

that it was both a turn to culture and a turn away from society and politics.<sup>2</sup> This might account for *X-Ray Architecture*'s lack of engagement with the politics and social dimensions of health and illness, excepting a few cursory references to war and individuals suffering from illnesses. The book's focus on (sometimes tragically) heroic, mostly male architects and their iconic architectural representations, while understandable given Colomina's explicitly "intra-canonical" approach and her attention "to the unexpected within the canon itself" (9), raises two historiographical questions.

First, what does it mean to write an intra-canonical history at a time when the Eurocentric canon of modern architecture is being challenged on many fronts by global, decolonizing, and race-conscious histories?<sup>3</sup> Why should one retreat to the canon, particularly when the modern history of illness and architecture is a thoroughly global topic, one inextricably connected to colonialism, race, and capitalism, as medical history and other fields have shown?

Second, is the intra-canonical approach compatible with interdisciplinarity, which is not just the ambition of this book but an important trend in contemporary architectural historical scholarship? It seems to me that the intra-canonical approach is very much about preserving disciplinary norms, even if it offers a few surprises. We might understand the motivations and intentions of canonical architects, and the meanings behind canonical buildings, differently through the intra-canonical approach, but the architects and buildings we look at remain largely the same. If anything, the intra-canonical approach further intensifies our obsession with these established architects and buildings, thus deepening, rather than shaking, the foundation of the discipline. In contrast, the main objective of interdisciplinary scholarship is not just to draw from two or more disciplines to bring about theoretical, methodological, and conceptual innovations as ends in themselves; rather, it is to use these innovations to challenge disciplinary norms and understand problems, subjects, and objects previously neglected or misrepresented by more traditional disciplinary structures. On the subject of illness and the built environment, existing scholarship has already deployed interdisciplinary frameworks to

broaden the geography of illnesses and diseases, types of buildings, and categories of actors beyond those canonical Euro-American examples so firmly entrenched within the discipline of architecture.<sup>4</sup> Scholars have also engaged with diffused and distributed groups, biopolitics, and government agencies concerning health and the built environment outside the established disciplinary frameworks of the canon.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between illness and the built environment is undoubtedly an important topic, and the suffering and anxieties caused by the coronavirus pandemic ongoing at the time of this writing further accentuate the significance of this topic. The effects of the medical and social pathologies caused by such viral outbreaks and other forms of illness, however, tend to be diffused in everyday lives and the attendant built environment rather than encapsulated in a few exemplary buildings. One could argue that these pathologies create human suffering, foreground complex politics of prevention and healing, and highlight social injustices and cultural responses that first and foremost show—as suggested in the title of a moving essay written by Sontag's son David Rieff following her death from blood cancer—"illness as more than metaphor."<sup>6</sup>

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## Notes

1. Adrian Forty, review of *Domesticity at War*, by Beatriz Colomina, *Journal of Architecture* 13, no. 4 (2008), 523.
2. See, for example, Tahl Kaminer, "Framing Colomina," *Footprint*, no. 4 (Spring 2009), 129–38. In the scholarship on colonial architecture and urbanism, the cultural turn has, in fact, contributed to greater attentiveness to the cultural politics of imperialism and colonialism. See Anthony D. King, *Writing the Global City: Globalisation, Postcolonialism and the Urban* (London: Routledge, 2016).
3. See, for example, Felicity D. Scott, *Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/Architectures of Counterinsurgency* (New York: Zone Books, 2016); Irene Cheng, Charles L. Davis, and Mabel O. Wilson, eds., *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020); Łukasz Stanek, *Architecture in Global Socialism: Eastern Europe, West Africa, and the Middle East in the Cold War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020).

4. See, for example, Anthony D. King, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Robert K. Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities* (London: Spon, 1997); Brenda S. A. Yeoh, *Contesting Space: Power Relations and the Urban Built Environment in Colonial Singapore* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1996); Lenore Manderson, *Sickness and the State: Health and Illness in Colonial Malaya, 1870–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jiat-Hwee Chang, *A Genealogy of Tropical Architecture: Colonial Networks, Nature and Technoscience* (London: Routledge, 2016).

