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The Education of the Architect

Historiography, Urbanism, and the Growth of Architectural Knowledge

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The essays in this book—ranging through architecture and urbanism in the United States, Europe, and the Near East—constitute a cross-section of the research interests, and illuminate the main themes, of a school of architectural thought at whose center stands Stanford Anderson. They have been deeply influenced by a philosophy of architecture developed by Stanford Anderson through his writings and through the teaching program of the Department of History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture, which he and Henry Millon founded at MIT over 20 years ago. The beginnings and orientation of the department and its program, discussed here in the chapter by Lawrence Anderson, were unique in that they wedded history to theory and criticism. Stanford Anderson's approach to architecture envisions it as a world of inquiry and as a discipline anchored in the epistemological bases offered by contemporary philosophical thought, especially the philosophy of science.

Clear thematic webs bind these chapters together. The deep preoccupation with modernism, its national ideologies, and regional responses in the American context are investigated by Siry, Fenske, and Schwarzer, whose concerns are echoed by Moravanszky, Casciato, Stieber, and Bozdogan, who examine European responses to American debates. The knotty interdependence between politics and the built urban environment is investigated by Ghirardo, Rabbat, and Olmo, who combine a broad historical range with a tightly woven methodological approach.

Beyond their passionate interest in architecture and urbanism, the authors share the assumption that architecture participates in, indeed contributes to, the development of ideas that are continuous across culture (Schwarzer, Casciato, Ballon, Stieber, Correa). Thus, architecture is not merely a dependent discipline, providing physical accommodation to ideas created outside its intellectual borders, nor is it an autonomous one, generating form according to its own hermetic rules. Whether historians or architects (and several of them received training in both areas), the writers assembled here share the belief that

contemporary concerns about architecture matter in the way history is constructed. For some contributors coming from architectural backgrounds, research in history became the environment in which phenomena apparent in contemporary architectural production could be investigated with a greater degree of dispassion. Sometimes they seek origins or critical turning points in this history, but always they search for the relationship of these events to the larger intellectual world. Since their view of architecture is as a body of knowledge evolving over time, these authors have resisted the wholesale espousal or rejection of modernism that have often polarized the examination and the practice of architecture in the second half of this century.

How is the history of architecture constructed? Can the processes of architectural creativity be explicated? What constitutes the body of architectural knowledge, and how can it be conveyed to students of architecture? These questions are among those considered in the eighteen chapters that follow. The parts of the book reflect the specific subjects through which the eighteen authors consider these broader historiographic, interpretive, and pedagogical questions. They also reflect the areas of the architectural discipline to which Stanford Anderson has made such influential contributions.

In part I, *American Debates*, the authors consider the totemic position of Frank Lloyd Wright's published architectural polemics, the bruising debates between Lewis Mumford and Henry-Russell Hitchcock, and the context of these debates in the uncharted architectural seas of the Cold War. According to Joseph Siry (chapter 1), Wright believed that the machine was the metamorphosis of ancient art and craft and "proposed that the dilemma of art's future might contain its own solution if the architect recognized that science had given 'to him new and masterful tools.'" Sustaining fiercely that "the artist had a crucial role to play in discovering the aesthetic possibilities of new means of fabrication," and recognizing that "science had put resources in the hands of the artist before he had been ready to intelligently assimilate their possibilities," Wright criticized American educational institutions, which had not, by 1901, forged the connecting link between science and art by training the artist to his actual tools. Wright claimed for the new industrial city, built in the image of man, the ultimate field of application for artistic ideals. Gail Fenske's examination in chapter 2 of the passionate debate about the two competing historiographies of modern architecture clarifies the differences between Hitchcock—arbiter and promoter of the newest aesthetic style—and Mumford, whose interest was in "an architecture that invested with consequence the intricate pattern of human life." Mumford had posited the Bay Region style as a native form of modernism; seeing architecture as a highly contingent discipline, he

approached architectural history as cultural criticism, and because of his interest in regional planning it became a form of advocacy. Accused by Gropius of chauvinistic and sentimental national prejudice (Fenske), Mumford's regionalism was exposed then by Hitchcock as an obstacle to the "changing conception of human nature as expressed in modern architecture," as Mitchell Schwarzer shows in chapter 3 in his analysis of the same public debate, situating the debate on regionalism in the crisis of American identity during the cold war. Replaying the dialectics of nationalism, the debaters on regionalism manipulated Wright's variable positions, associating him now with one side, now with the other.

