imperial wedding of Charles V and the royal entry of Philip II on major construction projects that followed on their respective heels: the Ayuntamiento (town hall) and the promenade known as the Alameda de Hércules.

In Lleó’s account, Seville’s Renaissance was a short-lived phenomenon that began in the 1520s and was already showing signs of decline by midcentury before dying out entirely at the end of the century. Lleó describes Sevillian humanism in the late sixteenth century as increasingly hermetic and insular, faults that he attributes to the impact of the Counter-Reformation and the Spanish Inquisition, which persecuted such luminaries as Arias Montano. The complex iconographical programs achieved by Seville’s sixteenth-century humanists turned into “pedantic erudite games” (240–41) among their seventeenth-century successors, who “trivialized” the imagery that Lleó characterizes as more profound and meaningful in the hands of the pre-Vicente Lleó’s own monograph (195). Rereading Nueva Roma in light of more recent scholarship has begun to explore the connections between the intellectual currents that drove Renaissance and Counter-Reformation thinkers might inspire a reconsideration of Lleó’s stark divide between the “open” and “closed” Seville. A reevaluation of Sevillian humanism that includes the seventeenth century would account for important figures like the churchman and classical archaeologist Rodrigo Caro (1573–1647), who do not figure into Lleó’s account of “New Rome.”

Lleó’s original project introduced new art historical methods to an informed local audience who would have known by heart the sweeping narrative of Seville’s rise as the center of the Atlantic trade and the genealogies of the city’s great noble families, and who would have recognized allusions to sonnets by Cervantes and references to minor incidents of local history. The new readers who pick up this attractive revised edition would benefit from more detailed explanations and citations. While the text has not been significantly revised, the new edition of Nueva Roma includes the welcome addition of indexes of names and places (but not topics); a substantially expanded and updated bibliography of secondary sources; and, most notable of all, well over a hundred color images integrated into the text (in striking contrast to what the author called the “austere” first edition, which had fewer than half as many black-and-white images at the back of the book). The images go a long way toward evoking the lost world of Renaissance Seville, even if many of them are too small to read the iconographical programs described in the text.

It has been over three decades since Nueva Roma was first published, and a great deal of new knowledge about Renaissance Seville has been excavated in those years: unedited manuscripts have been put into print for the first time (including Lleó’s edition of a 1594 manuscript describing Ferdinand Columbus, the subject of an important exhibition and catalog by Mark McDonald. The 2012 edition of Vicente Lleó Cañal’s Nueva Roma makes available for the first time in decades a milestone in Renaissance Seville, even if many of them are too small to read the iconographical programs described in the text.

Three recent books on Japan’s mid-twentieth-century Metabolist movement demonstrate how differing source materials yield new insights into important architectural moments. That the authors were able to develop new perspectives regarding one of the first truly media-aware architectural movements—concerning practitioners who have, over the past half century, reaped major international awards and published numerous books on their work and thinking—shows what can be revealed by moving beyond disciplinary conventions.

Rem Koolhaas spearheaded a multilingual team of researchers, interviewers, and photographers who produced the most fascinating of these three texts, a book that he explicitly and repeatedly argues should not be considered an architectural history. Instead, Project Japan: Metabolism Talks . . . is
RK (Looking at a photo of Kurokawa posing beside a car): How much of a role do you think your physical beauty played in your career?

KK: Physical beauty? (surprised) You know, in my 20s, every weekly magazine was coming to me.

RK: For your physical beauty?

KK: Not beauty, but my lifestyle . . . Everyone wanted my face . . . . I was so lean then because I was poor. I had no money to eat. I weighed only 35 kilos.

RK: So that’s the secret. A beautiful, sensual moment . . . (405)

The passage is typical of Koolhaas’s pop culture approach to the profession’s past; he wants to know what people wore, what cars they drove, whether they went to jazz clubs. But one of the benefits of the method is adeptly illustrated in his interview with Ekuan, which turns quickly to the industrial designer’s recollections of visiting Hiroshima a mere twenty days after the atomic bombing. Ekuan lost his father and sister in the blast and muses, “Experiences like that redirected my perception of the mutability of life from a sense of vanity and desolation to the sense that change drives new growth” (481). The significance of Ekuan’s Buddhist beliefs, which might have come off as clichéd shorthand for Japan’s unfamiliar cultural traditions, is powerfully highlighted by the juxtaposition of Kurokawa’s narcissism and Ekuan’s self-effacement.

