then Vereinigte Schultöp elffabriken. The
museum is located in Tauberbischofsheim.
9. Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn, and Kate Rou-
smarie, eds., Silences and Images: The Social
History of the Classroom (New York: Peter, Lang,
1999); Martin Lawn and Ian Grosvenor, eds.,
Materialities of Schooling: Design, Technology,
Objects, Routines (London: Symposium Books,
2005); Linda Bryder, “Wonderlands of Butter-
cup, Clover, and Daisies: Tuberculosis and the
Open-air School Movement in Britain, 1907–39,” in In the Name of the Child: Health and
Welfare, 1800–1940, ed. Roger Coote (London:
Routledge, 1992), 72–95.

Jean-Louis Cohen
Architecture in Uniform: Designing
and Building for the Second World
War
New Haven and Montreal: Yale University
Press and the Canadian Centre for
Architecture, 2011, 448 pp., 300 color illus.
$50. ISBN 9782754105309

Through the ages, war has been a font
of architectural innovation, spurring new
techniques and materials, transmitting
ideas about style (through cultural contact),
form, and space making (through experiment),
and shifting professional attitudes and training. War has also been
architecture’s muse, as the Futurists
or Erich Mendelsohn’s sketches from the
front during World War I attest. When
nations have tilled toward conflict,
moreover, their home fronts have been trans-
formed, and architecture has responded—
often self-consciously. How strange that
historians of twentieth-century architec-
ture have only in recent years come to
study this enduring and enormously fruit-
ful relationship.¹

In his book Architecture in Uniform:
Designing and Building for the Second World
War, Jean-Louis Cohen nods to this tradi-
tion in previous generations, writing “there
is nothing new about the relationship
between architecture and armed conflict,”
pointing out that Vitruvius was a military
engineer (11). He then exceptionalizes the
experience of World War II, when total
war and the forces of modernity mobilized
everything, altering the very dynamic of
social relations and communication. This
idea of totalization is neither a new theme
nor a novel claim for what happened dur-
ing World War II—or more broadly,
modernity. One need only turn to imperial
Rome, Leonardo’s Italy, or, as William
Leuchtenburg has demonstrated, to the
United States between the two world wars,
to see the extent to which war has been the
central dynamic of Western society, and
martial language its conceptual frame-
work.² Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find
a moment when war, the forces of produc-
tion, and culture have escaped dialectical
transformation.

The historiographical lacuna is more
interesting. Cohen notes the strange omis-
sion of the war years in major texts on
modern architecture, although the pro-
pensity of the architectural history canon
to seek out exceptional and photogenic
buildings helps explain the gap. Cohen,
one of the most prolific and accomplished
historians of twentieth-century architec-
ture, lays out the terrain of elision, but
shies away from explaining the histori-
ographical reasons behind it. It is fair to
wonder whether any of the projects or
buildings in this book will enter a canonical
text. Far from an indictment of Cohen’s
work, it reflects the nature of the canon
and pedagogy in the field.

One of the virtues of the book is to put
all of the World War II belligerents into
comparative perspective, where previous
studies have focused on single nations or
figures. We learn about architects, both
well known and obscure, from nearly
every major nation involved in the war.
The cultural whiplash that results is a small
price to pay for this geo-historical pan-
orama. Few corners of the globe escaped
the war and architects everywhere had
to respond to the changing conditions.
Most attempted to find relevance for them-
selves and the profession by reasserting or
redefining the architect’s role, to “fight as
architects,” as one writer put it. This meant
distinguishing themselves from those in
other professions, especially engineers, and
articulating their expertise in a moment
when the profession itself was often at
a loss to define itself. Architects who could
not enlist found work in expected pursuits:
planning and logistics, military build-
ing and housing, and camouflage. They
also were called on to protect historic
monuments, redesign machines and pro-
duction lines, and serve as experts.

Cohen’s work joins a growing literature
on war and culture. He focuses on archi-
tecture in its most generous sense. We hear
about domesticity and war, the effects of
rationing on innovation, victory gardens,
factories, war housing, prefabrication,
intellectual migrations, and numerous
other topics that have been more thor-
oughly treated elsewhere. But they have
never been assembled altogether, which is
Cohen’s primary achievement. Who else
has the range to work with equal facility
with the Anglo-American, French, Italian,
German, and Soviet scenes? The book is,
indeed, a formidable act of assemblage and
synthesis. The images alone, the most
exquisite range on the subject ever gath-
ered together, make it a valuable resource.

Cohen is most provocative in his exami-
nation of how war created a new urban
geography, forcing new focal points,
boundaries, movements, spectacles, theo-
ries of defensible cities, and actual agglom-
urations into being, especially in war zones,
where the home front melted into the mili-
tary front. This transformed cities as both
engines of war and shields for citizens.
“The cities were mobilized into the econ-
omy of a war that starved their inhabitants,
that used them as theatres for great bat-
tles,” and as targets for aerial bombard-
ment (35). As the city became a target,
architects immediately began seeing this as
a design problem. This theme could be a
book in its own right, as any number of
topics in this wide-ranging study could be.
In this sense, rather than providing the last
word, by design Cohen has opened up the
field for future research, something
he modestly notes in the preface. In fact,
since most of the material, aside from the
images, is drawn from magazines and sec-
ondary sources, rich avenues of primary
research remain open for future scholars.

