for the design of public space within the city, was a pioneering one in the early 1950s. Wall clearly shows the ways in which this strategy questioned not only conventional design methods, but also the way in which traditional architectural types—particularly the street—were pro-
grammatically and formally reinterpreted as “living rooms of the community” (109).

To establish a relationship between the suburbanizing mechanisms that had been developing since the late 1920s and Gruen’s development concepts for the city, Wall describes in detail the political, economic, and social forces “that precip-
itated America’s urban and suburban rev-
olution” (57–65). By contrast, however, only a few passages in the book make refer-
ce to other contemporaneous exam-
ple of planning alongside explanations
of Gruen’s projects. A timeline offers associative clues, and the text proceeds
on the same basis. Wall mentions the
Greenbelt towns of the New Deal as the
source for Gruen’s models of the
regional shopping center, interprets
Lewis Mumford’s “poly nucleated city” as
a prototype for Gruen’s centralized
urban model, and describes Clarence
S. Stein’s interpretation of the “neigh-
borhood unit” at Radburn as providing a
background to Gruen’s conception of
“community planning,” but the author
does not offer deeper insights into these
familiar issues. By contrast, Wall’s com-
ments on Gruen’s highly innovative concep-
tion of the architect as an “inter-
disciplinary team leader” (78–79) and his
“integrated planning” model of action
(168) are illuminating. A notable
(although too brief) section is devoted to
the surprising methodological and ide-
ological parallels between Gruen’s defini-
tions of the city center and the CIAM
discourse on the heart of the city. In
1952, for example, Gruen proposed that
the city center should “fill the vacuum
created by the absence of social, cultural,
and civic crystallization points.”

In the same year, the city center was described in the CIAM 8 conference publication
*The Heart of the City: Towards the Human-
isation of Urban Life* as a “meeting place
of the people and the enclosed stage for
their manifestations.”

Although Wall’s book is not really
intended to address issues involving the
history of conceptual relationships in
architecture, it does establish the impor-
tance of Gruen’s contribution to changes
in human living spaces during an era of
social restructuring, a time of apparently
limitless mobility and early mass con-
sumerism. In *Victor Gruen: From Urban
Shop to New City*, Wall has not written a
history of ideas relating to Gruen’s
urban-planning theory. Yet this book,
along with Hardwick’s work, does lay the
foundations for such a history. Wall
begins to make available a fuller and
more comprehensive view of this period,
a pivotal view historically and in terms of
urban planning, and he offers a better
way of understanding Gruen’s theories
about the city in the context of the post-
war period.

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**Notes**


4. “A Short Outline of the Core,” in *The Heart of the City: Towards the Humanisation of Urban Life*, ed. Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, Jose Lluís Sert, and Ernesto N. Rogers (New York, 1952), 164–68. It should be noted that Wall’s book reflects a continuing imbalance in the state of research on postwar CIAM, which
still tends to emphasize Team 10’s criticism of CIAM’s prewar guiding principles in the mid-1950s. The canonical view that Team 10 represented a complete ideological break with CIAM does not adequately account for the considerable evidence for historical continuity between Team 10 and its predecessors.

William H. Jordy
Edited and with an introduction by Mardges Bacon

*“Symbolic Essence” and Other Writings on Modern Architecture and American Culture*

Ask a current architecture student what he or she knows about William Jordy and your response is likely to be little more than a blank stare. In fact, ask anyone teaching architecture to describe Jordy’s work and, unless he or she went to Brown University, you’re still likely to get a rather vague reply. How is it that Jordy, who lived from 1917 to 1997, doesn’t have the same disciplinary stature as his peers, including Reyner Banham, Alan Colquhoun, Colin Rowe, and Vincent Scully? All of these other architectural writers have very defined historical projects and appear again and again on contemporary syllabuses. *So where’s Jordy?*

