photographers and delineators are sometimes omitted. While both books include the maps needed to understand the location and layout of the Canal Zone, those in Greene’s book, drawn by Jeffrey Ward, are superior. Still, shortcomings aside, Missal’s and Greene’s books present important and complementary new perspectives on the construction of the Panama Canal, perspectives not readily available elsewhere.

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Notes
1. Roosevelt’s trip to Panama marked the first time a sitting president had left the U.S.

Eric Mumford
Defining Urban Design: CIAM Architects and the Formation of a Discipline, 1937–69


Mumford’s goal in the present work is to elucidate and defend the role that CIAM-influenced urban design played in America. He believes it has been misunderstood—that most people associate it unfairly with the wholesale demolition of urban areas and the building of inhumane high-rise housing projects inspired by Le Corbusier, while attributing a sensitive contextual approach to the rebuilding of cities to Jane Jacobs. Mumford describes numerous attempts to accommodate existing fabric in postwar plans and takes pains to explain how Le Corbusier’s influence has been misconstrued, noting how his ideas changed over time. When he came to New York in 1935, for example, Mumford points out that the Swiss architect was “much more interested in Rockefeller Center” than in “slum clearance housing projects” (29).

Defining Urban Design surveys early CIAM meetings and discusses the impact that the immigration of early participants from Europe had on American education. It describes the formation of the Harvard Urban Design program under Dean Joseph Hudnut in 1936 and Walter Gropius, who served as architecture chairman from 1937 to 1952. The book conscientiously chronicles the content of Harvard studios in the 1950s and ’60s as well as the Harvard Urban Design Conferences that took place annually from 1955 to 1965, naming the speakers and positions they held at the time of each one, and the topics they discussed in order to lay the groundwork for a complex understanding of “urban design” and its influence.

At the first conference “a young associate editor of Architectural Forum, Jane Jacobs, first put forward her thesis on the importance of small business and institutions to neighborhood street life” (122). Other speakers included Edmund Bacon, who was executive director of the Philadelphia Planning Commission at the time. Bacon discussed his contextual plan for Society Hill, while shopping center architect Victor Gruen (who also created plans for Fort Worth and Kalamazoo) put in the first of several appearances as a speaker at Harvard conferences.

While this book is perhaps less critical of the kind of “pedestrian space” promoted by Gruen than it might have been (shopping centers are, after all, private property, not truly public spaces), it usefully acknowledges the important innovations of Bacon, Oscar Stonorov, and Louis Kahn in Philadelphia, where a respect for traditional streets, sidewalks, and existing building stock first became part of postwar planning in the U.S. It also argues effectively that exurban expansion and urban “renewal” (i.e., wholesale demolition) were not solely the work of CIAM-inspired urban designers.

Mumford notes farther that “by 1934” (before the influential Europeans began arriving in the U.S. in the wake of World War II), “the U.S. government had begun to sponsor the clearance and rebuilding of older working-class areas in the central parts of cities” (12) with the encouragement of Americans such as Catherine Bauer, Lewis Mumford, Henry Wright, and others associated with the Regional Planning Association of America, which advocated Garden City schemes. However, this book allows that “modern architects…quickly lost control of the process of setting government design standards” (13).

Numerous modern architects—Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Hugh Stubbins, William Wurster, Richard Neutra, Saarinen & Swanson, Howe, Stonorov & Kahn, even Frank Lloyd Wright (though his was not built)—received commissions to design wartime suburban housing communities, “which tended to follow the model of the” ex-urban “federal Greenbelt towns and Farm Security Administration settlements of the 1930s” (32). In 1942, long before the first official Harvard Urban Design Conference of 1955, discussions at the Harvard Graduate School of Design focused on these communities, which were associated with the gigantic suburban wartime industrial plants whose siting led to mass worker migration to “generally within a thirty-mile radius of the older downtowns” (32).

Carefully tracing the thinking of Sert and his colleagues, Defining Urban Design makes the case for their interest in pedestrian activity and public gathering spaces as well as their respect for the existing context and history. In 1954 Sert asked Sigfried Giedion (who had given the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1938 that later became Space, Time and Architecture) to begin teaching more history at the GSD, although it was called “History of Urban Design,” not architectural history.
Mumford does not suggest, however, that architecture came to play a somewhat muted role when it was folded into “urban design” with city planning and landscape architecture. “By the fall 1956 semester, after the First Harvard Urban Design Conference in April,” the ideas that Jane Jacobs had articulated—that the current effort to bring the suburb into the city was a mistake and . . . architects and planners should study whatever ‘has vitality, in city life’”—had begun “to be codified at GSD” (131–32). This was five years before the publication of Jacobs’s influential book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.*

Sert began to incorporate these notions into his studio on the South Harvard Square area, which “was premised not on the clearance and rebuilding of an existing urban area but on new intervention within it” (130).

