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Introduction

by Michael Benedikt

To live is to evaluate. To live among others is to be evaluated.

Let me elaborate. In order to survive, all living creatures must be able to distinguish the good-for-themselves from the bad-for-themselves. Basics are uncomplicated. But by the time evolution yields up human beings living in societies with multiple institutions—science, government, education, the professions, and many others—the processes by which evaluation happens and the targets at which evaluation is aimed become multifarious. Good-for-*me* becomes tempered by good-for-*us*, and good-for-*right-now* by good-*in-the-long-run*. Every action finds itself linked to others into long chains of preconditions, procedures, and protocols, some of which seem to be "only social," others overly painstaking, even superstitious, but most of which, in fact, serve to incorporate ever more information into our decision making. Out of this evolving, ever-complexifying filigree, patterns emerge. Definitions of "value" multiply and compete, not just because what each institution *does* is different, but because each has an interest in self-perpetuation—indeed, in expansion—under the general mandate of all living species, all institutions, all ideas, to grow, replicate, and proliferate, if necessary at the expense of others.

Architecture is an institution. And like the others, it is criss-crossed by the values put forth by other institutions, even as it seeks to perpetuate and proliferate its own. This is why our wanting to honor an architect, building, style, or model of practice above others in a *public* way—accepting some values from outside and projecting others into the milieu—is entirely natural. It is also why difficult questions arise, such as: by what criteria, internal or external, should honor be bestowed on buildings and their architects? Who shall do the judging and who the bestowing?

And let us not forget this question: who cares? Who *ought* to care?

The articles collected in this fourth *HDM Reader* address just such questions. I shall introduce each one and try to stitch them together. To do this, however, I need to offer ananalysis of the *venues* in which and the corresponding *values* by which architecture is currently evaluated.

First, there are the venues in which (and the processes through which) *architects* publicly *honor each other*: design awards, competition wins, publication in professional magazines and books, election to FAIA status, invitations to lecture at schools of architecture, and so on. In each venue, some sort of jury or editorial review is involved that gives the evaluation a measure of objectivity. The *values* that dominate are values like: significance- or uniqueness-of-program, compositional or formal freshness, mastery of some new technology, fineness of construction, and "narratibility" (making of a good story). These values are often disguised by the jargon of the day.

Evaluation of architects and their buildings by the *public*, on the other hand, proceeds in a far more casual manner: publicly in a few newspapers and "dwelling" magazines, privately around water-coolers, in cars driving by new projects, and so on. Here the values of livability, contextuality, "classiness," price, and goodness-for-the-local-economy come to the fore, plus simple judgments of ugliness or beauty ("I *like* it." "*I* don't.") The public also expresses its opinion, anonymously and in the aggregate, by its market behavior: the places people like to visit, the "properties" people like to invest in or rent. And it expresses itself through local government: city ordinances, development review processes, neighborhood review boards, etc., all of which aim to restrain architects' desires to be expressive and experimental on the one hand, and/or please a private client on the other.

Architects are also evaluated by those who *commission* them—I mean clients and their financiers—and these individuals tend to judge architects on yet other bases, such as their friendliness, reliability, efficiency, experience in a certain building type, fees, level of service, signature style, and often mere consanguinity or a social connection. These evaluations are made in other venues: at interviews, around boardroom tables, by word-of-mouth, at social events, and after tours and site visits.[i]

And finally architects (and their work) are evaluated by members of *allied professions* and occupations. I mean engineers, interior and landscape designers; contractors, suppliers, craftsman, and so forth. Among these groups—and let's just say this and get it over with—architecture's internal values are an especially hard sell. More important to them is ease-of-construction and the architect-at-hand's speed, devotion to teamwork, and "flexibility."

Four venues, then, and at least twenty applicable values. So again: whose judgments and whose values should prevail?[ii] If the right answer is "a balance of all," then by what means could that balance be achieved? Could/should some authority—perhaps an architecture magazine—arrive at an overall scoring system that publicly evaluated this architect or that building to be superior to others in a *comparative* way? Magazines like *Road & Track* and *Photo* do this for cars and cameras every month. They provide rank orderings and elaborate reasons for every call. Why not *Architecture* architecture?

I shall not go into why my suggestion is not likely to be adopted. But it does raise the question of whether and how the general public's evaluative voice is heard by architects, and of who, exactly, evaluates buildings in its behalf. Is the public's voice heard at all? Citing architects' elitism, some would say "not enough." Citing the marketplace, others would say "too much already." In deciding who's more right (for both have a point), it helps to remember why we have *professions* in the first place.

A member of a profession—any profession—is a person who claims the public's *trust* by having received a specialized (and itself accredited) education, having experienced a period of supervised apprenticeship, having passed special examinations, and now holding a state-issued license to practice.[iii] Two kinds of trust are fundamental: the trust that the professional will serve the client using the best knowledge available in the field, and the trust that the professional will preserve and promote the public good.[iv] Why is either trust needed? The first is needed because in all but the most obvious cases of incompetence, clients are unable to judge the goodness of the service provided. It is simply beyond their training or ability to tell whether they are receiving good, let alone the *best,* service. . This is why we permit the surgeon to do what he advises. (Who do we go to for a second opinion? Another surgeon.) This is why we sign where the accountant says "sign."

The second trust is needed because the public as a whole simply cannot stay on top of the welter of decisions made daily that affect the welfare of all. Moreover, the second kind of trust means that clients can afford to be selfish in what they commission a professional to do. For they can rest assured that the professional is not only *trained* to uphold the public interest (even as they serve theirs), but is also *pledged* to doing so.

