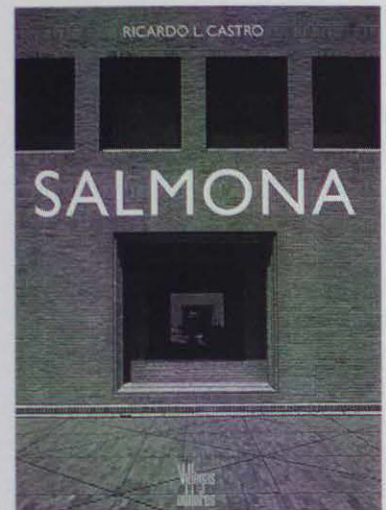


Book Reviews



Ricardo L. Castro
Rogelio Salmona
Bogota: Villegas Editores, 1998
reviewed by Conor Sampson

In the eponymous retrospective of Rogelio Salmona's work, Ricardo Castro has collaborated with the Colombian architect to reveal the permanence and revive the memory of an architectural continuity between Colombia's past and present. Colombia is made up of a multitude of independent events that trip over each other in tide after tide of accelerated change. In 1995, I spent six months on exchange in Colombia where I lived the most formative and destructive experience of my architectural education. The experience both reinforced my appreciation of architecture as an ordering, historical force, and left me with a sense of the almost complete futility inherent in any effort to create order out of chaos. In North America, one rarely asks why we build; it's always a question of how or to what effect; in Colombia, one builds out of a sense of urgency to either house oneself, or to make sense of a place without places.

Rogelio Salmona is not a book of incisive and moralistic architectural criticism. It is a book of evocation, resolute and complete in its recreation of an experience. I have never held much faith in architectural writing that attempts to evoke space through a literal description, as it leaves one with a bare image,

stripped of the memories of its inhabitants and removed from the significance of its history. In the novels of Colombian writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez, who is frequently alluded to in the text, space is rarely described; an atmosphere is evoked through the actions of a legion of characters, through the pounding of rain on roofs and the decay of houses. History and events occupy the rooms, filling the volumes with associations and meaning. In this monograph, Castro avoids the trap of literal description, preferring to let us sense the spaces by sharing his personal memories and associations with Salmona's work and those historical precedents which he feels have influenced his perception and analysis. The quiet fashion in which Salmona articulates his views through his words and his works is always deferential to his materials and the environment, and it leaves one with the image of a man still learning and tentatively sharing his personal conclusions:

I prefer an architecture which allows me to hear the echo of emotions, and I am moved by those architectures which let one catch a glimpse of the wavering hand of the person who planned and built them, his doubts, his mistakes and efforts, which appear like silent notes in the final results. Above all his doubts. Doubt is always a creator of discoveries, of distancing from ideological schemes; it obliges one to think, to see things with new eyes, without preconceptions (224).

There are two central characters in this book: the first, Castro, is silent and watching while the other, Salmona, is a sort of omniscient narrator, animating the bricks and will of the space much in the same way Louis Kahn used to in his lectures to students. The episodic structure of Castro's visits to the projects is bridged by the removed continuity of Salmona's voice-overs that provide a context for the architect and his architecture. This book has the quality of a discussion, with the interviewer mute and Salmona responding reflectively, comfortably and in an honest way, as both men move through the spaces. There is a great sense of reverence, of tiptoeing through the buildings at dusk or sunset, engaged in a

dialogue full of certitude and clarity unclouded by the black smoke and hoards of people who will surely come with rush hour. As the silent partner in the dialogue, Castro does not so much explain the architecture or history of Salmona, but rather articulates his own approach to it, his own background and appreciation, allowing Salmona to speak for himself. Castro's strength is his ability to convey the vision transparently without betraying the sense of being an intermediary.

The essays which introduce the volume set a tone of nostalgia and reflection, finding the inspiration for Salmona's buildings in a field of references including the historical touchstones of Greek and Pre-Colombian indigenous forms and Salmona's internship with Le Corbusier. For Castro, the multiple historic references and patterns are part of a syncretic tradition elaborated by the Cuban, Alejo Carpentier. According to Carpentier, the Americas were formed by a projection of European history upon the New World, such that they became a surreal juxtaposition of past and present. Thus, "the themes of nature, history, time and the individual intertwined with the notions of the eternal baroque and the fantastic, reflect what Garcia Marquez calls the 'outsized reality' of this region of the world" (16). Via the intermediary of building, Salmona succeeds in recalling the memories and resonance of history in "an architecture that, in moving us, leaves a deep emotional trace" (18).

The theme of nostalgia resonates strongly throughout this work. When Castro discussed palimpsest, I thought immediately of Bogota and the time I spent there; the bizarre juxtaposition of history superimposed with the equally powerful currents of modern chaos. One always senses the ground in Colombia or its agents, weather and decay. One always feels things are about to revert to the ground, to become part of either a colonial history or a vegetated state. Salmona's buildings have the virtue of belonging to this ground, fading into it, while leaving a clearly delineated incision of experience, of presence. The order and wisdom of Salmona's work draw their strength from the only ordering features in Colombia today: those of nature and history.

Castro's photographs, amplified by the high quality of the printing, are stunning. For the most part, Castro utilizes a clear perspectival approach that draws one into the space along with the photographs. Castro's photographs have no human subjects, but he exploits the visual effects of layered planes and openings, captured views and parallel promenades. Were the viewpoints not so evidently "conceived," the result would have been either empty or disquieting, but seen with the text one is aware of Castro's conscious attempt to create a visual experience that parallels his textual analysis of the plan and promenade. In contrasting relief to these rich photographs, the editor has presented the plans as delicate white tracings on a grey tonal wash, complemented by a descriptive introduction to the formal composition of the schemes.

