After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City
MICHAEL SORKIN AND SHARON ZUKIN, eds.
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The September 11 attacks transformed all of New York City, not just the historic financial district of Lower Manhattan. In *After the World Trade Center*, the eminent social critics Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin call on eighteen of New York’s leading urbanists and scholars to consider the attack and its impact in the broadest context. These essays provide a panoramic social portrait of the city at a new crossroads, one that both reflects New York’s preeminent role as a financial and cultural capital and reveals the fault lines under the last few years of rapid growth. Readers will not find politically correct essays here. Instead, the book points to a radical rethinking of the catastrophe and the future of New York City. The intent is to open a wider discussion, to consider the responsibility of architecture and the needs of a living city. Challenged rather than subverted by collective grief, the contributions are a manifesto for a democratic rebirth in which all the city’s communities, from Tribeca to Chinatown and Jackson Heights, count. The essential character of New York — its spontaneity and courage, its gutsy edginess and boisterous public life, its ugly conflicts and “business as usual” attitude — emerge in this volume in all their raucous splendor. The gaping, sacred site of Ground Zero becomes the lens through which the city’s “landscape of power” and its social relations are imagined. The result is a provocative tour de force that succeeds in opening a multitude of perspectives on a horrific event.

In essays by David Harvey, Neil Smith, Mustafa Bayoumi, and Keller Easterling, the World Trade Center is understood as the symbol of global capitalism, the seat of an American empire. There is outstanding analysis here of the skyscraper, and the ultimate skyscraper of the Twin Towers, as the icon of capitalist domination. The towers were not, as David Harvey says, neutral or innocent spaces (p. 59). Harvey sees the effect of September 11 as “snapping the thread” of global capitalism and American hegemony. New York tied its sails to the animal spirits and “irrational exuberance” of capitalist geopolitics that offered ultimate power and high risk. Hubris was at play on September 11, and the city may well have to adjust to a troubled, lesser status in the future. Neil Smith examines how September 11, as global event and local disaster, has been turned into a national tragedy that justified war against Afghanistan. Hyperpatriotism, press censorship, the hardening of borders and identities in response to the attack merged into a dialectic of fabricated ignorance and national victimization. The slippage between an ideological Americanism and the interests of global capitalism, between assumed global privilege and isolationism, has made the United States into the most dangerous of rogue states. Mustafa Bayoumi and Arturo Ignacio Sánchez explore this danger further by singling out the experience of Arab-Americans and Latinos in New York since September 11.

And yet the Twin Towers were indelibly part of the New York City skyline. They were a local phenomenon. Among the most valuable essays in this collection are those that provide the rich historical context of downtown life before the World Trade Center. Edwin Burrows examines the wars and violence that marked its early history, and Beverly Gage describes the 1920 Wall Street explosion. Looking back at these layers of memory, “mining the past for lessons in the present” (p. 47), provides a framework for a more democratic and equitable rebuilding and self-invention of New York. Marshall Berman, Sharon Zukin, John Kuo Wei Tchen, and Eric Darton inspect the dispossession and terrorism that marked the authoritarian building of the World Trade Center itself. The port cultures of New York, the multi-ethnic Washington Market were destroyed, as were Radio Row and the Syrian Quarter — all victims of a regime of money and power defined by global finance, Wall Street, and local real estate interests. Built by the Port Authority and the Rockefeller family, the Twin Towers were an idol to privileged elites. In an effort to understand this “architectural terrorism,” Eric Darton draws comparisons between Mohammed Atta and the World Trade Center’s chief architect, Minoru Yamasaki. The destroyer and the master-builder of immense architectural scale share the same ability to manufacture daydreams, to distance themselves from flesh-and-blood realities by working in the realm of abstraction. The politics of architecture are studied further by Mark Wigley who imagines buildings as witnesses to human experience and as metaphors for the body and the human condition. The twisted and pulverized remains of the World Trade Center were our own remains. As architectural design, the Twin Towers were sublime excess. They were pure image, floating ethereally above the skyline. “The unfathomable trauma of their destruction simply deepened the mystery” (p. 82). Andrew Ross and Christine Boyer both examine skyscraper building and the World Trade Center as architectural utopia, and September 11 as the dystopian inverse.

