the Bhong Mosque in Pakistan, which was designed and funded by a local landowner and comprised a variety of materials and decorative motifs (Figure 2). According to Venturi, the mosque is exuberant and flamboyant, a perfect example of “sources, high and low, focused and broad.” Criticisms of the award, however, saw the Bhong Mosque as “baroque,” kitsch, and undervaluing its selection as a winner added fuel to criticisms of the omission of “modernist” buildings, such as the National Parliament House designed by Louis Kahn in Dhaka, from consideration for the Aga Khan Award. The “anti-modern bias,” as one commentator noted, was “troubling” and catered to populist sensibilities that were ideologically charged.

The criticism was clearly directed at Venturi. One of the two dissenting jurors, Mehmet Doruk Pamir, wrote, “There is a romantic bias toward traditionalism, historicism and the vernacular. This represents at least one dominant strain within the architectural discourse in Europe and America during the last decade.” While Pamir was correct in identifying Venturi’s influence on the outcome of the 1986 awards, the temporal and geographic effects of Venturi’s influence were not specific to that moment. The seeds of postmodernism to which Pamir alluded were already sown in Complexity and Contradiction, and they found fruitful soil in the discourse on Islamic architecture put forth by patrons in the Middle East and the Islamic world.

The Baghdad State Mosque competition and the selection of the 1986 Aga Khan Award winners revealed the disjunctions in Venturi’s theoretical stance, which aimed to reconcile historical, often elite, style with the everyday. They also made evident the influence of his work on the broader discourse on “Islamic architecture” in the region. The primary shortcoming of VRSB’s Baghdad State Mosque proposal was that it gave little consideration to the history of Iraqi architecture, as though regional and chronological specificity did not matter. In the case of the award, Venturi’s championing of the Bhong Mosque, despite great resistance, revealed the tension between the high-minded discourse encouraged by the Aga Khan Foundation and the difficulty the jury faced in recognizing an unusual, if culturally relevant, project.

The question of representation, central to Venturi’s explorations, remains elusive. Calling for a plurality not just of architectural design but also of use and function, Venturi seeks diversity in form and relevance in historicism. The lessons that he tries to derive in Complexity and Contradiction have not always been successfully adopted in the Middle East, although architects such as Abdel-Wahed El-Wakil in Saudi Arabia and Hilmi Şenalp in Turkey have implemented historicist style in their designs. Modern critics have often been hesitant to explore the cultural impact of Venturi’s approach, while the academy falls short in its ability to judge works that do not fit easily into a modernist idiom. The challenge, as articulated by Venturi fifty years ago, remains to be met.

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Notes
2. My use of the term representation has to do first with architectural production and the ways in which Venturi uses drawings and photography to represent his “view” and second with the demographics (representation of ideas and people) that Venturi’s work engages and the ways in which he attempts to reconcile elite patronage with popular taste.
3. A parallel influence was that of regionalism, as put forth by Kenneth Frampton. A broader study would consider the relationship between these two thinkers and their reception in the Middle East. Kenneth Frampton, “Prospects for a Critical Regionalism,” Perspectives 20 (1983), 147–62.
4. This was in contrast to early twentieth-century state projects that were modernist and linked themselves to pre-Islamic histories. Sandy Iserstad and Kishwar Rizvi, “Modern Architecture and the Middle East: The Burden of Representation,” in Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century, ed. Sandy Iserstad and Kishwar Rizvi (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 3–36.
8. One participant in a symposium related to the competition, French critic Bernard Huet, noted, however, that architecture in Iraq had traditionally been restrained in its use of color, restricting the use of polychrome tiles to select spaces in interiors. Thus one could note that VRSB’s project misunderstood the meaning of traditional in this context, choosing instead a generic Islamic style. Bernard Huet, “Reflections on the Projects . . . ,” in “Regenerative Approaches to Mosque Design,” 47.

Power and Privilege

When I arrived at Princeton University nearly thirty years ago to start my undergraduate education, I secured a work-study job washing dishes on the breakfast shift at Gordon Wu Hall. While the work was tedious, and the dank scullery air left my clothes smelling of eggs, I took pleasure in the design of my workplace. In Architecture 101 the following semester, the first assignment was to choose a room somewhere on the campus for analysis through drawings and text. Aware that Wu Hall was a celebrated recent building, and knowing it from daily experience, I chose to write about its entry hall and dining room. In words and novice pencil drawings, I carefully described the postmodernist interplay between modernist and medieval architectural forms staged in the building’s façades and primary public spaces.

This intimate engagement with Wu Hall was my path into the work of Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown (VRSB), into Complexity and Contradiction, and into architectural history, theory, and criticism at large. I learned postmodernism in part from these close interactions with Wu Hall and from...
studying the ways it engaged the campus context. Walking each morning through the quadrangles and passages of Princeton’s Tudor Revival dormitories on my way to the dishwashing station, I passed ogival doors, bay windows, and pedimented archways similar to those depicted in *Complexity and Contradiction*. In Wu Hall, as well as in halls paneled and trimmed with Gothic Revival motifs designed by architects working for Ralph Adams Cram and Cope & Stewardson, I ate and studied on VRSB furniture that abstracted and stylized those motifs.