The simplicity of the architecture itself leaves one silent until one begins to pry at the joints, wondering how it all comes together so seamlessly. An aside, which might hopefully be addressed in a future edition, is that while the plans and sections crucial to understanding the relationships of spaces within the buildings are well represented, there are no details of construction, no lexicon of the rich brick vocabulary Salmona has developed. One problem is that the forces that Salmona has had to struggle against are not apparent enough. These haunting projects have the resonant power and solitude that Castro's photographs convey, but if they were placed in context they would gain the quality of oasis in the jungle of modern Colombia. It is an awareness of this contrast that makes one fully conscious of the architect's achievement and reassures one of the values of architecture in a place so shaken by irrationality and change.

Conor Sampson, B.Arch '96, works in Washington DC. He anticipates returning to school next fall because he has "already seen all the stuffed animals in the Smithsonian" (conorsampson@hotmail.com).



Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton
Landscape Narratives:
Practices for Telling Stories
 New York: J. Wiley, 1998
 reviewed by Julie Althoff

Before reading this book, I was hyper-critical of certain aspects of my landscaping profession. In fact, I would have doubled over with laughter if I had heard the words "landscape architecture" and "theory" in the same sentence. With few exceptions, it seemed that landscape architects were at least one hundred years behind the times, still designing picturesque Olmsteadian parks and neighbourhoods. I had very rarely seen innovative landscape architecture projects, and when I had, they often came from the hands of architects. But *Landscape Narratives: Practices for Telling Stories* paints a different picture.

This book is ingenious. The authors' method is subtle, yet their message proposes a new way of looking at landscaping practices. At first the reader might question the division of the book into parts entitled "Theory," "Practice," and "Stories." This organization may raise questions as to whether the authors intend to close the gap between theory and practice or keep the approaches separate. The reader might also wonder about the division of the parts into catchy chapter titles straight out of Heidegger, such as "Revealing & Concealing," "Opening," and "Gathering," but this should not be a deterrent. The book is not as divisive as it may seem and is definitely worth perseverance.

It is important to note that the book seems to be geared toward design professionals and students without much of a theoretical background. If you have read Saussure, Ricoeur, and Barthes, you may want to skip some sections of Part One: "Theory." Those

already familiar with the material will still appreciate the first section for its clever graphic organization of a text dense with references. If the reader starts to get overwhelmed with information (which may well happen when Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Barthes and Derrida are all mentioned within the space of two pages), he or she can just look to the margins and the sections in bold print; the pictures and their captions give perfect examples of what the authors say in the main body of the text. The main text is split and separated or printed in bold depending on what is being relayed, whether it is a study of a specific person or place, a narrative, or an interpretation. In this way, the authors are doing precisely what they are asking us as to do as designers: to re-evaluate the traditional linear way of reading, and allow for multiple readings.

In Part One, a broad discussion of "narrative" in relation to "landscape" ranges from the historical to the ecological. Part One also gives an overview of some linguistic theory. The authors do not go into depth on any one theory, nor do they give their own opinions. As they say at the end of Part One, "this is an initial framework for understanding the implications and potentials of the stories we tell and the landscapes we make."

Part Two: Practice was my favourite section of the book. Here, the authors "illustrate a series of narrative practices" through specific projects. The chapter entitled "Naming" begins by explaining that the act of naming is a creative process. There is power in naming places; names are not neutral. After giving examples of how names have been given and how they have been lost, the authors describe a wonderful project in Atlanta, Georgia. REPOhistory "is an artists' collective engaged in repossessing, or reinscribing, absent, suppressed, or forgotten through sitespecific public art" (99). It reclaims an African-American community known as Buttermilk Bottom which disappeared "under the guise of urban renewal." The authors are not only critical of the replacement of historical, local names with meaningless names, they also offer

creative solutions for reclaiming place: "Renaming, then, whether by decree, developers, or referenda, is an exercise in claiming identity and power. It raises issues of whose history is inscribed in the landscape, how diversity is included within previous discourses of selection and exclusion, and how renaming reclaims the loss of place identity" (99).

The chapter entitled "Sequencing" provides a great chart comparing film's time-altering devices (such as jump cut, flashback, and fade) to devices used for structuring plot in the landscape. It also has ideas for student projects and a section that gives familiar landscape forms (such as circles, mazes and spirals) potential meaning in the context of a narrative.

The chapter "Revealing & Concealing" is divided into sections on secrets, transparency, and masking/unmasking. "Transparency," for example, deals with projects that seek to reveal what was once hidden in our surroundings, as a way of increasing awareness of how we treat our environmental resources. However, the authors astutely point out that simply exposing an environmental problem is not a solution.

In "Gathering," the authors give examples of projects which draw on different notions of gathering including the miniature, the souvenir, and the collection. They also point out that "because landscape and culture are so interconnected, the conservation of a place requires more than simply collecting and preserving its pieces" (180). They give the example of *casistas* in New York City's South Bronx, which are tiny reproductions of Puerto Rico that involve the community in activities and celebrations that change with the seasons, providing a gathering place of social activity, culture and memory.

Next, the chapter on "Opening" explains the importance of designing open, landscaped narratives as opposed to the closed narratives of theme parks, malls and gated communities, which homogenize different voices, compressing the layers of history. After giving different examples of open narratives, the authors warn that "opening" does not necessarily bring

meaning. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Parc de la Villette.