The last series of the book’s essays reflect on the future of downtown and New York. Developers jockey to control the right to rebuild Ground Zero. Financial firms line up for sweetheart deals. Architects and planners debate surveillance schemes over New York’s boisterous public life, and proposals for memorials remain contentious. None of these processes have achieved a political consensus. The capacity of the exclusive Lower Manhattan Development Corporation to offer leadership through its “market-driven” strategies is taken to task by Peter Marcuse, who calls for a more transparent, democratic, and informed planning process. Setha Low considers the future of public space at Ground Zero in terms of commerce, remembrance, and civic life, and Robert Paaswell looks at transportation strategies. But whether lower Manhattan can realistically hold on to its economic and financial predominance,
whether any architecture and design can re-create its centrality, is the key question debated by Michael Sorkin and Mike Wallace. While the city argues about what should fill Ground Zero, contrary forces shaping its future are at work. Despite its good intent, this disjuncture in the efforts to “re-create” downtown and preserve the concentration of power and wealth in Manhattan, and the decentralizing processes that are spreading New York City’s functions throughout the five boroughs and the metropolitan region is replicated in the bulk of the book’s essays. The vast majority of people who worked downtown before the attacks lived elsewhere in the region. More than 40 percent of the employees in the World Trade towers commuted from New Jersey. And the victims lived throughout the New York metropolitan area: some 680 were from New Jersey alone, another 700 from other suburbs and towns surrounding New York City. Yet the focus for these scholars remains exclusive: the postattack community gathering at Union Square in Manhattan, the ethnic communities of Manhattan, the economic competition between midtown and downtown Manhattan. An even more provocative approach to “after the World Trade Center” — and a more democratic manifesto — would be to include the neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens, the suburban communities of New Jersey and Westchester that all gathered to mourn their dead, that are also reeling from the economic impact of September 11, and that see themselves as a vital part of the rebuilding process and the future of New York City.

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Ethics and the Practice of Architecture
BARRY WASSERMAN, PATRICK SULLIVAN, AND GREGORY PALERMO

John Wiley and Sons, 2000
324 pp., illustrated
$60.00 (paper)

*Ethics*, as defined by Merriam Webster, is the study and philosophy of human conduct, with an emphasis on the determination of right and wrong, the philosophy of morals, and the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group, or any race or nation. Most recently, the subject of professional ethics has come under intensified scrutiny, evidenced by a spate of new books, articles, and columns. It seems to signal a call to arms, which is the premise upon which the following review is predicated.

According to the Avery Index, under articles, there are twenty-three citations online under the heading “Professional Ethics.” Twenty-one of these are from the 1990s; the other two from the 1980s. Under the articles heading “Architectural Practice—Professional Ethics” are thirty-two listings; the earliest in 1977 and next earliest in 1984; while, in marked contrast, ten listings were published in the 1980s, fifteen in the 1990s, and already eight in the new millennium. Seven books on the subject were published in the 1990s, and four have hit the streets since the beginning of 2000, including the book being reviewed here, *Ethics and the Practice of Architecture*. In the August 2002 issue, the *Architectural Record* reviewed four books on the topic of the ethics of design. Simultaneously, *Metropolis* published Milton Glaser’s article, “The Road to Hell,” about professional ethics, measuring a graphic designer “level of discomfort about bending the truth, and Blair Kamin’s “Architect Do No Harm,” delivering “tales of moral decrepitude from the notebook of an ever more cynical architecture critic.” Notably, “The Ethicist,” a weekly column in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, premiered in February 1999. More recently ArchVoices — an excellent new publication which is “an independent weekly email newsletter compiled by and for aspiring and young architects” (http://www.archvoices.org)— delivered excellent coverage on the topic of professional ethics in its July 26, 2002, issue.

Of the three most recently published books on ethics, it is interesting to note the main focus of each. Tom Spector’s *The Ethical Architect: The Dilemma of the Contemporary Practitioner*, according to the respected Boston critic Robert Campbell, “meant to cleanse the air of wrong ideas so as to make way for the author’s own solution.” The book follows the Vitruvian model of utilitas, venustas, and firmitas, and discusses ethical issues through a classical lens. Although a somewhat rarefied and personal treatise, this book does close on the right note by calling for explicit dialogue about ethical concerns. The second recently published book is entitled *Ethics and the Built Environment*, edited by Warwick Fox. This book, primarily authored by scholars teaching at universities in the Commonwealth, the cauldron of so many contemporary ethical issues, is all about issues of the built environment. It is only reasonable that scholars who have inherited the legacy of the industrial revolution and all its waste should now illuminate the ethical issues of this legacy. Hence, as stated on the book jacket, this immediately refers to the “the green bits” and the “brown bits” issues, and the ethical issues that are raised “by the relationship between the built and the natural environment.” The authors further address questions about the way in which “we ought to build.” Articles included here range from discussions about cities, global warming, and sustainability, to the ethics of architecture.

