tion work. The rest of the chapter, on materials, tools, and techniques, offers useful information. The discussion of retablos in chapter ten is informative, offering analysis of exterior and interior surfaces (façades and altars). Special emphasis is placed on the altars of the San Xavier del Bac church, south of Tucson—perhaps the most elaborate of the buildings considered here. Also discussed are the creators, builders, and decorators of the retablos and the themes they favored. To her credit, Giffords provides an iconographic and art historical analysis of the material rather than a simple list of parts or types.

The focus of the book is on the gathering of information on the churches, clergy, and religious images and presenting it in the clearest way possible with photographs, diagrams, engravings, and drawings. However, Gifford’s stated aims raise questions regarding her research plan and its implementation. Given the vastness of her topic, is it enough simply to introduce the material and analyze it in terms of style? What of her material’s associations with the broader history of art and architecture? How should the churches built forms be viewed in light of the history of settlement and development in this region? Scholars routinely survey the existing literature before presenting their own views and analyses, indicating gaps or problems in the literature and outlining what they intend to add or contribute. Giffords does not do this. She does provide an extensive discussion of the various styles found in this region (Mudejar, Gothic, Plateresque, Renaissance, Mannerism, Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassicism, Tequitqui, and Mestizo), along with lists of churches that exemplify each. Yet she does not analyze the relationships between these styles over time and place. In fact, such relationships between cities in northern New Spain have been defined and analyzed by many previous scholars, but Giffords does not acknowledge this.1 The churches of northern New Spain are obviously stylistically related to churches found elsewhere in central New Spain and Europe. Differences between the baroque in Italy and Spain and the distinctive character of the baroque in New Spain are widely recognized, yet how those differences should be defined is a subject of continuing debate. So too are the characteristics of the indigenous (or Tequitqui) style. Giffords does not recognize these debates or position her work in relation to them.

While Giffords conducted extensive research, much of the content of her chapters could have been presented more efficiently in another format, such as glossaries or appendices; her material is expository rather than supportive of a hypothesis. It is certainly important to know who built the churches, but materials and techniques need only be understood to the extent that they shaped built forms and spaces. The same is true of her discussions of clergy—how they were governed, what they wore, and what objects they used in conducting services. Giffords does not generally analyze or interpret her material or lead the reader to broader and more satisfying historical contextualizations. The usual concerns expressed by architectural historians regarding precedents or antecedents, developmental sequences, and other historical questions, are not part of the discussion. Had the history of architecture been the book’s main focus, it would have been more useful to the architectural specialist and the general reader alike.

JACINTO QUIARTE
University of Texas at San Antonio

Notes

For many adults, watching students interact during recess can be a confounding experience. The play area, an isolated island originally built by adults, becomes the students’ domain, replete with insider references and esoteric games that only they completely understand. Cryptic as they may be, these strange activities demonstrate the students’ hunger for autonomy within a world designed by their elders. This tension between the adult desire for control and the childhood need for independence is one focus of a new collection of essays, Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children. Though the book’s early chapters consider ways children can frequently be treated as political or ideological pawns, the most compelling essays investigate the ways they assert their own creative influence. As such, they cogently support one of the book’s central arguments: though children live in a world constructed by adults, they are “social actors in their own right, who use and interpret material culture in their own terms” (2).

Material culture is defined broadly by editors Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith. Though several of the book’s fifteen chapters concentrate upon the architecture and design of children’s physical spaces, others explore the intangible ways that adults can influence a child’s thinking. This breadth contributes to the book’s success, which is further bolstered by the editors’ ability to effectively juxtapose topics as diverse as campfire design and South African apartheid. Though the volume is divided thematically and chronologically into four sections, the diversity of subject-matter allows the reader to make unforeseen connections and gain a deeper understanding of how children are controlled by and take control of the world around them.

Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith, editors
Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children

BOOKS 575
Part one, “Child Saving and the Design of Modern Childhoods,” concentrates on different ways that adults have established infrastructure for children from the late nineteenth century to the present. This section broadly explores the political motivations behind the development of child-focused environments. Essays by David C. Sloane and Abigail A. Van Slyck, among others, examine spaces devoted to health and lifesaving as well as recreation, and specific topics range from early summer camps and children’s hospitals in the United States to sick rooms in Canada and an experimental park in New Zealand. By exposing the underlying motives behind the design of these spaces, the authors in part one concentrate on the adults who design modern childhoods rather than the children themselves.

