

Another important feature of this study has to do with Lee's focus on the norms and forms of the built environment, whether at the architectural level or the urban level, and how these shape their inhabitants. It is unfortunate, however, that the author's chosen methodologies did not include mapping this spatial history. As we see the Las Vegas casino evolve through a collection of plans, it would have been fascinating to be able to consult a cartography of Singapore Island portraying the specific morphologies of Chinatown and the concentration of gambling activities in other neighborhoods and streets. This would have added another layer of complexity and concreteness to Lee's analysis of the social and economic functions of gambling in the everyday lives of working-class Singaporeans, especially presented alongside a similar cartography of state-led urban renewal projects that supposedly disrupted these traditions in the name of modernity.

The concept of modernity itself and its connections with the nationalist regime's policies might also have warranted further discussion and problematization. Indeed, in sketching out the stories of the Chinatown street economy, where gambling definitely served as an economic engine, the author tends to posit this as a traditional, "sophisticated" society that was then "besieged by post-independence modernization" (93). In this scenario, Lee presents the criminalization of gambling, as well as hawking, as nothing short of a "sustained assault on a way of life and a form of social organization" (115). For a more nuanced interpretation, however, it would be useful to put the analysis of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Western "rush towards modernity" (29) into perspective as a global aspiration, whether in a metropolitan, colonial, or postindependence framework. In fact, state-building practices based on technoscientific knowledge were implemented all over the world during this period, representing precisely what the author refers to as forms of "spatial control" (245). Urban restructuring, control over public space and public life, infrastructure, public buildings—these are all features of the design and construction of the modern state as it took form in the nineteenth century.

State-building efforts have always required public funds, and, for the most part, public treasuries have benefited

from concomitant tax reforms. However, creating state monopolies from formerly illegal activities to fund specific projects is not unheard-of either. In the nineteenth-century imperial hub of Macau, for example, the city's Portuguese administration legalized most of the southern Chinese provinces' traditional gaming activities as a means of asserting the city's political independence. Given the seductive income generated by gambling, as well as lucrative concessions that represented up to a third of Macau's total annual state income, the authorities continued to condone these practices. No morals clause could ever compete with the material profits of such an arrangement. As such, Lee's critical reading of the historical trajectory of Singapore toward Las Vegas culminating in the Marina Bay integrated resort as "a story not of 'liberalization,' but of gradual monopolization and enclosure of a lucrative economic activity by a partnership between modern states and corporations" (240) also reveals a rather predictable consequence of early twenty-first-century economic globalization.

Nonetheless, Lee's book, with its careful methodology and thoughtful use of sources, constitutes a valuable contribution to the fields of cross-cultural relations and global social history as these relate to the built environment. Offering an important point of departure for further research on the history of gambling in South Asia, it will be useful to anyone interested in the social and urban impact of formal and informal economies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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Robin Schuldenfrei

Luxury and Modernism: Architecture and the Object in Germany 1900–1933

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2018, 336 pp., 74 color and 126 b/w illus. \$65 (cloth), ISBN 9780691175126

Robin Schuldenfrei's *Luxury and Modernism* is its own modernist luxury object. The silver block capitals of the book's title, embossed into the surface of its defiantly jacketless, off-white woven cloth cover, suggest the glint of a sleek chromed column against

a textured travertine wall, or a tubular steel chair resting on a plush—and impractical—natural wool carpet. Inside, the book's endpapers, mimicking slabs of richly veined marble, perpetuate the paradox of sumptuous austerity. So does the flyleaf of dark, bottomless teal, as well as a lavish two-page photograph showing the interior of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's 1929 Barcelona Pavilion, with its expanses of transparent glass, its opulent white leather-and-chrome Barcelona chairs, and its dividing wall of solid, book-matched red-gold onyx.

