How we as architectural historians conceive of Poland–Lithuania in our research represents a challenging problem. Europe was not a homogeneous entity, nor was the later construct of East and West, and the risk of blurring the individual identities of regions or states is especially pertinent to the study of the Commonwealth as a union of two nations. (The same goes for the autonomous city of Gdansk and other territories within this political border.) We have yet to fully understand the internal functions of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth as a cultural region. Thus, the study of art and architecture in the Commonwealth deserves a more thorough and nuanced examination of the complex social and political conditions leading up to the Remarks on Architecture.

Another way into this investigation would be to examine the Commonwealth through its entangled networks, whether religious, economic or political, rather than as a homogeneous block. Elsewhere, I have argued that Polish early modern architecture and architectural theory cannot be fully appreciated unless economic geography is taken into consideration. The Polish noble was a landowner, and this particular social and economic status in turn shaped the identity and ideology of the homo nobilis in significant ways. Polish patrons were keenly invested in managing their manorial country estates and in the efficient use of their land for the production of commodities (in particular cereals) for export.

The numerous agronomic manuals published in early modern Poland invite us to consider other theoretical trajectories that shaped architectural theory. One of the earliest Italian agricultural texts available in Poland was Pietro de’ Crescenzi’s Opus ruralium, written around 1305. Crescenzi’s text was available to Polish audiences in Latin, Italian, French, and German as early as 1531, and in Polish by 1542. A second Polish edition featuring elaborate illustrations followed in 1571. It inspired the manuals of Anzelm Gostomski and Kazimierz Jakub Haur, the latter of which included extensive discussion of architecture and the first known architectural drawings of a façade and floor plan of a manor house. This literary material addressed an extraordinary range of subjects relevant to the Polish rural nobility, including domestic and farm architecture, landscape architecture (gardens, orchards, ponds), infrastructural and technical works, and other issues related to running a household economy. These texts, drawing on classical authorities such as Columella, Cato, and Varro, offered time-tested methods as well as updated instructions by experienced practitioners. In Poland, a lively discourse on architecture unfolded in the agricultural manual, not in the architectural treatise. Thus, it would be useful to consider Remarks on Architecture within this tradition as well.

Polish builders followed the advice of the ancients by seeking to dwell in accordance with the local climate, which would in turn dictate cultural traditions. Careful attention to local conditions was essential for healthy living, the practice of building, the cultivation of plants and animals, and the storage of perishables. Brief Study of the Construction of Manor Houses, Palaces, and Castles, Bases (soil) of the Polish Sky and Customs, a treatise published by an unknown author in 1639 (commonly identified as the first Polish architectural treatise), thus affirmed what was already an established concern for the study of architecture in Poland. That text also engaged with broader European architectural traditions by citing authors, such as Vincenzo Scamozzi, who were especially concerned with local environmental conditions. Remarks on Architecture attests to the ongoing theoretical dialogue of Polish architectural culture with that of other regions of Europe—a point that should not surprise readers of this review. Guile’s translation of Potocki’s treatise and its accompanying materials signals a new and exciting opportunity for further research and represents a welcome addition to the broader field of architectural history.

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Notes
2. Ibid.

Christopher Long
The New Space: Movement and Experience in Viennese Modern Architecture
New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016, 246 pp., 130 color and 114 b/w illus. $75 (cloth), ISBN 9780300218282

Until recently, critical discussions of Viennese modernism have centered primarily on the fin de siècle. Major themes have included the Wagner school, the Secessionist movement, the Wiener Werkstätte, and the rejection or remaking of ornament and symbol. By contrast, Christopher Long’s The New Space: Movement and Experience in Viennese Modern Architecture offers a fresh perspective by looking closely into spatial experiments within Viennese modernism from around 1910, with the waning of the Jugendstil, until 1938, when Hitler and the Nazis annexed Austria. Long traces the evolving ideas about space articulated in the writings and buildings of three Viennese architects—Oskar Strnad, Adolf Loos, and Josef Frank—and highlights their shared investments in conceiving spaces that might elicit perceptual sensitivity. Pursing this line, The New Space opens a new and significant chapter in the history of modernist space making.

Of the book’s three protagonists, Loos has received the most extensive scholarly interest, especially for his rejection of modern ornament and his Raumplan concept. By contrast, Frank has remained a relatively peripheral figure, despite growing attention to his distinctive approach to architectural space. Strnad is the least known. Aside from a few early monographs and a recent exhibition catalogue published in German, The New Space is the first major publication in English to examine his work in depth.

In the course of ten chapters, Long weaves the three architects’ individual experiments into an account of a shared quest to create affective spatial experience. Chapter 1 summarizes key debates about architectural space in contemporary German-speaking intellectual circles and lays the theoretical groundwork for the three architects’ practice. Art historian August Schmarsow is a central figure in this discussion, given his influential assertion that the essence of architectural creation is the framing of space; everything else (façade, structure, mass, and ornament) is secondary, subordinate to that. Building on Robert Vischer’s notion of aesthetic empathy and the related theories developed by Heinrich Wölfflin and Adolf von Hildebrand, Schmarsow argued that a full understanding of space demands not only visual perception but also dynamic physical, emotional, and psychological engagement.
According to him, architecture is defined by the subjective perception of space; our bodily and sensory involvement acts upon the imagination, which may, in turn, creatively reshape the experience in our minds. It is this process of regeneration, Schmarsow stressed, that gives architecture reality and significance. Following this line of reasoning, the task of architects is to create spaces that stimulate physical and perceptual responses. This groundbreaking idea led to revolutionary new ways of producing architecture that underlay the experiments of the book’s three protagonists. “The new space” of the title points to this subjective construction of spatial reality and the concomitant reconfiguration of the mind.