The third book, *Ethics and the Practice of Architecture*, herein reviewed, is a textbook to be used in schools of architecture to teach the fundamentals of ethical theories, the relationship between theory and practice, and, using the case study.
method, the process of applying this knowledge to everyday situations encountered by both students and practitioners of architecture. As such, it sits nicely between the personal attitude of Spector and the universal attitude of Fox to explain how their respective concerns can be applied by both students and practitioners. And this is exactly what they have done and exactly what we need.

Ethics and the Practice of Architecture is arranged in three parts. The first two borrow titles from the NAAB accreditation language. Part I, “Awareness,” is both an introduction to and a refresher course in ethics. Moving from the general to the specific, a generic discourse on “Some Basics About Ethics” concludes with “The Ethical Nature of Architecture” and the discussion, “What Is a Profession” ends with “The Profession of Architecture.” An introduction to the contributions of Plato, Aristotle, Vitruvius, and Palladio, as well as explanations of the concepts and theories of teleology, deontology, virtue, and contract provide an excellent foundation for exploration, discussion, and the didactic objectives of the book.

Next, in Part II, “Understanding,” is a study of codes and laws, organizational and management issues, and professional roles and ethical considerations. This section includes a “A Closer Look at Being an Architect,” with a history of the profession, legislated and institutional considerations, and aspects of integrity and commitment. It then takes “A Closer Look at Making Architecture” including the delivery of services, office management, and responsible client relations. And, finally, the section concludes with “A Closer Look at Doing Architecture Ethically,” charting, in great and usable detail, professional roles, architectural activities, and ethical issues as well as societal and professional ethical considerations.

Part III, “Choices,” gives the reader an opportunity to apply the lessons of parts I and II. Thirty well-chosen and well-organized case studies present situations and questions to be used in group/class discussions. The reader is given the needed material to investigate cross-referenced, ethics-related, decision-making phases including personal choices, employee rights, fee proposals, design integrity, design build, bid openings, construction observation, and post-occupancy evaluation against a social purpose to personal welfare continuum. Lastly, a scholarly and useful appendix includes a wealth of ready references, ranging from the complete text of the NCARB 1998 Rules of Conduct to well-formatted study guides, notes, and bibliographies.

The authors of Ethics and the Practice of Architecture bring a wealth of scholarship and experience to a subject that is not often so well explored. This book took more than ten years to complete and involved key contemporary academic and professional leaders. Ethics is an increasingly important subject as we enter the new millennium and as architects and design professionals face an expanding range of challenges and choices. From global warming to global economic practices, from rain forest and fossil fuel depletion to synthetics and synfuels invention, from sprawl to the new urbanism, and from luxury to affordable housing, the question of doing well by doing good rises and falls on a constantly changing climate of ethical considerations. Design today is increasingly a moving target, a set of circumstances that require quick judgments and decisions about extremely costly and influential acts executed in the dark without sufficient time to think about the complexities of each situation.

The many issues that practitioners will encounter are of types and magnitudes not heretofore encountered. As the medical profession must deal with the ethical and moral dilemmas of gene splicing and cloning, so must the design professions deal with universal issues affecting their day-to-day practices. Professional ethics and the process of globalization, with its concomitant cultural and religious heterogeneity, is just one topic in this critical dialogue, especially in the post-9/11 environment. There is help and hope in the ethical dialogue. Understanding which issues are personal and which are professional is a good starting point. Determining which of these ethical issues one can influence versus determining those that one cannot is an important consideration. After reading the book, architect Roberta Washington, a symposium panelist, commented, “I had the first good night’s sleep in years and the best weekend after understanding those issues that can and should be left in the office and those that needed to be brought home. My anxiety level dropped sharply.”

Although there are no easy answers for the big questions, there are some answers for the more quotidian matters. Paraphrasing Professor Tom Bredenthal speaking at the First Annual Ethics Symposium held in 2000 at the General Theological Seminary in New York City: the real exploration and value of ethics necessitates face-to-face exploration of subjects otherwise unexplored. He further maintained that ethics is best explored in small groups as opposed to the lecture/speaker/audience format. He said, in essence, it was the dialogue that mattered, not the event. Here, again, the book serves well in a design intended to encourage and facilitate dialogue, informed by case studies and propelled by good questions.

This book has already served as a successful catalyst. It has spawned the aforementioned annual symposium on architecture and ethics held in New York. Now cosponsored by the Cathedral of St. John the Divine and the AIA New York Chapter, the increasingly successful event attracts a wide range of participants discussing a wide range of issues. It is easy to recommend this book to professors teaching management courses, to those teaching courses in the general architectural curriculum, and to students and practitioners who are uneasy with how to confront the myriad ethical issues encountered daily. It might well be a useful model for other disciplines in need of similar guidance.

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