

entitled “L’Américanisme et la modernité,” organized in Paris in 1985 by Hubert Damisch and Jean-Louis Cohen under a variety of auspices that included the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales and the IFA. In a way, the subject is best served by having been first investigated in depth by an American scholar, someone intimately familiar with the architectural scene and its complexities in the U.S. in the 1930s. One of the strongest contributions Bacon’s book makes is precisely the prodigious amount of information it provides on the debate in this country concerning the modern European movement. Whether the focus is on the confrontation between critics and defenders of modernism in the architecture faculties of the Northeast, or on the controversies elicited by Le Corbusier’s presence within the corridors of MoMA (which sponsored his tour) or the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Bacon vividly describes the extent to which the architect served as a kind of lightning rod among students and faculty.

Bacon sets the scene for her study by enumerating the contacts Le Corbusier had with Americans, from clients (the Michael Steins, the William Cooks, Winaretta Singer/Princess de Polignac) and office assistants (Norman Rice, Robert Allen Jacobs, and others) to Josephine Baker, whom he first met aboard ship returning from South America in 1929. She also mentions what in recent years some French intellectuals have called *américanisme*, referring to a debate in the 1920s and ’30s about whether America could or should provide a model of productivity as well as a cultural example for Europeans to emulate.² These two themes recur constantly throughout Bacon’s narrative: the impact of professional, personal, and sentimental encounters on Le Corbusier during his visit, and the manner in which his intellectual preconceptions were continually being tested. On the one hand, the book reads as a biographical novel—an approach the author recognizes—in which, for example, the American writer Marguerite Tjader Harris, “the intimate

friend [who] revealed to Le Corbusier the deeper dimensions of American culture, allowed him to acquire a more diverse experience of it, and encouraged his creativity.” Harris was his “‘guardian of the hearth’ in New York, she remained his earthly Amazon, his fair Jeanne d’Arc and radiant symbol of his future in New York.” On the other hand, it reads as a cultural and architectural history of America in the 1930s, wherein Le Corbusier bounds from place to place giving lectures, visiting the cities and factories, and generally confronting the material reality of the day with the “myths” of *américanisme*.

Américanisme is not a theory but a critique, positive and negative, that was especially strong in the 1920s and ’30s in France and persists to this day. Bacon uses this notion as a backdrop to Le Corbusier’s experience in America, but treads the fine line between his preconceptions and what she terms his “predispositions.” The author is right to say, in her concluding remarks: “Moreover, his study of American history and culture was selective. His philosophical predisposition toward the visionary also limited his ability to engage mere facts. And the same temperament that impeded his previous efforts to make connections with politics and industry in France and in other countries reasserted itself in the United States. For these reasons Le Corbusier’s preconceptions of America remained in tension with his experiences, allowing his idealism to dominate” (310). Thank goodness for visionaries and idealists!

Bacon has written a formidable volume. While some Le Corbusier specialists may find her presentation of some of the received ideas in the book tedious reading, she is exceedingly scrupulous in citing her sources, particularly scholars such as Mary McLeod and Francesco Passanti whose excellent recent work informs her study in different ways. Others may question the pertinence of elaborating upon Le Corbusier’s extrajugal romantic exploits on the grounds that it does not shed new light on his creativity. Yet, the soundness and

the depth of Bacon’s knowledge both of American architecture of the period and of Le Corbusier scholarship make this an authoritative account that will undoubtedly stimulate further research.

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Notes

1. The Centre d’Archives d’Architecture du XXe Siècle, overseen by the history department of the IFA, whose head, Maurice Culot, has been the driving force for many years in collecting these documents, is open to researchers. Susan Day, Jean-Baptiste Minnaert, Gilles Ragot, and the many other contributors to the Perret *Oeuvre complète* often worked as a team at the Centre. Under the new director of the IFA, historian Jean-Louis Cohen, the collecting and research continues actively.

2. As a concept, *américanisme* encompasses all those beliefs, myths, suspicions, and passions reflected in European attitudes since the eighteenth century. It covers anti-American sentiments as well; see Tony Judt, “Anti-Americans Abroad,” *New York Review of Books*, 1 May 2003, 24–27. In *Américanisme et modernité* (Paris, 1993), Jean-Louis Cohen and Hubert Damisch refer more precisely to the “model” that America could represent for Europe and particularly French authors, Georges Duhamel among others, and how these authors projected their own “scenes of a future life” through the prism of American culture. Bacon relates this model to Le Corbusier’s preconceptions.

