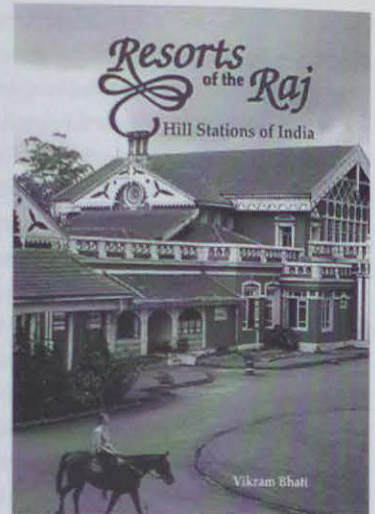


Book Reviews



Vikram Bhatt

Resorts of the Raj: Hill Stations of India

Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 1998

reviewed by Elizabeth Elbourne



Vikram Bhatt, *Resorts of the Raj*

VIKRAM BHATT'S VISUALLY stunning examination of the hill stations of British India, *Resorts of the Raj: Hill Stations of India*, is an arresting work. The book has two major components: a written analysis of the forces that created the hill stations, and the author's own striking photographs of the hill stations and their architecture today. As such the book straddles past and present. One of Bhatt's fundamental claims is, for example, that there exists a "need to explore how the sound physical planning, municipal and administrative organization of the Raj might serve as a vehicle in efforts to address the environmental crisis faced by people now suffering in the hill regions because of uncontrolled development" (23). The book thus both examines an aspect of India's vexed imperial past and, in a sense, celebrates a legacy which Bhatt attempts to re-appropriate for contemporary India.

This is certainly not an uncomplicated legacy. The very existence of the hill stations

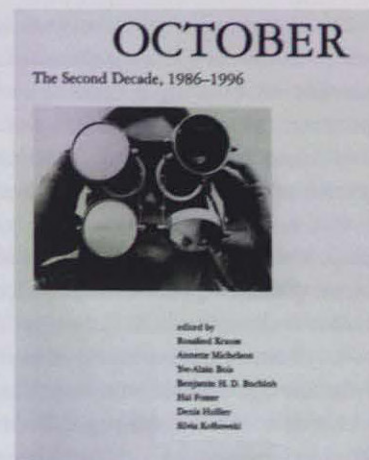
was rooted in the desire of the British to separate themselves physically not only from the heat and hurly-burly of the Indian plain but also, it would appear, from Indian life itself. The British found the climate of India intolerable. They tended to be homesick and to be convinced (with reason, Bhatt suggests) that India was unhealthy for European constitutions. From the early nineteenth century onwards, therefore, they built resorts in the hills, recreations of an imagined Britain, to which they retreated during the hottest period of the year. Women and children would stay for longer periods, to be joined by their men folk during summer vacations. Indeed, from 1864 onwards, the Governor-General moved progressively larger parts of the government en masse to the elegant resort of Simla during the heat of the summer months. The annual government retreat from Calcutta occasioned considerable expense and controversy but proved unstoppable. The history of the hill stations is therefore a central part of the cultural and political history of British rule in India.

Although Bhatt's study is relatively light in tone, his focus on the material valuably brings to light many of the physical details of British rule. The reader is struck, for example, by the image of British (as presumably of Indian) elites being borne on the shoulders of bearers to reach their mountain retreats: four to eight men to carry one person up to the mountains in the days before railways. It seems a very intimate relationship, despite the formal separation which was perhaps its psychological counterpart; it is also a telling symbol of the sheer labour power required to maintain such establishments. Another such image is that of the *punkah-wallah*, whose job was to spend his days fanning. Bhatt's photographs further convey well the material experience of the past: they recapture the physical appearance of the hill stations, just as his text focuses on smells, sensations and his subjects' experience of their environment. The very luxury of the photographs, nonetheless, is perhaps misleading from a historical point of view: here is India as the beleaguered British might have wanted it, without many lower-class Indians in it and with very beautiful views.

Resorts of the Raj gives useful insight into the lives of British administrators and soldiers and, especially, their wives. Bhatt stresses the private lives of the British inhabitants of hill stations, providing a sympathetic social history of their experience. He uses the diaries and letters of elite women to particularly good effect, as he shows how they tried to domesticate space and to remake India in the image of Britain. Nonetheless, the historian will be somewhat frustrated by *Resorts of the Raj*. It is aimed at a popular market as much as a scholarly one. The author permits himself generalizations along the lines of "until the 17th century, to European scholars, mountains inspired horror" (26), which cry out for counter-examples. Bhatt also draws on a fairly limited number of secondary sources and does not attempt to provide exhaustive, rigorous analysis.

In the end, however, this is perhaps not the aim of this book. It succeeds very well in its primary goal of documenting and celebrating the hill stations of the Raj. The photographs are of great beauty. The book successfully underscores the role of the remaking of space in colonialism. It pays particular attention to the relationship between the environment and the architecture of the hill stations. Bhatt seems to argue that although (ironically) the hill stations were designed as a retreat from India, their architecture was well adapted to the Indian environment. He also, finally, examines some ways in which the buildings of the hill stations are being used for contemporary purposes, such as schools and honeymoon retreats: it all seems an ironic and yet fitting conclusion to the multilayered history of the Indian hill station.