Cohen’s mode of telling this story
makes the book difficult to summarize.
Thematically divided, its overzealous use
of subheadings, leaving many sections only
two paragraphs long, creates a staccato
rhythm that makes for stop-and-go read-
ing. Names, projects, and places fly by.
A hefty-sounding section such as “The
Significance of Planning,” which could
take up a whole chapter or book, falls off a cliff after one column. While Cohen expressly aimed for a "series of cross-sections through the various theatres of the war" (15), they read more like rapid sketches. This could be the result of thinking through the project as an exhibition—it was staged at the Canadian Centre for Architecture—where the organization was spatial rather than bookishly linear and where text humbly assists rather than boldly asserts. The result is something that can feel reportorial rather than analytical; wood was reinvented as a material; "tempos," otherwise known as temporary programmes, appear; prefabrication became essential; and so forth. It also means that readers have to be resourceful: Ernst Neufert’s contributions are decentralized to no less than eleven different places in the book, Louis I. Kahn’s to ten.

Where literary shape seems to have been self-consciously jettisoned, tension and beauty in the telling come through the unexpected juxtaposition of episodes—as in an exhibition. Several pages on Edwin Bergstrom’s Pentagon Building in Washington directly abut a short piece on Auschwitz, all as part of an investigation of the new scale the war brought into being. The implications remain tacit, but no less poignant, especially in a moment when so many scholarly texts telegraph their every intellectual move. Still, one could wish that this sort of explosive comparison were not left to dangle without comment. Is the Pentagon really comparable to Auschwitz, or to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, which comes later in the chapter? The cross-section, to take up Cohen’s architectural analogy, is meant to reveal structure, and perhaps it does, but the book lacks the sort of horizontal cut—or plan—that would reveal the circulation of characters, ideas, and interpretations into a cohesive argument.

The writing is elegant and the object is handsome, but it lacks the comforts and purposefulness of narrative. The text, moreover, infrequently talks to the images, reinforcing the sense of museological reserve.

Why does this matter? Narrative is not the only way to tell a story and historians have played with nonlinear or thematic structures with great success. One reason is that the war—perhaps all war—is a moment of narrative intensification, of rapidly rising and falling plotlines and crescendos. As much as any human activity, war is fought to make it end, giving its every twist a sense of narrative traction, as David Kennedy’s Freedom from Fear makes abundantly clear.1 Choosing to mismatch representation with reality in this way makes it nearly impossible to carry an argument beyond a paragraph or two. On the other hand, a different kind of reading results: one can enter Cohen’s book at any point without having to backtrack to pick up the gist. Fascinating tidbits appear on every page.

Perhaps it is fairer to treat the book as a catalog. Taken as such, it is full of sensational illustrations and exposition. Readers familiar with the author’s work will not be surprised to find several astonishing images by Le Corbusier. Less familiar will be Yakov Rubanchik’s image of anti-aircraft balloons in the streets of Leningrad or the wonderful diagram detailing Japanese air raid guidelines, where architectural graphics meet proto-anime. Those who appreciate Gordon Cullen’s lovely drawings for The Concise Townscape will be fascinated by his drawings describing the “design, construction, and everyday life in anti-aircraft shelters.” Even a photograph of Albert Kahn’s factory-like drafting room, with draftsmen lying over sprawling drawings as they work, brings home the altered scale brought on by war.

Sections on the architecture of mobility, occupation (including “esthetic purification”), and the proposed Soviet war memorials are, for their brevity, fresh and poignant. In the section on camouflage, while drawn almost entirely from publications, Cohen deftly shows how camouflage was part of a much larger practice of simulation and deception, including a faux Paris along a geographically similar bend of the Seine built to trick the Luftwaffe into unloading their bombs prematurely. Just the list of modernists who tried their hand at camouflage is impressive: Louis I. Kahn, Le Corbusier, Ernő Goldfinger, Norman Bel Geddes, Percival Goodman, László Moholy-Nagy, György Kepes, George Fred Keck, among others. Hugh Casson’s analysis of the paradox of modernists hustling to learn the illusionism of camouflage is among the most insightful statements about this moment in architecture (204).

Whatever quibbles one might have with it, Architecture in Uniform is a book of extraordinary range and keen insight. It will remain essential for anyone working on architecture and war in the twentieth century.

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Notes

Daniel Purdy
On the Ruins of Babel: Architectural Metaphor in German Thought

In contemporary industry, technology and science, it is common to encounter the word architecture used in contexts outside of building design or construction. Most often, architecture refers to an overview or big picture of an enterprise, machine, or organism. Thus business architecture encompasses a company’s interoperability and responses to the external environment. Computer architecture assesses codes, data paths and processing, and computations that model virtual and physical states. Brain architecture looks into how experiences build complex circuits from simpler circuits so as to achieve higher levels of plasticity when it comes to impulse transmission between sensation and initiation. In each case, architecture describes a system’s production of information as a means of reasoning: statistical