5. To be fair, Colomina does indicate the "biologization of politics" (18–19), but she does not develop the point. See, for example, Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty: Environmental Politics, Technoscience, and Women Workers* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006); Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006); Gregg Mitman, *Breathing Space: How Allergies Shape Our Lives and Landscapes* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007).

6. David Rieff, "Illness as More Than Metaphor," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 Dec. 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/04/magazine/illness-as-more-than-metaphor.html> (accessed 23 Apr. 2020).

Martino Stierli and David B. Brownlee, eds.  
**Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty:  
On Robert Venturi's "Gentle  
Manifesto"**

New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2019,  
192 pp., 37 color and 38 b/w illus. Packaged with  
a facsimile edition of Robert Venturi's  
*Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*,  
1966. \$45 (cloth), ISBN 9781633450622

In his introduction to Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), Vincent Scully declared, "This is probably the most important writing on the making of architecture since Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*, of 1923"—a statement that has become a truism in architectural history. But what can be made of this pronouncement more than half a century after it was written? Moreover, how are readers to revisit a book that is already so canonical?

In 2016, numerous exhibitions, symposia, and publications marked the fiftieth anniversary of *Complexity and Contradiction*'s first appearance, including a three-day event at the MAXXI in Rome, features in *JSAH* and *Architectural Design*, and, most

important, a two-day international symposium at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, whose press first published the book. At MoMA, scholars and architects from around the world gathered to discuss the book's significance and enduring impact. This was followed by a one-day event at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, which led to the publication of *Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty: On Robert Venturi's "Gentle Manifesto,"* an edited volume complemented by the facsimile edition of Venturi's original book with which it is packaged. Edited by Martino Stierli, Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, and David B. Brownlee, professor of art history at the University of Pennsylvania, *Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty* includes essays by Stierli, Mary McLeod, Joan Ockman, Andrew Leach, Jean-Louis Cohen, Lee Ann Custer, Dianne Harris, Peter Fröhlicher, Stanislaus von Moos, and Emmanuel Petit. Between these in-depth essays are shorter texts by Stephen Kieran and James Timberlake, Pier Paolo Tamburelli, Michael Meredith, Sam Jacob, and Deborah Berke, and two short original interviews, one with Rem Koolhaas (interviewed by Stierli) and the other with the late Stanley Tigerman (interviewed by Brownlee).

The volume opens with a brief introduction by Brownlee and Stierli, followed by Stierli's essay "Robert Venturi and MoMA: Institutionalism and Outsider," which provides an institutional history, explaining Venturi's intricate and paradoxical relationship with MoMA in the period leading up to the publication of his book. Published during Arthur Drexler's long tenure at MoMA's Department of Architecture and Design, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Stierli notes, "articulated the increasing concern about the fate of modernist architecture that was shared by both Drexler and [Philip] Johnson" (21).<sup>1</sup> Stierli maps the complex network that included Drexler, *Arts & Architecture* publisher John Entenza, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, and Venturi, relying on extensive work in MoMA's archive and the Venturi, Scott Brown Collection in Philadelphia. Following the correspondence among these protagonists, Stierli leads the

reader through the archives, setting the tone for the new, edited book, the richness of which lies in its attentive and detailed exploration of archival material. In so doing, he shows how Venturi's book, like some of Drexler's canonical exhibitions, was part of the same "institutional apparatus whose ideological foundation [Venturi] challenged" (23).

Books are often highly collaborative enterprises with complex genealogies, the traces of which may be seen in the authors' acknowledgments. These short texts, generally a page or two, can be gold mines for researchers. Mary McLeod unravels a tale of inspirations and friendships in her essay "Venturi's Acknowledgments: The Complexities of Influence." She explores the relationship between Venturi and his mentor, Vincent Scully, explaining how they met through Robert Stern. Stern's is among the first names mentioned in Venturi's acknowledgments. At the time, he was a graduate student at Yale and the editor of a double issue of *Perspecta* that published excerpts from Venturi's then-forthcoming book. McLeod also mentions Venturi's relationship with Marion Scully, Scully's second wife, who edited Venturi's manuscript before he submitted it to MoMA. Marion Scully's influence is illustrated by an annotated page from the draft manuscript (56), which reveals how she not only edited but also sharpened and clarified Venturi's text. McLeod then recounts the lifelong friendship between Venturi and Philip Finkelpearl, a student of English (and later professor at Wellesley College) who met Venturi at Princeton in 1946: "It was Finkelpearl who proposed the title *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*" (57). McLeod's essay adds a layer of humanity to Venturi's enterprise and helps contextualize his well-known book. Its eleven pages of endnotes construct another, parallel narrative—full of color, but confirming the rigor of McLeod's scholarship.