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Ed. Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson,
Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh,
Hal Foster, Denis Hollier, and Silvia
Kolowski
October: The Second Decade, 1986-1996
Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997
reviewed by David Theodore

THIS IS THE second volume of essays selected from the twenty years of work published in the hip and influential journal of twentieth-century art practice *October*. The essays cover a broad array of topics, from painting to television, Walter Benjamin to Hans Haake. But unlike many collections, they are united in the sense that each writer seems aware of the work published in the journal as a whole.

These are important essays, but they are not really for beginners. Their significance is clear, really, only if you have some idea of the critical and academic orthodoxies they challenge. The writing is provocative, complex and sophisticated, clearly positioned in a postmodern left-of-centre universe of "French" or "continental" theory: structuralism, phenomenology, Foucault, Barthes, psychoanalysis, Bataille, Ricoeur. The book is divided into sections on "Art/Art History," "Postcolonial Discourse," "Body Politics/Psychoanalysis" and "Spectacle/Institutional Critique."

The importance of psychoanalysis here, the seriousness with which it is discussed and its pervasiveness, is striking. Some writers on architecture, especially historians such as Beatriz Colomina who are especially interested in gender, sex and sexuality in architecture, have tried to connect architectural theory and psychoanalytic theory (Freud, Lacan, Klein), but never with the vehemence and faith found in studies of culture, literature, film and art. And indeed, in contrast to the ubiquity of psychoanalytic musings, there is little direct discussion of architecture in these pages. Even the selection by superstar architect Peter Eisenman and Silvia Kolbowski, "Like the difference between Autumn/Winter '94/'95 and Spring/Summer '95," which presents their collaboration for an installation in the clothing boutique *Comme des Garçons* in Soho, New York, is deliberately non-architectural, a cross-disciplinary experiment that tries literally to dissolve the walls between art, architecture, commerce and video.

This de-emphasis of architecture is part of *October's* program. Krauss and Blois have recently made a bid for art-history immortality with their 1996 exhibition (at Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris) and catalogue *Formless: A User's Guide*, an attempt to rethink the history of art in the twentieth century as an attitude against form. Such an attitude, extended from Georges Bataille's concept of "*informe*," is of course antithetical to architecture, which in the West has traditionally had the task of showing order (cosmological and social) through appropriate form.

Nevertheless, *October* offers countless cultural analyses of interest to students of architecture, inquiries that show how the development of ideas affects and is reciprocally changed by conditions of representation, institutional development and cultural practices. These writers never flag in their search for the meaning of art, the moment of significance, the modes of knowledge and, in all its Freudian implications, the appearance of art on the scene of cultural practice. (The rhetoric is quite contagious.)

There is, for example, an extract from Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's *The Public Sphere and Experience*. This book is an absolute

must-read for anyone attempting to use Habermas's theory of a public sphere in developing theories about architecture. Kluge, a German lawyer and a Brechtian filmmaker, was one of the signatories of the Oberhausen manifesto; he has deep experience with connecting cultural, political and social reality through political change, poetic creation and intellectual analysis. He brings, therefore, strong contemporary artistic and political experience to Habermas's abstractions: the perfect context in which to think about the theory of the public sphere in terms of architecture.

Likewise Leo Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" on how to learn from the horrifying social and political responses to the AIDS epidemic, T.J. Clarke's "In Defence of Abstract Expressionism," on the lingering of lyricism and lyric forms in post war culture, and V.Y. Mudimbe's "Which Idea of Africa? Herskovits's Cultural Relativism," on the difficulties of "rigorously conceptualizing the reality of Africa," are all penetrating contemplations implicating their subjects (i.e. AIDS and sexuality, romantic individuality, and the appropriation of non-western societies) with the role of representation, signification and cultural action. Unless you hold a formal, art-for-art's-sake theory of design, these articles are the perfect helpers both to judge the effect of architectural action and to deepen and broaden our discussions about architecture.

The one problem with this collection is that if you are already a follower of *October's* main contributors—Yve-Alain Bois, Rosalind Krauss, Hal Foster—and their intellectual high wire act, you probably have photocopies of these essays at home. If not, this collection probably won't convert you. But you should read it anyway, if only to know that art historians are out there *thinking*. As a project, *October* has an exemplary breadth and coherence—forms a school of thought—that compels attention.

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Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier
*Architectural Representation and the
Perspective Hinge*
Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997
Reviewed by Barry Bell

ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION AND the Perspective Hinge is a dense and complex book. It addresses the development and significance of a perspectival imagination within Western cultural history, presenting a vast array of resources within a remarkable scope. Cosmology, optics, philosophy and architectural theory have been marshalled into a synthetic argument reflecting upon the changing nature of architectural representation. Bristling with ideas and references, the text is provocative, in the full meaning of the term. It forces one to reconsider the accepted foundations of architectural practice. It also provokes one to react, to argue back, and ultimately, to propose alternate solutions. In this sense *The Perspective Hinge* is a truly theoretical text. It engages in a conversation where readers are forced to confront their own theo-

ries, and to test them in the face of the historical understanding presented here.

