spaces in ways that build upon Mario Passanti’s drawings of some forty years ago, these new graphic interpretations call attention to the importance—and the limits—of visual experience.6

The question of what meanings Guarini’s buildings were intended to embody, if any, is addressed tangentially. Guarini held beliefs about beauty that were similar to those of his contemporary, the French moderne Claude Perrault, for whom beauty was mediated by factors such as local custom and optical effects. Despite his deep mathematical knowledge, throughout his treatise Guarini conveys the view that, in buildings, geometry was far from an end in itself; he repeatedly invokes the concept of marvel and describes architecture as an “Arte adulatrice,” a phrase often translated as “a flattering Art,” but perhaps better rendered, in keeping with its Latin root, as “an obsequious Art,” since, as he goes on to say “reason does not want to disgust sensation.”7 With words that call attention to the spectator, Guarini reasoned that “[i]f two possible reasons an Architecture that is well-proportioned in itself may appear deformed and unpleasing to our eyes: One is the force of our immaginattività . . . The other main reason is the site, when objects must be shown, either from too close or too far” (79–80). As suggested by Dardanello and others here, Guarini’s productive relationship with the concept of perspective, despite his rejection of it as a way to represent buildings, shows his concern with perception and notions of theatricality. In her study of the painted decor visible in Guarini’s engraving of S. Gaetano in Vicenza, Klaiber advances the provocative idea that the architect imagined a form of Gesamtkunstwerk of the sort more often associated with his contemporary, Gianlorenzo Bernini. Just as Richard Pommer long ago intuited the inspiration of Emilian perspectival painting, and Scott later proposed that Roman frescoes inspired Guarini’s thinking about vaults, such broader approaches to an architect sometimes characterized as a pure geometeer deep our understanding of his innovations.8

The essays in this volume go far in probing how Guarini invented his unusual forms by fusing empirical with artistic concerns, and in suggesting why his buildings remain so affective. With these new insights in place, one can begin to comprehend the intellect behind buildings which, as an eighteenth-century Frenchman simply but aptly put it, embody “something truly Majestic.”

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Notes
7. Guarini, Architettura civile (Turin, 1737), 1:iii, introduction.

James Marston Fitch


Everything old is new again. Reading this collection of essays, one is astounded at the prescience of James Marston Fitch’s ideas. Selected Writings, edited by Fitch’s widow, Martica Sawin, is a long-delayed wake-up call to current problems. To cite Jane Jacobs’s foreword, Fitch opened eyes “to the virtues and possibilities of democratic inclusiveness” (7).

A brief biography of Fitch reveals the circumstances that led to his life-long pre-occupation with energy conservation and his polemic against an automobile-centered culture. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1909, Fitch died in New York in 2000. Lack of finances led to his departure from architecture school in New Orleans and an early career in journalism at Architectural Record. This was followed by a position in the Federal Housing Authority under the New Deal, where he was engaged in establishing standards for government-subsidized architecture. The turning point in his life came in 1942, while serving in the Air Force, when he was assigned to the division of meteorology. Here he became acutely aware of the interdependence of climate and architecture, and the effects of the former on building. After World War II he edited and wrote for Architectural Forum and House Beautiful, working at the latter from 1949 to 1953. A brief study period in Italy ended with the offer of a position at Columbia University in 1954 (replacing Talbot Hamlin in the School of Architecture); later he pioneered Columbia’s program in historic preservation.

The book is divided into five parts: “Criticism,” “History,” “Preservation,” “Climate and Environment,” and a final section, titled “Toward a Philosophy of Building.” Fitch himself introduces his first published paper, an essay written in 1933; “The Houses We Live In: An Anonymous Lament” investigates the
dilemma in the design of period houses employing the latest technology, albeit concealed. Fifty years later, in 1983, he states the leitmotif of all his work: that function satisfied is the ultimate source of satisfactory architectural form. His basic axiom of design was “that structural member is absolutely best which carries the largest load with the smallest cross section” (27). From beginning to end, then, Fitch challenged the formalism that prevailed during his lifetime that slighted the basic tenets of architectural reality: climate, context, and comfort. To a great extent this predicament still exists.