Knowing that *Complexity and Contradiction* had originated in the thesis Venturi completed while himself a student at Princeton, I felt myself interpellated into a genealogy of architect-scholars who absorbed the heritage of European architecture by living amid its epigones, and I recognized the campus as a habitus rich in what I was learning to call cultural capital. A key dimension of that habitus was a nonchalance—a disdain, even—toward the university’s earnest Tudor Revival buildings. Among architecture students, at least, a casual disregard for this architecture of privilege was tacitly communicated as part of the Princeton sensibility.

In subsequent studio courses I caught only the tail end of postmodernist design practice and soon was steeped in deconstruction, a different kind of language game. But from the lightly worn erudition and wittily provocative play with architectural codes displayed in Wu Hall I learned a stance: familiar fluency in languages of privilege, displayed through a mildly scandalous insider’s transgression of their rules. I came to understand how knowingly flouting the rules of an architectural language could augment the cultural capital gained by merely speaking that language, and to recognize how the architecture of Wu Hall accrued value in this way. I came to see this insider’s wit as a way to stay ahead of people who knew the language only from a distance. Wu Hall’s association with precursors such as Michelangelo’s Laurentian Library and Giulio Romano’s Palazzo del Te gave this strategy a name: mannerism.

My process of learning from Wu Hall, and from the treatise the building elaborated, came back to me at the 2016 SAH annual meeting during a session on mannerism in twentieth-century architecture. Listening to presentations about Le Corbusier’s Villa Schwob, Colin Rowe’s essay on mannerism and modern architecture, and buildings by VRSB, Michael Graves, John Hejduk, and Peter Eisenman—along with more than one exegesis of a brief exchange among Anthony Blunt, Rudolf Wittkower, Sir John Summerson, and other historians after a lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects in February 1949—I found myself extrapolating from Wu Hall a general theory: mannerism is the reinscription of privilege, a strategy through which elites renew the devalued currency of their cultural capital. Twentieth-century mannerism started to seem like a way to preserve the intellectual and cultural authority of the field’s most privileged practitioners in the face of competing conversations, practices, and agendas.

Sitting in the Pasadena Convention Center as colleagues revisited the RIBA conversation, I thought about the scope and subject of other conference sessions. One explored the capacity of oral history to diversify the range of voices represented in our historiography. Another considered the achievement of women builders beyond the Western world. In a discussion about globalizing the architectural history survey, a colleague asked if it made sense for such courses still to teach Chartres Cathedral—or any of the great Gothic cathedrals—given the expanding scholarship on a multitude of Christian architectures. With this context of disciplinary restructuring in mind, what is at stake when we focus our attention on a lineage that links Michelangelo and Le Corbusier to VRSB, Eisenman, and the emerging practitioners currently engaging with mannerism in their academic design practices? What does it mean for us to affiliate ourselves with scholars and critics such as Blunt, Wittkower, Summerson, and Rowe? Certainly, historiographic investigation of an art historical category is a worthy objective for an SAH conference session. In this case, though, the narrowness of the frame and the fidelity of the contemporary research to the terms set by midcentury leaders from the London establishment stood out. I came to the dispiriting conclusion that the panel, like twentieth-century mannerism itself, was—perhaps inadvertently—shoring up the value of a particular Anglo-American lineage of architectural academicism in order to protect its contemporary legatees as other scholars claimed space in the discipline for topics that have so far received scant study.

Similarly, what does it mean to dedicate our attention, and the limited pages of this journal, to revisiting *Complexity and Contradiction*? How do these essays augment the stock of capital vested in ideas and materials associated with some of the discipline’s most privileged people, institutions, and canons? (I recognize that this includes me, invited to contribute at least in part based on my intimacy with the Venturian surround.) How can we cross-pollinate conversations about mannerism and U.S. postmodernism with those about globalization, gender, and multiculturalism—and so open our accounts of the 1960s, and of the twentieth century more broadly, to figures, traditions, and contexts hitherto marginalized in U.S. historiography? *Complexity and Contradiction* is a great book that models a nuanced and rich way of seeing buildings. But how much attention does it merit given the sense many of us have that we are just arriving at a basic understanding of vast areas of the world’s architectural production and theory? How can we intersect Venturi’s compositional and stylistic approach with analytics that reveal other kinds of architectural complexities and contractions, such as those relating to architecture’s imbrication with systems of class and labor, gender and sexuality, ethnicity and race? To the extent that we do keep rereading *Complexity and Contradiction*, we should situate the book within a history of privilege that skews architectural knowledge, excludes a wide range of perspectives, and alienates people who might otherwise engage with our discipline. Intersectional analysis can help us not only to better understand books like *Complexity and Contradiction* and buildings like Wu Hall (the kitchen and scullery as much as the entry and dining halls) but also to challenge the reproduction of power and privilege.

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