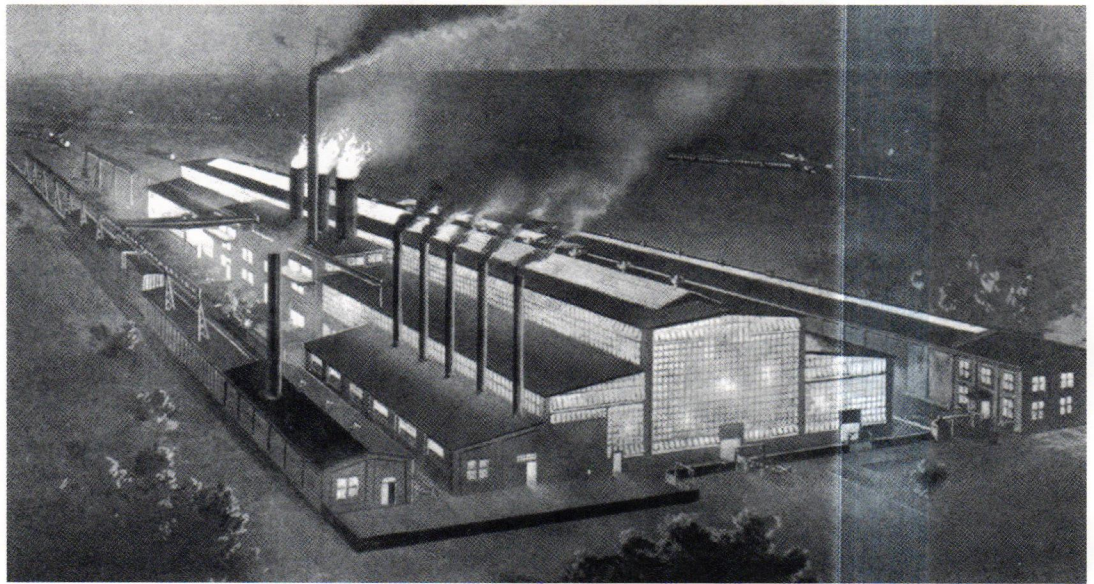
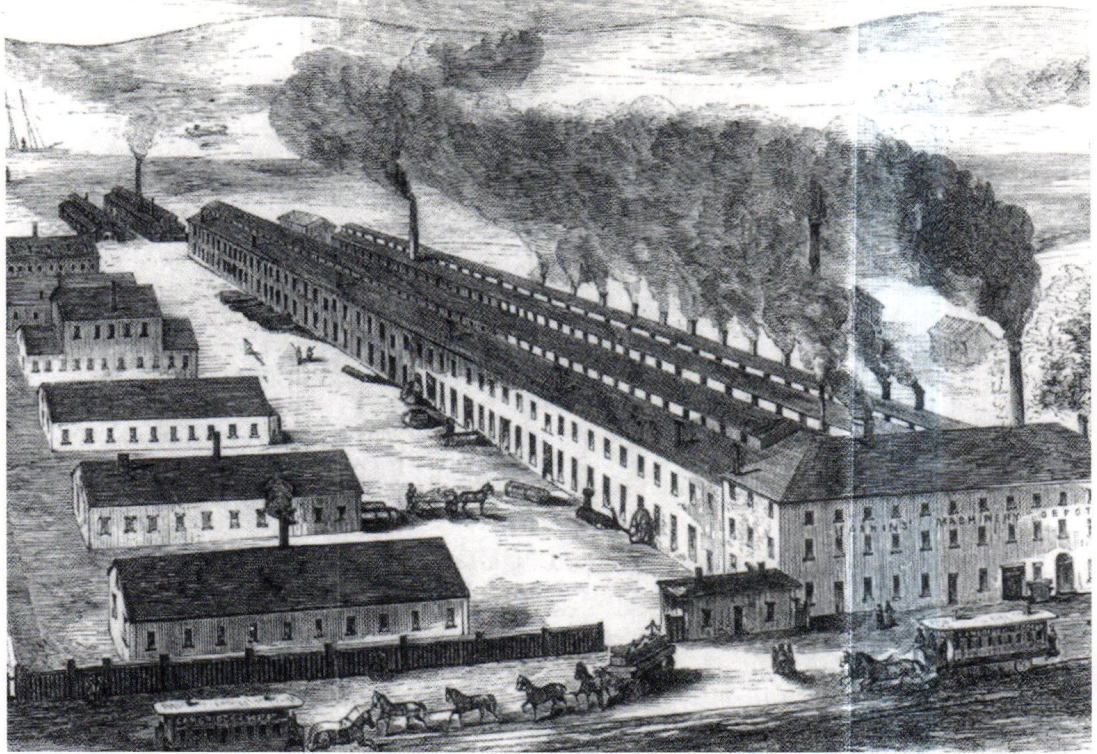
top