The book is additionally complicated however, because it also presents a manifesto for contemporary practice. Interesting in itself, the core historical argument proposes to reveal the problems and possibilities inherent in our contemporary state at the "end of history." Its academic aspect chronicles the philosophical underpinnings, development, and application of a perspectival vision within an increasingly instrumental world. How and when this perspectival bias became predominant within western philosophy and, by extension, architectural practice, creates the axis (the "perspective hinge" of the title) around which architectural intent and effect can be judged. Framing, and interweaving throughout this account, however, is a second text. This latter narrative (though arguably the former in intent) is a polemical tract. The intent of the book, state the authors, is not safely academic, but to participate within, and even direct proper artistic activity. It challenges contemporary architects to recognize the historical development of our postmodern architectural condition, with its inherent problems, as a foundation for an ethical and meaningful practice.

Balancing these two books is an ambitious challenge. While it accounts for some interpretive and structural difficulties, this responsibility creates the interesting rhythm of engagement and commentary which percolates through the text. A variety of provocative historical interpretations derive from this dual ambition. The collisions between history and manifesto are also, however, occasionally didactic and even manipulative, where the past is adapted to serve its contemporary polemical purpose. While possibly inherent in the desire to create art from history, these occasional frictions serve to position the text clearly as a personal statement. This idea of a personal statement is part of the book's implicit argument; one which is challenging but ultimately compelling.

History

The principal argument broadly follows a temporal sequence. Modern western history is

framed by a pre-perspectival state, where one was fully engaged with a meaningful cosmos, and now, a possibly post-perspectival one which is our challenge (or destiny) to recognize and fulfil. The middle period between these two, roughly coinciding with the development of modernity in the West, is the time of increasing perspectival control.

This perspectival period is marked by the gradual transformation of a fully connected perceptual world, understood in relation to a finite and Divine cosmos, into the homogeneous and unqualified idea of space we know and assume today. While the basic outlines of the argument have been well developed elsewhere, the authors trace it anew through the intriguing relation between optics and architectural drawing. The increasing role of perspective, with its ability to replace or eventually control other forms of ideation and representation, is charted. The shift, for example, from considering a plan as the physiognomic footprint of a building, to viewing it as a building sliced and seen from an infinite distance above, demonstrates this development.

The distinction between *perspectiva artificialis* and *perspectiva naturalis* is central to the argument. *Perspectiva naturalis* refers to vision fully situated in a place, which recognizes both the perceiving subject and a valuable, independent world. *Perspectiva artificialis*, constructed perspective, proposes the replacement of that temporal and situational world with one controlled by a single order. This dialectic also takes the form of an argument between perspective and "depth." Depth, as the criterion for action, revels in a place of mystery, encounter and embodied experience. It allows a simultaneous reflection and engagement, as well as a place of "erotic" exchange. Perspective, on the other hand, presents a situation where "the constituting ego reduces the presence of reality" (11). The challenge presented is to return discourse, and architectural production, to the possibility of depth.

Shadows, and how they appear in drawing, is one particularly interesting aspect of this dialectic. A shadow can refer to the presence of the infinite sun, the place of mystery within the world, or a problem to be dispensed with

through the glaring light of perspectival reason. Such choices reveal a great deal about the degree of control desired over the physical world. These concerns, with the accompanying insights into cosmology and optics, present a very productive terrain for architectural investigation.

There is an impressive synthesis of different arts and sciences in support of these architectural questions. While major architectural theoreticians are addressed, most of the references are drawn from the fields of prescriptive geometry and cosmology, and are likely unfamiliar to most architects. As a corrective to the ever increasing specialization in academic fields, or to the recent abdication of historical awareness at many schools of architecture, this reminds us of the rich associations that architecture has traditionally maintained with other disciplines. The bibliography should be of great interest to specialists within the field and to those who would like to investigate different episodes more closely. The high quality images provide a parallel text which should be more generally appealing, though perhaps for the wrong reasons (with respect to the book's polemical position).

The book describes itself as a genealogy. The danger in such a genealogy, however, is its apparent naturalness or even necessary nature. Once identified, the strong historical line admits little variation, and seemingly reduces the textual protagonists' capacity for personal engagement with their context—the kind of engagement which is demanded of us as well. Historical figures play out their roles according to their place on the line of descent. To the book's credit, reference is often made to circumstances where differing opinions coexist. Legacies of prior cosmological visions lurk within later philosophies, just as certain writers foreshadow subsequent instrumental developments. Yet the overall plot is one of linear development, leading from an earlier state of fulfilment to our present condition of conceptual and psychological degeneracy.

As a result this genealogy appears more as a pathology: a kind of forensic history. The patient, symbolic presence within built architecture, is obviously dead (the word "obvious"

appears rather often) and the task, for those few survivors on the fringe, is to learn from this demise in order to avoid the same fate.