In Part Three: "Stories," the authors look at three specific stories and the artists, designers, developers, tourists, etc. that influence the sites. The first, entitled "The Wasteland and Restorative Narrative," looks at the ecological narratives in the New Jersey Meadowlands. Although the authors applaud some of the restorative projects of the wetlands, they also ask the question that seems to be ignored despite our trendy "save the world" mentality: "restore to what?" In the end, this nature we seek to return to may just be a reinvented one.

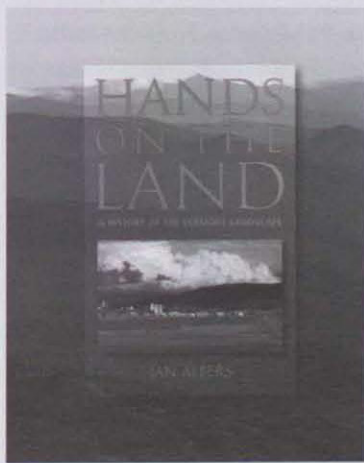
The final chapter in Part Three is an amusing look at two different "Road Stories" that recounts some personal and historical anecdotes from the authors' travels. But my favourite chapter in this last section is called "Writing Home". It tells "home narratives" of three different sites. A sly start is made with the story of Cazenovia, a historic town in central New York. Preservation and restoration of the town began in the 1960s with the help of a group of concerned citizens. But, as the story of this idyllic community unfolds, the reader comes to learn of the exclusionary principles that make Cazenovia what it is today. It started with the summer colonists after the civil war. They would decide who could and could not buy land according to the family name and economic status. In an ironic twist, the next narrative of home that is told is of a new community that looks to traditional places such as Cazenovia as a model for stability of home. But this neo-traditional community is based on a model that never really existed: Cazenovia was an elite group of people, not a democratic community. The authors end the chapter by encouraging the reader to question and redefine "home."

Another story tells of Nos Quedamos (meaning "we stay"), a group of people in the Bronx who show that notions of home do not need to be derived from elite models. On the assumption that the Bronx was "inner city" and thus not a community, the city made a proposal for an urban renewal project that would displace residents. The people rose up

in protest claiming that the area was a community made up of their homes, which they would not leave. Today they are working with the city as an integral part of the vision for the future.

So is there anything this book is missing? Possibly: the volume would have benefitted from a concluding chapter of synthesis. This book covers a lot of ground — please forgive the pun — but with every project and every chapter, a strong idea is enforced: many stories are told by the landscape, we just have to pay attention to hear them. And as designers, we have to help these stories be heard by others. *Landscape Narratives* is powerful in that it gives us a new way to look at landscaping practices. Having won the 1998 American Society of Landscape Architects Communication Merit Award for this volume, Matthew Potteiger and Jamie Purinton are already fulfilling a main objective ventured in their book: to promote innovative work on landscape architecture projects in the future.

Julie Althoff, M.Arch (History and Theory), now practices at Lager Raabe Skafte Landscape Architects, Inc. in Philadelphia (Althoff@LRSLA.com).



Jan Albers
Hands on the Land:
Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000
reviewed by Andrea Merrett

Landscape, in its definition, implies a human interaction with the land. Even

wilderness is subject to a cultural translation. *Hands On The Land* is the history of a particular landscape shaped over the past four hundred years by many generations: Vermont.

My memories of Vermont are shared between a farm my parents rented occasionally for winter weekends, and the Long Trail which I hiked every summer during adolescence. Vermont holds an image of wholesome living and tightknit communities, a place where the past is still alive. This is what draws thousands of tourists there every year, as well as new inhabitants wishing to escape the frenzy and isolation that characterizes many of America's large cities. But Vermont is not immune from the forces that have shaped other parts of the states; deforestation and pollution have taken their toll in this state, and more recently, so have suburban sprawl and the erosion of traditional village centers.

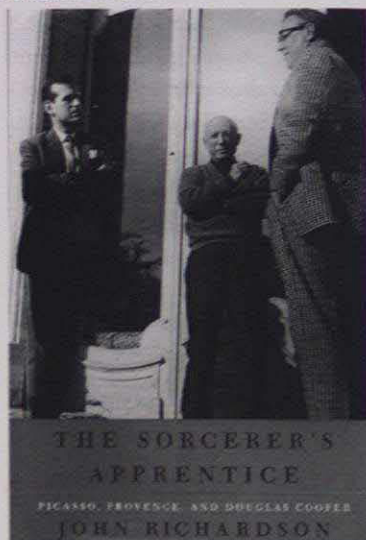
Jan Albers proposes her study of the history of land use in Vermont in order to help those making lifestyle choices understand the long-term consequences of their choices. At the heart of the Vermont landscape is the idea of community. In her introduction, Albers evokes the picturesque Vermont Village, with its white houses and church steeple. This is the ideal, a cosy village nestled into the land. The reality is these villages took many generations to develop, starting with a few houses, built on cleared land. The original settlers to Vermont were isolated on farmsteads. The state was settled later than the other New England states, and many people were drawn to Vermont to escape the Puritanical atmospheres of established towns and villages. These factors helped to gain Vermonters the reputation of being very individualistic. The new communities reflected the desire for independence and freedom. The churches now so associated with Vermont villages, were often built well after a community was established. Communities in Vermont were built up around neighbors helping neighbors.

The republicanism which was such an important force in establishing Vermont helps both to protect and undermine its ideals.

