architectural or design canon. Instead, they contribute a detailed, rich, and diverse set of evidence about the making and meaning of the domestic interior and how it was planned, imagined, and importantly, manufactured and realized in this crucial period for the design of the domestic interior.

Jeremy Aynsley
Royal College of Art

Notes


Rumiko Handa and James Potter, editors

Conjuring the Real: The Role of Architecture in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-century Fiction

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011, 232 pp., 33 b/w illus. $35.00, ISBN 9780803217430

Given how much has been written about architecture and literature over the last few decades, the subtitle of this book might seem to promise a belated subject. The essays collected here are the result of a lecture series held in 2007 at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln, though the length and density of some of them suggest versions that preceded their presentation at that conference. This density is in fact one of the strengths of this book, which strays far from its title and announced theme. The other strength is the astoundingly roster of contributors, many of whom will be familiar to readers of this journal. For those not familiar with them, this volume is valuable as an introduction to some of the leading figures in fields as far apart as literary medievalism, structuralist art history, poststructuralist architectural theory, and Victorian set design. Most of the chapters restate arguments or present evidence that the authors have published in earlier forms. An analogy might be some projects that bring in a team of superstar architects to design separate buildings for what is supposed to be a common project.

Rumiko Handa, one of the editors, provides the introduction to the volume, explaining that the lecture series was part of an effort to integrate architecture into the study of the humanities. One aspect of this effort is a database (http://aiith.unl.edu) accessible after submitting a copyright agreement with the University of Nebraska. Some of the many buildings, scenes, and illustrations referred to in the text can be found at this site. The representations of the architecture of the past in recent film and popular media functions as a synecdoche for the larger frame of history and a sense of period, she explains, and the chapters in the volume are designed to trace the prehistory of that representation in early cinema, stage design, popular illustrations and literature. The concluding chapter by Nebraska architects Toby Olson and Josh Silvers on buildings and gardens in film versions of Jane Austen is a good example of her project. The “fiction” in the title thus is a very loose category. So is the “real,” for that matter, gesturing toward a theoretical awareness only briefly demonstrated in most of the following chapters, with one or two exceptions.

A brief summary can only point to the subjects and arguments of the various chapters rather than communicate the richness and detail of their exposition. In “All that Life Can Afford? Perspectives on the Screening of Historic Literary London,” film historian Ian Christie reprises his convincing defense of British film and its proclivity for literary adaptations. Rather than being un-cinematic or uncritically heritage-minded, this attentiveness to historical setting carries on one of the original strengths of early cinema, a reconstruction of the past through architecture and setting. Michael Alexander, the noted translator and scholar of Old English poetry, gives a clear working definition of historical fiction beginning with Sir Walter Scott. Relying on his widely-read recent study Medievalism, he describes how architecture and setting in Scott and others reflect the themes of their socially and politically concerned novels. Alexander ends with a revealing passage from Dickens that cycles through the Victorian period’s entire range of attitudes to the architecture of the Middle Ages, from curiosity to utopian enthusiasm to dismissal. A curiosity of Alexander’s own essay is his hostility to the medieval fantasies of Gothic fiction, which he condemns for their lack of literary merit. Stephen Bann contributes an example from art history, the illustrations of the Norman abbey St. Georges de Boscherville from the late eighteenth through the mid-nineteenth centuries. Its illustration history tracks the revival of interest in medieval architecture from an antiquarian exegesis followed by a broad popularization to an image that serves as a specimen of Norman architecture in Thierry’s Atlas. In so doing, the visual image of this abbey forms something of a countertop to the cycles of the historical imagination that Bann had identified many years ago in textual discourse in his influential study of nineteenth-century historical ideologies, from “code,” to “message” to “myth.” Instead, the image of the abbey begins as part of a “myth” and ends up as a piece of “code.”