Schuldenfrei proposes luxury—visual and material, but also social, cultural, and economic—as a new, yet historically embedded framework for reinterpreting the formative period of German modernism from 1900 to 1933, the creators and creations of which have been equally deified and demonized in the scholarship of architecture and design ever since. Her contention for modernism as luxury prompts her to interrogate the underlying conditions that produced this relationship and to propose a new historical reading of modernism inseparable from luxurious materials, things, and practices. This original approach to well-trodden territory poses complex questions about the definition(s) of "luxury," the nature of modernism, and what these intersections might ultimately reveal about lived experience in the modern period, not simply for the elite with their fluffy white rugs but also, at least to some extent, for the servants who kept them that way.

Considering modernism as luxury enables Schuldenfrei to investigate German modernism's material manifestations, but also its broader social, cultural, and economic implications on fresh terms. The book's introduction, presenting key issues in original yet accessible ways, and confronting modernism's compelling rhetoric with its less-known, more-conflicted lived realities, should be a required text for graduate courses on modern design, architecture, and related topics.

Between its creamy cotton covers, *Luxury and Modernism* gathers, synthesizes, and further problematizes many critical reassessments of modernism in thematic chapters organized by six concepts pivotal to period discourses on architecture and design: consumption, objectivity, capital, production, subjectivity, and interiority.

By examining the activities and products of four primary players—the architects Peter Behrens and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the German Werkbund (the organization of artists, architects, designers, industrialists, retailers, educators, and many other professionals with a stake in the modernization of Germany’s material culture and built environment), and the Bauhaus—each chapter agglomerates luxury’s modernist definition through its particular network of socioeconomic and cultural-aesthetic concerns.

“Consumption” opens the book by focusing on Peter Behrens’s canonical designs for the corporate identity of the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft’s (AEG, the German equivalent of General Electric). Schuldenfrei presents electricity—and the technology that housed and delivered it—as luxury. She proposes Behrens’s primary achievements with AEG as forging new connections between modernist aesthetics and consumer desire, as well as between industrial products and the notion of luxury. The question of what these modernist aesthetics actually were (in theory and/or in practice) is introduced here in relationship to the German term *Sachlichkeit*—straightforwardness, matter-of-factness, or “objectivity.” Throughout the book, Schuldenfrei offers various English approximations for *Sachlichkeit*, but more frequently she defines it (or declines to) by example, describing an object or space simply as *sachlich*. A more nuanced and historically informed definition of this key term (employed as early as the 1890s) would have enriched this chapter while setting the stage for discussions of *Sachlichkeit* in subsequent chapters.¹ A strength of this chapter (and the book overall) is its insightful and sensitive analysis of the liminal architecture of the showroom and shopwindow in conjunction with the new industrial products inhabiting these shallow, hybrid spaces. Schuldenfrei thus demonstrates that the scholarship of architecture and that of design are inextricable during this period.

“Objectivity: The Werkbund Display Window and Architecture’s Object” proposes the shopwindow, with its *sachlich* objects, as a new space of exclusive luxury. Schuldenfrei here defines luxury as “elegant attrition”—a provocative counter to typical associations of luxury with excess.

However, this productive new definition has the unfortunate side effect of reifying *Sachlichkeit* as “spare” and “stripped down.” The possibilities of *Sachlichkeit* as simultaneously “honest,” “authentic,” or actualizing correspondences between the product’s purpose, its form, and its presentation for consumption are not sufficiently investigated, and so the puzzle of how *Kauflust* (desire to buy) was sparked in the modern consumer through a *sachlich* or “honest” display of industrial goods remains largely unexplored. Drawing on critiques from a multitude of Werkbund affiliates, this chapter conveys the organization’s presence and influence not just within debates on design and cultural aesthetics, but in its power to shape German consumer capitalism at street level—a welcome addition to existing scholarship.² Schuldenfrei’s brief introduction of distinctive cultural players as simply “Werkbund leaders” or “Werkbund members,” however, homogenizes the reader’s perception of the Werkbund, making the organization appear more monolithic and culturally unilateral than prior works have shown.³