Alas, and also happily, no profession today operates quite so insulated from the hurly burly of the marketplace. At the extreme, clients (and patients) behave like consumers or customers, demanding "value for money," expecting immediate results, and taking their business elsewhere if they are inconvenienced or offended. And many professionals are happy to oblige, behaving rather like competitive on-demand *providers*. To them, refusing service, or advising a client away from their immediate self-interest and towards their longer-term self-interest (or, heaven forbid, the *public* interest) seems presumptuous, elitist, paternalistic, undemocratic, insulting of the intelligence of the client/customer, etc., etc.—not to mention bad for business. As antidote, loyalty to a/the profession is salutary. The practitioner's duty to uphold the profession's values and standards *must* discount the public's opinion (and often the last client's opinion too) of the quality of his or her work. Cast into the very DNA of the institution of architecture, as into the DNA of medicine, law, and the other professions, I am pointing out, is a certain indifference to lay criticism.

We can think of this as a good thing. Ordinary people really *don't* know enough. But when the public finds an articulate voice in an educated and popular critic, as it sometimes does, that voice is discounted too, and this may not be a good thing.[v] Members of the public too often suffer their town's Architecture—banal or exotic as the case may be—in silence, shaking their heads at what architects do, and one has to wonder why. Is it their inability to articulate their suffering or even *know* that they are suffering despite the critic's help? Do ordinary people feel insecure about their right to complain about the mediocre and pretentious "junkspace" that constitutes the bulk of our environment? Or is it prudential: is it an unwillingness to find themselves ever persuaded to divert resources from their present pleasures to architectural ones, which are expensive, and which, God forbid, they might come to *need*? I don't know. But I would suggest that opening up non-market channels of critical communication between architects and the general public, *going both ways*, has the same urgency in this century that it had in the last.

Two groups remain whose opinion architects do care about: other architects (and here I include architecture critics, historians, and writers), and clients. Gathered in this volume of *HDM Reader* is a selection of notable articles by the first group.[vi] Although it represents only one of the four "venues" in which architecture is evaluated, what this first group thinks, values, and writes matters. It matters at the better architecture offices, which strive always to advance the field as they serve the client and the public good, and at the better architecture schools, where architecture's values are constantly being debated, not just transmitted.

It should not go unnoticed in all this, however, that although the articles presented here are evaluative of certain architects and their work, they are also implicitly evaluative of each other and of architectural evaluation itself. Historians, critics, editors, and writers in architecture play on a field of contestation too, competing with each other as to the importance of their values, as to the trenchancy of their observations, and as to the effects of their thought upon the practice of the day. And no one is more tempted to evaluate the evaluators than writers of introductions to books like this. I shall try not to abuse the privilege.[vii]

Hélène Lipstadt open this volume with discussion of Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch in St. Louis Missouri. We are at once intrigued. Designed in 1948 and completed in 1963 to much public acclaim, the Gateway Arch nonplussed both the sculpture-critic community and the architecture-critic community. Neither an arch nor a gate, neither architecture nor sculpture, what was it exactly? And why, today, is it so rarely taught?

Upon the armature of this elusiveness Lipstadt offer a distinction that reappears in many of articles that follow: that between *icon* and *canon*, iconicity and canonicity. Almost magical in its optical effects, the very uniqueness of the Arch projects it into the realm of iconicity, says Lipstadt. But it cannot function as part of a *canon*, which is to say, as a work judged by most as best of its kind *and* worthy of being a model for others to follow in rule if not actual form. The Statue of Liberty and the Eiffel

Tower are also more iconic than canonic, except that they are typical of landmarks, are good landmarks, and reach poetically upwards. They too are just too unique.

And then there is the sheer popularity of the Arch. "Understanding the *Arch as an icon that is not canonic*," Lipstadt writes (her emphasis), "initiates a special sort of historicization rich in emancipatory potential." Emancipatory? Emancipating us from the style of historical assessment that disvalues popular appeal *ipso facto*,as against the reigning International Style model championed by Gropius—an architecture designed, as it were, not to need design, only correct carrying out—Saarinen carved a path that led as directly to Venturi as to Gehry. Using sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as her guide, Lipstadt takes the view: "A disdain for iconic buildings is inculcated in architectural education along with . . . a respect for canonic buildings." To do otherwise would be to teach exceptionalism and to allow popular opinion to be the judge of architecture, which is, of course, unprofessional in the terms I offered earlier, not to mention lacking in "class." Lipstadt does not make this argument, exactly. But its implication remains. More than a history, Lipstadt's essay is a model of deep investigation into the sociological (i.e., class) and cognitive-categorical assumptions that underlie the whole enterprise of architectural criticism.

Given the ecstatic reception of Gehry's iconic buildings today by young architects, by the public, and by the architectural press, one wonders whether we have become the wiser. Perhaps the difference lies in Gehry's methods and forms, which at least seem to be imitable, and thus elevate his later *oeuvre* to potential canonicity. Or perhaps it is Gehry's mind-set, precedent-set, and client-set, and the constant identification of all three with the artworld, high (Bilbao) and low (Experience Music Project in Seattle). How classy—how confusing—is that? It's not Saarinen's world any more.

And yet one might not think so to judge by the reception of the PSFS building in Philadelphia designed by George Howe and William Lescaze. In "What Goes Unnoticed," David Leatherbarrow makes a case for its canonicity despite, or perhaps because of, that building's Art Deco style (interior and exterior), which, to the present-day eye, seems timelessly elegant, and that building's spatial, structural, and programmatic "ultrapracticality." (This was the term used during its design and which was set before Howe and Lescaze to achieve).