Stanford Anderson **Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century**

Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000, 429 pp., 250 b/w illus. \$70 (cloth), ISBN 0-262-01176-X; \$42 (paper), ISBN 0-262-51130-4

In a series of three articles published in the journal *Oppositions* between 1977 and 1981, Stanford Anderson published a masterful reinterpretation of Peter Behrens’s work for the AEG, the German state electric company. In them, he argued—in a reading soon buttressed by Tilmann Buddensieg and Henning Rogge—that this was not the apparently transparent representation of industrial modernity we had assumed. Instead, it was the work of someone “critical of

modernity” who believed “that the artist had the will to reform the modern condition.” Anderson supported this stunning proposition, so useful to the postmodernists of the period, with a persuasive array of primary sources. The result joined Neil Levine’s work on Henri Labrouste’s Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève in Paris as a landmark in the reappraisal of the prehistory of the modern movement, which was now for the first time assessed on its own terms.¹

In the opening pages of *Peter Behrens and a New Architecture for the Twentieth Century*, Anderson succinctly summarizes his original argument:

In accepting the challenge of designing factories, Behrens’s concern was not with recasting all of architecture in terms of a modern industrialized response to building. His concern was rather with elevating so dominant a social force as the factory to the level of established cultural standards. What makes his work interesting and important, independent of the quality of the actual achievement, is that he understood that the established cultural standards must be transformed in the process of assimilating modern industry. Behrens was committed to a lofty art, but also to the demand that high art participate directly in life.

Such a claim is no longer unusual, but it is due in large part to Anderson’s own scholarship that we have come to accept the way in which he identifies the lingering historicism and deliberate monumentality of structures like the AEG turbine factory in Berlin of 1908–9.

Any assessment of the volume must take into account its unusual history. In 1968, Anderson defended his Columbia University doctoral dissertation on Behrens before an imposing committee that included Edward Kaufmann, George Collins, Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and Robert Rosenblum. Between 1970 and 1992, he published five full chapters and part of a sixth as articles. The present book incorporates eight chapters of the original dissertation, which, Anderson explains, he has “supplemented in two identifiable ways: first,

detailed and magisterial studies such as that by Tilmann Buddensieg and his colleagues on Behrens’s AEG work or Gisela Moeller on the Dusseldorf years cannot be subsumed, but are acknowledged in ‘Postscripts’ in more closely related subjects.” Second, “studies on more specific topics are incorporated by references in new or expanded notes.” A ninth chapter is new, “except as it incorporates a small part of what had been the ‘Conclusion.’” Many scholars will envy Anderson for being able to publish at such a leisurely pace and for not having to revise the body of the text in light of recent scholarship. These are luxuries rightly available to very, very few. While it is not a better book for having appeared twenty years after its writing, we should nonetheless be grateful to have this long-influential material finally available in such a convenient format.

The core of the book remains the three chapters originally published in *Oppositions*, as well as the fourth on theater, which appeared in 1990 in *Perspecta*. In the latter, Anderson reveals the hitherto unsuspected importance of theater to the architect. He focuses, however, on the impact of theater as cultural renewal, only hinting at the central role it will occupy in the emergence of architectural abstraction. Anderson’s accounts of Behrens’s membership in the Darmstadt Artists’ Colony, founded in 1901, and his directorship between 1903 and 1907 of the School of Applied Art in Dusseldorf add important background and nuance to this discussion. They are preceded by a discerning survey of the variety of ideas that inspired the diverse forms Art Nouveau took in Germany and Austria. The penultimate chapter describes the scope of Behrens’s prewar Berlin practice by documenting the work he did for clients other than the AEG. The final chapter surveys his postwar work in far less detail. The considerable scholarly apparatus of this beautifully designed book includes an invaluable catalogue raisonné as well as a comprehensive list of Behrens’s own writings.

The architect who staged such a compellingly controlled vision of

modernity in his work for the AEG emerges from this highly critical study as a far more conservative figure than anyone but Anderson could have imagined a generation ago. He is now embedded in the multiplicity of intellectual contexts that can be clarified only by such a complete examination of original published sources (except in the case of the catalogue, archival sources play a minor role in this study). Anderson excels at recounting the path that led Behrens—who began his career as an artist—to believe that stability lay in geometry rather than structure. He follows the diverse strands of theory and practice that informed Behrens’s choices about forms and his understanding of their meaning, confidently challenging the myths that accumulated around the modern movement as it justified its own existence by rewriting the story of the recent past. His discussion of Behrens’s industrial design skillfully delineates the limits of that achievement, which he rightfully strips of past hyperbole. Behrens, he reminds us, did not invent the field of industrial design and made only modest changes to the casing of the AEG’s arc lamp.

Although it is an uncontested scholarly monument, this study already shows its age. The notes that follow the first chapter make no mention of recent scholarship by Debora Silverman and Nancy Troy that highlight the nationalist context of decorative-arts reform in turn-of-the-century Europe.² Anderson’s discussion of Behrens’s classicism steadily weakens as that classicism broke free of its tense relationship with an industrial aesthetic that contributed so much to the power of the AEG turbine factory and more overtly engaged German nationalism. The paragraph on Behrens’s final project—an AEG building for Albert Speer’s north-south axis—does little justice to the moral as well as architectural issues posed by Adolf Hitler’s admiration for Behrens’s German Embassy in St. Petersburg and by the architect’s decision to join the Nazi party.