Richard Schoch, the theater historian, provides what might be considered a prequel to Ian Christie’s chapter. In “Performing History on the Victorian Stage,” Schoch describes the emergence of historical accuracy in architectural settings and costumes in Victorian productions dealing with the premodern past. Schoch details Charles Kean’s almost scholarly sets, which often recreated medieval processions as way of communicating the reality of the past, performing as well as recreating that past. The educational and commemorative quality of these productions were supported by Queen Victoria’s somewhat surprising enthusiasm for the theater, rendering them part and parcel of the many exhibitions, dioramas and tableau that
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Pierre Ballantyne picks up the promising conversation that Zola and Dickens actually reveal a haunted, psychologically charged identity between person and building. Dickens's "genius," "models," "scenes," "mirrors," "associations," "fictions," "shadows," and "mementos"—which collectively illuminate the composite quality of Soane's own "poetry of architecture." In these chapters, Furján situates aspects of Sir John Soane's house than to recent ones. This is not to imply the book is anachronistic; rather resonated with the concerns and interests beyond its walls. Thus the chapter "genius" discusses the prevailing concern for artistic invention, Coleridge's distinction of imagination and fancy, and the value of individual style as a professional currency. The chapter called "Mirrors" explores the technology of the mirror and the changing fashion for different shapes and surfaces, before undertaking a close scrutiny of the positioning and effects of the many mirrors Soane installed. "Associations" takes up theories of the picturesque and the contrived play of associations presented to viewing subjects, while "Shadows" addresses the sensibility of the gothic and the mood of gloom in relation to Soane's very deliberate construction of a process of viewing.

Furján's aim is to convey to her reader the experience of the residence for a visitor during Soane's lifetime. By reconstructing its myriad referential skeins and signifying atmospheres, Furján intends to "unravel the meanings behind these spaces" and to restore to the house an understanding of its social significance (2). It is not, in other words, to be simply understood as a private interior in which a viewer gains voyeuristic entry into the architectural mind of Sir John Soane. All along, the house was the setting of a social transaction between Soane and his acquaintances, but more generally between Soane and the public who was allowed to tour the house, and even among the individual members of that public as they encountered each other in the parties Soane hosted. Based upon the experience of the house that she reconstructs, Furján argues that 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields—as a house, office, and museum—was and is a "spectacular theater," a structure designed for the staging of spectacles, with its various contrivances of space, illumination, and décor all turned toward that end. The use of colored panes of glass to wash diffuse yellow light across plaster casts, for example, or the optical distortions of convex mirrors, or the fictional narrative of a resident monk in the basement rooms of the house, are understood by Furján as devices that contribute to an overall presentation of effects and affects that engage each viewer in a "theater of display" equally as spectator and actor.

In this approach, Glorious Visions adheres more to the sensibility of early descriptions of Soane's house than to recent ones. This is not to imply the book is anachronistic; the resonance occurs because Furján is attempting to draw together the historical description of the house as an object with the former historical experience of its architecture. Indeed, Glorious Visions insists

Helene Furján

Glorious Visions: John Soane's Spectacular Theater
London and New York: Routledge, 2011, 198 pp., 26 color and 15 b/w illus. $54.95 (paper), ISBN 9780415781589

The intricately connected spaces of Sir John Soane's house at 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields and the themes that lace together the varied objects in those rooms, along with the strict legal requirement that it all be maintained in perpetuity, muddle the presumptively distinct functions of a house, an office, a museum, and a memorial. Historical accounts of this complicated ensemble (including those written during Soane's lifetime) have in response tended to employ clarifying genres—the catalogue raisonné, for example, or biography, with its evident priority of chronology, or a summary tour, leading from entry hall to bedchamber.

Helen Furján's Glorious Visions: John Soane's Spectacular Theatre adopts a different structure of explication, one that depends not upon the physical ordering of the house or upon the life of its architect, but that draws selectively from both those sources and, more decisively, from the culture within which they were immersed. The chapters of the book present what Furján calls a "series of tropes," which she uses to isolate particular characteristics and implications of the architecture of Soane's house (6). There are eight in all—"genius," "models," "scenes," "mirrors," "associations," "fictions," "shadows," and "mementos"—which collectively illuminate the composite quality of Soane's own "poetry of architecture." In these chapters, Furján situates aspects of 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields within the cultural knowledge and the social conventions of Soane's period in order to reveal how one or another register of the architectural interior resonated with the concerns and interests beyond its walls. Thus the chapter "genius" discusses the prevailing concern for artistic invention, Coleridge's distinction of imagination and fancy, and the value of individual style as a professional currency. The chapter called "Mirrors" explores the technology of the mirror and the changing fashion for different

John Ganim

University of California, Riverside

Note