The belief that individuals must have the right to do what they wish with their personal property is often in conflict with the needs of the community. This is a major conflict now facing Vermonters, as more and more people move to the state hoping to find a pace of life already lost in the communities they leave behind. Along with new housing developments and suburban shopping malls comes sprawl, which is eating up many American towns. The desire exists to protect a more traditional way of life in Vermont, but it is at odds with the patterns of contemporary economic development. However, as the state has been slower in developing away from smaller towns and modest urban centers, there is still the potential for Vermonters to show the way to preserve communities in a country where many people feel detached from the landscape in which they live.

Hands on the Land is formatted as a history textbook. Beautifully illustrated and accessibly written, the book covers the history of the state all the way back to prehistoric times. Albers highlights her text with anecdotes and stories of common people. She answers her question of how a landscape is created, even though she falls short on questioning what the future of Vermont should be, and how it might be obtained. She does, however, provide the background to the discussion.

Andrea Merrett, BSc. Arch '00, is a frequent contributor to T5C.



John Richardson
The Sorcerer's Apprentice:
Picasso, Provence, and Douglas Cooper
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999.
 reviewed by David Theodore

Hypothesis: Modern architecture has never been as important to modern artists as modern art has been to modern architects. The work habits of Corbu—painting atelier in the morning, office in the après-midi—or of El Lissitzky are remarkable from the point of view of architectural history. But artists have less interest in architectural problems—who knows why? too capitalist? imperialist? unromantic? Even Mr Warhol lived surrounded by antiques, while working in the iconic, modern space of Billy Name's silver-concept Factory.

It's a complicated, wide-ranging subject—should modern art be displayed in contemporary architecture? Is gallery space neutral? What about land art or performance art? When Beuys talks to dead rabbits, is the Guggenheim merely a neutral space, or is it enfolded in the significance of the, uh, art?

The depth of this separation between disciplines is one of the implicit stories of John Richardson's new book *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Richardson, a British art-world writer born in 1924 who now lives in New York City, is a fascinating modernist insider. His unfinished biography of Picasso is already being compared to Painter on Proust and Ellman on Joyce, although it will be much longer than Strachey on Nightingale (he's only up to Vol. 2, 1907-1917). This new book is a memoir of his own friendship with Picasso and Richardson's mentor and lover, Australian art collector and historian Douglas Cooper. It is gossipy and anecdotal, more of a Ned Rorem outing than an attempt to deal definitively with any of the principals. In effect, it's a breezy collection of all the delicious, bitchy stories he's been dining out on for forty years.

In this story about modern artists and modern art history, historic architecture is central. Richardson's relationship with Cooper plays out in a house Cooper bought,

the Chateau de Castille near Uzès in Provence, where they lived together during the 1950s. It was filled with Cooper's seminal collection of postimpressionist art, in particular the work of Braque, Léger, Picasso and Gris. It helped cement their friendship with Picasso—and his wives, ex-wives and mistresses—who lived nearby. They would lunch with Jacqueline and Pablo in her bedroom at the Picassos' Villa La Californie near Cannes, or Picasso and his entourage would stop in at Castille for dinner after the bullfights at Arles, sometimes with Cocteau and his entourage in tow.

But practically the only mention of modern architecture in the book is a brief discussion of the Mas Saint-Bernard, constructed by Mallet-Stevens for the Vicomte de Noailles in the 1920s: "an enormous house in a modernist style rather too tainted with art deco" (119) he opines. This concise dismissal is typical of Richardson's approach to art appreciation, a sort of style-plus-emotional-response schema which sometimes degenerates to commentary which could have come straight off a television special. It is not very useful for comprehending modern architecture. But Richardson provides ample evidence that the method was approved by, maybe even modelled on, Picasso's own methods.

Richardson certainly sounds like a fun guy. Unfortunately someone must once have told him he looks as handsome as a movie star—vanity oozes out of every photo. There is one shot of him sharing a joke with Cocteau that gives some idea of the aimability of the man who made so many famous friends. It's too bad more of them were not architects. Richardson is an excellent chronicler of intersections in the social world of celebrity artists. Architectural history needs some of this kind of *belle-lettresish*, human-interest gossip to counteract the dry, corporate institutionalised story of modern architecture that is perhaps the biographical equivalent, if not the legacy, of the International Style.

David Theodore, BArch. McGill '96, is on the editorial board of T5C.



Debbie Travis with Barbara Dingle
Debbie Travis' Weekend Projects:
More than 55 One-of-a-kind Designs
You Can Make in Under Two Days
New York: Clarkson Potter, 2000.

Christopher Lowell
Christopher Lowell's Seven Layers of
Design:
Fearless, Fabulous Decorating
New York: Discovery Books, 2000.
 reviewed by Helen Dyer

Debbie Travis' *Weekend Projects* and Christopher Lowell's *Seven Layers of Design* are two recent publications that remind us that leisure is not always synonymous with relaxation. While neither claims to turn us into professionals, the intention of both books is to show us how to achieve a lasting feeling of satisfaction from making our personal mark on our living space.

The book of weekend projects both challenges and promotes the notion of the weekend as an oasis, the container of our free time in which we develop and nurture the "after hours" vision of ourselves. In this vision, we often see ourselves enjoying the fruits of our labours, one that architect Robert Stern has called "moments imagined" — enjoyed while simultaneously using up the "spare time" in the construction of the project upon which we are intended to sit or lie. By creating places where we can picture ourselves relaxing, we strengthen the image of the free and leisurely human being in control of time that fits into its own special category. By spending our free time making these places, we enslave ourselves to the notion of using even our leisure time constructively.

