ing the unseen possibilities of the urban milieu, were often ideologically and politically at odds. Busbea assesses these "prospective" practices, to use the period term, as both forward looking and at times regressive; as both critical of modernism—particularly the Charter of Athens—and seeking continuity with aspects of modernist urbanism. Within the utopian mandate various aspects of French modernism come into play: the projects of Le Corbusier, Marcel Lods, as well as the planning policies that begat the postwar monstrosity of the grande ensemble. Although formally benign, the conception of utopia was certainly ideological, and some of its theorists were not shy about expressing their technocratic aspirations. The elaboration of such factors situates spatial urbanism and "prospective" thought within the particularity of French politics during this period, illuminating assumptions about administration in an emerging post-industrial society.

The book is very clearly organized, with an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. Each chapter explores different aspects of the "phantom" city, connecting and elaborating the terms introduced earlier in the text. This makes for a rich historical account in which the competing influences, paradoxical interpretations, and conflicting ideological overtures take tangible shape. Michel Ragon, for example, coined the term urbanisme spatial and further served as an "animator" for the formation of the Groupe International d’Architecture Prospective (GIAP) in 1965. According to Busbea, Ragon saw that "radical social and technological change calls for the radical architectural and urban solutions" (86).

The easy circulation of images through architectural culture made available entire bodies of work that were at times deprived of their theoretical groundings and social context. The more arcane period pieces were consigned to the dustbin of history, but Busbea usefully unearths them for analysis. Important texts such as Henri Van Lier’s Le nouvel âge, the various works by Abraham Moles (including those with Élizabeth Rohmer such as Psychosociologie de l’espace) situate the discussions of networks, cybernetics, the astonishingly optimistic belief in self-organizing systems, and the conflicts between the structural and phenomenological potentials of new technologies. The aims of "prospectivists" are distinguished from groups such as Architecture Principe or the Situationists, which have enjoyed comparatively enthusiastic reception beyond France. Busbea offers useful historical accounts of the roles that Roland Barthes and Jean Bau-drillard played in interpreting effects that architects and artists had imagined years earlier. He also explores the links between utopian thought and such postwar architecture and urban planning projects as La Defense, highlighting the paradoxes inherent in utopian thought when, as he demonstrates, social and ideological aspirations can be duplicitous.

There are many positive qualities that distinguish Busbea’s book, and any search for the negative would only produce picayune comments. This would simply turn away from the work of architectural history and dwell instead on tidbits of evidence, missing the real contribution of this book. Given the quality of Busbea’s analytical and interpretive achievement, it is not surprising that Topologies was short-listed for the 2008 Bruno Zevi Award of the International Committee of Architectural Critics.

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Kelly Donahue-Wallace

The Art and Architecture of Viceregal Latin America, 1521–1821
Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006, 304 pp., 32 color and 104 b/w illus. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 9780826334596

The entwined endeavors of religious conversion and military conquest that established Spanish power in the Americas also produced some of the Western Hemisphere’s most remarkable architecture. The buildings constructed between 1521 and 1821 in the Spanish American colonies relied on Western European architectural vocabularies and traditions, and were shaped by the distinctive geographic, political, and cultural circumstances of their American settings. The post-conquest convergence of European forms, local architectural precedent, and native practice gave rise to buildings that often do not fit neatly into the usual stylistic categories of architectural historical analysis. Study of this architecture and its varied influences offers an opportunity to consider the processes of stylistic change and the malleability of stylistic labels.

Kelly Donahue-Wallace takes up this challenge and provides a welcome survey of the major monuments and styles produced in the Spanish-American colonies. The author focuses on the viceregal centers Mexico City and Lima, and Cuzco, capital of the Inca Empire, but includes discussion of smaller centers of artistic efflorescence (Puebla, Zacatecas, Quito, and Potosí, among others) as they become significant to her more or less chronological narrative. Emphasizing the communicative power of style and form in architecture, painting, and sculpture, Donahue-Wallace delineates the significant differences in the art of distant parts of this vast region even as she demonstrates the continuities found there.

