

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."¹ 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).

Chapters 4 and 5 turn to corridors in modern commercial building types. Parisian arcades feature first, segueing into nineteenth-century exhibition halls (including the Crystal Palace), and then “one of the key corridic structures of our time: the shopping mall” (119). Again, Luckhurst traces a narrative arc from “immersive dream worlds” (103) to the dystopian present of today’s abandoned “dead” malls, favorite settings of zombie movies.

Hotels and their corridors are his next subject in the book’s strongest, most original chapter. Luckhurst argues that “the corridor most forcefully enters our consciousness in that moment when we leave a large modern chain hotel bedroom, pull the heavy fire door shut, and look down a vast vanishing perspective of identical doors receding into the distance” (127). He claims that this experience of corridors represents “a kind of existential angst . . . *corridor dread*” (127). As before, Luckhurst traces the dystopian present back to more utopian origins. He offers a detailed history of Statler’s invention of the revolutionary “monster hotel” for the modern masses, featuring stupendous corridors and endless numbers of rooms, which Luckhurst associates with “the utopian promise of social levelling” (147). Inevitably, in this author’s narrative, the dream sours culturally, as evidenced by film noir corridor conspiracies and Heideggerian homelessness. The hotel corridor now “dramatizes the annihilation of any chance of an authentic self and becomes a dystopian space of existential dread” (147).

The remaining chapters cover familiar ground. Chapter 6 focuses on “corridors of reform” in prisons, workhouses, asylums, and hospitals, tracing again Luckhurst’s familiar narrative arc from nineteenth-century utopian hopes (for healing pathologies) to twentieth-century dystopian consequences (of numbing standardization). He makes the salient point that early asylum corridors were meant to be “therapeutic,” “social spaces for patients” (194) to regain their equilibrium, but by the mid-twentieth century were “seen as an environment that induces lunacy rather than cures it” (198). In a clever turn, Luckhurst concludes this chapter with a discussion of schools and universities, where corridors regained their utopian character by promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, as in MIT’s famous “infinite

corridor” and the University of Leeds’s “Red Route” of the 1960s.

Chapter 7 delves into Victorian domestic planning and the role of corridors in securing privacy and status. Luckhurst makes the thematic, ironic point that corridors in homes, as elsewhere, contain an inevitable tension between connecting people and separating them. Chapter 8 continues the book’s forward movement in time and typology, now to office buildings, beginning in the late nineteenth century with their “corridors of power,” a term Luckhurst tells us was coined by C. P. Snow in 1962. There is no utopian beginning with offices—except maybe the striving for efficiency, but this is not linked to corridor spaces—but rather a quick descent via Franz Kafka and Jean-Luc Godard into the “windowless and oppressive corporate corridor where receding identical doors mark out systematic destruction of the individual by the instrumental rationality of corporate number-crunching or state administration” (234).

The book’s final chapter is based not on an architectural type but on a literary one. Luckhurst creatively argues that gothic fiction, inaugurated by Horace Walpole and apotheosized in Kubrick’s *The Shining*, possesses a specific tone of horizontal dread, different from the terror engendered by vertical movement via stairs, attics, and basements. “Corridor Gothic” (264) is “a general anticipatory condition of waiting for something awful to happen” (280), “a quintessential feeling of *Angst* or dread induced by the modern corridor” (264). Its greatest cultural expression is the horror-film corridor scene, in hotels, asylums, and hospitals. The peak moment is achieved through Kubrick’s famous Steadicam shots of the child Danny ferociously Big Wheeling down the haunted corridors of the Overlook Hotel. “The bland, horizontal anonymity of the corridor . . . turns it into a place of unsettlement and unease, the Bad Place or dys-topia of our administered world” (284).

Corridors does not so much end as extend. Luckhurst’s short conclusion adds to the book’s litany of corridic spaces the tunnels of light commonly described by people who have had near-death experiences and the use of the word *corridor* to denote vast linear territories—think of the Danzig and Northeast Corridors—although, the

author admits, “architectural history might fall away in these extensions of the term” (292). Indeed, *Corridors* does its best work when untethered from architectural history, offering virtuoso short essays on histories of institutions and types, literature, film, and philosophy, structured as one narrative after another of utopia-turned-dystopia: the book’s own corridic structure. As architectural history, its value lies in the way it links together all the relatively well-known corridic types from prisons, malls, hotels, universities, houses, hospitals, and offices.

The book has some architectural historical shortcomings: characterizing the Smithsons’ Hunstanton School as a concrete building; furnishing exterior views but not plans of London asylums; and, much more significant, omitting mention of Beaux-Arts planning’s corridor armature, responsible for much of the architecture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Readers will have to take with a grain of salt, too, the assertion that the vastly broad Crystal Palace and Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II are corridor structures. Deliberately, the book neither establishes nor sticks to a narrow definition of the corridor. It lacks the precision and discipline of Jarzombek’s study: “Whereas a corridor could have rooms on both sides and emphasizes speed and efficiency.”²

The great value of Luckhurst’s *Corridors* is as popular architectural history, underscored by Reaktion Books’ superbly clean production and eminently graspable trim size (6¾ by 8¾ inches). The gold standard of the genre remains the journalist Michael Pollan’s *A Place of My Own: The Education of an Amateur Builder* (1997): witty, knowing, humble, and literary.³ Architectural historians should be inspired by these books, trying their hands at the breezy, broad, informative style that Luckhurst displays, and imbuing this form with our field’s insights and scholarly discoveries.

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Notes

1. Mark Jarzombek, “Corridor Spaces,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 4 (Summer 2010), 770.
2. Jarzombek, 748.
3. Michael Pollan, *A Place of My Own: The Education of an Amateur Builder* (New York: Random House, 1997).