Debbie Travis' book of weekend projects is an easy-going volume, written in a breezy, uncomplicated style. Encouraging, and cheerful about her own shortcomings, which include fear of power tools and dislike for the needle and thread, Travis' approach to environmental enhancement is unimposing and no-nonsense. It's possible to believe that you could complete one or two of these projects before relegating the book to its place on the coffee table, where guests will spend idle moments leafing through it and envying you the time to do-it-yourself.

Travis presents us with a book of 59 projects, a number that hints at the idea of one for every weekend of the year, with a few extras thrown in for the hopelessly addicted. The first project whose photograph appears in the book is, perhaps not coincidentally, the Crackle Varnish Clock Table — a representation of time standing still, perhaps evoking the feeling that one gets when fully connected with one's paintbrush. Appreciation of most of the projects, however, demands a certain flexibility of taste. It was beyond my limited experience with the thrill of renovation to understand why anyone would hunt down a beautifully weathered antique table, only to permanently deface it with a trompe d'oeil dishcloth (64-65). I was similarly bemused at the addition of a picket fence effect to the window box (72). These projects are for those with time on their hands, or for those who subscribe to the idea that all time spent dabbing paint on wood is time well spent. Other projects range from the nifty to the downright itchy (sackcloth cushions?) but there are basic ideas and skills here that are undoubtedly useful to anyone with the urge to stencil a floor or brighten up a plain mirror. What does this book of projects represent? To some (including yours truly) it is a challenge that produces a tinge of guilt because it is totally resistible. To others, it represents the attainment of power through knowledge and skill. The book is a supplement to the popular Painted House series on which Travis has founded her reputation.

Christopher Lowell's *Seven Layers of Design* is intended for the more adventurous

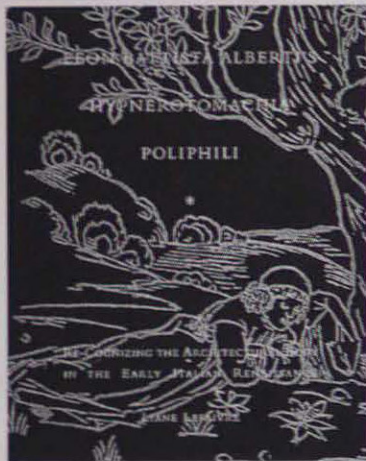
with some basic skills. Seven layers of design are the stages that, if followed, will practically guarantee good results. The emphasis here is on the total look rather than on individual projects. He spikes his authoritative prose with exclamation marks and goofy poses to spur on the feeble-hearted.

Mr. Lowell's thing is fantasy enhanced with plenty of doo-dads to keep the eye busy. Witness the children's bedroom with the nautical theme pictured on page 153. Lowell doesn't stop at the boat-shaped bed; his taste for whimsy is in full swing with the "ocean" floor and shelves shaped like a lighthouse. He even throws in cool marine hardware and a sea chest. The finished effect is irresistible even to an adult, but it's hardly a project for the timid. Similarly, there's the master bedroom with a tropical theme, a delicious hideaway from the real world. Lowell considers the master bedroom to be a ceremonial space, dedicated to the rituals of relaxation rather than simply a place to sleep.

Some of the rooms in the book are victims of over-dressing, and at times one wonders where the human beings fits into the scenario, but there is some sound advice on everything from fabrics to flooring, and at the end of the book, thoughtful tips to the exhausted decorator who decides to call in a professional to finish off the job.

Interest in home renovation is not new. The Industrial Revolution marked the beginning of leisure time for the ordinary person, and later the availability of mass circulation magazines and government grants for renovation sparked an interest in improving the home environment — a luxury previously enjoyed exclusively by the wealthy. While there is no doubt that do-it-yourself books and television shows have changed countless lives and homes, there are still those on whom the charms of home renovation are lost, and for whom, the ultimate question is: how much living space should one reserve to store a half-finished boat bed when life intervenes mid-way through its completion?

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Liane Lefaivre
**Leon Battista Alberti's
 Hypnerotomachia Poliphili:
 Re-Cognizing the Architectural Body in
 the Early Italian Renaissance**
 Cambridge: MIT 1997
 reviewed by Tracey Eve Winton

WHAT NEXT? A Question of Authority

The *Hypnerotomachia* is an illustrated dream-novel narrated in the first person by the melancholy Poliphilo. It was published anonymously in 1499 at the Aldine press in Venice, and attributed to the Dominican monk Francesco Colonna. Lefaivre's project is to demonstrate that it is a treatise on architecture by the well-known Alberti, whose own more scholastically organized *De re aedificatoria* was published in 1485. While this idea is provocative, it is not innovative, and the evidence presented is entirely circumstantial and ultimately unconvincing. Nor is the relevance or significance of Alberti's authorship suggested. Lefaivre's interpretation of the historical material is reductive in its presentation of the original treatise and historicist in the presentation of its ideas; for all her discussion of "the body," metaphor, and invention, she has failed to grasp the way the human body was understood to operate, not only generally in the Quattrocento, but specifically as evinced in the *Hypnerotomachia* itself. This book demonstrates the dangers of

historiography; with its alluring aesthetic texture it threatens to colonize the historical material which it purports to illuminate by burying it beneath a spurious reconstruction.