The Davenport & Bridges' Car Manufactory in Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, 1857.

bottom

Steel-framed sash windows, like those used in the Buffalo Foundry Company of 1903, allowed manufacturers to let more light into the factory.

(images from *The Works*)



This schism between engineer and architect was resolved, at least with respect to industrial architecture, by the mediation of European avant-garde architects. The Europeans, as Reyner Banham has shown in his 1986 book, *A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture, 1900–1925*, justified their faith in the machine by citing the work of American engineers. En route to Kahn's sleek, industrial modernism, both engineers and architects experimented with a variety of approaches, including the corbeled bricks of the American round-arched style, studied in Kathleen Curran's 1988 article, "The German Rundbogenstil and Reflections on the American Round-Arched Style"

and in Susan Kay Appel's 1990 dissertation on American breweries. Following Terry Smith's views offered in his book *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America*, Bradley argues that the aesthetics of American industrial buildings were different from European high-style modernism. The distinction for Bradley and Smith was that American factory buildings were truly functional, while Europeans expressed functionalism symbolically.³

Bradley's discussion of industrial modernism raises provocative questions. The endless self-promoting rhetoric of architects, engineers, clients, critics, and historians makes it problematic to separate the actual from the symbolically functional

in architecture. For example, the stark contrast between Kahn's 1926 open hearth steel plant, constructed at the Ford River Rouge works in Dearborn, Michigan, and contemporary American open hearths suggests that Kahn could express the functional just as symbolically as European architects. Indeed, it would have been more appropriate to compare American factories to contemporary European factories rather than to such high-style architecture as Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer's 1912 office building for the Fagus Shoe Last factory. The answer to the question of symbolic versus actual functionality may require engineering analysis of the structures—a skill that few architectural historians have or seem inclined to acquire. Likewise, as historians of industrial architecture pursue the issue of industrial modernism, it is important to remember that other new fields have often found it useful to argue their legitimacy by pointing to an influence on modern art. There should no longer be a need for this, however, as industrial architecture is significant in its own right.

The organization of *The Works* is in part a function of the relative newness of industrial architecture as a field of academic study. Two-thirds of the book is devoted to defining and setting the text for future study. Indeed, readers may find the discussion of wall and monorail systems reminiscent of an architectural style handbook. Only reminiscent, however, because Bradley does not provide the level of detail needed to do the industrial equivalent of making the distinctions between, say, regional examples of Georgian and Federal. Nor is there much emphasis on chronological development, as might be expected if this were a survey following the tradition of Sir Banister Fletcher's *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*. Nevertheless, the level of information that Bradley does present will be very useful for dating and assessing the integrity of industrial buildings. By codifying the terminology and firmly establishing the dates that building systems were introduced, Bradley has moved industrial architecture scholarship to a position where it can move beyond the framework of Daniel Nelson's *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880–1920*.⁴

The vast amount of information in *The Works* will shape the research agendas of industrial archeologists, preservationists, and architectural historians. Bradley, for example, raises the important question of whether industrial buildings were leaders in innovative building technologies. Much tedious work making specific comparisons to nonindustrial buildings lies ahead. Conceived by the publisher as a companion to Robert B. Gordon and Patrick M. Malone's 1994 *The Texture of Industry: An Archaeological View of the Industrialization of North America*, and the

