

notes—814 of them!—to literature in contemporary publications and to a wide-ranging review of the secondary literature should make the book useful to many students foraying into German architecture, planning, housing, and design.

But *Das englische Vorbild* is too broad a survey, and too limited to published literature on the arts, to explore critical topics satisfactorily. The evidence that English reforms made their mark in Germany earlier than thought reopens the questions of how and why the Germans transformed the English heritage so that the Modern Movement veered so sharply from the English source. The answers, I would think, are to be sought first in social and economic history, which Muthesius never examines. Why was German industry much readier than English to sponsor reforms in design after 1900, and what was its position earlier? Why were the reforms directed by one segment of the bourgeoisie against another, rather than toward a classless society as in the English vision? Why was nationalism rather than socialism linked to the new aesthetics in Germany before the First World War—and the reverse afterwards? Why did reform, in short, become the vehicle of changing ideologies in Germany so much more than elsewhere? In the post-Pevsnerian view of the Modern Movement as a group of ideologues, these questions need not be avoided. It is a measure of Muthesius' limitations in this area of history that he never once mentions the name of Marx. Likewise aesthetic issues, such as monumentality, the demand for a more vivid art, or the affective and decorative valuation of color, are raised rather than studied, leaving many clues to be followed up.

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A. W. Reinink, *Amsterdam en de Beurs van Berlage, Reacties van Tijdgenoten, Amsterdam and Berlage's Exchange, Contemporary Criticism* (Cahiers van het Nederlands), 's-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij, 1975, 157 pp., 70 illus. Hfl. 42.50.

When one haphazardly hears how much trouble people employed in Paul Rudolph's Boston Lindeman Medical Center have doing their work, one is struck by how ineffective the present system of architectural criticism actually is. In all honesty: there is no such system, nor is there a real attempt to formulate one.

The situation in Amsterdam about seventy-five years ago was very different, when after a troublesome preliminary development, the new Exchange building was finally erected, between 1898 and 1903. The underlying considerations and values for that im-

portant Amsterdam trading bulwark, and the sophisticated solutions which H. P. Berlage applied to it, were a hot topic in those days and subjected to many kinds of discussion and argument.

Reinink's excellent analysis is concerned with how the Exchange was seen by the public, particularly the critics, around the time of its completion. The impressive amount of preserved critical material was generated by the importance of the building and especially by the way Berlage stressed this importance, almost deliberately making his design into a presentation of the new, twentieth-century architecture. The exciting way Reinink edits this material can be a source of inspiration for establishing more systematic methods of judging concepts in the building activity of our own time.

The book is in Dutch, but it contains an extended and satisfactory English summary. After a description of the preliminary history, Reinink starts his analysis with a section on the nature of criticism. There is the nonverbal criticism in cartoons and in the use of the style of the building by other architects. There is the criticism expressed in folk humor: quotations from the man in the street as published by the press. The Exchange was compared, for instance, with a locomotive, a mill, a dinosaur, and a lethargic lizard.

Then Reinink finds obtuse criticism—cases in which, under the pretense of expertise and without restraint, offensive things were said. There is also criticism as popular education: in a Lutheran paper it was assumed that if Jesus Christ had still been on earth, he would certainly have looked with interest at Berlage's new building; and in a Christian-Socialist magazine the Exchange was praised as a "glorious expression of the proletarian spirit." Finally there is professional criticism. Here Reinink distinguishes, after J. Stolnitz, five kinds of criticism: according to "rules," contextual, impressionist, intentional, and intrinsic. Each is clearly expressed in evaluations of the Exchange.

Cuypers, for example, states that Berlage violated certain traditional rules of architecture. But Cuypers also makes his evaluation contextual by analyzing the commission on the basis of prevailing circumstances. Willem Kromhout provides a good example of impressionist criticism by talking about squares of Florence and Siena, having seen the final designs of the Exchange. Berlage's intentions were analyzed by H. J. M. Walenkamp in a series of articles. Intrinsic criticism, lastly, takes as its starting point the formal analysis of a work of art, and this trend can be found in the material.