Unlike his peers, it was not until last year that a collection of Jordy’s articles was brought together into a single volume, permitting an assessment of his role as a historian and critic of modern architecture. Expertly edited by Mardges Bacon, who also contributes a lengthy and illuminating introduction, *“Symbolic Essence” and Other Writings on Modern Architecture and American Culture* collects texts written by Jordy between 1943 and 1993. Among his contemporaries, it is Scully to whom Jordy is most often compared. The two did their graduate work at the same time at Yale, subsequently taught together in the history of art department at Yale, and focused their careers primarily on American modernism. Unlike Scully, however, Jordy’s doctorate was in the burgeoning discipline of American studies; entitled “Science and Power in History,” his dissertation focused on the nineteenth-century historian Henry Adams. And whereas Scully has published well over a dozen books, Jordy published only three
(not counting a score of exhibition catalogs), and one of them was not on architecture but on the life of Henry Adams. While friendly with Scully, Jordy was stifled by his colleague's supersized presence and personality as well as his dominance of the modern and American fields at Yale. “I was on a collision course with Scully,” Jordy acknowledged in a conversation with Bacon in 1994, and he was happy to have the opportunity to accept an appointment in Brown’s art department in 1955; Jordy remained at Brown until his retirement thirty years later. Brown offered Jordy career security but not necessarily a career stage, perhaps because unlike Yale (Scully), Cornell (Rowe), or Princeton (Colquhoun), Brown has no school of architecture and therefore limited Jordy’s instrumental appeal. While this issue of audience certainly comes into play, Jordy’s own formation might also be responsible for his more limited reputation.

Bacon’s thorough introduction to “Symbolic Essence” offers a fascinating snapshot of a lifetime of scholarship that was consistently interdisciplinary or, as Joan Ockman accurately specifies in the volume’s forward, scholarship that was “transdisciplinary” (viii). According to architectural historian and theorist Mark Linder, who introduced the term to architectural discourse, transdisciplinarity “is distinct from more pervasive notions of interdisciplinarity that understand the combination of various disciplines as a means to establish shared methods or concepts.” That does not mean that transdisciplinarity abandons disciplinarity; in short, transdisciplinarity demands disciplinary depth but shuns disciplinary limits. Graduating from Bard in 1939, Jordy majored in art, but even at that point he was developing multiple strands of expertise: he painted two social realist murals for his senior exhibition and also wrote a senior essay on “Henry Adams and Walt Whitman.” Upon graduation, Jordy entered the Institute of Fine Arts, but frustrated by what he perceived to be an overly determined pedagogy and the lack of encouragement for American and modern topics, Jordy left before graduating. Following three years of noncombat service in the Army, he began graduate work in the new field of American studies at Yale. As Bacon notes, “His interests had clearly shifted from problems exclusive to art history to those of cultural history, and he was eager to investigate the impact of American politics, economics, literature, and sociology on aesthetic issues and, more specifically, on the problem of the skyscraper” (6).

This transdisciplinary approach remained consistent for the rest of his life; Jordy’s writing can be categorized as cultural and intellectual history, technical expertise, aesthetics, and architectural history. Bacon divides the book’s fourteen essays and one lecture transcription into three sections of five: “American History and Visual Culture,” “The Arc of European Modernism,” and “The Historian as Critic: Formal Perspectives on American Architecture after 1945.” The pieces range across a striking variety of topics that now seem well ahead of their time: corporatism, naturalism, aestheticism, symbolism, regionalism, and relations between industry, war, and architecture. One of the strongest pieces in the book is a lecture from 1993 on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), which discusses regional history, civil engineering, tourism, environmental and ecological impact, planning logistics, architectural form and ornament, landscape, and politics as well as the contemporary repercussions of the TVA. Atypically written in the first person (perhaps because it is a transcribed lecture, combined by Bacon with notes from related lectures, rather than a published paper), this long, especially engaging piece ranges from musings over the corporatism of the TVA’s structure to Jordy’s fear of stray arrows as he wanders about a site in Kentucky during archery season. If Scully were to write on the TVA, his focus would be much more singular (most likely celebrating the heroic forms of the structures themselves). Banham would have included the environmental aspects, but he would not have entered into the same detailed political history of the association. The longest piece in the book, it seems to best capture Jordy’s originality as well as his actual voice.