“Capital” and “Production,” the book’s Bauhaus chapters, offer valuable correctives to the school’s sticky mythology (initiated by its founder, Walter Gropius). These chapters take up and embellish the book’s leitmotif: the discrepancies and tensions between modernism’s progressive, egalitarian rhetoric and its frequently luxurious, exclusive, and bourgeois manifestations. Particularly useful is Schuldenfrei’s revelation that the modest-looking, flat-roofed 1923 model Haus am Horn, with its cutting-edge technologies and materials, was perceived at the time of its construction as utterly luxurious—its amenities and the lifestyle they implied out of reach for all but affluent Germans. “Production” weaves Walter Benjamin’s landmark essay of 1935–36 “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” into an account of the Bauhaus’s attempts to reproduce its houseware designs through collaborations with industry during the 1920s. This integration of Benjamin’s pivotal text—typically discussed in relation to fine art and its attendant “kitsch” rather than in relation to design—with the aims and failures of the Bauhaus is revelatory for both. The problem of the gap between the

Bauhaus’s utopian dreams of egalitarianism and its design of expensive products unfit for mass manufacture, available to and desired by the cultured few, is not new; however, Schuldenfrei effectively rewrites Bauhaus history by asserting that these products were neither innovative nor progressive in themselves, but rather enduring staples of the bourgeois lifestyle.

The final chapters, “Subjectivity” and “Interiority,” explore the materiality and exclusivity of Mies’s interiors, examining them as sites of seclusion from modern urban life and of intimate contact with rarefied, luxury materials that served as a means of transformation for inhabitants. With effective recourse to biographical material as well as little-known anecdotes about well-known commissions, the book’s culminating section warms up modernism’s stereotypically cold functionalism, like sunlight setting the monolithic yet translucent onyx wall at Mies’s Tugendhat House aglow. Schuldenfrei portrays Mies’s domestic spaces as oases of individual autonomy placed at a safe remove from the masses. Enticing descriptions of natural and industrial materials and the interior spaces they construct make a seemingly effortless case for this “other” Mies—and other modernism. Although Schuldenfrei distinguishes Mies from his architectural predecessors and contemporaries in principle, some more direct visual comparisons (perhaps with the domestic architecture of Adolf Loos, who also privileged sumptuous materials, privacy, and the autonomy of the dwelling subject) might have further strengthened her case. In these “Mies” chapters, technology and consumer products cede their constructive, architectural power to materials. Completing the book with definitions of luxury (and modernism) as both rare material and coveted retreat from mass culture, Schuldenfrei amplifies the book’s steady drumbeat of “economy,” quoting Mies in 1926: “Now there is only economy. It dominates everything, politics and life” (250, n. 102).⁴

Luxury and Modernism could be criticized for its near avoidance of politics in the treatment of a nation that underwent almost continual upheavals between 1900 and 1933. Some discussion of what became of the Tugendhats’ exclusive, expensive retreat during the Third Reich, for instance, or the fact that the promotion and

proliferation of modernist-styled consumer goods did not wait for World War II to end, but began under the Nazis as an insidious form of propaganda, could have enriched the author's socioeconomic arguments.⁵ But despite these reservations, there is an appeal—and a logic—to following the money. What is luxury today, after all, if not the power to avail ourselves of the finest and the best, to surround ourselves and seclude ourselves with it?

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Notes

1. For a foundational discussion of *Sachlichkeit*, see Harry Francis Mallgrave, "From Realism to *Sachlichkeit*: The Polemics of Architectural Modernity in the 1890s," in *Otto Wagner: Reflections on the Raiment of Modernity*, ed. Harry Francis Mallgrave (Santa Monica, Calif.: Getty Center for the History of Arts and the Humanities, 1993), 281–321. For an overview, see Freyja Hartzell, "Delight in *Sachlichkeit*: Object as Subject in German Design, Architecture, and Art," *German Quarterly* 92, no. 2 (Spring 2019), 256–59.

2. On cultural aesthetics, see Mark Jarzombek, "The 'Kunstgewerbe,' the 'Werkbund,' and the Aesthetics of Culture in the Wilhelmine Period," *JSAH* 53, no. 1 (Mar. 1994), 7–19; John Maciuka, *Before the Bauhaus: Architecture, Politics, and the German State, 1890–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

3. See Joan Campbell, *The German Werkbund: The Politics of Reform in the Applied Arts* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978); Frederic J. Schwartz, *The Werkbund: Design Theory and Mass Culture before the First World War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996).