While McLeod discusses Venturi's personal relationships, Joan Ockman expands on external references that were, she argues, part of the "complexity revolution" of the 1960s. In "On Robert Venturi and the Idea of Complexity in Architecture circa 1966," Ockman shows how other books, such as Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Christopher Alexander's *Notes on the Origin of Form*

(1964), were, like Venturi's, imbued with the notion of complexity. "Indeed, Alexander, Jacobs, and Venturi were all of the opinion that a paradigm shift had occurred that architecture could ill afford to ignore" (79). Returning to Finkelpearl and the influence of New Criticism and T. S. Eliot's modernist poetry (something also mentioned by McLeod), Ockman discusses Gestalt theory, which Venturi first encountered at Princeton in 1949, and its reliance on relationality. Venturi's interest in Gestalt can be attributed to his concern for how "context" affects building and, "reciprocally, how new buildings change the meaning of the pre-existing environment" (79). Understanding this helps the reader reposition Venturi's postmodernism within a larger time frame, one that extends back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Ockman further traces the influence on Venturi of such figures as Josef Albers, György Kepes, D'Arcy Thompson, Herbert A. Simon, and Warren Weaver. In short, she examines the foundation of thought upon which *Complexity and Contradiction* stands.

In his essay "Opus 2: Robert Venturi's Metamorphosis of Duke House," Jean-Louis Cohen provides a detailed account of Venturi's first completed design, the renovation of the James B. Duke Mansion, home of New York University's Institute of Fine Arts. Delving into the early history of Venturi's practice and the history of the institute, Cohen unravels the negotiations between proponents of old and new architecture in the late 1950s. Arguing for Venturi's interest in contemporary Italian design (Franco Albini, Ignazio Gardella, and the firm BBPR), Cohen examines drawings, correspondence, photos, and other archival documents from the Venturi and Scott Brown archive at the University of Philadelphia and the Institute of Fine Arts.

In her essay "Teaching Complexity and Contradiction at the University of Pennsylvania," Lee Ann Custer traces the genesis of Venturi's book in the graduate course *Theories of Architecture*, which he and Denise Scott Brown taught at the University of Pennsylvania. Based on her examination of lecture notes, teaching records, and Venturi's own slides, as well as interviews she conducted with his former students, Custer asserts a close connection

between the course and the manuscript for *Complexity and Contradiction*. Her essay is delightfully illustrated with Venturi's slides of Hagia Sofia, Saint Peter's Basilica, and Pier Luigi Nervi and Annibale Vitellozzi's Palazzetto dello Sport, as well as pages from Venturi's MFA thesis and his handwritten lecture notes, and an image of the young architect working in the slide room at the University of Pennsylvania.

Most of the essays in this book project the reader into the history-laden atmosphere of the archives, so what does it mean to look at *Complexity and Contradiction* from the perspective of architects working today? According to the British architect Sam Jacob, "Venturi's writing is far more than a functional window onto the world: it is a place where ideas are generated through the use of language" (157). A similar insistence on Venturi's intellectualism is emphasized in the interview with Stanley Tigerman, who said of Venturi's book, "It made me think," and "He was much more of an intellectual than I was." According to Rem Koolhaas, the book's relevance today lies in its bold opposition to the current architectural culture: "It has a smallish format, it's not fat, and it has content, it has an argument, and all three conditions are absent from current architectural discourse" (76).