Art

Facing this challenge necessitates a manifesto: a call and direction for action. The historical narrative posits that the standard techniques of architectural representation, and their use within an instrumental building process, have become corrupt. This condition renders the building of a true architecture difficult, if not impossible. One must transcend this state with a new approach, through creating an "erotic" relation with architectural representation. Erotic here refers to an action carried out in a desired relation to (an)other, while in full awareness of one's temporal situation and its limits (including mortality). It also includes a knowledge of the impossibility of an ultimate identity with the beloved, hence an awareness of the necessary perceptual "gap" present in any relation. Only in such a space may one ethically act, recognizing our past while not being limited to it. It is an interesting challenge, and an important one.

While present throughout the text, these directives for contemporary practice are explicitly outlined in "The Coda," presented as a conclusion to the book. Yet the Coda more accurately outlines a set of premises or personal truths ("our beliefs"), which should be accepted as working hypotheses in order to proceed within the space of the text. This "suspension of disbelief," so crucial to reading fiction, is equally necessary here, as it allows one to approach the book on its own polemical terms, rather than to get caught up with its implicit assumptions. I would even suggest reading the Coda first. Its principles are present throughout the preceding pages, so it is preferable to address them early. Also the Coda is not a necessary conclusion to the historical outline, and prior knowledge of it does not destroy any narrative suspense.

The Coda describes an approach to architecture. The central historical text, however, deals with architectural representation. Although the stated aim of the book is "building architecture which is a poetic translation" (8),

or even more clearly, to "examine a transforming relation between practice and theory, between the making of images and the making of buildings" (17), the relation to building is only lightly considered. Greater attention is given to the primary significance of its representation. This predilection occurs because architecture is viewed primarily as the translation of an idea, or of a drawing which is closer to that idea. While the integral relation between an architect's tools and their impact on the design of buildings is clearly worthy of attention, the assumed nature of this "translation" is troubling. It demonstrates a bias of a unidirectional process, moving from the real (idea, art) to the necessary but debased (building). This assumption negates the possibility that an architectural event might start with an imaginary action or engagement in the world rather than a graphic form or fixed philosophical position. It also disallows the potential that a future "making" could be achieved through drawings, but not be exclusively controlled by them.

In this respect the manifesto fails its stated aim: to "examine the transforming relationship . . . between the making of images and the making of buildings." How building, distinct from new forms of drawing, might begin to address these issues is left unaddressed, with the exception of a general appeal to depth and the allusion to architectural drawing possibly being like a musical score. Proper practice, as a result, remains in the realm of the academy, or in the world of subsidised "art," and a possible engagement with the contemporary city, while not explicitly condemned, is not credited.

Intertext One: Structure

The coexistence of the manifesto and the historical outline is one of the most intriguing aspects of the project. This simultaneity is present through the appearance of the polemic within the body of the text, the important role of individuals, and through the strength of the authors' voice. It is also, however, fundamentally expressed in the book's structure, which demonstrates the integral symbiosis of the authors' interests.

At its simplest level the structure follows a musical analogy. "The Prelude" (introduction)

presents an abbreviated exposition of the principle themes, which are then restated and expanded upon through three "Variations" (the central chapters). The Coda returns to the Prelude's concerns explicitly, which can now be observed with greater clarity. It is an engaging though difficult structure for a discursive text. The challenge is to maintain the suspense of each sequential unveiling, without revealing too much, while also acknowledging the necessity of persuasive clarity.

This structure of temporal revelation is combined with a strong symmetry which frames the time of perspectival development (history) with the Prelude and the Coda. Schematically the structure can be represented as: answer (lost past, future foreshadowed), problem (historical development), answer (possible future). The principal (though unstated) model for this symmetrical construct, revealed temporally, is the Bible. We have lost the Garden of Eden, but salvation is still possible through faith. Yet even in salvation the Garden can not be reclaimed. Innocence has been sacrificed, and one's salvation at the end of time occurs with full knowledge of the past, in The Heavenly City. Awareness of history (and correct reactions to it) is the crucial means for achieving this passage.

Intertext Two: Hagiography

The principal narrative means for linking the manifesto to the historical material occurs through the treatment of the lives and work of individual personalities. Indeed the text approaches a hagiography of important thinkers. Their accomplishments and idiosyncrasies are celebrated, which brings an engaging immediacy to the work. The issues, it implies, are not lost in some distant and irrecoverable past but are rather contained in a set of decisions made by people. Even some of the villains of the story are given sensitive treatment personally, which stresses the importance of individual practice and responsibility. More significantly, a subtle sense of personal identification with these kindred spirits rests within the apparently academic prose.

Most of the protagonists are philosophers and theoretical writers, though significant ar-

tistic and architectural figures do appear. The corporeality of Michelangelo's work, for example, is generally praised. Michelangelo is deemed to have celebrated the flesh of the world through his concern for bodies in motion: the right sort of erotic knowledge. He is also noted for his ability to manifest a project through a detail sketch, a form of interpretive relation acknowledged elsewhere. Dante, Piranesi, Boullée, Guarini and others receive recognition for their "critical" projects, and their distinctive personal imaginations. The Renaissance writer Francesco Colonna is also praised for his architectural vision, as seen in the text *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*,

The principal architectural protagonist is Le Corbusier. As a painter and an architect he reconciles personal discovery with its architectural "translation." The *Poème de L'angle Droit*, a thematic grouping of lithographs, is presented for its depth of architectural meaning. And, in the only sustained reference to a building within the text, the Monastery of La Tourette is described as a model of proper architectural production. La Tourette manages to achieve the depth desired by the authors, through its critical approach, treatment of material and light, and its engaged programme.