Fitch’s titles are often revealing. In the section “Criticism,” one finds “A Building of Rugged Fundamentals: Kahn’s Laboratory for the University of Pennsylvania” (1960), which recognizes a “hierarchy of ennobling spaces” (46) but ignores the building’s apparent flaws. “Boston City Hall, End or Eve of an Era” (1970) is almost a cautionary tale in its analysis of sculptural monumentality and the loss of flexibility. Still, Fitch finds the redevelopment of downtown Boston promising as a model for urban regeneration in American cities. “Physical and Metaphysical in Architectural Criticism” (1982) reads like a guide to architectural criticism, as it declares the necessity of site exploration in all its manifestations, including dialogue with the inhabitants of the architecture when possible. Photos, while necessary, should not be the principal reference data; rather, Fitch advocates an analysis of performance instead of “metaphysical disposition” (83)—a surprising injection of theory in these pragmatic papers. He launches a powerful attack on postmodernism’s abdication of professional responsibilities, finding its premises—its emphasis on stylistic/historicist conceits—ethically unacceptable. He indicts Charles Jencks’s Language of Post-modern Architecture (1977) for advocating a “frivolity, idiosyncrasy, and self-indulgent exhibitionism of architectural form” that had resulted in a historicizing eclecticism and led to the new fad of “façadism” (68).

In the section “History” Fitch introduces his seminal work, American Building: The Historical and Environmental Forces that Shape It (1947). While he attributes his contextualist approach to building types and settlement patterns to Marxist dialectical materialism, this seems at times contrary to his general non-ideological stance. In “The Golden Leap: The Palace, the Bridge and the Tower,” he explores the interconnection between the formal and the functional in the evolution of architecture, while extolling the works of nineteenth-century engineers. The underlying structure of Paxton’s Crystal Palace, Roebling’s Brooklyn Bridge, and Eiffel’s Tower, born of necessity, determined the aesthetics of these revolutionary innovations. Fitch tackles early American architecture in essays on George Washington’s Mount Vernon and Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello, in which he explores different attitudes toward the slave-powered plantation. As a proponent of architecture as a civilizing force rather than a merely utilitarian agent, Jefferson receives high praise; his Lawn at the University of Virginia is called America’s greatest architectural achievement. In examining the architecture of the twentieth century, specifically, that of Mies van der Rohe, Fitch questions the ideal of platonism, especially when it is at odds with function, as in the Farnsworth house. “Utopia Revisited” (1966), meanwhile, is a paean to the Bauhaus theory that “social utility and functional effectiveness must establish the parameters of esthetic decision” (155). “Murder at MoMA” takes on Robert Venturi, whose Complexity and Contradiction was published by the museum. Fitch condemns this attack on modernism for its basis in aesthetics rather than functional or environmental concerns. A similar mentality characterized MoMA’s “The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts” in 1975, which reflected the reactionary attitude of a museum once dedicated to the principles of modernism and the idea that architecture was an “instrument for social justice” (168).

In the section “Preservation” Fitch addresses problems of restoration, including the recuperation of places ruined by natural disasters—floods, fires, earthquakes, decay, or rebuilding. In that archetype of preservation, Williamsburg, Fitch finds the creation of a world that never existed due to the absence of adequate documentation for the original town. This is the stuff of today’s theme parks. But much has changed since Williamsburg’s reconstruction in the 1930s. Preservation now is more sensitive to historical accuracy and often more concerned with entire built environments than individual buildings. There is a yearning in many urban communities for a historical past, a tendency that is manifest to a limited extent in the transfer of the idea of the European historic center to American cities. Papers and memoranda reveal Fitch’s part in preservation’s evolution through his passionate involvement in its practice and philosophy. An unpublished report of 1974, “A Comprehensive Program for Scenographic, Horticultural and Botanical Rejuvenation,” concerns Central Park at a time when it was suffering from neglect, poor maintenance, and overuse. A paper dated 1998 considers the “visual criteria for historic building restoration,” taking into account changes due to aging and environmental factors (208ff).

In “Climate and Environment” we reach the core of Fitch’s contribution. From his days as meteorologist, he was obsessed with the relationship between climate and architecture. Topographical circumstances also loomed large for him. Prior to the introduction of hydroelectric power, architectural design was often determined by natural phenomena—attention to site, orientation toward the sun and wind, the insertion of tree belts, the growth of vegetation. Fitch’s preoccupation with the natural elements and the land does not preclude the necessity of engineering for optimum efficiency, but he finds that a lack of attention to environmental forces and an overemphasis on industrialized high-tech solutions often leads to inferior buildings.

The final section of the book, “Toward a Philosophy of Building,” encapsulates Fitch’s approach to architecture. Two main themes emerge: (1) conservation of energy should be part of building and large-scale planning, therefore climate and environment play essential roles; and (2) stylistic criteria should be subordinate to architecture’s total impact on the human body. Long before the present
clarion call for “green,” Fitch exposed the fundamental misconceptions regarding energy, namely, that it was cheap and inexhaustible. Modern technology must be directed to benefit mankind. Above all, he deems the auto the “enemy of urbanity” and calls for its “banishment . . . either to the periphery of the city or to a subterranean plane all its own” (276).