Society of Architectural Historians' monumental state-by-state survey, *Buildings of the United States*, the present volume has a strong geographical focus on the northeast and to a lesser extent on the industrial Midwest. This is understandable given the true scale of the topic and the substantial, even critical, project support by the Hagley Museum and Library. Indeed, the vast majority of the wonderful illustrations are from the Hagley's extraordinary collections. While the subtitle, *The Industrial Architecture of the United States*, was probably dictated by the publisher's marketing department, it nevertheless presents a challenge and a charge to all those working in the field. There are real needs to test Bradley's findings over a broader geographical range, to expand coverage to include a wider variety of building types, and to exploit the primary research in the HAER collections. ■

Notes

- 1 Examples include Reyner Banham, *A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture, 1900–1925* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986); Betsy Bahr, "New England Mill Engineering: Rationalization and Reform in Textile Mill Design, 1790–1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1987); Susan K. Appel, "The Mid-Western Brewery before Prohibition: Development of an American Industrial Building Type" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1990); Amy Slaton, "Aesthetics of a Modern Industry: Buildings of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad's Scranton Yards," *IA: The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology* 22 (1996): 25–39; Lindy B. Biggs, *The Rational Factory: Architecture, Technology, and Work in America's Age of Mass Production* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); James Michael Buckley, "A Factory without a Roof: The Company Town in the Redwood Lumber Industry," in Annmarie Adams and Sally McMurry, eds. *Exploring Everyday Landscapes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 75–92; Slaton, *Reinforced Concrete and the Modernization of American Building, 1900–1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- 2 Eric DeLony, "HAER and the Recording of Technological Heritage: Reflections on 30 Years' Work," *IA: The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology* 25 (1999): 5–28.
- 3 Kathleen Curran, "The German Rundbogenstil and Reflections on the American Round-Arched Style," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 47 (December 1988): 351–73; and Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- 4 Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880–1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).

Community Builder

by Kenneth Frampton

Despite the vast influence media has on the world in which we live, we are still subject to a lack of information with regard to world culture. This shortfall is due in part to inexplicable, possibly unconscious prejudices. Thus, while we are momentarily informed on Japan, we hardly know anything about India, Australia, or South Africa. Alternatively, while we are *au courant* on Spain, Portugal, France, and Germany, we know less about current practice in Scandinavia—apart, that is, from Finland. We have even less hope of staying informed about the nature of certain specific architectural movements within these societies. For these reasons, *Erik Asmussen, architect*, by Gary Coates, with photographs by Susanne Siepl-Coates, is a particularly revealing work. Their book presents the work of a meticulous Danish architect who has spent most of his professional career in Sweden, working for various organizations inspired by Rudolf Steiner and producing a mode of building that, as Coates puts it, cuts across any stylistic distinctions we might care to make between the modern and the postmodern.

Erik Asmussen's architecture patently stems from what we may loosely identify as the revisionist tradition of the Baltic States. I am referring to a line of architects who, by the mid-1930s, had already repositioned themselves with regard to the abstract, white, flat-roofed architecture of the international avant-garde. I have in mind a range of work that even extends beyond Scandinavia, from the organicism of Hans Scharoun's model apartment block, designed for the Breslau, Poland, housing exhibition of 1929, to the montage approach adopted by Alvar Aalto in his 1934 house in Munkkelahti, Helsinki, or, say, Gunnar Asplund's brick-clad State Bacteriological Laboratories erected outside Stockholm in 1937. Asmussen had already become part of this tradition when he assisted the distinguished Swedish architect Nils Tesch on the design of the Solna High School, realized between 1945 and 1947—a neo-Asplundian work that exhibited a faceted roof profile that Asmussen himself would adopt in his maturity.



Erik Asmussen, architect

by Gary Coates
Byggförlaget, 1997
240 pp., \$60.00

Asmussen first encountered the architecture and philosophy of Steiner when he was thirty-five years old during a visit to Dornach, Switzerland, in 1947 while en route to Italy for a vacation. This was the year Asmussen became converted to Steiner's philosophy of anthroposophy, which posited that individuals could attain a higher level of consciousness that would allow them to have a cognitive experience of the spiritual world. This encounter would prove decisive for both himself and his wife, and two years later, in conjunction with other like-minded parents, they founded the Kristoffer-Waldorf School in Stockholm, an institution for which Asmussen would eventually realize a building some eighteen years later.