This critical response to the building is justifiably generous, but also rather general. How exactly La Tourette achieves its virtues or what distinguishes it from other well intended attempts to make meaningful architecture is left implicit. While it is clear that the book is not about establishing critical methodologies, it would be useful to know why this one building, amongst all others, holds such answers. Unfortunately, once a work is held up to be emulated or disdained, with its meaning obvious, it is no longer necessary to look at it directly. This is perhaps due to the sense of personal identification mentioned above. An earlier reference to Le Corbusier reveals these dangers of identification clearly, in a passage worth quoting at length.

Theoretical projects have been both experimental, in scientific pursuit of formal discovery, and poetic, in artistic pursuit of an order that might be recognised by the inhabitant as a place for dwelling and personal orientation. Some outstanding

buildings by Le Corbusier, for example, fall into this category, constituting a true architecture of resistance, "despite" their full-scale existence and usefulness. These works have subverted the reductive instrumentality of architectural representation and also aimed at transcending the enframing vision, in the process unveiling the true potential of architecture in a postmodern world. Neither intuitive nor irrational, these works are suffused with the logos of myth. Their primary mission: to embody the ethical values of the imagining self, and to avoid at all costs the dissolution of the human body into the space of drugs and electronic simulation. (87)

To state so categorically that Le Corbusier's primary mission was to avoid the abyss of drugs and cyberspace provokes skepticism. We may be able to use his life and its architectural lessons for that purpose, but to project that desire backwards is unfair.

Intertext Three: Autobiography

The coexistence of the two texts is ultimately established through an omnipresent voice. Reminders of the real (polemical) issue and its significance appear regularly as mini-conclusions punctuating the historical narrative. The reader is brought outside the material to be reminded what is at stake. Events are given simple and definitive meanings, in a fashion which approaches the allegorical.

While the authors' certainty is enviable, perhaps some statements reflect what they would like to be the case, rather than what, verifiably, is. The following quote reflects on the relation between perspective and axonometric drawing:

We may remember that the "subject" of traditional perspective representation (and pre-revolutionary European architecture) was always an active, embodied observer, never totally disconnected from the world's passions and motions, willing to acknowledge and remain subordinate to the larger orders of nature and politics. Axonometry, on the other hand, addresses a disembodied observer in pursuit of individual prosperity, freedom, and pleasure—a passive observer for the first time capable of self-conscious disengagement from the limits granted by the body and the world. (316)

Always, never, and for the first time are very definite statements for such large topics. This

clarity also projects forward to us. We are told that "only a thorough grasp of the dialectic between the profound historical roots of the technological project and its specificity within the last two centuries may suggest possible alternatives for contemporary architectural practice" (84). This historical approach may be a potent one, but is it really the *only* possibility? It may be reasonable for theoreticians to propose answers to artistic practice, but to preclude any other avenue for meaningful discovery is extreme.

This didactic quality is difficult to reconcile with the call to think and act ethically, with an imaginative and reasoned personal choice. Such unqualified directives may even awaken an iconoclastic or rebellious streak (at least in this reviewer) which, once provoked, begins to find ample examples to react against. The authors' lack of doubt might even lead to material being manipulated. Boullée is quoted from his epigraph to his *Essai sur l'Art*, quoting Caravaggio, "Ed io anche son pittore," which the authors translate as "I am also a painter" (220). Their point is that real architects have always been artists as well, if not primarily, and that visual production is central to an architectural imagination. But the translation seems flawed. Why would Caravaggio write such a phrase? What else was he? The quote could also be, preferably, translated as "And I, also, am a painter." In Caravaggio's case this could refer to the challenge of being a painter during his time, working under the great weight of his Renaissance predecessors (Leonardo, Michelangelo), and his sense of meeting that challenge. For Boullée, in a different context, and with a different scale of artistic production, it would likely be something more like an excuse.

In spite of these concerns, however, the polemical text is the more satisfying of the two, because it is the more important to the authors. One accepts the stated beliefs as working premises, and then discovers how they can redirect or rearrange the history of architectural representation. The historical survey, though no doubt important to the development of these beliefs, and valuable in itself, is a bit of a smokescreen for the reader. Its meanings have

already been extracted and presented, which renders the core history somewhat illustrative, and allows little experience of a shared discovery.

We observe the authors' path and their judgments. It can be somewhat difficult to judge the historical events themselves, but what the authors think about them is never in doubt. Interestingly, the occasional ambiguities of this personal voice also reveal how they consider their own book. The text presents "complex questions, with great repercussions for our own artistic and architectural practice" (67). Does this refer to our time's artistic practice, or the authors' own? Their artistic work is not presented here for examination, unless, however, it is the book itself. With its explicit reference to musical structure, and its self-conscious polemical nature, it becomes apparent that the text is not simply telling us how to make art, it is trying to show us. This presents a glimpse into the authors' personal imagination, the imagination which arguably provides the means of transcending our state at the end of history. It doesn't matter whether we are convinced in the regular academic sense. We are given access to a personal practice and, as in a work of art, we dwell within its embodied presentation.