The pieces that do adopt a more forceful voice and a stronger focus markedly stand out in the collection. “Seagram Assessed,” first published in the Architectural Review in 1958, makes a simple but original argument—that the Seagram Building does not aim for the weightlessness of Mies’s other American projects but instead purposefully foregrounds what Jordy calls visual weight—and then proceeds to qualify this assessment with a careful reading of architectural form, reference, material, and technology. This detailed critique oscillates between the perspective of an architect (examining details and technique) and that of a historian (reading Seagram’s position in the city as well as in architectural history), with each perspective rendering the other more profound. However, the other four essays in the “Historian as Critic” section do not share this early piece’s precision and depth. The final paragraph of “Robert Venturi and the Decorated Shed,” originally published in The New Criterion in 1985, for example, reads: “Venturi’s work gains in strength and possibilities as he steadily expands his resources. And if the decorated shed should fail him at some point in the future, the duck is also available” (274). Could it be the venue of this piece that influenced such an ambivalent, flat critique? Jordy was the architecture critic for Hilton Kramer’s conservative culture magazine from 1982 to 1987. Given that the earliest piece in this collection, “The Fiasco at Willow Run,” was published in The Nation in 1943 and that Bacon so emphasizes Jordy’s liberal politics, Jordy’s relationship to The New Criterion is curious, to say the least, and is surprisingly overlooked in the introduction. Reading “William Lescaze Reconsidered,” written in 1984, one can only wonder if Jordy’s critique of the fate of the PSFS Building’s architect might also have some autobiographical resonance: “Sometimes [Lescaze] was successful, sometimes less so; but there is about this
work of the thirties a spirit of discovery and adventure which seems to have dwindled as the style became more familiar, the solutions more pro forma, and (quite as important, it would seem) the progressive spirit and individuality of Lescaze's early clients inevitably gave way to more conventional and more commercial patronage" (185). Jordy's earlier writings generally have more "bite" to them; is the growing ambivalence that marks some of his later essays evidence of the same fate that befell Lescaze?

Even Jordy's early essays are marked by a penchant for the ineffable, however, and one can only conclude that the answer to "where's Jordy?" is: somewhere in the middle, or at least somewhere that cannot be pinned down very easily. The essay that gives the collection its title, "Symbolic Essence," which was published in JSAH in 1963, focuses on what Jordy sees as the essence of modernism's lasting legacy—symbolic objectivity—and reads this modern condition in architecture as well as in humankind: "This double condition of the brute thing, beligerently and mysteriously within its extrahuman realm, yet simultaneously grasped by human consciousness as an artifact of willed order and focused associations, evokes the condition of modern man" (148). The essay holds in equilibrium fact and myth, physical and metaphysical, technology and nature, and in so doing, it exposes Jordy's own balancing act. Always in this collection, the strongest essays reveal a depth and consistency across multiple knowledges, which Jordy encompasses and connects in ways unimaginable from the vantage point of a singular discipline. But balancing acts carry risks, too. In terms of Jordy's transdisciplinarity, perhaps his relative obscurity in relation to his peers is due to this very intellectual horizontality. Has Jordy been subject to the same fate of many a recent graduate student: interdisciplinarity (or even transdisciplinarity) is encouraged during coursework but, at the end of the day, offers less career security than scholarship that is more limited, more focused, more disciplinarily defined? Moreover, Jordy's broad, horizontal approach and tendency toward equivocal conclusions offers the reader much information but, at times, does so at the expense of overwhelming his critique. Balancing acts such as Jordy's can lead one to disappear critically into an invisible, ambiguous ether when they become nothing more than "on the fence." Many of Jordy's later essays fall into this category, but the best essays in this collection are nothing less than remarkable transdisciplinary high-wire feats.

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Notes