In considering “The Future of Architecture” (1970), Fitch emerges as remarkably prophetic. Emphasis on cognitive studies today and the entry of neuroscience into the discipline of art—as in the late nineteenth century—reinforce the interplay of visual phenomena and experiential reality. The study of sensory stimuli, whether overload or deprivation, revive the discussion of the connection between metabolic function and aesthetic response and of man’s psychosomatic relationship with his environment. Unprecedented challenges in aerospace medicine and technological inventions “confront architecture with new esthetic and ethical responsibilities” (290).

An appendix presents “Fitch as Architect.” Photographs depict modest houses that demonstrate principles of “climate control,” the ideal integration of house and site, and Fitch’s affinity for Japanese architecture, especially in landscaping. However, in 1970 he abandoned the bucolic life and settled in Manhattan’s East Village—a “committed urban dweller” deeply involved with adaptive reuse and historic preservation.

In his many publications, Fitch reiterated the purpose of architecture—to serve human needs—and the requirement that architecture be conceived “according to ethical guidelines that emphasize the welfare of human societies.” No finer tenet can be conceived than his conclusion that “the ultimate task of architecture is to act in favor of human beings—to interpose itself between people and the natural environment in which they find themselves, in such a way as to remove the gross environmental load from their shoulders. The central function of architecture is thus to lighten the very stress of life . . . to maximize our capacities” (24).

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**Philip Niles**

**Beauty of the City: A. E. Doyle, Portland’s Architect**

Corvallis: Oregon State University, 2008, xvi + 352 pp., 98 b/w illus. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 9780870712962

**Susan Hume Frazer**

**The Architecture of William Lawrence Bottomley**


**Stephen Fox**

**The Country Houses of John F. Staub**

College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007, 408 pp., 224 color and 114 b/w illus. $75 (cloth), ISBN 9781585445950

Three recent monographs on the work of American architects who practiced in the first half of the twentieth century consider a period when traditional, classical, and historically based design was eclipsed by the rise of modernism. This was a time when, in Marcus Whiffen’s words, “some architects went so far as to regard the historians as necrophilous disturbers of the graveyards of the past, who might at any moment disinter a corpse whose style was still capable of infecting the living.” The dusting-off of this architecture of many styles raises the specter of eclecticism—a label used by many twentieth-century critics and historians to brand entire careers as out of step with modernism’s progressive ideals. The historian who examines these virtually forgotten practices today rescues buildings of great beauty from the oblivion of critical aversion and general neglect.

These three books present this architecture on its own terms, using contemporary sources and astute observation to let each architect’s work speak for itself. But the authors’ approaches are very different. Philip Niles has written a biography of Portland, Oregon, architect A. E. Doyle that includes as much information about the early history of that city as it does about architecture. Doyle’s large body of work, which defines the character of Portland to this day, is celebrated more for its volume than its quality. Very little ties this architect’s career to contemporary developments or to other cities. Susan Hume Frazer has produced a carefully researched and beautifully presented catalog of William Lawrence Bottomley’s work, with histories and descriptions of many significant commissions. Her mission is to celebrate the deft, erudite, and stylish hand of an architect whose works range from Georgian-style single-family houses to great Art Deco masterpieces such as River House in New York City. Setting a more ambitious agenda, Stephen Fox has completed a masterful account of the career of John F. Staub. With incisive and trenchant criticism and analysis, and brilliant illustrations, Fox argues that Staub’s architecture served a central role in formalizing and codifying the nascent social order of Houston and other southern cities where he worked. Fox was writing in the shadow of Howard Barnstone’s book, *The Architecture of John F. Staub, Houston and the South,* a project on which Fox had assisted. Published in 1979, this was an early and thorough examination of the career of an eclectic architect; in the foreword, Vincent Scully posed a question that is relevant to the study of the work of any eclectic architect of this period: the question is not how the work is “different from that of the Modern movement, nor how it is eclectically varied in itself, but how it is like that of the modern architects, and what is its own overall stylistic cast of form.”

Philip Niles sets out to show how Portland and A. E. Doyle grew up together. He has written a biography that provides an intriguing record of many aspects of the history of Portland, yet one that suggests the need for more scholarship on the architecture. The book is chronologically organized into ten chapters that tell the story of Doyle’s life and work, followed by a list of projects. Niles discusses the early house commissions, the commercial buildings that were the backbone of the practice, and Reed College, Doyle’s most prestigious commission. A postscript addressing how Doyle dealt with the emergence of the modern movement as the firm’s business dried up after 1929 concludes that he was ultimately a traditionalist; however, Doyle’s young