Between the seminar in 2016 and the edited volume's publication in 2019, Venturi died, making this celebration of *Complexity and Contradiction* all the more poignant. But one could wonder if it is even useful to analyze every detail of a book such as this, looking backward and forward, digging, exposing, speculating. *Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty* will undoubtedly appeal to those who love archives, and to students and aficionados of postmodernism. It also suggests a more inclusive definition of postmodernism, which now appears to be embedded in a large network of ideas and people reaching back to the early twentieth century and forward to our present day.

Despite unavoidable repetition between a few of the essays and other texts included, *Complexity and Contradiction at Fifty* offers a detailed study of one of postmodernism's most seminal publications, greatly contributing to the emerging scholarship on both architectural publishing and postmodern architectural culture. Postmodern thought in architecture was constructed largely

through a series of books, among them Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città* (1966), Venturi, Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post-modern Architecture* (1977), Christopher Alexander's *A Pattern Language* (1977), Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter's *Collage City* (1978), Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* (1978), and Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Genius Loci* (1979). All of these were important contributions to the writing of architectural history and theory, yet the stories of many of them remain unwritten.

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## Note

1. Famous episodes in Drexler and Johnson's re-evaluation of modern architecture were the MoMA exhibitions *The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts* (1975–76) and *Transformations in Modern Architecture* (1979), both curated by Drexler. One could argue that the edifice of modernism had already been shaken as early as 1964, when Drexler's predecessor, Bernard Rudofsky, organized the original and ambitious exhibition *Architecture without Architects*.

Roger Luckhurst

### **Corridors: Passages of Modernity**

London: Reaktion Books, 2019, 336 pp., 40 b/w illus. \$35 (cloth), ISBN 9781789140538

Roger Luckhurst, professor of literature at Birkbeck, University of London, has produced in *Corridors: Passages of Modernity* a delightful, informative cultural history of one of architecture's most ubiquitous spaces. In nine relatively short chapters focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain and the United States, plus an introduction and conclusion, Luckhurst draws on a dizzying array of sources and references—from Stanley Kubrick's 1980 film *The Shining*, Charlotte Brontë's 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*, and the current television anthology series *American Horror Story* to Charles Fourier's phalanstery, Soviet social condensers, and Ellsworth Milton Statler's hotels—to make the case for corridors' dual utopian and dystopian characters.

The introduction establishes Luckhurst's basic argument and his book's difference from other recent treatments of the subject. For example, Luckhurst cites

a 2010 article by Mark Jarzombek that occupies the heights of world politics and architectural history, linking corridors to imperial power, speed, connectivity, and flows "built around the nation-state, class identities, bureaucracies, universities, corporations, hospitals, and travel."<sup>1</sup> Luckhurst, by contrast, frames his study as a cultural-psychological examination of "the strange emotional tenor of corridors" (14).

Luckhurst assumes a broad definition of corridors. In the first chapter he traces a prehistory back to Greek labyrinths, medieval cloisters, and seventeenth-century Dutch interiors before arriving at Blenheim Palace's explicitly termed "corridors" (after earlier Italian and Spanish names for messengers' passages). He then hits his stride in the linked second and third chapters, which encapsulate his narrative of corridors' historical journey from utopian to dystopian. He identifies the corridors of Fourier-inspired phalanx buildings across the nineteenth century as crucial sites for producing perfected human relations:

The openness of these wide communal galleries, speeding the movement to social halls and communal rooms, the constant sense of festival, the displacement of pre-sexual children and post-sexual elders from the centre of the building down along the corridor, were all integral to the architecture. The utopia that this new corridor brings is realized through a space intended to dismantle all prior social relations, most particularly the bourgeois family, folded in on itself behind closed doors. In utopia, the corridor always promises radical social reassemblage. (52)

In the third chapter's survey of twentieth-century social housing schemes, Luckhurst observes that "the corridor remained central to communalism" (68). He traces corridor derivations from Soviet continuous balconies and Le Corbusier's interior streets to the Smithsons' sky decks—though the Smithsons declared these to be "places and not corridors or balconies," he notes (96). He does take seriously the 1960s–70s critique of social housing complexes that focused on their often dangerous, dehumanizing, institutional corridors; he attributes this to "the rejection of the collectivist politics that inhered in large-scale housing projects" (102).