The following notes are an attempt to redress the formalist renditions in *Leon Battista Alberti's Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: Re-Cognizing the Architectural Body in the Early Italian Renaissance*. All citations of *De re aedificatoria* are from *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, translated by Neil Leach, Joseph Rykwert, and Robert Tavernor. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press 1994

The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* is not a Treatise on Architecture

Lefaivre unquestioningly continues in the tradition that the *Hypnerotomachia* is a treatise on architecture, but this first point is the most problematic. The *Hypnerotomachia* was adopted widely as a treatise on architecture in Western Europe and had an inestimable influence on architecture, literature, painting, and garden design. However, it was not intended as such; it is a treatise on the creative imagination and deals with sensory perception and representation based on a specific model of the human body which Lefaivre does not address in her book, although her final four chapters describe "The Dangerous Body," (in which the Mediaeval period is characterized as 'paranoid'); "The Marvelous Body," (about the richness of architectural surface seen as clothing); "The Divine Body," and "The Humanist Body," (in which Renaissance architecture is characterized as libidinally charged).

Conspicuously absent is the *humoral body* deriving from Galenic medicine, in which the body is constituted of four humours as a microcosm of the four elements that make up the world. The humours are the radical moisture that flows through the body as a spiritual mediator between body and soul; contiguous with the macrocosmic world spirit, they give humanist man his power over elemental nature, and their relative proportions formulate character or temperament. It is on this humoral theory that the *Hypnerotomachia* stands as a work on the

imaginative faculty, consanguine with the philosophical writings of Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino, and it is through this focus that the *Hypnerotomachia* is occupied with the symbolism of eros and melancholia.

As a paradigm for "world," architecture is used as a device in the structure of the cognitive theory. The architectural works described are not models of formal order, but particulars used to demonstrate moments in a dialectical process of transformation between the artifex and his environment. For this reason the text introduces deliberate perceptual "errors." The incremental process of purification successively educates Poliphilo's sensual perception and his imaginative capacity for projective representation (reconstituting the symbolic constellation of the architecture around him.) In the structure of the dream (*hypnos*), the symbolic (*eros*) and the diabolic (*machia*) are opposing forces reconciled. To the architectural language it has borrowed in order to define itself, the humoral element gives back both practical and symbolic notions about history and language, mythology and representation, the control of fluids in and around buildings and gardens, vision and phantasmic memory, and the expression of surface character as a function of deep (spiritual) energy: the reciprocity between cosmos and the cosmetic.

Why the *Hypnerotomachia* could not have been written by Alberti

The monuments presented in the *Hypnerotomachia* are in no way intended as paradigms that could be used to restabilize architectural convention. This differs radically from Alberti, whose innovation was to set out conventions and rules for the art of building, oriented toward the future. Alberti's personal emblem was a winged eye, with the motto *Quid Tum?* meaning *What Next?* Despite Alberti's affinity for mental design, even he could do nothing without a body, and at the time when the *Hypnerotomachia* was written he had already been dead for sixteen years.

In the treatment of ornamental surface Alberti and the authors of the

Hypnerotomachia are on common ground, but with different aims. Alberti was not concerned with the humours; they are mentioned briefly in *De re aedificatoria*, chapter nine, but not with great erudition. Alberti is more preoccupied with the generation of built form through lineaments and matter, the organic consonance of parts within a body, and his representational strategies demonstrate this essential difference. For Alberti, the design of the building, the lineaments, can be conceived entirely in the mind:

Nor do ornaments have anything to do with material....It is quite possible to project whole forms in the mind without any recourse to the material, by designating and determining a fixed orientation and conjunction for the various lines and angles. Since that is the case, let lineaments be the precise and correct outline, conceived in the mind, made up of lines and angles, and perfected in the learned imagination. Alberti, Book I *The Lineaments*, p. 7

The *Hypnerotomachia* provides multiple examples of a more tactile approach to architectural materials, the flaws and inconsistencies in the marbles being set to use as articulations of the carvings, as if the very imperfection in the stone were an intimation of the presence of life. The eroticism of aquiline Jupiter bearing Ganymede up to Olympus, and the statue of Venus nursing Cupid demonstrates the reciprocity and interpermeability of their plastic space with Poliphilo. The *Hypnerotomachia* submits to Renaissance Neoplatonism and alchemy in its recommendation that art be an imitation of nature, even as representation was to be modelled on perception. The distinction of Poliphilo's vision is that an imitation not of natural form, but of natural principles, gives rise to form through animation. The artifex is necessarily engaged in a dialogue with nature, and what could be more natural than the mythical history of the original Golden Age?

It is not the actual edifices of history but their recoverable principles — in this case, symbolic attributes — which interest the Humanists. The clear hypnerotomachic imperative with respect to the relation of theory to history is analogical: not to imitate

the appearance of the archaeological material, but to use wisely those appropriate theoretical principles, derived from and in imitation of physical nature. Form emerges when material is infused with soul which gives it life and temporality — form which is neither simply structure nor surface but animation and spatiality. The authors of the *Hypnerotomachia* propose that design should be a celebration of a happy marriage rather than a copy compromising Form in matter and space. While for Alberti the architect struggles to create wholly ideally, the craftsman's work being important but independent, the *Hypnerotomachia* envisions "design" as a continual process of orientation integral to and indivisible from life and culture.

Problems of Historicism in Hermeneutic Methodology

There is no more dangerous error than that of mistaking the consequence for the cause: I call it reason's intrinsic form of corruption.

F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 47.

