when architects call and ask for directions or for additional
napkins because they were dissatisfied with their first efforts.
After all, the curators write, a napkin drawing is supposed
to be spontaneous.

The nearly mythic status of a “napkin sketch” derives
from a generation of modernist architects for whom going
out to lunch was as much a part of the design process as
smoking a cigarette. Sometimes during a meal with colleagues
or clients, a dynamic conversation yielded a surprisingly
synthetic image that would survive the meal and hang above
drafting tables or computers. Evocative line drawings on
scraps of paper appear framed in the homes of architects
and clients, as if they were the DNA of great design.

Fanciful doodles and iconographic signatures in Dinner
for Architects display the cult of celebrity architects more than
an interest in design process or results. Inadvertently, perhaps,
the exhibition catalog exposes spontaneous napkin drawings
(not found here) as an artifact of another era—an era when
architects regularly left the office to meet over food and
drink and conversation about whatever was “on the boards.”

—Jamie Horwitz, Iowa State University

Consumption and Identity in Asian American
Coming-of-Age Novels
Jennifer Ann Ho
New York: Routledge, 2005
ix + 202 pp. $75.00 (cloth)

In an analysis of six contemporary Asian American coming-
of-age novels, this volume examines how Asian American
adolescents challenge and revise their cultural legacies and
experiment with alternative ethnic affiliations through their
relationship to food. The analysis includes Frank Chin’s
Donald Duck, Lois Ann Yamanaka’s Wild Meat and Bully
Burgers, Lan Cao’s Monkey Bridge, Nora Okja Keller’s
Comfort Woman, Gus Lee’s China Boy, and Gish Jen’s Mona
in the Promised Land. The author argues that the instability
of adolescence allows for a particularly cogent depiction in
these novels of the conflicting identity-shaping forces that
confront Asian Americans on a daily basis—the pressures
of dominant society on the one hand, their ethnic families
on the other. By portraying the consumption patterns of
their protagonists, the examined texts provide a more
nuanced and complete picture of what it means to be Asian
American than do the prevailing stereotypes depicted in
the mainstream media. Food helps to elucidate both the
complexity of the process of Asian Americanization and
the differences in the individual experiences of Chinese,
Japanese, Vietnamese, and Korean men and women search-
ing for a new home. By carrying different messages—ethnic
pride and the shame of ethnic difference, the trauma of
displacement and the desire for acceptance—food functions
not merely as a signifier of ethnicity but also as a powerful
symbol of the “reinscription of Asians into American history
and culture” (p.145).

This volume is testimony to the creative use of food by
Asian American authors to express their characters’ struggles
to define the boundaries of their multiculturalism, and
Jennifer Ann Ho succeeds in giving this creativity a context.
However, we will never know how deep is the gap between
fiction and reality. Weighing the imagined consumption
of the literary world against the genuine experiences of
Asian Americans seems to me a much more challenging
endeavor. The goal of this volume is, in the author’s own
words, “to lay the groundwork for future studies of foodways
and Asian American literature” (p.15). I sincerely hope
that she will not limit herself to literature and that we can
expect work of a wider focus in the future.

—Katarzyna Cwiertka, Leiden University

Paper or Plastic: Searching for Solutions
to an Overpackaged World
Daniel Imhoff
San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2005
viii + 168pp. Illustrations. $16.95 (paper)

Contrary to what its title implies, Paper or Plastic is not pri-
marily about personal responsibility in packaging choices.
Instead, it covers the entire gamut of packaging problems
and solutions, from the fact that wooden forklift pallets are
generally treated as disposable and use 40 percent of all
American hardwood cut annually, to innovations in biodegrad-
able food packaging. We learn that nearly 60 percent of
all packaging is made for food and beverages and that half
the volume of America’s municipal solid-waste stream is
packaging. Thus, how we package our food is a critical
issue. Some level of packaging is required to keep our food
safe and avoid waste. However, recent increases in food
and water packaging are independent of safety concerns,
such as the bottled water phenomenon, which generates an
appalling 1.5 million tons of plastic waste per year. Twenty-
five percent of bottled water is actually tap water. A 1999
study by the Natural Resources Defense Council found that
33 percent of brands sampled contained contaminants,