Starting an independent practice in 1960 at the age of forty-seven, Asmussen transformed the freely planned, informal functionalism that he had evolved with Tesch into a more organically planned, largely wood-framed, timber-clad manner. Displaying a plasticity influenced by Steiner's architectural organicism, as had first been embodied in the Dornach Anthroposophical headquarters in the 1920s, Asmussen's new Kristoffer-Waldorf School was constructed on an undulating hilltop site and centered about a large one-thousand seat auditorium, which was built into the slope in order to accommodate a raked floor and a two-story basement. This large four-square building was flanked by pitched-roof classrooms with pavilions that were loosely arranged around two adjacent playgrounds and situated on the hillside beneath. Built in three phases between 1965 and 1990, the final building constructed at the complex was dedicated to handicraft and was symbolically located opposite the kindergarten, so that the youngest children could observe the oldest children and vice versa. For Asmussen, this reciprocal perspective provided each group with a sense of generational continuity.

Kenneth Frampton is the Ware Professor at the Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University, New York. His books include *Le Corbusier* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001) and the best-selling *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 3rd ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992).



Asmussen's preoccupation with psychosocial and spiritual well-being may seem naïve to those of us who live on the cutting edge of a postsocialist, global society, in which the idea of patriotism, let alone spiritual community, appears almost obsolete. Only in the Swedish welfare state, perhaps, does one feel that such an idiosyncratic communal project could be brought to fruition and maintained over a forty-year period, without any evidence of decline.

Following the completion of the first phase of the Kristoffer-Waldorf School in 1967, Asmussen devoted his entire professional activity to the Steiner movement, most particularly to the development and expansion of the Rudolf Steiner Seminar and Vidar Clinic at Järna, situated on the Baltic Sea, south of Stockholm. The Anthroposophical settlement at Järna was an ideal Steiner community, complete with every essential amenity; Asmussen himself moved to Järna in 1976 and would live there until his death in 1998. For all intents and purposes, Asmussen would design every significant building in the Järna complex, covering a wide range of communal types, including a market garden, a farm school, dormitories, a kindergarten, a music school, a eurythmy house, a library, a clinic, and a culture house comprising a five-hundred-seat auditorium with supporting facilities and offices for the Swedish Anthroposophical Society. While Järna is by no means the sum of Asmussen's production, it remains nonetheless the spiritual core of his work, particularly the performance hall of the culture house. With its Goethean-inspired multicolored auditorium ceiling, painted by his lifelong colleague and fellow anthroposophist, the artist Arne Klingborg, and its carved wooden walls designed by the sculptor A. John Wilkes, the culture house represented Asmussen's closest reinterpretation of Steiner's original vision.

With its rhythmically alternating, expanding, and contracting volumes, its square plan with diagonally faceted corners; its hipped roofs and characteristically anthroposophic hooded windows, Asmussen's architecture is both stylistically eccentric and, in a sense, conventional. Something else is involved here, however, that is perhaps of greater import to our understanding of Asmussen's work, with implications that go beyond the Anthroposophical movement, for we may



identify here two generic attributes that Asmussen urges us, by example, to reintroduce into contemporary practice. The first of these concerns the possibility of returning in a modest way to the principles of vernacular building, not only in terms of the vertical timber board-and-batten construction that is typical of his work, but also with regard to the way in which his buildings are sited in the landscape. One notes the ways in which Asmussen's variously round, faceted, and pitched roofs and cut-out, cantilevered forms rhythmically respond to each other in much the same way as do traditional agrarian complexes, which are composed of the "organic" forms of stables, barns, cowsheds and silos, all of which, with their outriding fences, invariably blend into the landscape in a harmonious way. The second attribute is the primordially tectonic character of Asmussen's details, the "metamorphosis" of structural forms at every conceivable scale so as to embody Arthur Schopenhauer's perennial concern for the interaction between the load-bearing and the load-borne elements; an expressive interaction that is particularly evident in the column-beam system of the culture house foyer, where tall, carved cruciform timber columns are isomorphically related to the carved hexagonal marble bases on which they sit. An equally impressive, if less honorific, tectonic play obtains in the open balconies of the Ormen Lange dormitory block, where radiating flat spars splay out from the square columns supporting the balcony. These spars are further reiterated as radial elements so as to form a timber balustrade running down the length of the access gallery. In an age in which, as Hans Sedlmayr put it, we suffer from the "loss of center," Asmussen elected to embrace anthroposophy as a way of closing the cultural code, so as to be able to work within a sensitive, organic, but limited palette, as opposed to the infinite external cacophony of value-free form. ■

opposite

Erik Asmussen, east façade of the culture house at the anthroposophical settlement at Järna, 1988–92.