The theme of children as political objects (as opposed to active subjects) is further emphasized in part two, “The Choreography of Education and Play.” As Gutman and de Coninck-Smith explain, the authors in this part show how “the symbolic importance of children’s spaces becomes especially visible in times of political struggle and cultural crisis” (10). Among other things, readers learn about education in the nascent republic of Turkey. Zeynep Kezer opens her essay by discussing the emphasis placed on map-making in Turkish public schools following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. As the national boundaries were being drawn, educators taught children to immediately envision and reconstruct the geography of their new country, demarcating it from its neighbors and making it more tangible. According to Kezer, the new Republic’s stability seemed to rest in the minds of Turkish children, and the reader is left wondering how children reacted to this map-making system and how they grew to envision the country as they matured.

Whereas the first half of the book deals solely with the adult shaping of children’s daily lives, part three, “Space, Power and Inequality in Modern Childhoods,” reveals the ways children fight to subvert societal paradigms. In South Africa white children occasionally upset the racial hierarchy by remaining close to their black nannies long after socially accepted periods of childhood. Similarly, Indonesian street girls proclaim their resilience and independence through tattoos and scarification, ultimately establishing a unique space for themselves where they had previously been the most marginalized subgroup in society. At the bottom of the traditional social ladder, they have created a microculture that they control on their own terms. These essays are some of the most fascinating and valuable in the entire collection; they prove that the dichotomy of adult as builder and child as user is simplistic, and indeed ultimately false.

This notion is further dispelled in the book’s final part, “Consumption, Commodification, and the Media: Material Culture and Contemporary Childhoods,” which tracks the emergence of children as an independent class of consumers. As Gutman and de Coninck-Smith write, children are “carriers and creators of culture who claim interspaces of adult society and make them part of modern childhood” (12). In his essay on a work-information series, historian Olav Christensen analyzes the slang, media, and motivations of this radical contingent within Norway’s elite skiing culture. Though the group has no collective ideology or formal organization, their love of the sport has shaped a unique, shared knowledge base and spawned key, if localized, notions of the sublime. Even more indicative of the powerful imagination of children, Mizuko Ito’s essay on Yūgiōh, a Japanese comic and animation series, explores the centrality of fantasy among Japan’s youth. Ito explains how the series’ main character, created by adults, has taken on new meaning and dominance due to the imaginations of young people who collect his cards and comics. Perhaps it is this chapter that best supports the thesis of the book: children are a proactive force in the formation of their own narratives.

In the book’s epilogue, historian John R. Gillis writes that “the islanding of children must be considered a creation of adults, a response to their own needs rather than to those of children” (317). This statement is supported in the first half of the text—which deals more with adult motivation than youth response—but refuted later on, when children are shown as the architects of their own fiefdoms. This contradiction seems problematic at first, yet upon closer investigation, it indicates how things have changed over the last forty years. No amount of writing can truly explain what goes on among children at the playground, yet Designing Modern Childhoods is a valiant attempt. Full of nuances and intriguing observations, it is insightful, revealing, and at times, even hopeful about the prospect of bridging child and adult worlds.

Giora Hon and Bernard R. Goldstein
From Summetria to Symmetry: The Making of a Revolutionary Scientific Concept

Giora Hon and Bernard R. Goldstein’s book is a history of symmetry in architectural and scientific writings from Plato and Vitruvius through the era of the French Revolution. Such a formulation of the book’s topic immediately invokes the question: which symmetry? An architectural historian will know, for instance, that summetria in Vitruvius meant something different from “symmetry” in modern English. The word has changed its meaning—i.e., it has come to express different concepts—a number of times in history. It is fair to ask which of these concepts the authors are writing about. Are they writing the history of the use of commensurable ratios (as the Greek word summetria was understood in the ancient times), or the history of bilateral symmetry (i.e., the situations in which the left and right side are equivalent) or the modern physical concept of symmetry? The answer is, in fact, none of these. Rather, this is a book about the various concepts expressed by the words that etymologically derived from the Greek word summetria. Hon and Goldstein’s book presents the history of a group of etymological cognates.