multicultural ethos. For these reasons, *Portrait of an Island* is a valuable asset for scholars as well as for students of African colonial architecture, the material cultures of imperialism, and early modern histories of identity formation and cultural exchange. With Hinchman’s help, we can continue to respect the contributions that diverse scholars and members of the public have made in broader discussions on colonial architecture and material culture in and beyond Gorée.

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Note

Despina Stratigakos

**Hitler at Home**

New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015, 373 pp., 13 color and 71 b/w illus. $40, ISBN 9780300183818

It is disturbing to think that Adolf Hitler still has something important to say. It is even more disturbing that we should pay attention. And yet, Despina Stratigakos shows us why we should in her book *Hitler at Home*.

It is clear that architectural historians have long favored the schemes of Albert Speer over those of Gerdy Troost—Hitler’s preferred interior designer. Speer’s work was public, Troost’s private. His work was grandiose, hers mundane. And perhaps most important, his work was male and hers, well, female. Given the subject matter of her previous book, *A Women’s Berlin*, we should not be surprised that Stratigakos reminds us how important females have been to the history of visual and built culture. As she says, if Speer had been more involved in Hitler’s domestic sphere, maybe the Führer’s domestic spaces would be more familiar. She also points out that the primary Troost archive in Munich will not open officially until 2019—something that tells us a lot about how the availability (or lack thereof) of documents has shaped the field, in terms of both the topics covered and the questions asked.

Stratigakos notes that architectural historians have privileged the public, grand, and male. In so doing, they have fallen victim to the ultimate fascist ploy—that of celebrating the mass spectacle of public architecture. Indeed, the history of twentieth-century architecture is a history of monuments and white men.

**Hitler at Home** reclaims the story of Hitler’s three primary domestic spaces: the Old Chancellery in Berlin, which was remodeled and refurnished in a modern, decluttered, and technologically savvy fashion when he became chancellor in 1933; his apartment on the dignified Prince Regent Square in Munich, which was re-fashioned to create the image of a more cultured inhabitant; and the Berghof, his Alpine retreat in Oberalzberg, where he often entertained foreign dignitaries and pretended to be a man of the mountain. Troost renovated each of these spaces during the Third Reich to reflect an understated refinement.

There is no doubt that the book pushes the boundaries of architectural history by drawing upon the domesticity of Hitler. We are forced to recognize that interior domestic space was not just important to the Reich but central to it, as Hitler sought to position his domestic self vis-à-vis his public persona. We see that the domestic is far from simply benign and private. In the case of this evil leader, it was public and dangerous. As Stratigakos argues, visualizing Nazi architecture began from the inside out. This is Extreme Home Makeover—Hitler Edition.

Throughout, Stratigakos shows us the importance of media coverage (including photographs by Heinrich Hoffmann and Eva Braun) as an element in architectural history. It was the news media that presented images and narrated texts about these three residences for the public—convincing them (including the British and Americans) that Hitler was a man of the people. As a result, even for those who never visited the houses, which most readers of the media coverage did not, the spaces were familiar and fetishized. In the process, politics, tourism, and architecture converged—especially at the Berghof, where as many as five thousand visitors demanded to see their Führer daily (some taking away fence posts as mementos). It is clear that the image of Hitler’s domesticity was not only public and political but also carefully constructed so as to exclude the 150 SS officers, barbed-wire fencing, and watchtowers that defended the mountain retreat.

Stratigakos shows how the Munich apartment and the Berghof were also occupied by very different inhabitants as World War II came to a close—Allied soldiers rifled through Hitler’s medicine cabinet, soaked in his bathtub, slept in his bed, and drank wine on his terrace. The residences represented for them the ultimate renewal of body and spirit—something Hitler himself had sought.

The book is well written and thoroughly researched. Stratigakos draws upon abundant print media, including magazine and newspaper articles, photographs, and architectural plans, and makes good use of her unprecedented access to the sealed and uncatalogued personal papers of Gerdy Troost. That said, the reader is left wanting to see more material culture—one table setting designed by Troost (featured in fig. 53) is not enough, particularly when the author convincingly shows how media coverage was used to create and cultivate an image of Hitler’s purported softer side—animal loving, child-friendly, and nature inspired—a far cry from the image of the man behind the gas chambers.

This is relevant given that Stratigakos held a fellowship at the Wolfsomian–Florida International University in Miami, the bastion of material culture from this period. So where are the ashtrays, rugs, and tourist trinkets? In other words, where is all the stuff that defined these spaces?

Another qualm lies with the book’s design—and this is no fault of the author, but rather the responsibility of Yale University Press. The publisher has bundled the book’s color images as a series of plates in the center of the volume, where they are divorced from the author’s text that discusses them and separated from the black-and-white images with which they are in dialogue. This is an outdated design strategy that goes back to the introduction of color printing; today it is inexcusable and cheap. This book merits better. And in an age of an uncertain future for print books, publishers should not only be cognizant of good design but also serve as role models in providing it in their products. Otherwise readers might ask, why buy the book? In other words, a good argument (as demonstrated by Stratigakos) merits good design.
And this lies squarely within the purview of the publisher.