One of the more serious problems of Lefavre's study is a failure to take into account how the Humanists understood their own bodies as microcosms of the cosmos, on the nature of which their own architectural anthropomorphism was based. Understanding a written work in its natal context is essential to a coherent interpretation of its intended significance.

Neither psychoanalytical nor physiological anatomization held court in the Humanist imagination; instead, an astrologically engendered humoral body responsive to the ministrations of sympathetic magic was the model on which the *Hypnerotomachia*'s buildings were based. The formal characteristics of these buildings laid out at length by Lefavre in favour of revisionist theories of Renaissance architecture are in reality articulations of much later art-historical developments, rear-projected: she ascribes to the *Hypnerotomachia* the invention of cinema, Romanticism, aesthetic theory, and women's lib.

While it is laborious to address an artifact or text without contemporary prejudice at some level, it is crucial not to colonize the

differences of the past under the banner of historical scholarship. History cannot be reduced to similes: "this is like that" does not mean automatically that "that" can replace "this." Once an interpretation of historical evidence exists it is liable to be sundered and decontextualized as material in the service of contemporary interests, but when the philological historian has chosen her subject, her responsibility is to render accessible the intentions of the author.

A Question of Authority

To trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown - the first instinct is to eliminate these distressing states. First principle: any explanation is better than none. Nietzsche, F. *Twilight of the Idols*, p. 51

Lefavre's book is not the first publication to assert that the *Hypnerotomachia* is Alberti's work. Emanuela Kretzulesco-Quaranta's *Les Jardins du Songe: "Poliphile" et la mystique de la Renaissance*. (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1986) makes the same claim, and eminent architectural historians such as John Summerson and Alberto Pérez-Gómez have noted similarities between *De re aedificatoria* and the *Hypnerotomachia*.

So pressing a question of authority is one that derives from our own cultural circumstances which privilege originality and authorship through the status of the individual. Although Renaissance thinkers were beginning to develop ideas in this direction, these ideas were related to an increasing consciousness of the freedom of the will, a new sense that permanent change in the divinely created world could be implemented through human works. For the Humanists, though, invention was ever bound to an ethic of responsibility. Written work was more usually a collaborative effort, rarely undertaken in isolation, as extant letters and works linking the key philosophers, poets, painters, patrons, and architects of that period demonstrate.

Humanist concepts of authority and our own are both predicated on the importance of

origins. For the Renaissance, the origin was a mythical Golden Age, an unfallen paradise pre-existing the instatement of the divisions of time and space; in the contemporary world, origins lie in the uniqueness of individual expression: essential difference. The need to attribute authorship of a work to a known figure in order to sustain or promote its validity is a necessitated product of our cultural pluralism and relativism; authority is often substituted for critical judgement; we privilege terms such as "originality" in the sense of individual innovation. For the Humanists, never agitated by imitation or plagiarism, scholarship was self-evident in the primogeniture of the writing. Their interest in authority escalated in the early part of the fifteenth century when the foundations of absolute truth in knowledge received through sacred texts had been shaken by Lorenzo Valla's rediscovery of rhetorical style in the ancients. It was a technical, not an ideal, concern: this knowledge had given to the tropes of rhetoric the function of revealing a moral doctrine held by an individual. The *Hypnerotomachia*, however, is already self-sustaining in the world of the work, and not in need of postmodern ornamentation.

Poliphilo or Polyfilla?

How does Lefavre's book serve and preserve the original *Hypnerotomachia*? A critical text should open up the symbolic images and questions of a primary text rather than closing down signification in an allegorical manner. As a mask, criticism may serve both to conceal and to reveal aspects of the work; as a frame or a threshold, it allows the reader to enter the original text and explore.

Leon Battista Alberti's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili: Re-Cognizing the Architectural Body in the Early Italian Renaissance* may confuse the real issues at stake in the treatise for those readers newly introduced to the *Hypnerotomachia*'s arcane delights. For that reason, *caveat lector*. The first principle of historicism is to make one's *knowledge of history* a substitute for historical actuality, in all of its unknowability, its incomplete picturation, its otherness, at whose delights

and surprises we can still marvel and learn. Let us not mistake Lefavre's hypothesis for the real treatise lying deliberately anonymous before us; let us not displace what is given in a primary text overflowing with vitality and spirit by smothering it in a Polyfilla reconstruction in order to fill up gaps perceived through a fundamental misinterpretation, which ends in dissimulating the *Hypnerotomachia* rather than eliciting its fantastic nature.

An architect prepares a foundation with care and deliberation: a vast edifice does not balance on a single molehill. If the underpinning of Alberti's authorship were to be dismissed conclusively, what would be the remaining significance of Lefavre's labours? There is a lot of first-class degree-zero information in this costly and beautifully produced book, including some statistics that would surely be construed as a joke by any serious historian, e.g. the precise number of pages in the *Hypnerotomachia* dedicated to descriptions of precious stones; the prolix iterations of the concept of "lust." Lefavre is reasonably (never exhaustively) thorough in her search for cross-references, but for the most part, however, her citation of sources for each fact or comment substitutes for a *responsibility* for its appraisal: the only hypothesis which Lefavre maintains independently is Alberti's authorship — which leaves her readers wandering in a *massa confusa* of data - sometimes wonderfully fascinating but ultimately incidental or irrelevant to the concert of either book: our irritation begging the personal question, "So what?" and, with academic trepidation, the more pointed question:

What next?!