Project Japan is warmly nostalgic for those far-off and chummier times. Historical photographs of the young Metabolists hobnobbing with internationally celebrated architects and artists, or with influential politicians and businessman, are only rarely matched by those depicting Koolhaas in chichi restaurants with the aging interviewees. Yet they implicitly argue a point rarely acknowledged in conventional architectural histories: difficult-to-document chance meetings, personal proclivities, and casual connections have important impacts on architects’ work and way of thinking.

The interviews also contribute to the success of Koolhaas’s book by breaking into digestible chunks the extensively detailed and often not widely known material illustrating the evolution of Metabolism. Koolhaas and his team, led by Kayoko Ota, accomplished an admirable level of archival sleuthing, especially in light of the Japanese tendency not to preserve the odds and ends of modern architectural practice. For example, Project Japan serves up more than a dozen unexecuted plans for building into Tokyo Bay, including Shinpei Gotō’s 1923 proposal following the Great Kanto Earthquake, Kikutake’s sketches of his Tower-Shaped Community and Marine City, ten approaches to landfiling developed between 1957 and 1961, and later fantasies by Tange (1986) and Kurokawa (looking ahead to 2025) (Figures 1 and 2). Koolhaas, with a greater interest in the urban-scale plans that emerged in the postwar period than most architectural scholars have demonstrated, also includes sufficient material on the political, economic, and physical infrastructure of these proposals, to establish an almost-plausible context for the better-known, pie-in-the-sky images of floating cities and helical towers.

The book’s perspective is strongly informed by Koolhaas’s long and successful career as a practicing architect heading a large firm; throughout, Project Japan underscores the point that ambitious efforts are unlikely to be the work of one person. While respectful of the significant role Kenzo Tange played in nurturing the Metabolist movement (handpicking participants and even standing up for many at their weddings), Koolhaas and his cohort are equally aware that Tange’s protégés developed complementary architectural approaches that strengthened the movement. To a greater degree than has been conventional, Project Japan highlights the Metabolists’ diversity, making the connections to their later work more persuasive.

Hajime Yatsuka’s Japanese-language book Metaborisumu nekusasu (Metabolism nexus), like Project Japan, argues that the roots of Metabolism’s audacious plans can be found in Japan’s imperial era. This might come as a surprise in light of the premise’s originality, but in fact the two books arose out of just the kind of casual connections that Koolhaas celebrates throughout his text: Koolhaas and Yatsuka have debated the topic of Metabolism over nearly two decades, and it is Yatsuka who initially developed the groundbreaking thesis underlying both volumes. The two books, though, are distinctive even while covering the same ground: where
Koolhaas’s book is sunny and gossipy; Yatsuka’s brooding text is colored by greater awareness of war’s devastation and political machination. The differences are underscored by presentation: Koolhaas’s book, published by Taschen, is visually crowded and printed in bold, bright colors; Yatsuka’s tome inclines to dense text and tiny, grainy black-and-white photographs or drawings, produced by a publisher better known for subjects such as technology and science. (In Ohmsha’s catalog, Metaborisumu nekusasu is followed by Automatic Control of Air Conditioning and Energy-Saving Strategies.)

This is not the first time Yatsuka has written on the Metabolists; in 1997 he coauthored a more conventional monograph with Hideki Yoshimatsu, published by Tokyo’s Inax: Metaborisumu: 1960 no nendai Niban no kenshiku avangaruto (Metabolism: Japan’s 1960s architectural avant-garde). His 2011 book is more historiographic and less concerned with the materials and formal similarities found in Metabolist designs than its predecessor. Instead, Yatsuka digs into the political and economic forces that fed the postwar era’s giddy exuberance, arguing at its heart that left-leaning architects, unwelcome in Japan’s early twentieth-century fascist state, found a haven building colonial communities in China and Manchuria, and then later revived their idealistic proposals at home following World War II.

Yatsuka’s encompassing discussion of the intellectual antecedents to Metabolism is his book’s greatest strength and its most vexing weakness. His 466-page text touches on how twentieth-century Japanese architecture and urban planning were influenced by the German expansionist principle of lebensraum, French electrification policy and the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Kyoto school of philosophy developed under Kitarō Nishida, to give only a few examples. Ever erudite, Yatsuka is unafraid to casually compare the Japanese Count Shinpei Gotō to French marshal Hubert Lyautey (19). Minor points or personalities that Koolhaas’s book has chosen to touch on only lightly or not at all become long digressions in Yatsuka’s hands. Reading Metaborismu nekusasu becomes an exasperating exercise in keeping track, with little assistance from the author, of literally hundreds of individuals—philosophers, politicians, planners, architects, artists, economists, businessmen, and bureaucrats—all of them active over decades and around the globe, and popping in and out of the text. Project Japan incorporates many snapshots of people at work and play; Yatsuka’s text, in spite of its greater interest in the postwar period’s major actors, does not include a single person in its illustrations. The difficulty in following Yatsuka’s uninflected interjections...
of his protagonists brings home the value of the colorful detail used to distinguish personalities in Project Japan.