Nor does Anderson fully address those aspects of Behrens’s practice that

diverge most completely from the architect's own critique of modernity, or take that critique into territory less useful to a revival of classical order. We learn little about the promotional role of Behrens's corporate work. Anderson does not illustrate his posters for the AEG or dwell on the advertising function of some of his purest architectural forms, such as the pavilion for the Delmenhorster linoleum factory. Buried in the catalogue, however, is a spectacular photograph of the night lighting of a similar commission. Anderson similarly does not address the importance of Behrens's flirtation with Expressionism. We should not be surprised that this advocate of crystalline form would produce in the Gutehoffnungshütte warehouse in Oberhausen (which Anderson has relegated to the catalogue) and the administration building for Höchst, two of the most important German buildings of the early 1920s.

To end on such a note, however, would be less than fair. Throughout the book, Anderson takes a profound approach not only to Behrens, but to architecture of the twentieth century in general. He prepares us for the scholarly work of numerous admirers on both sides of the Atlantic, who for many years have found subjects for entire books of their own in brief passages from his writings. Together they have changed the course of our field.

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Notes

1. Neil Levine, "The Book and the Building: Hugo's Theory of Architecture and Labrouste's Bibliothèque Ste-Geneviève," in Robin Middleton, ed., *The Beaux-Arts and Nineteenth-Century France* (London, 1982), 138–73; and Levine, "The Romantic Idea of Architectural Legibility: Henri Labrouste and the Neo-Grec," in Arthur Drexler, ed., *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts* (New York, 1977), 324–416.
2. Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley, 1989); and Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven, 1991).

Monumental Architecture

Marjorie Susan Venit

Monumental Tombs of Ancient Alexandria: The Theater of the Dead

Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 267 pp., 10 color and 160 b/w illus. \$80, ISBN 0-5218-0659-3

Jane Taylor

Petra and the Lost Kingdom of the Nabataeans

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002, 224 pp., 156 color, 5 halftone, and 4 line illus., 3 maps. \$39.95, ISBN 0-6740-8849-9

Both books under review treat ancient architecture from lands that eventually came under Roman control, and both chart a chronological path through the centuries that precede Roman involvement. As such, they can be thought of as part of the growing literature on provincial Roman architectural studies, while at the same time they attempt to define how *local* societies maintained and transformed their visual culture as they came to acquire new identities. Marjorie Susan Venit contributes a volume on the ancient tombs of Alexandria, using one of its most coherent bodies of remains to offer an understanding of this complicated and fragmentary Greco-Egyptian city. Jane Taylor writes of the ancient Arabian people, the Nabataeans, presenting a vibrant narrative and photographic history of the many spectacular ruins still standing in the deserts of Jordan.

Venit identifies three major goals for her work. First, she calls attention to monuments that have been unjustifiably neglected in modern scholarly treatments of the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. Second, she offers the volume as an act of conservation, noting that many Alexandrian tombs have been destroyed since discovery and that the journals that record them are themselves deteriorating rapidly. She adds that these reports

are seldom, if ever, included in American research collections. As a result, her book not only forestalls a loss of knowledge but also introduces the material to a wide scholarly audience for the first time. Finally, the author discusses the tombs in terms of centrality, diversity, iconoclasm, and influence within a dynamic ancient population. In so doing, she brings into focus—in at least one arena of visual culture—shifting Alexandrian attitudes toward religion, ethnicity, politics and morality.

The book comprises a series of chapters that approach the tombs in light of social and historical themes, followed by an appendix that offers a complete, but somewhat too succinct, catalogue of monuments. The loosely chronological groupings of tombs, spanning seven centuries (from ca. 330 B.C.E. to ca. 400 C.E.), are the basis for the interpretive essays. Chapter one, for example, uses the lavish but fragmentary Alabaster Tomb to suggest royal funerary and architectural trends in post-foundation Alexandria. The text also introduces the topic of ethnicity, referring to recent theory on the social construction of identity, but examines it primarily at a formal level by linking elements of an iconographic program or of nomenclature to broad categories such as Greek, Egyptian, Jewish, or Christian. The attempt is worth making, and the evidence for ethnic complexity is well presented, but some of Venit's interpretive strategies are problematic.

I am uneasy, for example, about the frequent extrapolations to "nearest parallels" (such as Phoenicia or Ephesus) to explain curious features found in Alexandrian tombs (20). Although the author writes with caution, this approach nevertheless depends on an idea of formal succession—as though architectural formulae are uniformly deployed. This is a problem if Alexandrian tombs are to mean something specifically Alexandrian, and it in turn seems to preclude a diverse context. I am also concerned that Venit risks reduction of ethnic complexity in relying on the evidence of names alone: Miriam or Joseph points to a Jew-