But I can say this of myself: I have often conceived of projects in the mind that seemed quite commendable at the time; but when I translated them into drawings, I found several errors in the very parts that delighted me most, and quite serious ones; again, when I return to drawings, and measure the dimensions, I recognize and lament my carelessness; finally, when I pass

from the drawings to the model, I sometimes notice further mistakes in the individual parts, even over the numbers. (Alberti, Book IX, *Ornament to Private Buildings*, p. 317.)

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Edward S. Casey
The Fate of Place
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998

reviewed by Michael Emerson

Edward Casey's *The Fate of Place* extends the philosophical examination of place he began in *Getting Back Into Place* (1993), but the two volumes, while thematically linked, approach their subject in very different manners. The earlier work is a rather lyrical line of phenomenological research and an investigation into the many ways place is experienced by different cultures: through travel and navigational practice; and in the built and natural environments. Readers interested in more tangible examples of the place-world will find them in the first book, which covers the specificities of our North

American places and discusses the philosophies of John Muir, Henry David Thoreau, and several indigenous peoples. *The Fate of Place*, however, is very much a work of academic philosophy and deals almost exclusively with the European philosophical canon, as filtered through twentieth-century Continental philosophy, believing that "to uncover the hidden history of place is to find a way back into the place-world" (xv). In this addition to the burgeoning literature on place, Casey constructs a comprehensive history for a concept which, too often, is used evocatively and uncritically. In doing so, he compels further examination of place's role in the Western philosophical tradition.

Casey's project uses the model (and often the content) of such philosophical histories as Arthur Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* or Alexandre Koyré's *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* in which an idea is isolated and followed chronologically through its development in Western thought. Casey's choice of the word "fate" in the title of the book hints at a problem with such wide-reaching histories: in telling the story of place it often seems that its many appearances are determined by a linear progression, or a logical succession of concepts. Casey is aware of the danger of this sort of historical determinism, if he cannot entirely escape it—works of such ambitious historical scope leave room for arguments among specialists in the many periods covered. It is to Casey's credit and the work's advantage that the footnotes show a genuine effort to engage such experts not just through their works but in conversation. As for other scholarly addenda, the lack of a bibliography and the inadequately specific index in such an expansive book are regrettable.

The work begins with the mythopoetic formulations of place in the ancient Near East and pre-Socratic Greece. Casey establishes the primacy of place in cosmogenesis through an examination of pre-generative "voids," revealing that even these supposedly empty, vacuous spaces contain placeful characteristics. Plato's *Timaeus* serves as a link between the older narrative traditions and the

categorical, philosophical place of Aristotle. While Casey's own post-modern understanding of place has many affinities with Plato's inclusive matrix, he finds in Aristotle's exclusive containment model of place a phenomenologist's concern with the world at hand. Casey is especially successful in presenting place's flux in the years following the ancient world up to the pre-modern period. Both Platonic and Aristotelian perspectives on the notion of place are re-examined, as well as ideas which emerged with early Christianity, from fifth and sixth-century thinkers like Proclus and Philoponus, rarely encountered in art and architectural discourse, appearing here with powerful reconceptualizations of place. The medieval controversy over the feasibility of pagan thought for theological determinations of place, provoked by Thomas Aquinas' Aristotelian scholasticism, is seen by Casey as a debate over cosmological infinity that will eventually allow the modern dissolution of place into the expanse of universal space. The intervening Renaissance is a problematic period for place, and Casey is hard pressed to account for the philosophical vagaries that became apparent. "Compromise is a close cousin of confusion," he writes, and one wonders whether the philosophical emphasis of his work ill accounts for the efflorescence of potentially placeful work that emerged during the Renaissance which blurred the distinctions between categories of knowledge.

Casey's understanding of history owes much to Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences* and its diagnosis of worldviews increasingly caught up in geometric/mathematical abstractions from the seventeenth century on: a diagnosis which results in fascination with, but little sympathy for, the post-Cartesian world. Newton, Leibniz, Locke, addressed place suggestively but eventually gave primacy to space, at place's expense. Casey expresses his disapproval of this in the first (and rather late) discussion of architecture in the volume, concerning Bentham's panopticon: the analogy of late eighteenth-century place with a prison/hospital type of building is no accident.

There is a lengthy lacuna of one hundred years between the work of Kant and the reappearance of place in Whitehead's thought. But it is Husserl's phenomenological approach that lies at the root of a return to place, as it gives onto two possibilities: the body-centred mode of Merleau-Ponty and the idiosyncratic ontological "openings" of Heidegger. Against these late modern alternatives, Casey sketches the post-modern turn to a fluid, inclusive sense of place that incorporates regional and sexual specificities through the work of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Irigaray, and Nancy. The book's most lengthy engagement with architecture is a consideration of Derrida's contribution to the "event architecture" of Tschumi's Parc de la Villette, but the project is perhaps most valuable for illustrating the difficulties in translating the post-modern concern for the heterotropic and "non-presented" into architectural form.

Through the millennia covered by this book, the recourse to architecture is rare, but given the book's status as philosophical history, this is understandable. Casey, however, acknowledges that in the contemporary re-emergence of place, it is social scientists, artists, and most notably architects who have had, and will continue to have, a leading role in showing us the many possibilities of place. The implicit challenge *The Fate of Place* presents to those interested in the architectural mode of place is this: if the experience of place is now understood most clearly through movement, how can architecture operate as a meaningful place beyond being a merely static referent or empty container? The question is not altogether new, and indeed has been of concern to the architectural community in various ways for several decades. But occurring as it does here in the context of a trenchant interpretation of place's controversial past, the question reinvigorates speculation on what place can be, while combating moribund nostalgia for what place was.

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