seemed to crowd all of London. In the most arresting chapter in the entire volume, “Shops and Subjects,” Andrew Ballantyne explores how characters in various fictions are “interfused” with their surroundings, alluding to Edgar Allen Poe’s Fall of the House of Usher and Georges Rodenbach’s Bourges-la-morte, before turning to more apparently naturalistic novels such as Dickens’s Old Curiosity Shop and Zola’s Au Bonheur des Dames. He argues that Zola and Dickens actually reveal a haunted, psychologically charged identity between person and building. Dickens’s shop operates like the depths of Freud’s unconscious, but Zola’s description of mechanical desire looks forward to Deleuze and Guattari. While reflecting a general sense of Paris familiar to us from Walter Benjamin, Ballantyne notes the source of some of Benjamin’s perceptions in his friend Louis Aragon. While all of the earlier chapters are learned and worthy, Ballantyne’s chapter is the only one that picks up the promising conversation between architecture and literary discourse started a few decades ago in such books as Sharon Marcus’s Inconspicuous Relations and the changing fashion for different sources of some of Benjamin’s perceptions during Soane’s lifetime. While reflecting a general sense of Paris familiar to us from Walter Benjamin, Ballantyne notes the source of some of Benjamin’s perceptions in his friend Louis Aragon. While all of the earlier chapters are learned and worthy, Ballantyne’s chapter is the only one that picks up the promising conversation between architecture and literary discourse started a few decades ago in such books as Sharon Marcus’s Inconspicuous Relations, Anthony Vidler’s The Architectural Uncanny, Jennifer Bloomer’s Architecture and the Text, and Philippe Hamon’s Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France, to name just a few.¹

While Conjuring the Real might not demonstrate the theoretical coherence that the editors claim, and while its engagement with similar efforts over the past few decades it limited, the rich and masterful essays collected here will reward the patient reading they deserve.

JOHN GANIM
University of California, Riverside

Note

Helene Furján
Glorious Visions: John Soane’s Spectacular Theater
London and New York: Routledge, 2011, 198 pp., 36 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 assemblage (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 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.¹ 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
upon its present relevance, and I would suggest that its argument on theatricality is, if anything, too directly oriented toward interests in atmosphere, mood, and affect in current architectural discourse. With its account tending more to collapse the distance between the two moments of cultural fascination than to summon readers back across that distance and into the experience of the house in the early nineteenth century, the useful comprehension a reader gains of the persistent relevance of the “theater of display” is offset by a diminished understanding of the actual consequentiality of such an architecture within its historical moment.

One cause of this tendency is likely the author’s decision to reconstitute the house as the crystallization of its cultural moment only through categorical discursive terms, rather than by also employing the more shaded terms that emerge through exchanges and occurrences, the margins of discourse that are created by circumstance. Put simply, notably absent from Glorious Visions is any scrutiny of catalytic events, or evaluation of rival decisions, or portrayal of antagonists. Culture here is discerned through a careful and detailed accounting of theoretical propositions and their dissemination, but that may not suffice for the deeper revelation of architectural experience that Furján intends. Soane was a famously fragile figure, quick to turn a criticism into an institutional or legal crisis, and both his personal decisions and his architectural work were fashioned through the abrasions of debate.1 Though Furján makes passing reference to episodes of familial and professional conflict, neither these events, nor any of the broader social and political events of the transitional decades of the early nineteenth century, are really considered to be instrumental aspects of the configuration of culture embodied in 13 Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

This is not an appeal to substitute an histoire événementielle for the discursive and formal analyses undertaken by Glorious Visions, rather to consider the relation between the conceptual categories it elaborates and the instrumentality they may have attained within the course of events. Furján adeptly demonstrates that the house produces an environment capable of reordering the anticipations generated by convention and thereby distances its spectators even as it engages them, but that equivocation does not, in her account, resonate within the certainties of its contemporary culture. To convey, as Glorious Visions does, the contours of the historical experience of Soane’s house is an accomplishment, yet with no weakness or shortcoming acknowledged in either Soane or his house, only an affirmation of the currently prevailing discursive terms seems possible. A further layering of the relation between the house’s architectural and atmospheric complexities and the uncertainties of the cultural moment is wanted in order to understand the “spectacular theater” as not only making effects within its architectural interior but also having an effect upon its social and cultural exterior.

With the thematic chapters of Glorious Visions, Furján finds a creditable balance between the desire to convey the innumerable refractions of meaning and space in the house and the need to guide her reader toward a conclusive understanding of its “theatrical structure.” Liberal quotation from Soane’s contemporaries supplies a sense of the fluidity of terms such as “imagination,” “scene,” or “gothic,” while Furján’s explication of the concepts defined in those terms is generally distilled and precise. The organization of the book around such themes induces a degree of repetition, belaboring the main theme of spectacularity and theatricality. The reader could perhaps have been given responsibility for recalling this theme from the finer grain of correspondences between chapters. One compensatory contribution to the reader’s understanding of the intricacies of the house is the set of color illustrations that compose a tour of the house. Most of these illustrations are photographs by the author that, at first glance, may appear to be underexposed or incorrectly tinted. But as the text makes clear, what Furján has endeavored to capture in these images are the various effects of gloom, contrasting colors of light, and optical distortion, whence her argument about spectacularity proceeds. Combined with a selection of watercolors of the house interior, the photographs do offer a supplementary guide into the remarkable experiential framework that Furján asks us to see.

TIMOTHY HYDE
Harvard University

Notes

Katerina Rüedi Ray
Bauhaus Dream-house: Modernity and Globalization
London and New York: Routledge, 2010, 228 pp., 32 b/w illus. $49.95 (paper), ISBN 0415475821

Katerina Rüedi Ray opens her book on the Bauhaus with four questions, which she repeats again in her conclusion. “How,” she asks, “do models of design education emerge in relation to social, economy, and cultural change,” “do economic and special structures, spatial and corporeal practices as well as systems of representation influence identity formation within architecture, design and art education,” “do models of architecture, design and art education change over time and within space,” and, finally, “can critical social theory inform architecture, design and art education?” None of the four relates specifically to the Bauhaus, although certainly the school can be used as a case study around which to develop answers to them. The strength of this book is its radical departure from the assumptions that have governed most earlier literature on the subject; the weakness is the attempt to cover such an extraordinary extent of ground in a scant 228 pages, sixty of which are devoted to notes, bibliography, and index. Ray careers back and forth in a narrative that spans at least six centuries and