While an "American" position was forged and painfully defended, European responses to American developments were predictably novel and numerous, as the authors of part II make abundantly clear. In the educational reform examined by Akos Moravanszky in chapter 4, America's position as a "paradigm of a materialistic, success- and health-oriented civilization" became part of the modern European vision, mingled with the impact of Darwinism, whose theories American realities seemed to confirm. As with Wright's lecture on the "Art and Craft of the Machine," Semper's pamphlet *Science, Industry, and Art* is shown to have provided an educational program to elevate public taste, and to promote a vision of the architect as the creative and artistic transformer of reality. Evaluating another response to Wright's architecture and thinking, Maristella Casciato in chapter 5 discusses the "phenomenon of the peaceful penetration of Wright's compositional methods and ideas" in the Netherlands. In the persuasive parallel between Wright and Dudok proposed by Casciato, the two architects are presented as "absolutely indifferent to the traps of ideology," each promoting a sense of collectiveness. Bringing the influence of Wright to a higher level, Dudok abandoned Wright's visionary tone and was able to "articulate a style suspended between traditionalism and modernism, the individualism of creativity, and the fundamentals of urban construction."

The vexed problem of regionalism is taken up in chapter 6 in Sibel Bozdoğan's discussion of Taut's architectural pedagogy in Turkey. She concludes, echoing the findings of Fenske and Schwarzer, that the "canonic precepts of International Style modernism were accompanied by the simultaneous quest for local and regional identity." Taut's invitation to Turkey was part of Turkey's turn to western Europe for models rather than "its own past, which was responsible for decline and defeat and unfit for a myth of unified national entity," but by the time he arrived there his reaction to modernist architecture was equally ambivalent. "Deeply aware of the irreducibility of architecture to its politics or ideology," Taut spoke against the "fetishizing of the stripped-off technique" and resented the reduction of architecture to "objects of use or

means of traffic,” declaring aphoristically that “all nationalist architecture is bad, but all good architecture is national.”

In part III, *Historiographic Constructs*, the authors comment on the interpretation, writing, and uses of architectural history from distinct points of view. Seeing nineteenth-century “life-philosophy” as the belief that “enhancement of aesthetic capacities would unify the disparate poles of industrialism and culture, of modernity and tradition,” Mark Jarzombek in chapter 7 examines the problematic of writing a modernist history when the work of art is expected to speak to us unmediated (since experiencing art is considered more fundamental than its examination). Offering self-understanding through art, “aesthetics was a weapon for society to defend itself from the inhumanity that lurks within human beings.” Taking as an example the historical writings of Louis Hautecoeur, whose “celebration of pure French art reinforced the ethos of aryanism,” Hilary Ballon in chapter 8 considers our attachment to the illusion of benign erudition. Hautecoeur used history to champion the idea of a purified French culture; dating classicism’s death to 1900 and considering the first half of this century a period of transition, he suggested that in order to “rebuild itself after World War II France had to rededicate itself to the core values of the classical tradition.” Architecture is part of a systematic view of culture which stands in for expressions of nationalism. For Danilo Udovicki-Selb, who argues (in chapter 9) the “relevance of Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics for a critical approach to the history of architecture,” architecture conjoins individual imagination, formal aesthetics, and the “historical grid.” Pursuing further historiographic relativism, Udovicki presents Gadamer’s notion that the interpreter is the partner of the author, sharing a common venture of critical evaluation in which the “ultimate fate of an [architectural] work rests on the excess of meaning that it is capable of revealing.” Observing “the alarming tendency to coin personal vocabulary and to give things new names,” N. John Habraken notes in chapter 10 that “there is among architects no common language of general significance . . . each one of us struggles in a personal way to describe.” “Failure to claim the built form as a common knowledge base makes architecture an individual adventure,” and isolates its practitioners. Habraken’s project, like Jarzombek’s, is to reduce the isolation of the architect. For this he prescribes a “thematic-knowledge” consisting of the “purposeful study of what has been known only by doing,” thus rendering explicit an underlying, shared, and growing architectural knowledge.

In part IV, on *Urbanisms*, the authors examine architecture in its specific and “natural” habitat, the city. Like Casciato, Nancy Stieber (in chapter 11) considers the impact of American practices on Dutch audiences for whom

urban subjects, like the skyscraper and the gridiron plan, were of intense interest. Though the “skyscraper was part of the European stereotype of America as a cultureless country,” and Berlage had attacked the “false pretensions of the skyscraper’s historical styles” as well as the gridiron plan—“synonymous with the ugliness of mere function untouched by aesthetics”—after his visit to the United States “Berlage recognized a spatial quality in the relation between the grid and the skyscraper that corresponded to his requirement for monumentality.” He found that the ratio of skyscraper height to street width in New York was similar to that of the Dutch city alley. His experience of New York—where light plays a creative role in making a mysterious play of shadow that he could appropriate as a value—helped him to imagine a “modern geometrical street plan which created a spatial order distinguishable from the thoughtlessness of the engineer’s ruler-drawn grids.”