above left

Erik Asmussen and Arne Klingborg.

above right

Staff, patients, and guests celebrate Midsummer at the Vidar Clinic at Järna.

(images from Erik Asmussen, architect)

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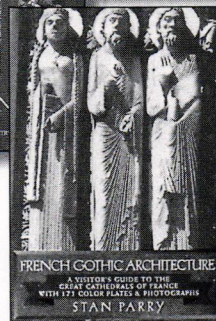
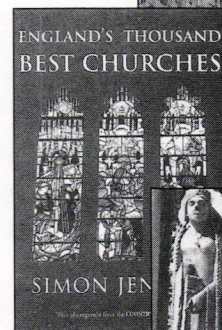
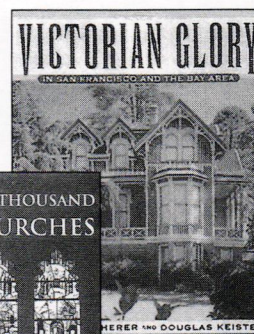
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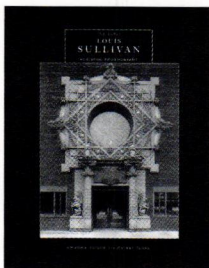
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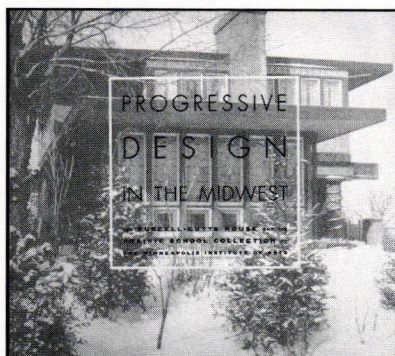
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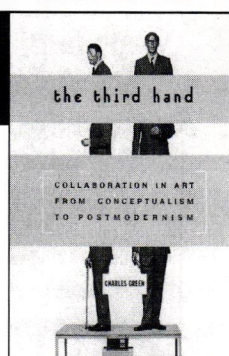
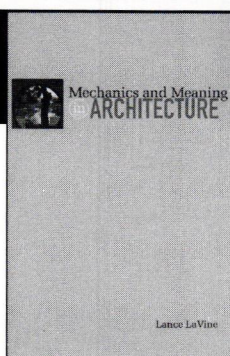
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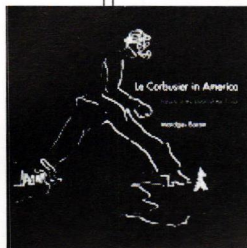
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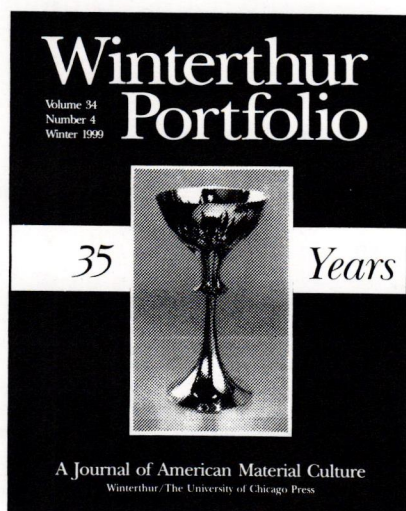
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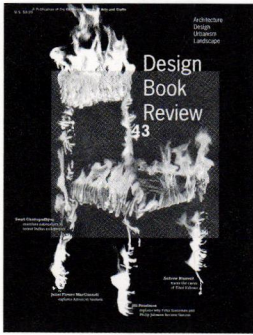
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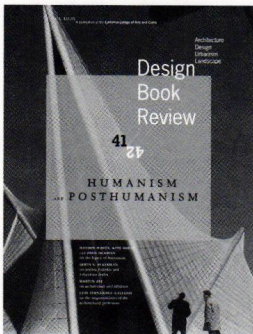