4. Schuldenfrei cites Mies's manuscript for an illustrated lecture dated 17 March 1926.

5. For a discussion of the Nazi regime's promotion of modern design and its aesthetics, see Paul Betts, *The Authority of Everyday Objects: A Cultural History of West German Industrial Design* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Etienne S. Benson
Surroundings: A History of Environments and Environmentalisms

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296 pp., 16 b/w illus. \$82.50 (cloth),
ISBN 9780226706153; \$27.50 (paper),
ISBN 9780226706290

Liminality is an essential feature of architecture. Through the techniques of design and the materials of construction, liminality demarcates space as interior or exterior

and differentiates cultivated places from fractious environments. Whether defined as natural or built, architecture's intricate entanglement with its surroundings perpetually nudges its disciplinary focus from the building as object to the field.

Although from the 1950s into the 1970s critics thoroughly discussed the relational discourses between architecture and the environment, these themes have recently received renewed attention and even institutionalization. The Emilio Ambasz Institute for the Joint Study of the Built and the Natural Environment at New York's Museum of Modern Art is just one prominent case in point. The institute was founded to encourage the investigation of trans-scalar and cross-historical relationships between environments and their human and nonhuman actors, for which architectural structures serve as mediating agents.

Linking the growing interest in environments with the escalating social urgency for active environmentalism, Etienne S. Benson's *Surroundings* documents the history of the concept of "environment" as well as its implications for future ecologies. Six sweeping historical vignettes traverse temporal and geographical limits to compile a composite image of the complex relations between actors and their surroundings, emphasizing their intimate association: "We *are* environments just as much as we are *in* environments" (1). Throughout, the book engages the processes of thought and adaptation—via rhetoric, practices, technologies, or social relations—that engender ways to mobilize the concept of the environment or its derivatives, and thus to construct knowledge about the world.

Distancing itself from genealogical histories of the concept, the publication extends its scope from prehistory to the envisioned abandonment of the term *environment*. On one side, it seeks residual manifestations of how historical actors conceived of themselves and their world prior to the rising popularity of the term in the nineteenth century and across imperial projects—that is, *environment* (British/U.S.), *milieu* (French/Dutch/Belgian), *Umwelt* (German), *ambiente* (Spanish/Portuguese/Italian). On the other side, it engages various contemporary scholarly discussions of the "other"

ecologies that transgress the concept's perceived discursive limitations, given that no single definition sufficiently addresses the diversity of coexisting planetary environments—such as Bruno Latour's actorial Gaia or Donna J. Haraway's "sympoietic" Chthulucene.¹ Benson's inquiry draws from these extremes—a before and after—to inform contemporary debates about environments and environmentalisms as they converge with the ever-present and admonishing leitmotif of the Anthropocene.

By stressing the urgency of developing a conscious environmentalist position in light of contemporary discourses on climate, energy, and viral contagions, the book joins recent histories of science, technology, and the natural or built environments—such as Joy Parr's *Sensing Changes* (2010), Andrea Wulf's *The Invention of Nature* (2015), and Daniel A. Barber's *Modern Architecture and Climate* (2020)—whose attempts at seeding environmental consciousness exceed the historical project and existing disciplinary structures to argue for awareness and ultimately change.²

Steeped in an approach that emphasizes "materialized cosmologies"—following the methodological considerations of the historian of science and ideas John Tresch—the book proposes the concept of "environmentalization," seeking to transcend mere contextualization (e.g., representation, interpretation) by focusing on the material conditions between entities (e.g., organisms, species, communities) and systems (e.g., biosphere), along with the practices or techniques that form and are informed by them.³ Exploring how the relations between these various agents and their frameworks transform from one historical episode and geography to the next, Benson's chapters unfold as historically situated themes with widely differing contents, which range from French naturalists' systematization of life and the economization of organisms in the early nineteenth century to early twenty-first-century writers' confabulations of anthropozoic climate change and the planetary necropolitics of the human enterprise.

Benson's disparate vignettes, presented in a chronological progression, use a template-like structure to connect particular variations of the concept of environment to its spawned forms of environmentalism