Art and Architecture of Viceregal Latin America, 1521–1821 was conceived in response to the need for an up-to-date book for teaching colonial Latin American art. It serves this purpose ably. Particularly commendable is Donahue-Wallace’s close focus on a limited number of sites and objects. Too often scholarship on Latin American architecture has attempted to survey many buildings at once, an approach that yields superficial analyses at best. In an especially effective chapter on the missions of New Spain (a vast area encompassing the present-day southwestern United States, Mexico, Central America, and much of the Caribbean), and Peru, Donahue-Wallace focuses on the Franciscan mission at Huejotzingo (New Spain, 1547–71) and the Dominican complex at Chucuito (Peru, 1581–1608), placing these in the context of the multi-dimensional, socio-cultural work of the early priests. She explains the more academic classicism of the Peruvian facades, in contrast to New Spanish eclecticism, in terms of both different indigenous artistic traditions and changing European approaches to evangelization after the Council of Trent.
Donahue-Wallace’s chapters on colonial urbanism, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious architecture, and neoclassicism are of particular interest. Chapters on colonial painting are interspersed with those on architecture. As she acknowledges, the separation of media is problematic in discussions of sixteenth-century works in which painting, sculpture, and architecture were interdependent. She resolves the problem in later chapters, treating churches and altar screens together, and discussing their roles in the evolution of the Churriguerean style in Mexico, and their functions in mediating devotion and defining interior space. The author gives additional attention to architectural sculpture in her discussion of the sixteenth-century Andean planiform style (also known as mestizo baroque), which she suggests may have been “an entirely new [style] created according to the tastes of the living indigenous population” (122). She notes that the planiform style was found on European and criollo facades, but does not delve much deeper into the far-ranging questions about cultural exchange and the synthesis of sculptural vocabularies in the style.

Donahue-Wallace claims that the art and architecture of the Spanish colonies “participated in a constant and diverse cultural negotiation” (xiii). While it is clear that the unique social and cultural conditions of the Spanish conquest and its aftermath gave rise to forms distinguished by their links to at least two different cultural traditions, and that entirely new spatial arrangements (e.g., the atrio and poa chapels) evolved to accommodate the requirements of religious conversion, the term negotiation raises problems. Throughout the text Donahue-Wallace admirably places building and paintings in the social and class networks of colonial New Spain and Peru, demonstrating the ways that colonial labor systems brought Europeans and Amerindians together in the formation of a mestizo culture. However, although the art, techniques, and building traditions of indigenous cultures clearly shaped Spanish Colonial architecture, it is doubtful that native artisans had much agency to negotiate.

At points one wishes for greater comparison of colonial art and its European models. A stronger discussion of precedents and more comparative plans and elevations would help readers understand Latin America’s colonial buildings in the context of Western architectural history, where they belong. Illustrations are abundant, yet the beautiful color plates featured at the center of the book are almost all of paintings, while buildings, and even paintings depicting cities, are shown in lesser-quality black-and-white graphs within the text. Translated excerpts from primary sources on architecture, urban planning, and colonial society from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries augment Donahue-Wallace’s narrative and are welcome in a field which urgently needs more high-quality English translations of original documents.


Gail Fenske

The Skyscraper and the City: The Woolworth Building and the Making of Modern New York

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 400 pp., 12 color and 200 b/w illus. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 9780226241418

Only now has one of New York’s most famous skyscrapers received the book it deserves. The world’s tallest building when it opened in 1913, Cass Gilbert’s Woolworth Building instantly became a popular tourist sight and was nicknamed the Cathedral of Commerce. Gail Fenske rightly treats the building as more than an isolated structure, locating it in the history of architecture, and the social and cultural history of New York. She gives equal attention to the building as commercial venture, as architectural form, as engineering feat, and as social construction. She makes clear from the outset that there was a tension between the Gothic exterior of the building and the modern engineering required to build it. She further emphasizes “the vibrant urban culture of mass entertainment, mass spectatorship, and technological theatrics in which Woolworth and his skyscraper both competed and triumphed” (5). Commerce was literally inscribed in the structure, with its shops, arcade, and spectacular lighting. The building was also intended as a projection of Frank Woolworth’s ego and as a giant billboard for his corporate brand.

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