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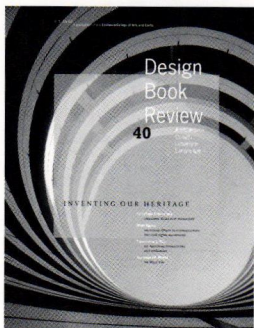


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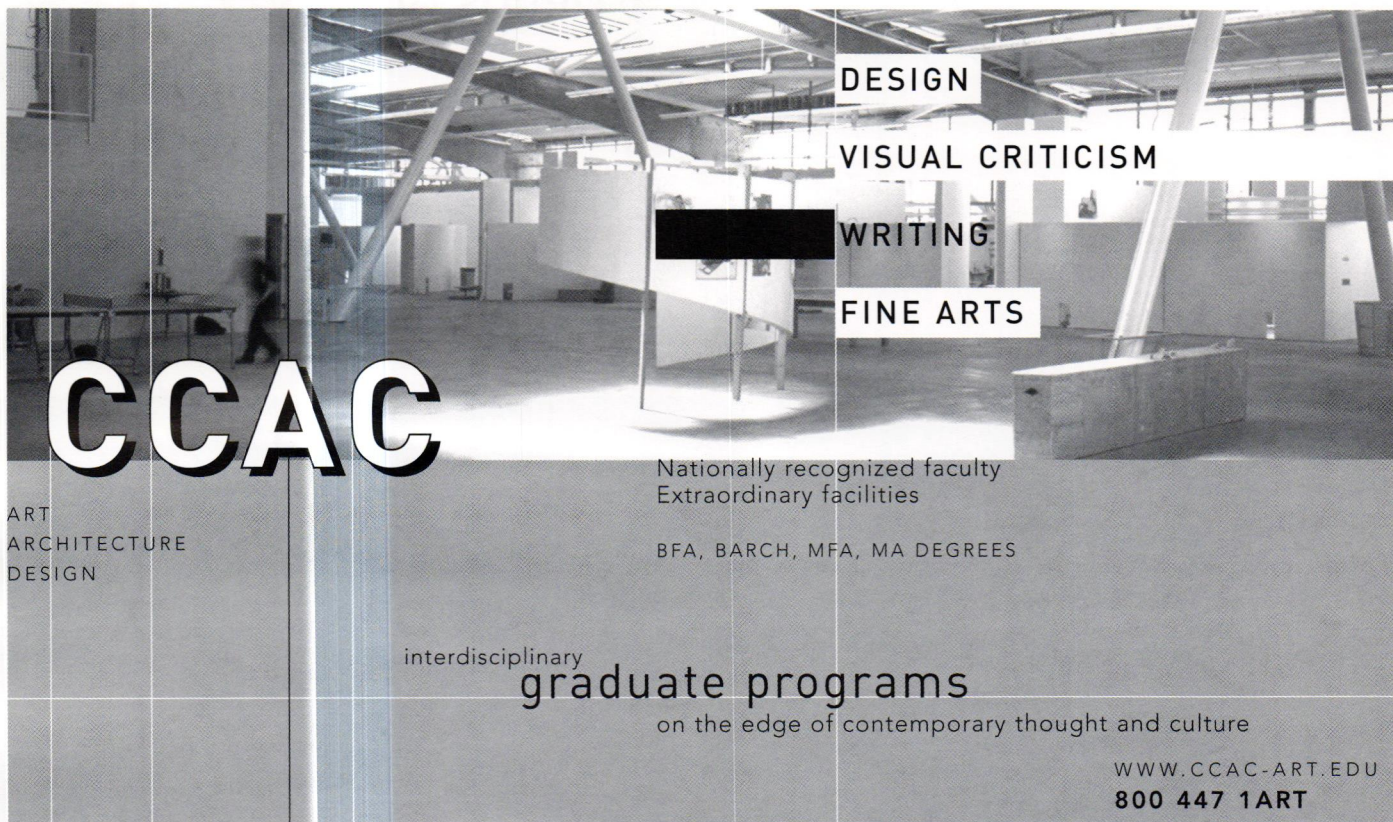
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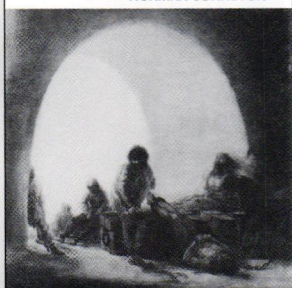
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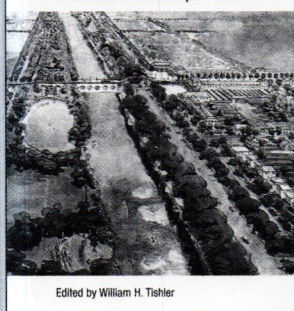