It is a provocative challenge to make a work of art from the raw material of an academic text. The book's structure, polemical spirit and personal voice do, however, make this artistic intention explicit. Yet the central narrative would likely appear to most as history, and the voice as discursive ideology. Art may still be reserved for architecture itself, rather than its theory. In this regards, however, the book is even more ambitious. Basing a text on the sobriety of a pathology, charting the demise of a world view deemed conducive to proper creation, while also proposing to inspire an epiphany of artistic creation is very difficult. It may not even be possible.

For this reason the statement mentioned earlier, regarding the historical approach as the *only* path available to an artist now, can be challenged. Art does not have to be *about* history. Perhaps it should be about life itself. Some of the works cited here, which are deemed to reflect on our historical condition, may seem

rather trivial to those active in the search for a real practice, or actually trying to make poetic building. Computers may not be much help, but why is cinematic montage assumed to be? Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, held up as an example, is remarkable in its imagery, and may even create an erotic space. But it can also be seen as a self indulgent, derivative, and ultimately pointless film.

Provocative Practice

This question of purpose leads to the issue of audience. Who is the book really for? Presently it reads as a summary of a larger pedagogic project, whose full development is known only to a select few. The text can remind them of their experience, and be a reaffirmation of an academic path taken. The message: keep the faith. Avoid the seductive neo-technological world of computer simulation now so uncritically embraced by many architectural schools, and remember that the spirit and lessons of the post-modern "critical project" still hold. Indeed, the timing of the book within the context of North American architectural education is interesting. It reminds the privileged reader that these principles are still valid, at a moment when they may no longer shock (or equally, perhaps, entice) as they once did. The argument is, however, arguably even more necessary now. In the face of recent developments in cyberspace, and in the current academic revenge of the progress-oriented technologists, questioning the technological project is more important than ever.

It is, perhaps, a book written for insiders, yet its value is not limited to them alone. Through the prism of perspective the book addresses the difficulty of maintaining an astronomical analogy within architecture after the demise of an ordered cosmos. This is arguably the most potent and enduring architectural question of the last four hundred years: what does one do, or rely upon, when this fundamental grounding of the discipline is lost? The text argues convincingly that choosing the technological project was the wrong answer, and has lead to our present abyss. One may question whether the localized conclusions are correct, but that is not really the issue. Equally the pro-

posed solutions discovered in the "critical projects" presented here may not be appealing, but recognizing the challenge, and facing it, is.

How to address this problem is ultimately up to each artist or theoretician, acting ethically in their own fields. The authors are to be congratulated for both articulating the problem, and taking a stand on its resolution. This provokes us to reply with our own historical interpretations, or even better, our own considered practice. The polemic tells us what to strive for, but how to achieve it remains open, especially within building, and thus awaits interpretation and discovery. The text is also provocative for any architect, or teacher of architecture, as it demands an examination of method. What are the means or implications of historical example and its interpretation? How should we consider our links with other disciplines, or the foundations of our own? The book's clear polemical approach helps one clarify one's own relation to historical material, and its use within argument or contemporary practice.

These provocations are the lasting value of the book. Architects are challenged to recognise, and accept the implications of their practice, and to discover ways of creating meaningful work in spite of them. We must dwell within the paradox of our situation, and make a personal ethical response to it.

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Janet Wright

Crown Assets: The Architecture of the Department of Public Works, 1867-1967

University of Toronto Press, 1997

reviewed by Vanessa Reid

POLITICS, PATRONAGE AND post offices converge in Janet Wright's *Crown Assets: The Architecture of the Department of Public Works, 1867-1967*. In it, the author takes us through 100 years of federally mandated buildings, from the structures of the Parliamentary precinct, to drill halls, hospitals, customs houses and, of course, post offices. The result is the history of the Canadian architecture envisioned by government and dictated by policy.

Wright's book is extremely well-researched. She investigates the decisions behind the design and construction of buildings and meticulously articulates their design details. As a summary of buildings, a discussion of the development of architecture in Canada, and a

detailed description of architectural styles, *Crown Assets* joins must-reads such as Harold Kalman's *A History of Canadian Architecture* (1994). What Wright does that is different is explore the link between the development of a national architecture and a frequently changing, but consistently conservative, government vision of, well, "Canada," and how this culturally defined concept can and should be manifested in the built form.

Although clearly geared towards a readership comfortable with and interested in detailed architectural descriptions, this book also offers an interesting, insightful perspective on Canadian history. Wright takes us through the history and designs of the Chief Architect's Branch of the Department of Public Works chronologically and thematically, through times of boom and bust: building a new nation; the architecture of growth and prosperity; wartime projects and the dormant years; building in the depression; and the modern era.

To her credit, Wright does not focus solely on glorified architectural "firsts"—the Toronto and Halifax armouries, for example, set a Canadian precedent by using all-metal trusses in 1895—nor does she overemphasize large, prestigious buildings such as Kingston's Royal Military College or the Parliament Buildings. Rather, *Crown Assets* includes buildings from the seemingly unimportant to the renowned.