"Does the identification of a building's style or its formal precedents," Leatherbarrow asks, "help us understand its contemporary and continued importance, in either architectural design or everyday life?" (I would call this part of a building's narratability.) Certainly guidebooks and docents think so, as do art historians generally. Style really counts. But the PSFS underwent several remodelings and "re-purposings," and it more than survived artistically. There is something deeper going on, and Leatherbarrow takes us there forthwith. With Beaux Arts genes in its form, Modernist blood in its frame, and the ideal of practical luxury, or luxurious practicality, in its mission, the building achieves a "laconic

precision," a "muted splendor" that recalls less a Western than an "Oriental" ideal: dark, polished, comfortable, ready to receive elegant inhabitation of *many* kinds. If this is Mies van der Rohe, it is early Mies van der Rohe, through Lescaze. Although innovative in its use of ground floor space and its connection to the rail line beneath, in its use of air-conditioning (it was the second building in the U.S. to be fully air-conditioned), and its escalators, use of the corner, and glazing treatments, the PSFS building certainly made urbanistic contributions to the street and to the city. But it became canonical, I suggest, for its singular and yet not idiosyncratic *beauty*—beauty of a kind architects could "do" today if they cared to. There are not many otherwise-everyday buildings of which that can be said.

Howe and Lescaze's partnership was short-lived, and, in the eyes of history, the PSFS building is the best work each was to do. In a similar way, Paul Rudolph's Art and Architecture Building at Yale would come to be seen as his best work, certainly his most iconic *and* canonic work. (I say "canonic" since Rudolph's tectonic ideas were massively copied for decades.) As Timothy Rohan tells us, in 1960 "Rudolph was at the top of his game." In the A + A building, "Rudolph seemed to have provided an alternative to the gray, soulless world of the corporatized International Style—to have devised a modernism simultaneously colorful, textured, rough, elegant, exciting, witty, slightly vulgar, and even dangerous."

Here was a building that was to become a whipping boy for postmodernism stylistically, and as though to prove the relevance of style, it was soon overcrowded and dysfunctional. Haphazardly partitioned, and with people afraid to touch its hammered concrete walls, an interior shantytown developed that was destroyed by fire, scarring the building and closing it down.[viii] Both the building and Rudolph's reputation sank fast.

It was not until the renovations of 2000 to 2004 were complete that the space Rudolph intended was seen once again. The tides of architectural opinion had turned. The Art School had moved out. From the *icon* that the A + A Building always was—first in glory, then in ruin, and then in begrudged repair—it returns as *canonic*. Its Piranesian sectional development will always have something to teach; so too will its materiality and color, its sensuousness, its restrained heroism. Rohan conveys this well. "We need caves, not just goldfish bowls," he quotes Rudolph as saying, in an obvious swipe at the Lever House and its progeny. *Im*pure modernism for impure, i.e. real, people. In Rudolph we find Kahn's monumentality and Wright's intimacy combined. We hear birds twittering as water falls to the ferned pool at the bottom of a canyon. We look out through clefts and bones. We look in to protected candlelight, fire. Is the value of a building determined forever? In some cases, it seems not.

In "Canons in Crossfire," Charles Jencks' launches us into the thick of modern architecture's ideational complexity. Architecture's "styles" and movements are no trivial matter, he argues, but are a manifestation of a healthy and heterodox process of speciation. There *is* no Modern canon, says Jencks; there *is* no central

best model, except in the minds of that species' acolytes. Purism may be the talk, but pluralism is the walk.

The resemblance to Church politics is not accidental: "Direct contradictions," writes Jencks (and here he is referring to Modernism's double face: avant-garde and establishment), "are no harder for the High Church of Modernism than they are for the Vatican. In fact, both thrive on them." The truth is that protean architects from Le Corbusier to Koolhaas have to reinvent themselves every ten years or so just to stay relevant. Not only is there an element of the demonic in human creativity, writes Jencks, but the "continual revolution" so dear to Modernism, "the constant change of fashion, business cycles, technical innovations, and social transformations" that roiled the 20th century, also "has meant that architecture, like most production in the other arts, has lacked the depth and perfection possible in earlier centuries." Quite a claim, and I think an accurate one with very few exceptions.

Jencks maps the history of Modernism as though it were the surface of a windblown sea ("It's hard to master an art while surfing the waves of 'what's next.'") and comes to rest as though he had found *his* boat, his hero, his "architect of the century" in Antonio Gaudí. Some would say that Gaudíproduced only iconic architecture, but Jencks sees Gaudías canonic. Conflating, perhaps, the man with the work, Jencks writes, "No other architect [of the time] managed to get craftsmen, artists, and even patrons working together on such a large and complete scale. His works remain the standard for the integration of all the arts at the highest creative and symbolic level.".

No other architect? With Brunelleschi in the distant background, it seems clear who Gaudí's successor is: the redoubtable Frank Gehry, whose forms are not that dissimilar from Gaudí's if we zoom in a bit, but whose legacy will have little to do with his iconic style and more to do with his canonical style of practice: integrative of all the building arts, embracing of construction, advanced in all the design tools available—a medieval model, one might say, of the architect as form-giver, inventor, artist, building master, and craft and construction director. Jencks does not draw this conclusion. That he does not might have to do with his preference for complex religio-symbolic form over complex rather meaning-empty form, i.e., with the iconicity of it all. But I would ask: if Gaudí is going to be canonic, does that mean that works of architecture should be valued by the mastery they show of the art and process of *building*? Or is it archi*tects* who should be so evaluated? When it comes to buildings, anyway, whatever happened to the virtue of livability?

Case in point: the prolific early 20th-century architect, Henry Hornbostel. As Daniel Willis nicely lays out in "In the Shadow of a Giant: On the Consequences of Canonization," Hornbostel labored in the shadow of his much showier senior and mentor H. H. Richardson and nowhere more obviously than in Pittsburgh. Willis compares Richardson's Courthouse/Jail and Hornbostel's City-County Building there with sympathy to both. But Hornbostel's grasp of what we today call "the

diagram" and was then called "the *partis*" (these are not quite the same, of course, but close enough), was superior to Richardson's, who excelled at expression, at dramatics. The City-County Building, writes Willis, is "unmatched in its gracious accommodation of its citizenry. . . . Eclipsed by the greatness of its neighbors and cloaked in an air of ordinariness of its architect's own devising, (it) remains unnoticed and unappreciated."