It appears that at the turn of the century, four main criteria were applied in professional criticism: monumentality, picturesque, character, and simplicity. It is in-

teresting to see how, for instance, this last item, simplicity, is seen in the framework of the whole society. Sometimes the simplicity found in the Exchange became an almost ethical concept, i.e., when a relationship was drawn with the Calvinistic element in the character of the Dutch themselves: "quiet and introverted." The Catholics, according to a critic writing in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*, saw "harmony with our somber skies . . . our pessimistic nature."

Mainly due to the way Berlage carried out his concept of architectural simplicity—a way which was not entirely loved by most of his contemporaries—the Exchange became the statement Berlage tried to make it, as he himself said in 1913, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the opening: "I really tried to do something important for Dutch architecture. It made great demands on my capacities and resources. May it prove in the future to mark the beginning of a truly great architectural art in the Netherlands."

Personally, I would have liked it if Reinink had considered the relevance of his study for our time more explicitly, if he had attempted to suggest proposals for reviving the old, or for starting a new, socially rooted method of criticizing architectural achievements. But perhaps this was beyond the purely objective treatment of the subject, which so attractively characterizes this little pearl of a book.

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Juan Pablo Bonta, *An Anatomy of Architectural Interpretations: A Semiotic Review of the Criticism of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion* (XI World Conference of the International Union of Architects), Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1975, 127 pp., illus. \$5.10.

This is easily the most important book on architectural interpretation to be published in the last ten years. Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Intentions in Architecture* (1963) and Paul Frankl's *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations Through Eight Centuries* (1960) are the previous milestones, but neither was as theoretically persuasive as this one. Juan Pablo Bonta has produced an impressively thoughtful classification of the way architecture can be interpreted—an anatomy, a dissection of the body, a corpus (some may think corpse) of architectural reactions to one building: Mies's Barcelona Pavilion of 1929. It has a breadth of approach which is very welcome at this time when criticism seems to be becoming partisan, doctrinaire, and even provincial. For Bonta does not argue in favor of a single, absolutely correct, and unchanging meaning of architecture, but shows how and by what mechanisms interpretations change. It is al-

together fitting for a man who has lived in different cultures (Argentina his home, Britain, Spain, and now the U.S.A.) and, one feels, is a son of the Enlightenment.

Bonta divides the criticism of the Pavilion into nine stages. The first, called “blindness,” concerns the way people overlook or do not even see an unfamiliar building. Seeing, and therefore not seeing, are cultural categories. One remembers Le Corbusier’s three chapters in *Towards a New Architecture* entitled “Eyes which do not see: Liners, Airplanes and Automobiles.” I think this category is particularly interesting, but perhaps Bonta could have elaborated on it. There are all sorts of ways people avoid looking and “systematically misunderstand,” to use a phrase from I. A. Richards’ theory of interpretation. Perhaps Bonta would claim this misunderstanding is another category, but I wish he had gone into aberrant readings of architecture, because they have a coherence and history too—particularly among casual users of a building. Bonta does not consider users and this makes his anatomy somewhat unbalanced.

The second category is called “pre-canonic responses” and concerns the most creative, often the first, interpretations. Then there are (3) the “official interpretations,” those of the architect and client at, say, the opening of the building; (4) the “canonic interpretations” which are collectively formed and stabilize around major cultural preoccupations. These can become reiterated until they are academic formulae and clichés—something to which Mies’s architecture particularly lent itself. “Class identification” (5) concerns the fact that people, critics in particular, see a building as an instance of a class, say the International Style. “Dissemination” (6) concerns the way canonic interpretations get multiplied and socialized until they become “grammatized to oblivion,” part of the category (7). But the whole process can start again with (8) “metalinguistic analysis,” the analysis of analysis, or what Bonta himself is doing or what you are doing as you read this, and (9) “re-interpretation” according to new preoccupations.

As you can see from this list it is roughly temporal, although of course reinterpretation and canonic readings can start immediately. It is also logically homologous except for (5) which is not a *stage* of interpretation. Thus Bonta gives us a kind of dialectical logic which shows how interpretations grow, transform themselves, and are used to see with, rather like a camera. The mechanism is all very fascinating and it seems to lead to the rather remarkable conclusion that the process of signification is as important as any particular set of meanings. Bonta claims his semiotic approach must consider “not what forms mean, but rather *how* they mean the various things they do.” The emphasis on

the “*how*” rather than the “*what*” is, I think, ultimately futile since the two areas are bound to influence each other.