Crown Assets is a rich mix of archival and contemporary photographs of rural and urban buildings across the country. The solid, square, brick Chief Quarantine's Officer's Residence on Partridge Island, New Brunswick (1923), for instance, was typical of the Branch's residential designs of the period, but also bespeaks a time when immigration to Canada was fraught with fear of disease. Some of these buildings are architectural representations of a federal presence, built in "deserving" towns to award faithful voters. Many of them, both large and small, were the heart of Canadian communities. By the 1930s, every town had come to expect their very own post office, with the help, of course, of their member of parliament. Almost every town got one, but often reduced in scale and detail. The post office in Salmon Arm, British Columbia (1935), was an example of the

one-storey, brick block, three-bay façade structures which became the formula for small federal buildings.

Wright points out that Ottawa's National Research Council buildings of the 1940s reflected emerging modernist sensibilities in Canadian design, a style towards which the Department moved tentatively at first. With the boom of the 1950s, modernism literally became public policy. A Royal Commission, together with members of parliament, expressed a desire to promote Canadian culture. They thought "the new engineering architecture," in other words modernism, was the appropriate means. The Chief Architect's Branch went through a radical change as it was decided that national competitions should be held for major public buildings "to avoid the mediocrity which so easily besets government architecture."

Mediocrity? Harsh criticism indeed. But Wright clearly shows that through turn-of-the-century nation building and despite wartime budget cuts, the Department's work, although conservative, left an imprint on and a rich built heritage in Canadian communities.

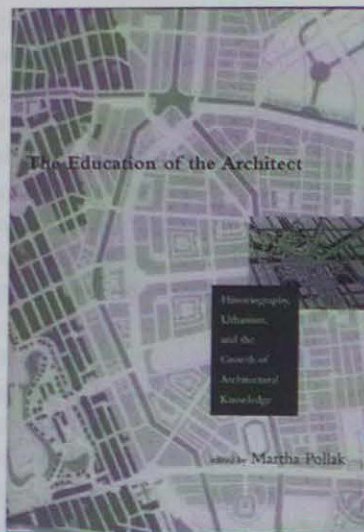
Unfortunately, Wright, like the Department's conventional approach to design, falls into a similar conservatism in her methodology. For her, architecture seems to be defined solely in terms of exteriors and stylistic movements. Discussing the link between policy, politics and space but including less than five plans of buildings, she ignores the reality of these buildings: they were built for communities, to be used by government employees and local residents. Federal buildings have been and continue to be used, not just looked at. Their interior organization, the way the space was intended to be used, can tell us a great deal about cultural attitudes, government bureaucracy and administration.

In the 1920s, for example, the industrialization of the mail engendered a new building type: the postal terminal. These did not replace post offices, but were indicative of a radical change in a postal system that was suddenly forced to accommodate the rise of new mail processing equipment. But how did the plan of the massive, urban, steel-frame Montreal postal terminal, with its ground floor post office (1937),

differ from the one-storey rural post office in say, Ponteix, Saskatchewan, built in 1957? What does the configuration of administrative offices versus customer space reveal about government policy? How did the plan express the Department's understanding or interpretation of the "Canadian-ness" it was attempting to construct across the country? And how did the plans for the same building types change over time?

Crown Assets is a thorough investigation of the government's vast real estate empire and a detailed guide to the evolution of Canadian architectural styles. But although Wright elegantly describes in writing many of the buildings's plans, by never analyzing the interior of these federal buildings—or even illustrating them—we cannot fully understand what is, in Wright's words, a "distinctly Canadian sense of place." We are left looking at façades.

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Martha Pollak, ed.

*The Education of the Architect:
Historiography, Urbanism, and the Growth
of Architectural Knowledge:
Essays presented to Stanford Anderson*
Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997
reviewed by Louis Martin

EVEN THOUGH NONE of these essays presented to Stanford Anderson advance a pedagogical model, it is not by chance that the collection is entitled "The Education of the Architect." Since Martha Pollak's six-page preface summarizes perfectly their content, I would like to take the opportunity in this review to explain their common philosophical orientation, which is rooted in the fundamental contribution of Anderson to the field of architectural history.

As Lawrence B. Anderson, former dean of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) School of Architecture, makes clear in his essay "History's History," Stanford Anderson's contribution constitutes an answer to the pressing need to redefine the field of architectural history in the early 1960s. In this essay, the difficult relationship between history and architecture in the USA is succinctly explained from

an insider's point of view. Here is his argument. Between 1880 and 1930, history was taught by two types of professors: the historian or the architect. When taught by trained art historians, architectural history seemed to participate in a scholarly activity driven by objectives external to architecture; when taught by erudite architects, history was often limited to the study of the monuments which justified the Beaux-Arts doctrine. The modernist criticism of history attacked precisely the shortcomings of these traditional kinds of history teaching, which authorized designers to copy historical styles. By the 1940s, under the influence of modernist educators, some American schools of architecture went as far as to transfer their architectural history faculties to history departments. But as the aging modernist masters left the scene in the early 1960s, the modernist cult was increasingly criticized, forcing the revision of the traditional methods of architectural history. As Lawrence B. Anderson indicates:

A cohort of architecture students born in the United States began to turn their attention to historical matters. The implantation of architecture schools in American universities was finally bearing fruit, for these young scholars could observe and absorb the ways applied in other departments to develop perceptions based on new knowledge. Their rubric shifted toward a redefinition of the field: it became *history, theory, and criticism*. There was a wish to explore not merely the physical legacy of architecture but also the written literature about architecture from different epochs. (442)

Among this cohort, Stanford Anderson, a Ph.D. graduate from Columbia University, has been a major force in reshaping architectural history and transforming it into a rigorous discipline. The origin of his position can be traced back to an early text of 1963 entitled "Architecture and Tradition that Isn't 'Trad Dad.'" In that text, Anderson refuted the futurist polemics of Reyner Banham by demonstrating that the English critic's opposition of tradition and technology was fallacious. Looking at the epistemology of science, Anderson demonstrated that Banham was mistaken in assuming that the development of science is driven by an enthu-

siastic jettisoning of tradition: on the contrary, even in the "hard" sciences praised by Banham, such as physics or biology, tradition is a constituent part of theory, because the validity of generalizing theories in any scientific field is a matter of social consensus. Rather than an accumulation of dead propositions or an indisputable authority, tradition constitutes in all scientific disciplines a body of acquired knowledge whose validity is constantly criticized. In the end, Anderson suggested that architecture might be conceived to be capable of working in a similarly critical manner relative to its traditions and its current problem setting.

This text, which remains by today's standards a remarkable piece of criticism, established the basis of Anderson's future research in the epistemology of architecture. On the other hand, I think that the conclusions of this subtle clarification of the mechanisms which underlie the development and the validation of knowledge have not yet been fully explored by the architectural community.

Significantly, Anderson's "Trad Dad" essay has been published in the book entitled *The History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture*, which diffused the proceedings of an AIA-ACSA Teacher Seminar held at Cranbrook in 1964.¹ The premises of that seminar signaled the lack of a solid theory in architecture, and the need to rethink the place of history in architectural education. That event, chaired by Lawrence B. Anderson and co-organized by Henry Millon, appears to have been a catalyst for the foundation at MIT, twenty-five years ago, of the first graduate program in the History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture (HTC).² Stanford Anderson, who was director of HTC from the beginning and led the program until the early 1990s, understood that the "interrelated roles of history, theory and criticism," as Peter Collins put it, constituted the intellectual universe of the discipline of architecture. The expansion of factual history into HTC transformed the field into an inquiry into the various types of discourses on architecture. In that program, the epistemological specificity of the discipline has been explored by several generations of students; new approaches to history taking into account the semi-autonomy of architecture

have been developed. In 1987, Anderson described his position in his typically succinct style:

The core of my argument is to accept neither complete determination nor autonomy. There is, rather, an intersection between a relatively independent field such as architecture and the enabling and limiting conditions of society. There is some internal order to the field of architecture, but its intersection with a particular society is a matter of historical inquiry, not logical demonstration. To pursue an understanding of this intersection—that is, the intersection of a certain state of the internal structure of architecture with a changing historical setting—I assert that we need more than one kind of history and more than one concept of the field of architecture.³

The essays collected in *The Education of the Architect* are an exemplary demonstration of Anderson's project. As they present new discoveries in the history of architecture and the city, they reflect on the construction of history, on the processes of architectural creation, on the specialized terminology of architecture, on what constitutes architectural knowledge, on the relevance of this knowledge for the students of architecture, and so on. In spite of their heterogeneity, they are all written from the point of view that historical knowledge forms the basis of architectural theory, which in turn forms the intellectual universe of architecture, "the growing body of knowledge that is unique to this field."⁴ If we except the essay by Carlo Olmo on Place Louis XV, the book offers, as a whole, a dialogical reading of modernism absent in canonical histories which examines both the theoretical propositions which constitute the core of the movement and their reception in different contexts and cultures. Students and scholars, historians and architects, will be interested in this book. It presents original historical research in architecture and urbanism, critical interpretations of modernism and reflections on the current problems of the discipline.

The sophisticated approach of the MIT school of architectural history led by Anderson has helped to develop a truly critical understanding of the relationships between history and practice. Through the clarification of the roles played by the heterogeneous types of discourses shaping architecture culture, this school

has led the integration of architecture within the family of the human sciences, and is still proving that it is possible to think rigorously the problems of architecture.

1. To be precise, the "Trad Dad" essay was a talk given to a very large and prestigious audience at the Architectural Association in the spring of 1963. Anderson's talk was introduced by Royston Landau, and followed a shorter speech by Ernst Gombrich; members of the audience included, among others, John Summerson, Arthur Koestler, Reyner Banham, Alan Colquhoun, and Alvin Boyarsky.

2. In addition to Stanford Anderson, the founding faculty included art historians Henry Millon, Wayne V. Andersen and Rosalind Krauss.

3. Stanford Anderson, "On Criticism," *Places* 4.1 (1987): 7-8.

4. Anderson 7-8.

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