It would seem that canonicity depends on iconicity and not the other way round. "Hornbostel's buildings," Willis goes on, "whatever they may look like, are all extraordinarily agreeable, kindly, indulgent. Such 'immeasurable' qualities are . . . generally excluded from the language of architectural criticism and praise. They are also among the most difficult architectural attributes to replicate, and this more than any other factor, has limited Hornbostel's influence on later generations of architects."

The situation today is hardly different. Iconicity is a precondition for canonicity: if it doesn't look amazing, it's not going to be instructive, whatever its other qualities. Maybe that's why young architects labor so hard to get to first base. If architecture can be said to evolve, then it is clear that the process of selection employed is sexually rather than environmentally selective: the peahen is interested in the peacock's feathers and how he sports them, not in the peacock's intelligence or other inner qualities (of which, for better or worse, the glory of his feathers is taken to be an indicator, a sign). And thus are more little peacocks hatched that will sport beautiful tail-feathers, and more peahens that will swoon for them, no matter how handicapped their suitors are by their plumage. Being immune to outside evaluation and limited in individual educability, the only other option for peacocks is gradual extinction.[ix] I shall leave the reader to connect the parable to architecture.

Like biological life-forms, cultural life-forms thrive (or do not) in an environment that picks and chooses among the variations. For an environment to be an *environment*, however, there must be something oceanic or atmospheric about it, something "all-around," so that multiple forces and multiple encounters can randomly impinge upon every instance of that life-form in a hard-to-predict (e.g. close to random) way. Isolation leads to stagnation. Predictability leads to all-too-successful tricks that cannot survive change. So what becomes of an instance of the life-form "architecture" that happens to be an eyesore to some and a thing of beauty to others? More pointedly (since the pattern is the same), what happens to a work of public folk art that is at once unique, crazy, enlivening, and embarrassing?

It depends what you mean by "the public realm" and whether and how that constitutes a selecting environment. With Tyree Guyton's 1988 sculpture on Heidelberg Street in Detroit as the example (four derelict houses covered with junk and bits of paint) John Beardsley launches into the problem. In "Eyesore or Art" we learn that then-mayor Coleman Young ordered the project's demolition. Making "no effort to hide his disdain, [and] exacerbating race and class divisions," Beardsley

reports, Young suggested that "if suburbanites like the project so much, they should move it to their communities." The project was demolished, and rebuilt by an indefatigable Guyten. The current mayor is more interested in reconciliation. But he is still ambivalent: "The City of Detroit realizes that the Heidelberg Project has artistic value . . . but it's trying to be sensitive to the concerns of citizens who live in the area."

Beardsley's social history of the project is both illuminating and entertaining. I cannot do it justice here. Rather, let me suggest that we have something to learn from the obvious: unlike most works of art, works of public art, and *every* work of architecture unless it is a mile from the highway, is in the public realm, even when it is funded by private institutions, used by private clients, and built upon private land. Every building exists *wherever it can be seen*, wherever it casts its shadow, makes a noise, or gives an echo. In real space, "public" versus "private" is not a watertight distinction. Buildings overflow their sites. Switching metaphors: buildings radiate their presence across and up the streets, over trees and rooftops, like blocks of pure light. Buildings can be gifts to passers-by or punishments. Architects might ignore public critique for reasons I have discussed, but they cannot withdraw from exposure to it.[x] Artists can. Indeed, what are *museums* but places to protect art from the public and the public from art, making their encounter entirely voluntary, pre-approved, and prearranged? This framing is not possible for architecture. To my mind, following through on the fact of architecture's radical publicness would require major supplementation of present-day architectural theory. We need a "field theory" of architecture if you will, one suited to our cell-phoned, internetted, experience-economized age, a theory as fully cognizant of property law as it is of the geometry of perception and the oceanic nature of information.

Works of architecture have few more eloquent spokesmen for their sensuous material reality than Juhani Pallasmaa. In his contribution to this volume, "Toward an Architecture of Humility: On the Value of Experience," Pallasmaa asks to see architecture as a thoroughly conservative art/profession at root, having the means and the mission to conserve—save—the world we think of as real and authentic against dissolving forces of the virtual, the mediated, the motivated, the marketed, the new, and the ephemeral. There is no advocacy in his position of a return to mud huts or log cabins. But there is the idea that the quality of community and sensuous experience attained living, say, in a circle of mud huts under a big sky, can be recalled—or rather, evoked or reinstated—in a perfectly modern manner. One looks for resonance rather than reference. The archaic *can* mingle with the present and the future, as long as the standard is authenticity.

I am signatory to the mission, and so are others.[xi] But Pallasmaa's piece makes me painfully aware of the possible narrowness of the vision. Spending time with Charles W. Moore in the early '90s was, for me, the antidote. What we say accurately about human beings—that "it takes all types to make the world"—should apply to buildings too, Moore thought, and, of course, to architects. Beauty,

he said, cannot be grabbed; it arrives as by grace. Now spread all the standard building-types along a spectrum that has "permanently lived in" buildings at one end, and "visited once in a lifetime" buildings (albeit by many different people) at the other, and one sees immediately that shock value, amazingness, iconicity—call it what you will—is simply the wrong choice for houses unless the client-owner is OK with being gawked at by architecture students and tourists, doesn't live there much, or plans to sell soon. Ditto with places of work. Familiarity breeds boredom if not contempt, especially when the building performs the same tricks day in day out. Do the janitors and guards at Bilbao not stifle a yawn as visitors stagger by, faces uplifted? Some buildings are vessels of time, others flashes of light, and that is the way it should be.