The nine chapters that follow examine the three architects’ work in roughly chronological order. Long takes a primarily descriptive and analytical approach. To highlight the spatial dynamism that characterizes the three architects’ work, he forgoes static descriptions of rooms in favor of vivid descriptions of bodily and visual responses to specific spatial sequences. Chapter 2 scrutinizes two critical essays published by Strnad in 1913, in which he argued that discontinuities and disjunction in a given space increase opportunities for bodily engagement and thus arouse a powerful spatial awareness. Thus, for both the Hock House (early 1910s) and the Wassermann House (1912–15), Strnad planned winding entry paths and devised various alterations along their courses, making them broader or narrower, lighter or darker, breaking them briefly or shifting them off axis.

The remaining eight chapters alternate in focus between Loos and Frank. This structure creates a dialogue between the architects’ evolving ideas about space making. The discussion begins with an investigation of the three architects’ work, and then explores how their ideas were translated into built form (albeit he supplies some context in endnotes). For example, in his comparison of...
the new space" with Le Corbusier’s concept of promenade architecturale, it would have been illuminating if he had analyzed further how these theories manifested differently in specific buildings. Despite this minor issue, this rigorous and focused study adds critical insights and nuances to the scholarship on Viennese modernism and contributes a refreshing and significant perspective to the discussion of modernist space making. Long’s articulate descriptions of spatial experience and cogent analysis of its underlying strategies enhance our understanding of subjectivity and architecture.

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Notes
5. English translations of both essays, “Einiges Theoretische zur Raumgestaltung” (“A Few Theoretical Thoughts on the Arrangement of Space”) and “Gedanken beim Entwurf eines Grundrisses” (“Thoughts on Designing a Ground Plan”), are included in the appendix to Long’s book.

M. Christine Boyer
Not Quite Architecture: Writing around Alison and Peter Smithson
Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2017, 483 pp., 25 color and 80 b/w illus. $44.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780262035514

Robin Hood Gardens (1972), the London housing estate that realized the urban principles of Peter and Alison Smithson, is now in the process of being literally and figuratively deconstructed. As would suit a pair of architects whose professional careers began with musings over the “as found” rubble of postwar London, the Victoria and Albert Museum has stepped in to salvage a three-story section of the structure from the demolition site. The segment, despite the curatorial conservation of its fittings and cabinetry, is not arbitrarily or even programmatically, determined fragment: it represents a full iteration of the repeated graphic sequence that once formed the building’s façade. This pattern of prefabricated parts preserves the centrality of the representational method that was as fundamental to the Smithsons’ practice as were off-the-shelf materials.

The graphology of this relicuary also encapsulates the spirit of the disproportionate quantity of historical research into the Smithsons and their work that has been conducted over the past few decades. Much has been made of the Smithsons’ commentary on the compilation of advertisements, as well as their affection for raw industrial materiality. Scholars, myself included, have deployed interactions of the couple with the politics of the discipline at home and abroad to preserve a portrait of an era that is both peculiarly British and central to the devolution of mainstream modernism. The universality of the particular was a strong theoretical suit of the Smithsons and perhaps the source of their current intellectual appeal. They described the thresholds crossed in the journey from home and neighborhood to the collective enterprise of the city as an ascending scale of interactions that grew increasingly conceptual in nature. Associational philosophy, furthermore, did not confine the Smithsons to a stylistic mold. It could generate the starkness on display in the Hunstanton School (1954) as well as the contextual urbanism of the Economist Building (London, 1964). The Economist’s courtyard was thus the perfect stage for the opening sequence (clowns included) of director Michelangelo Antonioni’s first English production, Blow-Up (1966), a film that investigated the forensic conditions of image culture while capturing the singularity of London in the sixties. In much the same way, the Smithsons moved fluidly from somber declarations on “habitat” (1954) and the future of modern architecture at CIAM to ironic visions for the imminent future, such as the one presented in their House of the Future for the Daily Mail-sponsored Ideal Home Exhibition of 1956.

Following the precedent set by the subjects, much of the scholarship on the Smithsons has prioritized their fixation with imagery. M. Christine Boyer studiously avoids this lead, as well as much of the secondary literature, in her recent contribution to this research area with Not Quite Architecture: Writing around Alison and Peter Smithson. This elision makes for a baffling read at times, especially when the work of others bolsters Boyer’s own sentiments. The alibi for this lacuna in what is an otherwise comprehensive text is, perhaps, that the focus here is on something different—that is, the extensive corpus of the writing authored by and around the Smithsons. Boyer has indeed burrowed deep into the archives and produced a painstaking work that brings a trove of unpublished material to light. This archival specificity provides a useful counterbalance to the body of more speculative work that has been done on the postwar period. The outcome of Not Quite Architecture, however, its oppositional pose notwithstanding, does not serve for the most part to redirect the interpretive work of others. Rather, it contributes to and elaborates on our understanding of the Smithsons.

Boyer deftly weaves together strands that until now have had to be assembled piecemeal from a variety of sources on British postwar modernism into a coherent narrative that will be particularly useful to