This is not to say that the maddening effort required to follow Yatsuka’s arguments is without reward. His book is a masterful outline of the political and economic uses of architecture at an important juncture in Japan’s history, laid out in rich detail (Figure 3). The book is seeded with delightful gems, such as a brief discussion of the development of Mount Fuji as a symbol for Japan, dating it, surprisingly, to the late nineteenth century (45), or the point that URBOT, a name Toyo Ito initially used for his first office, was originally used for a software proposed by Kenzo Tange that would automatically generate plans (378). Yatsuka’s book, too, belongs in any major library; it will certainly remain unrivaled in its scope.

The greatest difference between Project Japan and Metaborismu nekusasu, though, is not their accessibility but their conclusions. Yatsuka views architecture as the reflection of national will; he argues that Metabolism briefly and successfully colluded with bureaucrats and business elites to express Japan’s postwar “superego” and that the movement collapsed when the nation lost its common sense of purpose. He clearly mourns the loss. Koolhaas, by contrast, presents Metabolism as opportunistic: “a Japanese avant-garde that engineered its appearance on the world stage 50 years ago and disappeared 25 years later in the bonfire of neo-liberalism” (12). He is most interested in the tricks architects used to achieve success and frequently asks them what percentage of their works have been built. Even as Koolhaas’s most interesting and most acid comments are directed at neoliberalism and the commercialization of architecture after 1970, he also serves up a cautionary warning regarding architecture as the expression of national identity. Nearly fifty pages present the overscaled and ossified variations on Metabolism that Tange and Kurokawa produced for oil-rich nations in the 1970s. The material in this chapter was likely as hard to track down as anything in the book: most of the buildings have never been included in architectural monographs, and Koolhaas himself went to the trouble to photograph the “People’s Palace” in Damascus, a gift from Saudi Arabia’s King Faisal to Syria. The chapter illustrates that state-generated architecture is not always ideal, either, further underscored by Koolhaas’s listing of projects unconsummated because of war, revolution, or assassination, and project teams working under military protection.

While Yatsuka was penning Metaborismu nekusasu, he was also involved in developing an extremely popular exhibition held on the Metabolists in 2011, which I reviewed for the September 2012 issue of the JSAH. This enabled him, like Koolhaas, to work with an extensive team in bringing to light a number of important and little-known materials. The two groups clearly swapped leads on resources and offered each other encouragement, and they generously cite each other’s efforts in their texts.

In spite of the considerable ambition and the aggressive research efforts both Koolhaas and Yatsuka displayed in producing their extensive texts, the exhibition catalogue Metabolism: The City of the Future; Dreams and Visions of Reconstruction in Postwar and Present-Day Japan is able to stake out ground they did not by hewing closer to the conventions of architectural history. Brief essays (the longest only seven...
pages) offer fresh insights into the precedents and formal properties of Tange’s Tokyo Bay Plan, Masato Otaka’s Sakaide Housing Complex, Isozaki’s dystopian City in the Air, Expo ’70 (Figure 4), and the rhetorical use of tradition by postwar architects and architectural journals. Those with a strong interest in the aesthetic antecedents of Metabolism will find the essays carefully crafted, but for many readers the texts may appear as merely diligent when compared to the intellectual latitude evidenced in Project Japan or Metaborisumu nekusasu, underscoring the value of drifting into new intellectual territory when writing on a well-explored topic.

The museum catalog’s greatest value lies in its higher production values; highly saturated color photography is crisply printed full page on coated paper, and, at 9 by 12 inches, the pages are nearly twice as large as those of the other two books. Koolhaas’s Project Japan, by contrast, is rendered in a deliberately up-to-date design by trendsetter Irma Boom. It is printed on toothed paper that takes the punch out of photographs, often overprinted in fluorescent orange or pink ink (Figure 5). Sadly, this book should not be expected to age well, even though Koolhaas’s prose can easily be said to have the longest shelf life.

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Note
1. All names are written here in Western order, with the family name following the given name.

Caroline Maniaque-Benton
French Encounters with the American Counterculture, 1960–1980
Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011, 244 pp., 51 color and 58 b/w illus. $99.95, ISBN 9781409423867

This handsome book investigates an intriguing and novel topic: the French attraction to American “alternative architecture,” which was prompted by the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s and which is being revisited by historians as a harbinger of today’s sustainability movement.