Then too, consider the headline: "SUN RISES. MILLIONS GO TO WORK." You will not see this on any page of a newspaper (although one could think of some chilling scenarios in which one might). So why decry, as Pallasmaa and others do, the publicity that attends the opening of new and striking buildings and the inattention we give to everyday ones, which are surely the ones that matter more? One arrives again at the reasons that architecture is a *profession* and not a business or hobby: we *have* to take care of the unglamorous stuff, without tire, in detail, with the best knowledge available, for everyone's sake.

After a rather abstract appreciation of Aalto, Pikionis, and Scarpa, Pallasmaa, alas, gives me further pause (and remember, I'm a fan, a co-religionist). He concludes by listing the virtues of the architecture we should want. This listing shows—as though it needed showing—that even the most pan-human view of the values of architecture can contain unwitting cultural biases. "Our age" he writes, "seems to have lost the virtue of architectural neutrality, restraint, modesty. Many contemporary architectural projects seem impudent and arrogant. Authentic works of architecture remain suspended between certainty and uncertainty, faith and doubt," and goes on in similar vein. Now, it is common to ascribe the virtues that belong to *people* to buildings (a mode of evaluation, most would agree, that loses its usefulness when the critical going gets tough).[xii] Is it impudent of me, then, to observe how Scandinavian, even Finnish, are the virtues singled out by Pallasmaa? I'm not saying they're *not* virtues. I'm just saying.

It makes me wonder if my own writing is not guilty of the same bias, albeit with different virtues. Indeed, why not just say "Some buildings are more *interesting* than others" and be done with it? This is just what Kurt Forster sets out to do in "Why Are Some Buildings More Interesting Than Others?" But because he puts the proposition in the interrogative, he cannot be done with it, and we read on. Forster's article is about evaluation itself as it is practiced by historian/critics of architecture. Might it be that, to this group at least, the first and last sin in architecture is *being uninteresting*?

Let us say yes. The problem of course, as Forster points out, is that how interesting X is depends less on X than on how X is conceptually framed, culturally

contextualized, scientifically and historically researched, and presented by some*one* . . . which is to say, on how interesting the historian/critic is. Let's face it, some people can make *anything* interesting (which is why good essayists are as rare as their potential subjects are legion), and some people can make everything boring. What are some of the stratagems of the former type even as they risk becoming the latter? [xiii]

In architecture there are several. Among them: providing historical background, preferably in vivid narrative form; weaving a web of ideas, metaphors, and analogies in which to locate the subject; contrasting different scales and levels of perception (macro, micro, personal, public); confounding personal virtues with architectural virtues, as we have just discussed, and then this one: detecting "logical" paradoxes, contradictions, and "tensions" in the work (or the things said about it) *and then leaving them deliciously, scintillatingly in place*. In this way a person of medium build becomes "tall, yet short; both, yet neither."

The last is a popular stratagem still, in these twilight years of post-structuralism, and Forster makes good use of it. But Forster also constructs a sly picture of the present moment in architecture, when *references* to things by buildings, as "picked up on" and explicated by critics, increasingly fails to satisfy. In the work of Peter Eisenman, for example, he sees the weakness as clear: complex figurations, formal moves, and pseudo-evolutionary design procedures based on the diagramming of invisible processes in other realms (e.g., molecular biology) yields up buildings that are only incidentally livable and only strainedly meaningful. Herzog and de Mueron's Signal Box building in Basel goes the next step: into enigma without apology. "[Its] impenetrable quality rewrites the equation of all its functions, invisible and symbolic," Forster writes, "and yet preserves a fundamental impenetrability to the traveler's passing glance. The Signal Box assumes the silent presence of a sanctuary in the desecrated terms of our time; what we have harnessed continues to escape our grasp. . . . The Signal Box codifies the powers it seeks to abolish by housing them in an inviolable shroud." Tall, yet short, anyone?

In the end, architecture without *imagination*—the imagination of the architect, and, I think Forster wants to add, the imagination of critics and historians like himself—is simply not interesting enough to *deserve* evaluation. Why? Because "only acts of *imaginative transmission*" (Forster's emphasis) "allow us to figure out how we came to fall into the place we occupy and what prospects lie before us." How serious is *that*? I am reminded of Oscar Wilde's semi-jest, spoken by Vivian in *The Decay of Lying*: "Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. . . . Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style, while Life—poor, probable, uninteresting human life . . . will (always) follow meekly after."[xiv]

As though to touch ground again, the editor next features the ideas of historian and architect Kenneth Frampton. Technically minded, socially minded, experienced at the drawing board, suspicious of art-world cant, prolific as a writer, and globally

well traveled, Frampton's interview by the editors ("Questions of Value") sparkles with wisdom. Canons depend on traditions, he notes, and both canons and traditions evolve. Iconic works by iconic architects are not the proper locus of critical attention, at least not *all* of it, as is currently the case. The condition of architecture as a whole, and the conditions of architectural *practice*, which differ from country to country, he argues, are eminently worthwhile studying in their own right. Politics, economics, institutional development, technological availabilities, labor play a role as least as large as that of pure architectural creativity in determining what gets built and how. In particular, in America, the framework for construction provided by a free-market economy means that people do *not* get what they really want or really need, only what they are persuaded to want by advertising, can afford to want, can finance or otherwise finagle to save or make a buck. Too many in the profession have become mere providers, and too many of architecture's clients have become consumers or the agents of or renters to consume ﬀrs. It would not be wrong to see in all this a socialist's commitment, antipathy to frippery, to the Wildean worldview. Of the "subversive" avant-garde designers of the day Frampton says (and it helps to remember that he teaches at Columbia): "Neo-avant-garde work . . . favors spectacular aestheticism . . . graphic in its formation . . . rather than architecture as such. . . . Given its post-Duchampian heuristics and its evocation of chaos theory, etc., this aesthetic speculation is rendered all the more intangible by vague divagations upon the relativity of value in the late modern world. Such neo-avant-gardism has indubitably yielded an architecture that pertains to the schizophrenic sensibility of our epoch; however, I am doubtful that either education, or any form of critique, let alone socially responsible modes of practice, can be predicated on a cultural discourse that is, in the last analysis, so indulgently elusive."

