Yeon was undoubtedly influenced by Alvar Aalto, who began to introduce native building materials and pitched roofs into his work. At the same time, Frank Lloyd Wright's use of low, horizontal forms and extended eaves, and by his integration of building materials and pitched roofs into the landscape, was sometimes difficult to comprehend what they might have been had they been realized. “In this regard,” Yeon himself lamented in 1968, “architecture is the most unsatisfactory of all the arts because it doesn’t really exist until it is built.” The design of “an original house, tailored to the needs of clients, expressing, let us hope, something of their personality, and fitting to the land and its environment, is a total waste of talents and energies if it is never constructed” (127). In this respect, Yeon experienced more than his share of disappointment.

Nonetheless, Treib’s gracefully written and thoroughly researched account of Yeon’s many achievements is a long overdue and welcome addition to the field of architectural studies. Two and a half decades after his death, this passionate defender of the landscape and culture of the Pacific Northwest is finally being celebrated for his contributions to the place that he himself embraced and celebrated throughout his life.

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Todd Gannon with Reyner Banham
Reyner Banham and the Paradoxes of High Tech
Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2017, 254 pp., 15 color and 115 b/w illust. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 9781606065303

With Reyner Banham’s death in 1988 at age sixty-six, an iconic and complex career in twentieth-century architectural history, theory, and criticism came to an untimely end. Banham’s twelve published books and more than seven hundred articles engage a wide array of fields, including pop art, automotive design, and cultural geography. His career-long emphasis on the relationship of engineering to modern architecture and his professional emergence among postwar London’s artistic avant-garde made him a unique chronicler of the British high-tech movement, and of such related trends and groups as the New Brutalism and Archigram. His much-anticipated monograph on high-tech architecture, however, remained incomplete and unpublished at his death.

In Reyner Banham and the Paradoxes of High Tech, Todd Gannon takes this lacuna as a point of departure. Gannon’s inclusion of Banham’s previously unpublished introduction is a welcome addition to the book, as are his explorations of archival material from the Getty Foundation. The gist, however, is his broader reassessment of Banham’s long-term engagement with postwar British architecture, of which high tech was a peak, and its relationship to mainstream modernism and postmodernism internationally.

Banham seems to be undergoing a slow transformation from major figure within and contributor to a broader field into full-fledged topic of scholarly research. Entries in the literature are numerous, while thorough treatments are few. Nigel Whiteley’s 2002 biography Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future is an intellectual history that engages and analyzes a range of issues from Banham’s career with erudition, but that format does not allow the focus that Gannon aims for here. Similarly, while A Critic Writes is a valued anthology of Banham’s wit and reportage, Gannon’s research, to say nothing of his analysis or contextualization, underscores the fact that full engagement of Banham’s published texts—let alone his unpublished archival material—is still an ongoing excavation.

Banham’s prominent career and influential writing often create a sense that his position at the intersection of engineering and architecture is a known quantity. An engineer by training, he switched to art history and earned a PhD in the 1950s from London’s Courtauld Institute, working under Nikolaus Pevsner. His dissertation, later revised and published in 1960 as Theory and Design in the First Machine Age, boldly upended the history of modern architecture, asserting that the movement’s claims to functionalism were largely visual conceits, not technical realities. As Gannon’s evaluation of Banham’s
final manuscript emphasizes, the early work established an unwavering premise for Banham's understanding and advocacy of high-tech architecture and related movements, from the beginning of his career until the very end.

Banham wanted to hold modernism to higher standards of engineering and functionalism than the idea of the International Style—with its aesthetic prejudices, technological ignorance, and latent classicism—would allow. And he especially wanted to rebuke the representational qualities and conventionalism of postmodern architecture, the kind advocated by his own student Charles Jencks in a kind of academic patricide that paralleled in which Banham had once levied on his part. The paradox of architecture for him was not simply that modernism had failed to illustrate true functionalism. It was that illustrating functionalism at all involved negating it altogether. What Whiteley states in his monograph, Gannon acknowledges and amplifies: form and function were not a synthesis waiting to happen, but one of numerous irresolvable antinomies that Banham was more apt to investigate dialectically than actually resolve.

Banham lamented the New Brutalism's decay from a rigorous ethical stance to a conventional palette of aesthetic practices, yet he himself was never able to completely abandon the idea that image, not just pure function, defined the New Brutalism, or, for that matter, its successor styles. Nor was he able to stick definitively with a set of defining principles for the movement. The early Banham of the clip-on era might have felt that the Pompidou was only an illustration of functionalism, not its real embodiment. Yet he praised it effusively as "the only monumental building of consequence to go up in Europe in the 1970s" (136, n. 62), and he later cast it as the definitive exemplar of the style's characteristics and principles. The Banham who had once debated whether the New Brutalism was an ethic or an aesthetic had, for the moment, chosen to accept the latter, at least with regard to the Pompidou. He expressed similar enthusiasm upon the completion of Piano's IBM Traveling Pavilion (1982; installed in Amsterdam, 1983–86), where the detail involved in connecting structure and skin was "a work of architectural art in its own right... an architectural composition richer than many complete buildings" (161). Gannon does not claim to have discovered the reasons for Banham's changes of view. Rather, he elaborates Banham's shifts in focus and method as these pertained to key buildings and designs, seeing these as a demonstration of his intellectual complexity. In this context, the freshly uncovered final manuscript demonstrates a surprisingly conventional return to visual and art historical methods, rather than ideologically driven ones, thereby revealing another Banham paradox.

As numerous authors have suggested, Banham's essays, with all their wit and erudition, are best read in original form rather than through the analysis of others. Yet, because of Banham's shifting viewpoints and unexpected responses to culture and context, Gannon's text is instructive, giving us cause to read Banham again with fresh eyes and clearer context when we do.

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Notes

Benjamin D. Lisle
Modern Coliseum: Stadiums and American Culture
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, 328 pp., 76 b&w illus. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780812249224

Howard Shubert
Architecture on Ice: A History of the Hockey Arena
Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2016, 328 pp., 160 color illus. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 9780773548138

Over the past two decades, the stadium as a building type has undergone a profound transformation. For most of the twentieth century, it was the preserve of builders and engineers far more than of architects. Indeed, the most prolific designer of stadia, not just in those years but perhaps ever, Archibald Leitch, was trained, depending on your historical research, as either a mechanical engineer or a "factory architect."

In the past century, the stadium generally was regarded as a project of modest architectural but specific commercial ambitions (with some rare, but notable, exceptions). Much has changed recently, owing to circumstances largely exogenous to design per se but central to the powerhouse role that sports play in the economies of cities around the world. In our present moment, a stadium is likely the single largest, most technologically complex, and, perhaps most important, expensive building in...