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-drawing 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 working-class subgroup of Norwegian snowboarders, 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 *Yugioh*, 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.

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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 *symmetria* 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 *symmetria* 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 *symmetria*. Hon and Goldstein’s book presents the history of a group of etymological cognates.
The original Greek meaning of the Greek term *symmetria* pertains to the commensurability of parts: the idea that all dimensions of an object (e.g., a building) can be expressed as ratios of whole numbers. This is the same as saying that none of the dimensions of the object relates to any of the others as an irrational ratio, such as that of the diagonal of a square to its side, a diagonal of a cube to its side, or the Golden Section (the diagonal of a pentagon to its side). The authors trace this use of the word in Greek mathematical writings and cite Roman authors (including Vitruvius) who used the Greek word transliterated into Latin to express this same meaning. A convincing number of examples from medieval Latin mathematical texts shows that this use of the cognates of Greek *symmetria* did not survive into the Middle Ages; rather, the two standard terms were *commensurables* and *communicantes*. The Renaissance brought the revival of the use of the Latin and Italian cognates derived from the Greek original term, still used in order to express the concept of the commensurability of ratios. The authors do not attempt to provide a full survey of the use of these terms in Renaissance architectural writings; the use of the term in the works of some major commentators on Vitruvius, such as Daniele Barbaro, is left undiscussed—arguably, this would merely make the book thicker, without providing any new insight into the use of the term in the Renaissance. However, the account of the Renaissance use of *symmetria* includes an extremely important reference to a passage in Serlio, in which the word is used in its modern sense to refer to the situation when parts on the left and right side of a building’s central axis are evenly deposited. As the authors show, this meaning only really came into use in seventeenth-century French architectural theory—and one is easily tempted to think that this was a lasting consequence of Serlio’s sojourn in France. The traditional meaning of the term is still preserved in Galileo’s work, but the use of the cognates derived from the Greek *symmetria* in French scientific circles was rare until the Revolution. Then suddenly, in the years 1793–1815, their use explodes. It was in these years that the scientific uses of the derivations of the Greek *symmetria* were established as technical terms in various scientific disciplines. The authors carefully analyze the formulation of the concept that is expressed by the term *symmetry* in modern geometry by Adrien-Marie Legendre (1752–1833) and the preceding attempts by Euler and Kant.

For an architectural historian, these final chapters are particularly valuable and interesting reading, since they provide a good account of the use of an important element of our terminology in other disciplines. The author’s argument that the modern formalized concept of symmetry was only developed by Legendre is certainly convincing. But one does become skeptical when the authors attempt to argue that the modern understanding of symmetry (in the sense of equivalence between the left and the right side of an edifice) was never articulated in ancient times.¹ This is obviously a very strong claim that cannot be defended simply by citing Vitruvius and showing that he did not use the term *symmetria* in the way we use *symmetry* in modern English—besides the only surviving Roman architectural treatise, there exists a substantial body of descriptions of architectural works in Greek and Roman literature. These sources needed to be systematically surveyed before the authors’ claim could be validated when it comes to the surviving Greco-Roman sources.² As for the claim that this articulation never occurred in any ancient writings at all, I simply do not see how it can be proved.

Architectural historians will enjoy Giora Hon and Bernard R. Goldstein’s book because it neatly summarizes the use of an important set of etymological cognates that have played an important role in the history of architectural theory. The book will be a stimulating read in many postgraduate architectural history programs. The connections that the book establishes when it comes to the use of the term in various scientific traditions provide an architectural historian with valuable insights and the wider perspective we often need.

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Notes

1. “[I]n contrast to material culture, the written culture does not exhibit any articulation of the concept of symmetry as we know it today” (13). The authors then try to differentiate between ability to recognize symmetry, the possession of the concept of symmetry, and the articulation of the concept of symmetry. The lengthy methodological introduction (1–65) would have profited much from the consideration of the recent related debates in the philosophy of history. See for instance Gad Prudovsky, “Can We Ascribe to Past Thinkers Concepts They Had No Linguistic Means to Express?” *History and Theory* 36 (1997), 15–31 and Mark Bevir “The Errors of Linguistic Contextualism,” *History and Theory* 31 (1992) 276–98. For a discussion of methodological problems pertaining to the attribution of concepts to historical figures, see most recently Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, “Making Sense of Conceptual Change,” *History and Theory* 47 (2008), 351–72.

2. This is not as huge a task as it may seem. For instance, a complete survey of all ancient sources writing about architecture (over 130 authors but excluding Vitruvius) was published in Russian in 1940. The book is masterpiece of Soviet scholarship, it is about 500 pages and it covers more or less all that was written on architecture in ancient times, from Homer to the fifth century A.D. V. P. Zubov and F. A. Petrovsky ed. and trans., *Архитектура Востока* (Moscow: Vsesoyuznaya Akademnya Arhitektury, 1940).

Robin Karson
A Genius for Place: American Landscapes of the Country Place Era
Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press (in association with the Library of American Landscapes), 2007, xiii + 428 pages, 483 b/w illus. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 9781558496361

In 1971 landscape historian Norman Newton suggested that a focus on country estates would lead to an impression that landscape architecture was “geared solely to magnificence for the opulent few” (xiv). Nevertheless recent historians have discovered a remarkable breadth in the period Newton named the Country Place Era. Mark Girouard’s *The English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* and Mark Alan Hewitt’s *The Architect and the American Country House: 1890–1940* established the country house as a significant domain of research. Robin Karson’s *A Genius for Place* significantly contributes to this research by expanding it to the landscape.