Economic realities weigh in everywhere, Frampton argues, and ought not simply to be accepted. Even the giddy pursuit of formalism will find itself hemmed in on all sides—computers notwithstanding—unless the profession first understands and then adjusts its mode of production. Perhaps buildings *should* cost more. Who is there to make *that* case? And on what basis could such a case be made if not (if I might chime in) by (1) articulating the subtle and life-enhancing things good buildings—really good buildings—actually *do*, and how they do them, and (2) conveying a sample of that expertise to architecture's clients and public, not to mention architects? Would this not make buildings interesting enough? Of course it would. But it might leave many practitioners of present-day architectural criticism high and dry, and it might necessitate other sorts of scholarship, journalism, and award-giving. One must look long and hard, Frampton suggests, at such projects as the University of Aviero by Alvaro Siza. But who has the time?

Frampton concedes that it would contravene human nature to be uninterested in the new. But there is something about the whole package of architecture that needs our critical/evaluative attention now, not newness per se or its promise in far-out form. How ironic it is, then, that never in history have so many creative and clever people like architects had so little time to research, read, absorb, or reflect upon

things that matter—that they *know* matter—before ploughing on. Call it information war; call it information sickness: productivity beating receptivity in every sphere; working at work, working at home, working on the road, working on "vacation," time more scarce than money, the accumulation of thought an impossibility. Was that your cell phone?

Sorry, mine.

Where was I? Is there something about the whole subject of values and valuation that suits the temperament of conservatives (and I don't mean Republicans)? Are values always "old things?" And is discussing them rationally, even cleverly, hardly ever more than a cover for lamentation over the passing of one's favorite ones?

To read the British philosopher of aesthetics, Roger Scruton ("Most Architecture Should Be Modest"), one would suspect so. More indignantly than Frampton and Pallasmaa, Scruton takes dead aim the capitalist paradigm (i.e., Americans): "Subtract the profit makers and the vandals" (notice the pairing) "and ask ordinary people how their town should be designed," (ordinary people know best of course) "and a surprising level of agreement will be reached." To wit: nothing too big or small, too broad or tall, something discreet in its lighting, "human" in its materials, something classical . . . something *nice*. The common good is not just common *and* good, but gooder than any good *sui generis*. Scruton comes away from Heidegger's statement that "we attain to dwelling . . . only by means of building" with the conclusion that people who hire architects are bound to do something "intrusive" to the good people who don't.[xv] But what distinction could be more crucial for architecture as a *profession* than that between private and public goods? And who is more strongly pledged than architects to devise a reconciliation between public and private goods in a way that, as times change, requires creativity? (Of course, I mean good architects, professional ones, not mere service providers or developers' lackeys.)[xvi]

Scruton presents the reactionary-conservative position succinctly. There is much in what he says that ought to be challenging to progressives and avant-gardists. With the passing of neoclassical architecture and its replacement by the Modernist idiom, it is true that whole "species" of life-enhancing space-types, material palettes, and dwelling-morphologies have become nearly extinct world over. Having abandoned the built-in wisdom of such long-evolved models, says Scruton, what remains of the once great art of Architecture is not much more than a money-driven free-for-all, "a practice dominated by talentless people" who imagine themselves *auteurs*. The picture Scruton paints is bleak, late Ruskinian. But unlike, say, Christopher Alexander or Robert Venturi, Scruton offers no way forward except perhaps Prince Charles's. Standards of aesthetic judgment may well be objective and timeless as Scruton warrants, and he claims to know them, but it seems to me that the virtues of the vernacular classicism he favors—and they are real—need to be limned in categories quite foreign to both philosophy of aesthetics

and art history if they are to be reborn in a new architectonic body, under a new technological regime.

In “From Taste to Judgment: Multiple Criteria in the Evaluation of Architecture,” William Saunders makes an equally impassioned—and dare I now say characteristically American—case for the diversity of values that apply to architecture, as a profession, as a product, as an art, as a business, as an academic discipline . . . simultaneously. How to manage such complexity? What critical sensibilities are best attuned to what problems facing architecture? How can anyone make value *decisions* with respect to architecture—and let us remember that “decide” comes from *de cidere*, to cut off—without cutting off the option to make decisions that might be different in the future, and do *that* without sliding down the slippery slope of value relativism now?

Like the experienced editor he is, Saunders turns to the better-known critics of this time and constructs a taxonomy of three basic critical positions. To these he attaches names. *Subjectivism*—Ada Louise Huxtable and Herbert Muschamp. Here, the critic claims a nature especially sensitive to architecture, and the critic’s emotional intuitive response to a building dominates. Shortness of analysis, hyperbole in praise, and vagueness in ascription of causes, are constant temptations. *Politics and Morality*—Mike Davis, Diane Ghirardo, Kenneth Frampton. Here the critic’s conscience dominates; buildings are social acts involving power and exclusion. Dogmatism is the danger of this position, blindness to pleasure, and vagueness (again), but now about how buildings *actually* have moral consequence.[xvii] *Pluralism without relativism*—Michael Sorkin. If sensitivity marks the first position, and sobriety the second, then romanticism, or “affirmation,” marks the third: a belief in human possibility, an interest in everything. Saunders leaves for last his favorite critical position. He quotes Sorkin: “Art, after all, is our great hedge against the oppressions of universal sure thing” and adds “Sensitivity to the dangers of ‘a universal sure thing’ is, I believe, a key trait of good criticism.” Good critics should be as aware of their own proclivities as they are of their subject’s, bring them forth, and put them down on the page. Living is all, and more life—or “maximum aliveness” as Saunders calls it—is the chief if not only goal worth striving for.