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Note

1. Despina Stratigakos, A Women's Berlin: Building the Modern City (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

Daniel M. Abramson

Obsolescence: An Architectural History

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, 206 pp., 68 b/w illus. $35 (cloth); ISBN 9780226478050

At the beginning of the twentieth century, commercial buildings in the United States were being demolished within as little as five years. Histories of modern architecture have started their accounts with the development of the large U.S. office building before, but Daniel M. Abramson begins his new narrative with their destruction, and with a novel body of research into the office building as real estate and tax liability. This first chapter—which locates the invention of the concept of obsolescence—introduces a book that concludes with obsolescence’s seeming nemesis, sustainability. It is a fine dialectic, Abramson shows, since the two paradigms do not so much oppose one another as address the same conundrum: how to manage change.

Abramson is a member of Aggregate Architectural History Collaborative, a fulcrum of what we might term our discipline’s materialist turn, by which architecture again represents material interactions that tell us about society’s modes of production, economic relations, uneven development, and ecological precariousness. Obsolescence furnishes the perfect lens for such a materialist architectural history, since obsolescence was advanced by real estate experts in the 1910s and 1920s to explain seemingly premature demolitions, especially in the Chicago Loop, as the “result of changing technology, economics, and land use, in which the new would inevitably outperform and devalue the old” (3). The author shows that obsolescence—for all its lofty antecedence in Heraclitus’s or Baudelaire’s philosophies of transience, and for all its hold over popular culture, from the triennial automobile model change of the 1920s to the throwaway consumer culture after World War II—was initially entirely prosaic. Obsolescence was an invention of the U.S. real estate industry, which sought to write into corporate income tax code allowances for the depreciation of building investments. This the industry had achieved by the early 1930s, largely thanks to its cozy relationship with Congress and the Department of the Treasury. Obsolescence, Abramson shows, is distinct from other moments and modes of change in architectural history, like that of Baron Haussmann in nineteenth-century Paris. Haussmann tore up Paris to make way for something that seemed permanent and monumental, whereas obsolescence naturalized perpetual technical and capitalist change.

As Abramson notes, it was as though “economic forces in the obsolescence paradigm transcended politics, subjective interest, and the role of the state” (33). The notion thus naturalized, the actual term obsolescence was itself free to become obsolete. In the decades after World War II, it was reframed as “blight,” for instance, lending comprehensive urban redevelopment a less calculated, more moral rationale. The book revisits the notorious case of Boston’s West End, in which we see how the paradigm also began to recognize that some buildings merited preservation: obsolescence and preservation coalesce from this point until the end of the book.

And so Abramson uses architectural history to answer Eric Hobsbawm’s question of how it is “that humans and society structured to resist dynamic development come to terms with the mode of production whose essence is endless and unpredictable dynamic development” (136).1 The architectural and architectural discourse of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have helped manage, by design, the contradictions between dynamism and constancy, especially as they have been exacerbated by capitalism, under which buildings live and die. So robust is Abramson’s account of the interaction of architecture and tax code (surely a little grueling to piece together, for which scholars owe him a debt) that the legal enshrinement of obsolescence in the 1930s is met, at the other end of the book, by the U.S. Tax Reform Act of 1976, which for the first time provided tax incentives to encourage the preservation of historic structures and disallowed deductions for their demolition. As the author observes, “In a country where social policy often runs through the tax code, this was a significant triumph of preservation as ideology” (130).

Indeed, the book establishes that obsolescence and anti-obsolescence have been more ideologies than the scientific rationales they may have appeared to be. For architectural historians, the ideology of obsolescence has two main strands that do not necessarily braid together, as Abramson explains. One was somewhat vulgar, worked instrumentally by the not-so-hidden hands of capitalist renewal, and served as a conduit of class struggle by any other name. By such “chronopolitics” (a term Abramson borrows from anthropologist Johannes Fabian), some groups and places could be denoted as up-to-date, others as underdeveloped, traditional, and stagnant. The rapaciousness of midcentury urban redevelopment can shock present-day readers all over again as they reflect upon ongoing social justice struggles.

The other ideological strand of obsolescence was a thoughtful and dynamic vehicle of social renewal, at its most brilliant perhaps in British and Japanese architecture in the 1960s, as another of Abramson’s chapters recounts. In Japan, metabolist architects projected the city in a state of flux; in the United Kingdom, the academic studies of Richard Llewelyn Davies and John Weeks formulated plans and elevations that could adapt to expanding socialized health care. In these chapters the author extends his discoveries about pre- and interwar real estate obsolescence into the better-charted history of the postwar avant-garde, of the indeterminate world of the Smithsons, Team 10, Yona Friedman, and Cedric Price. This is a story familiar since Charles Jencks’s Modern Movements in Architecture of 1973, and perhaps the main new insight here is that there was a disconnection between understandings of obsolescence in Britain and the United States, for instance, and between university research and research elsewhere in government and industry.2 Abramson recognizes that this area of history is due for an overhaul: “The U.S. and British cases do not exhaust the possibilities of studying national contexts for emerging architectural consciousness of obsolescence in the 1950s” (71).