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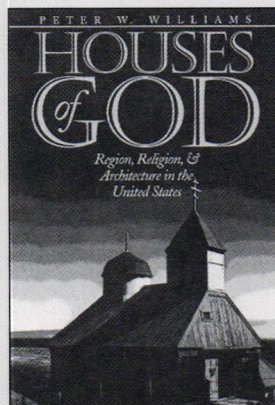
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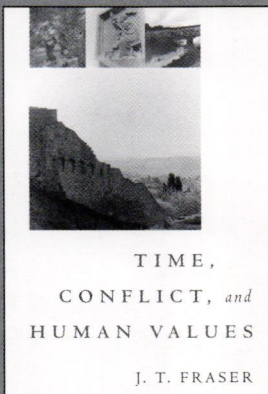
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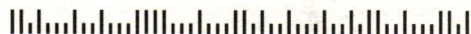
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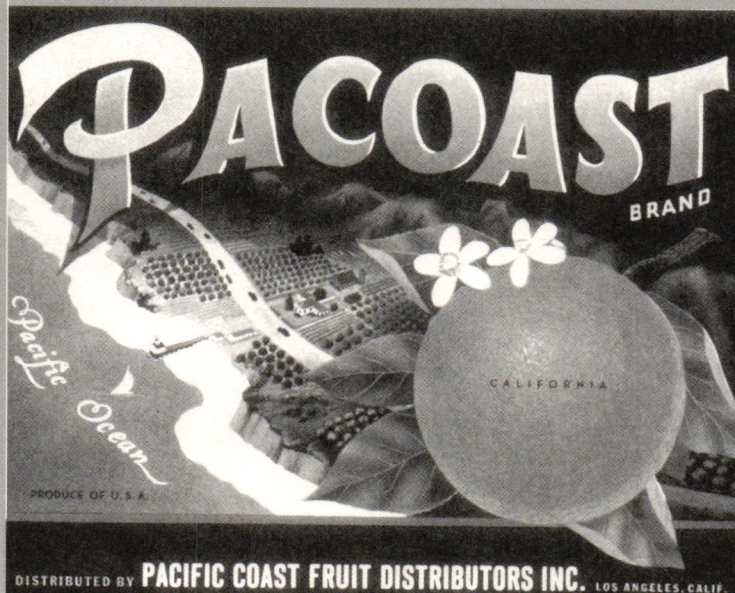
Front cover of George L. Mesker and Company's sheet-metal catalogue from 1902.

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

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California

Idyllic Eden, entertainment capital, food mecca, place of nonconformity and protest—California remains a center for artistic and architectural innovation. This special issue of DBR examines the different cultural, ethnic, and economic landscapes of the state, including the vast farms in the California Central Valley, the U.S.–Mexico border, countercultural communities, and postboom Silicon Valley. Writers analyze the work of the architects who defined the California lifestyle: Irving Gill, Richard Neutra, Rudolf Schindler, and William Wurster.



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].)

Coming up

DBR 46



Gwendolyn Wright
on the vocabulary of modern architecture

William Lake Douglas
on landscape architect Dan Kiley

Malcolm Quantrill
on Alvar Aalto

**Dan Kiley, Air Garden, United States Air Force Academy,
Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1968.**

(from Dan Kiley, *The Complete Works of America's Master
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Bulfinch Press, 1999).)