Precisely. But there are dangers and temptations in the pluralist position too. At the meta-level (i.e., at the level of criticism of critics), one must note that when broadmindedness is the virtue heralded, profligacy is the only rebuke that sticks, and the one who offers it is likely to be framed as a killjoy; while at the first level (i.e., that of actual observations about buildings), the romantic view leads one powerfully to the “pathetic fallacy”[xviii] once again, in this case, reading qualities of the architect into the buildings they designed and vice versa. Thus are Aalto’s *buildings*, according to Sorkin and quoted by Saunders, “supple, human, careful . . . friendly . . . gracious, never authoritarian.” (Those Finns!) Recovering somewhat, Saunders concludes with a rallying cry to his peers, tuned to a perfect pitch: “If architecture that achieves artistic, affective, inspirational power while satisfying

functional needs is that architecture which most embodies fullness and richness of life, the criticism will attend to that architecture above all."

May it be so.

The volume closes with two papers that circle back to its opening themes, on the editorial hope, perhaps, that the reader has grown wiser.

"Once Again By the Pacific: Returning to Sea Ranch" by Tim Culvahouse and Lisa Findley, tells the story of the rise and fall from the critical landscape—less fall, really, than fading—of Moore Lyndon Turnbull Whitaker (MLTW)'s landmark condominiums on the coast of Northern California. Here was a group of buildings that achieved iconicity and canonicity for decades, not to mention career-cementing accolades for its chief architect, Charles Moore. Why did it slowly disappear from view? Culvahouse and Findley suggest that it might have been how Moore's practice developed—"the provocative—some would say kitschy—buildings Charles Moore designed after he left MLTW: the Piazza de Italia, the Wonderwall for the New Orleans World's Fair, and so on." The work of Lyndon and Turnbull became too unassuming, they say, while Whitaker turned to teaching. Does the failure of an iconic work to become canonical in its architect's *own* oeuvre eventually undermine its claim to canonicity in general? This seems not quite right: Wright and Le Corbusier had Picasso-like "periods," as have Graves and Gehry. As Jencks pointed out, great architects reinvent themselves. I suppose it's a matter of risk. Moore tasted architectural liberty in imagination, in fairy tale, in lightness of being—elements all present at Sea Ranch, bubbling under the Puritan material honesty of the barn as a type and giving it new poise, new life—and, as they say, "ran with it" . . . right past where most architects wanted to go. This is one explanation. Another is the parallel process in the world of architectural theory and criticism, where, as Culvahouse and Findley sketch out, the tides of pop and then historical postmodernism rose and then fell and then rose again, only to be dashed on the pilings of deconstructivism and then soothed (finally?) into glassy-smooth certitude of today: the Modern is here to stay (but throw in a few compound curves).

As against the vagaries of this story, Culvahouse and Findley re-experience Sea Ranch first hand and up close, providing us with a vivid account of the life-oriented thinking it embodies. With only occasional use of "yet" and "deploy" (those two emblems of Ivy League Theory) and with a minimum of human-virtue-listing, the authors explore the typology, influences, and landscape of Sea Ranch in a tour-de-force of professional architectural appreciation: observant, plain-spoken, technical, experiential, historical, and generous—a canonical elegy, one might say, for a deservedly canonical work.

Diane Ghirardo, whom William Saunders in this volume groups with critics committed to the political/moral stance, gets the final word. In "The Absence of

Presence: The Knickerbocker Residence and the Fate of Non-Elitist Architecture," we are treated to a fine example of how the approach works.

"The Knickerbocker Residence?" you ask. Precisely, says Ghirardo: you don't know it. It is an SRO (single-room-occupancy) forty-eight-unit apartment building for otherwise homeless and/or mentally ill veterans in Brooklyn, New York designed by Jonathan Kirschenfeld (who?) of Architrope (wha?), and built for $117/sq. ft in 1994–1995. Each apartment is better than it has to be in every way, says Ghirardo, from the architect-designed fixtures to slightly taller-than-standard ceilings. "Although small, the units radiate warmth and light." Moreover, the complex operates largely within the language of the surrounding buildings and was achieved by applying enormous ingenuity both in design and in negotiating the regulations that apply to such buildings.

Diligent in seeking the approval of his peers, and not without Ivy League educations, friends in high places, and prize-winning track records of their own, Kirshenfeld and his partner, Andrew Bartle, submitted the Knickerbocker project to architecture magazines. Receiving brief mention for moral worthiness, no more, they sought the ears of Paul Goldberger and Herbert Muschamp. Neither would bite. Both were too busy reporting on the stars and/or sharing a dais with them. Focusing on the opening, at roughly the same time, of Peter Eisenman's Aronoff Center for Design and Art at the University of Cincinnati (which building I can here merely assert, having spent time in it, is one of the worst ever designed for its purpose), Ghirardo proceeds to skewer the vacuity and condescension of the speakers ("Peter's friends") not just with distaste but marvel: "How could such groups, " she seems genuinely to wonder, "have been able convince so many of their cultural superiority?"