In chapter 12, Diane Ghirardo, examining the urban “battle for the hearts and minds of Italians under fascism,” moves beyond regionalism to *campanilismo* by showing how programs were developed for Ferrara that advanced the views of history and society espoused by Mussolini. Through the Foucaultian categories of surveillance and spectacle the fascist regime gained control of the public realm. Reflecting specific Italian conditions, it is the “connection between the modern and the ancient that provided important legitimating functions.” Linking aesthetics and politics “the urban ceremonial enacted in Ferrara pleased the fascist leadership because it selected out of the city’s long history references to patrician dictatorship rather than to republican control.” (The relationship of aesthetics and politics equally concerned Americans like John Dewey, as Moravanszky and Jarzombek remind us in their chapters.) In Nasser Rabbat’s view (chapter 13) architecture was also affected by political realities in the 1870s, as he shows in his analysis of the construction of the Rifa‘i Mosque in Cairo. He examines the neo-Mamluk style in which this building was realized in order to “illustrate the workings of the multiple internal and external programs in an East–West architectural exchange”; his intention is to avoid the interpretation of the “East–West discourse in architecture as merely a reflection or an expression of a power relationship,” teasing out, instead, the “complexities and intricacies informing the nature and range of interrelations between the two sides.”

Turning to another localized study, of Place Louis XV in Paris, Carlo Olmo in chapter 14 questions the separation between the history of institutions and urban history, positing a “history of municipality” that would encompass both. His evaluation of the building history of this royal square shows its settlement as an internal colonization represented by conflicted patronage, and points out that the “ratified success of the square does not mesh with the

intricate and contradictory aspects of the history of the making of the square,” but rather illustrates the “difficult cultural role played by architecture in the social relations of prerevolutionary France.”

In the last section of this book, part V, *Teaching Architecture*, four distinguished educators consider the most difficult facet of the discipline, that is, its pedagogical mandate. Asking himself, and us, whether ethics have a bearing upon architecture, Royston Landau in chapter 15 traces the origins of the modernist ethic, proposing Patrick Geddes (also discussed by Fenske in chapter 2) as a significant link in the long chain of modernist-ethicists. This proposed tradition includes William Morris and John Ruskin before Geddes, and continues up to the reinvocation of Geddes’s advocacies by members of Team 10. Although the “modernist agenda had included ethical concerns up to that time, these were later abandoned,” in Landau’s view, as “architectural thought became immersed in considerations of form and technology.” Landau postulates the emergence of a new ethical sensibility, connected with a concern for ecology, which “for the first time appears to bring together in a comprehensive way architecture, ethics, and the person.”

Less optimistic, Micha Bandini in chapter 16 is concerned that “contemporary architectural debate has sought legitimization through the adoption of selected philosophical tendencies, but has ignored the issue of boundary.” Inquiring polemically whether architecture is really a discourse, Bandini contends that “architecture has a very particular and complex epistemological structure not shared by the other visual arts,” and is concerned that the “difference between analysis of the creation of architecture and the creation of other cultural artifacts has been erased.” She points to problematic areas within the disciplinary segments of architecture (“the stumbling block in the rational and balanced appraisal of design and history may be found in the special relationship between critic-historians and architects”), to the crisis of pedagogy in architectural design (“design is no longer perceived as an organized and organizable set of notions which can be taught within recognizable patterns and hierarchies of complexity”), and to the diminished community (“the community of discourse upon which the advancement of disciplinary knowledge may be said to have been based”), and then vigorously proposes ways of redressing the situation.

By contrast, Lawrence Anderson in chapter 17 is impressed by the “changes that have occurred in historical studies as reflected in the teaching programs of architectural schools.” Finding that academic scholars who are sensitive to the artistic aspects of architecture and also responsive to its technical and social facets are not as rare as they used to be, Anderson locates the modernists’ criticism of the teaching of architectural history in the use of history as

“quarry,” or model. He asserts that from the redefinition of the field—in response to this rejection by architects—resulted the history, theory, and criticism of architecture. He thus pays homage to the department founded by Stanford Anderson and Henry Millon, from which eight of the contributors have graduated (and eight have taught or lectured there). Charles Correa’s parables and fables (chapter 18) lead us to ponder several questions that can be considered as summarizing *The Education of the Architect*: Can one maintain independent judgment and follow a charismatic teacher? What is the right balance in architectural pedagogy between visual and verbal skills? Correa begins his essay with a memorable aphorism: “We do not know if architecture can be taught, but we know that it can be learned.”

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