Let me give some categories of content which might expand Bonta’s categories of interpretive stages. First, and most important, are the users’ daily reactions and understandings, for these keep the building alive. These reactions might constitute a silent majority for Bonta because they are not written down (besides the Barcelona Pavilion was not “used” in the customary sense of that term). As Umberto Eco has argued, architecture may be interpreted correctly, even *inattentively* like background music, or even correctly *misused* (the Roman Basilica as a church). Architecture as a sign system is much more permissive than poetry, more malleable to the public. Thus I would add, somewhere near the beginning, a category called “popular use” and try to show how that influenced the other stages. Le Corbusier’s Unité d’Habitation at Marseilles has been “misused and misinterpreted” and made into a public monument—all of which has colored subsequent interpretation. Even more, his Pessac housing has been transformed by popular use and resulted in another kind of “metalinguistic analysis” (the sociological kind), rather than the one Bonta mentions. It is this interaction of interpretation *with* the changing building which should be analyzed in future studies.

Also, it seems to me that Bonta overrates consensus and underrates divisive readings (interpretations seem to be fairly cumulative in his schema). In a sense interpretations are at war with each other, and the great battle is between popular and elitist codes. Bonta treats architects’ and critics’ reactions to Barcelona, whereas if he had taken Pessac, the categories would have been quite different and shown a basic division. Most users see architecture as signifying a *way of life* and thus they put it to other interpretations than those Bonta mentions. Perhaps an ideological category should therefore be added and a basic split made in the anatomy.

These are my misgivings, but they do not undermine this major landmark of interpretive study. It is something to build on and modify in the future, a testimony to patient thought and a catholic point of view.

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Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic 1955–1972*, Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1974, 97 pp., illus., diags., plans, secs. \$6.95.

In his introduction of 1966, Vincent Scully acclaimed Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* as one of the

most seminal works on architecture to have appeared since Le Corbusier’s *Vers Une Architecture* of 1923. Now a decade later, the publication of Alison and Peter Smithson’s *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic* brings one to the threshold of an equally extravagant claim. This text is one of the most significant and fertile writings that the Smithsons have produced to date; significant because it demonstrates in an elliptical way the gross vulgarity and irrelevance of much of our present architectural sensibility, and fertile because it indicates with considerable subtlety strategies for transcending this impasse.

Inasmuch as it is an essay in architectural sensibility, *Without Rhetoric* is a rarity in itself. Few works have dealt profoundly with this topic. From the twentieth century one thinks of Loos, of Mies, of Le Corbusier, of Duiker, of Neutra, possibly of Adrian Stokes, and even of Worringer. From the nineteenth, one surely turns to Pugin, Viollet-le-Duc, to Ruskin, and in a negative sense to Morris. Other than such illustrious figures, most architectural writers, be they architects or critics, have had neither the temerity nor the capacity to attempt and achieve so awesome a task. The Smithsons then are to be doubly applauded; firstly for achieving that which for others has all too often proved impossible, and secondly for the delicacy of the sensibility they proffer.

It seems essential to the Smithson sensibility that *Without Rhetoric* is formulated as a continuous text, loosely organized around retrospective themes ranging from a recapitulation of their initial perceptions of the “pop world,” first celebrated under the evocative title of “But Today We Collect Ads,” down to their long-standing reevaluation of Mies van der Rohe, here introduced under the title *Without Rhetoric—Calm as an Ideal*. As with their *Team 10 Primer* of 1956, the continuous text, studded as it is with asides, footnotes, and framed quotes, cannot help but present itself as a looped discourse. Like a composition with changing parts, it may be entered into at any point, to almost equal effect. The implicit lack of rhetoric finds its reflection here in the non-hierarchical structure of the text, which stresses the delicate and synthetic nature of the argument.

It is necessary to distinguish between sensibility and style and to note that what the Smithsons have in mind is not so much the style of Mies per se, as that which is contingent to his approach, either by way of material expression or as a result of the particular way relationships are established in space. “We should not,” they write, “look at the buildings for what can be lifted off to paper over the next client’s programme or to lose our aesthetic problem: they are to be seen as a vehicle conveying the self construction, the