The reception of Knickerbocker Residence is for Ghirardo symptomatic of old-fashioned class warfare: that dense and useless game of prestige management played in cities like New York among the *culturati* in general, not just name architects. The Knickerbocker Residence is simply "about" the wrong *people* within the wrong taste culture. "To the world of architecture as currently constituted," she writes, "such client groups and their invariably downscale districts are not worth lionizing in order to cultivate them for future work. At its core, architecture today is supremely elitist. . . . "

"Well, yes," one wants to reply, "and it long has been." Which is no excuse, of course: slavery was around for a long time too. And yet, and yet . . . I cannot help thinking that Ghirardo's anger overwhelms the facts and the fact that the times *are* changing. At around the same time that Architrope was finishing its project, several SRO hotels designed by Rob Wellington Quigley in San Diego were receiving warm publishing attention, complete with photographs and design feature analysis. Michael Pyatok, then as now, was neither unknown nor poor, and both Quigley and Pyatok's design awards require much scrolling on their web-pages. Samuel Mockbee has ascended to architectural sainthood, and a large and growing

constituency around the country is trying to emulate the Rural Studio where *they* are. The *New York Times* did a Magazine feature on the Studio, and coffee table books still arrive. *Nest* had a good run; *Dwell* is thriving; pilgrimages to Marfa continue. These are encouraging signs. Among the next generation of architects I detect a burgeoning interest in architecture that is good—good in a moral sense, with the conviction that this architecture will have a beauty as unmistakable as a lily's precisely for being not directly sought, that it will hold our interest precisely for being genuinely, complexly, humanly, phenomenologically interesting in itself, not razored to within an inch of its habitational life. A Pritzker Prize might not be just around the corner for this kind of architecture. But it will come.

Judging Architectural Value is the title of this book. Can architectural value be judged fairly, judged objectively? I think this book shows that it can—as long as one leaves the proposition somewhat vague and in the passive voice, and as long as one does not imagine "judged" to mean fixed forever. Flux is the norm. All values evolve except the value of life itself.

The gains offered to life by evolution are less ratchet-like than wavy, less assured than statistical. What promotes "maximum aliveness" here and now may not promote "maximum aliveness" there or forever. We might take comfort, though, from knowing that we always have this deepest of life-principles to turn to, to study, and to apply. Just how many ways are there for buildings to help preserve, honor, and promote all forms and instances of life except those that destroy others (for this is how "aliveness" is maximized)? I don't know. The counting of the ways has just begun.•

Notes

i. When a design *competition* is the means of commissioning, and the jury is representative of different classes, cultures, or areas of expertise, a clash of values is all but a forgone conclusion. Which is why so few competitions result in the best architect doing the best job.
ii. An answer to the question "who cares?" will emerge from the rest of our discussion.
iii. Business people and tradesmen also ask for our trust, of course, but only to the extent of the law. Here a reputation for honesty, as well as a competitive quality/price ratio for the goods or services delivered, is sufficient. Codes of ethics, Better Business Bureau memberships, and the like, are optional: good if they increase business, otherwise not. Businesses advertise and cajole, but professionals are only recommended. Professionals *profess* (from the Latin "declare publicly") that they extensive knowledge of something difficult, that they to deserve our trust; that they will act/advise/serve for the good of all and not themselves alone . . . and wait.
iv. This covers obeying all the laws that obtain and being honest in all their professional dealings.
v. Some popular newspaper-based critics have larger ambitions than speaking for architects to the people and for people to the architects. They wish to become "players" themselves in the development or art-cultural scene.
vi. Perhaps some future publication will give voice to the second.
vii. Interestingly, since there is no professional association of architecture writers, my professionalism in this regard is subsumed under that of university professors', whose

primary responsibility "is to seek and to state the truth as they see it," and to support the free exchange of ideas. (See *<www.iit.edu/departments/csep/codes/coe/aaup-g.html.>)*
viii. The fire was accidental, although lore has it as deliberate—an expression of the campus rebellions of the 1960s.
ix. For an accessible exploration of the mechanisms and consequences of sexual selection, from plants to humans, see Geoffrey Miller, *The Mating Mind* (New York: Anchor Books, 2001).
x. The same is true of our *appearance* (a lovely term), since it happens to others. We ought not to allow ourselves to dress and groom how *we* please, at least not when *in public* (another lovely phrase, hinting of immersion).
xi. Michael Benedikt, *For An Architecture of Reality* (New York: Lumen Books, 1987), Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture* (Basel: Lars Muller Publisher, 1998).
xii. The attribution of human qualities to inanimate things was memorably called "the pathetic fallacy" by John Ruskin. With more about the class dimension of the pathetic fallacy in architecture, see my "Class Notes" in *Harvard Design Magazine* 11, Summer 2000, 4–9.
xiii. Interestingly, each type gambles with its class status. For when "interesting" is the overarching value, the person wielding the judgment is presumed to be above concern with more basic, utilitarian, values, and even esthetic ones. Topping that, class-wise, is to find the world *boring*—if, that is, you also have means and power. There is nothing quite so tiresome, dear, as *enthusiasm*, nor so bourgeois as *knowing* things. I would not bring this up were architectural (and artworld) criticism not so riddled with class-specific value systems.
xiv. Quoted by Joshua Glen, "Oscar Wilde (1854-1900),"
<*www.hermenaut.com/a163.shtml*>.
xv. Look twice at the word "we" when it comes from a philosopher, and three times if the philosopher is Heidegger. Heidegger's claim is quite wrong too, in that the vast majority of people do not dwell in anything *they* built at all. The phenomenology of the real construction process remains to be done, as does a study of the difference between owning and renting, making and finding, designing and fabricating.
xvi. Nor is dwelling only "collective" as Scruton passingly asserts. It is also—indeed I would say mostly—intensely private and personal. See Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*.
xvii. The reader can see my own view at work: I just don't think architects (or critics) *know enough* about what buildings actually do or how they do it. Theory in architecture knows as much about the phenomenon *building* as Galen knew about the body.
xviii. See note 11. When critics discuss critics, or when critics (or historians) evaluate archi*tects*, as people, as creators, etc., a degree of *ad-hominen* argument is appropriate. The question is: do *buildings* affect people just as people do, or as their architects do? Can an annoying architect make a serene building? I think so. The distinction between art and artist is a crucial one to all literary and art criticism, of course. It is an oft-crossed boundary, however, and not always detected.