Sert chose this studio topic partly to convince Harvard president Nathan Pusey to create a planning office for the university, which he did that November. One of Sert’s former students, Harold Goyette, became its director, and Sert and Goyette went to work on a planning study. “While the existing street pattern was to remain, the idea was to ‘eliminate dilapidated buildings’ and generate plots for university expansion, with the ‘maximun separation between pedestrians and vehicles’ to be organized by a pedestrian-friendly infrastructure of arcaded streets and por- ticos” (130). Mumford explains how Sert proceeded, noting that “the most successful part of the *Inventory of Planning* was the proposal for a system of pedestrian paths linking the various parts of the campus. These tied together existing paths into a new pedestrian circulation system, which Sert then used in siting new projects, such as Holyoke Center” (156–57).

But while Sert respected the plan of the university, he made little attempt to respond to its architecture—in material, shape, details, or scale. In fact, Mumford admits, Sert even wanted to demolish beloved (if quirky) Memorial Hall. He does concede that what Sert and his partners built at Harvard was not universally admired: “Although later bitterly criticized by local preservationists for its modernist architecture and bulk, Holyoke Center was in fact quite unusual for the time, for its attentiveness to pedestrian circulation and the way its massing was adjusted with setbacks so as not to visually overwhelm its surroundings” (130). However, it was not just preservationists who disliked the massive bare concrete Holyoke Center, despite the walkway that runs under its upper stories. Sert, Jackson & Gourley’s forms never struck a chord with the greater Harvard community or general public. Their buildings made no attempt to refer to the small-scale redbrick buildings surrounding it or to defer to historic buildings nearby in the sensitive way that Louis Kahn had done at the Yale Art Gallery seven years earlier. Mumford explains that in 1956, two years before Sert started designing the Holyoke Center, he and some of his faculty colleagues held a roundtable discussion with Edmund Bacon, Gyorgy Kepes, Kevin Lynch, Gropius, and Maxwell Fry “to define the purpose of the Harvard Urban Design Conferences” (137). They “agreed that urban design should be ‘primarily concerned with the visual aspects of the contemporary city: the area most neglected today’” (137). Clearly, continuity and what later became known as contextualism were not what they had in mind, but just what they did mean is not really clarified in this book.

One reason Jane Jacobs had such an impact beyond the halls of academe (and one that is not fully acknowledged here) is that she was able to convey her ideas with strong visual images so that readers could nod and say to themselves, “Yes, of course. I’ve noticed that.” Her ideas may have been in the zeitgeist and articulated at the Harvard conferences, but the reason that people attribute them to her is that she was able to express them clearly and intriguingly in a book that is still popular today. Great books can move bulldozers out of the way.

Mumford does clarify the role Sert played at Harvard, untangling his influence from that commonly attributed to Gropius. And if Sert is Mumford’s protagonist, his antagonist is Robert Moses, who often criticized planners (and anyone else who got in his way). Clearly Moses was despised in the circles chronicled here, as statements by everyone from Gropius to Jane Jacobs make plain. And his methods were brutal. Still, his early parks and highways were superb examples of their types, and the tower-in-the-park housing projects in New York continue to provide sound, sought-after housing, even though they are not aesthetically pleasing or especially efficient uses of land.

While it is not within Mumford’s purview to assess the long-term success and failure of the buildings and plans he describes, his research will prove particularly useful to scholars interested in the fallout from the conferences he so carefully surveys. This book is also important because, as Mumford points out, the Harvard program would go on to become a model for urban design programs created throughout the United States. With its attempt to unify city planning, architecture, and landscape design, the Harvard program absorbed influences from the sciences and the visual arts in a manner that ensured its ideas would enjoy wide and lasting influence.

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Notes


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*Adolf Loos—dílo v českých zemích/ Adolf Loos—Works in the Czech Lands*

Prague: Muzeum hlavního města Prahy and Nekladatelství Kant, 2009, 393 pp., 302 color and 193 b/w illus. 790 Kč (paper), ISBN 9788085394634

Jindřich Vybiral

*Junge Meister: Architekten aus der Schule Otto Wagners in Mähren und Schlesien*

Vienna, Cologne, and Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2007 319 pp., 156 b/w illus. €39 (cloth), ISBN 9783205775737

Although he is now inextricably linked with the Vienna of the first decades of the last century, Adolf Loos was not a native...