book reviews

His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Technology
Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun, editors
University Press of Virginia, 1998, 240 pages, 14 illustrations
$18.50 (paper)

His and Hers consists of eight conference papers published as book chapters that claim “to explore the history of consumption by synthesizing discrete historical literatures on consumer culture, gender, and the history of technology” (1). Each chapter probes the topic by way of a case study, most chapters focusing on an artifact of material culture: chocolate (Gail Cooper, Associate Professor of History, Lehigh University), luxury hotels (Molly W. Berger, Visiting Assistant Professor of History, Case Western Reserve University), glassware (Regina Lee Blaszczyk, Assistant Professor of History and American Studies, Boston University), stoves (Joy Parr, Farley Professor of History, Simon Fraser University), and shopping centers (Lizbeth Cohen, Professor of History, Harvard). Collectively, these chapters expose an underlying intention of crossing among various fields of history and knowledge, and attempt the noble act of interdisciplinary research.

While some provoking details are revealed in a few of these chapters, the book is limited by a theoretical foundation that overlooks the research of the past two decades. The terms gender, consumption, and technology as cited in the book’s title are conceived in far too broad and general a way, and the texts are far too specific to ultimately define them. Throughout the book, gender is expressed simply as the difference between men and women rather than as an enunciation of social, biological, or behavioral characteristics. Accepting the book’s working definition, the lack of reference or influence of the last two decades of gender studies, particularly women’s studies, is notably alarming. Technology, according to this book, exists almost exclusively as domestic objects or objects of domestication. The discussion is curiously reminiscent of Gideon’s work on architecture and technology. One is left wondering about the omission of contemporary technologies that have reinvented and defined architectural practice, theory, and construction let alone reconfigured our world as a global commodity. And while the authors show a diligence toward investigating consumption in the USA between the 1880s and the early 1970s, primarily within the white middle class, they omit the wealth of crucial developments and conflicts currently challenging the social and built environment, including postcolonial studies, global-based economies, and international scholarship on politics, culture, and difference. Finally as the chapters hone in on the miniscule details of very particular places and events, they neglects to step back and critically reconnect with the broader issues in the context of contemporary culture, leaving us with a series of disparate analyses rather than a larger understanding.

This book stands as a reminder of our professional responsibility to give by way of our work, so that ideas, projects, theories, and discoveries extend beyond our own academic production to connect to some larger framework of collective knowledge. Each of these chapters waits to be digested and culled into a larger, richer and active discourse.

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Hot Towns: The Future of the Fastest Growing Communities in America
Peter Wolf
Rutgers University Press, 1999. 282 pages
$27.00 (cloth)

The title Hot Towns asks readers to discover the new towns of the west, towns settled by the wealthiest, mainly elderly, Americans in their quest for safe places that offer recreational and cultural facilities, pretty views, and environmentally sound conditions—in other words, a comfortable bourgeois existence. This exclusive group and their movement is described as the fifth wave or fifth migration, the other four migrations constituting the historical waves of settlement that crossed the United States.

Although these privileged people form a major theme of the book, Wolf also discusses other social and economic classes in “growth towns” across America. Some, like Las Vegas, are already established cities, but have an ample amount of new housing and a large job market resulting from its glitter tourist pull. Growth towns and their organization—physical and political—are the gist of the book. Wolf is methodical in supplying economic and demographic data to

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support his text. This information is instructive, but it becomes distracting to the reader when it appears opposite Wolf’s explanations. Wolf identifies himself as a new urbanist, and like others, he has an abhorrence of cars in town centers. In fact, the limiting of cars in communal spaces could only bode well, and here the new urbanism, often considered an escapist venture in historic reassurance, is in concert with many more realistic visions in the architectural profession. Kenneth Frampton, for example, conceives of the invention of the automobile as more dangerous to our civilization than the potential disaster of the atomic bomb (Architectural Review, November 1999, 76ff.). It should be recalled that the auto was responsible for the fourth migration to the suburbs, as Wolf records, and that now, throughout the United States, families consisting of four to five members have equal the number of cars.

As a new urbanist, Wolf supports continuing local building traditions by means of town review boards. He notes that local zoning laws restricting design have existed in some towns since 1925. Although this may have had a positive effect in some towns, success is contingent upon the education and critical insight of board members, a factor that Wolf neglects. Wolf also believes that local design should find its roots in the past, and, although he is careful to acknowledge the difficulty in settling on aesthetic standards, he feels that town buildings and street furniture should be subject to review. The case of Cape May, New Jersey, is instructive here, as a case in which review board concerns focused only on ornamental frills rather than the genuine Victorian architectural tradition of its core. As Frampton would have it in his “critical regionalism,” the history of a place must form a part of design, but it must be sifted, scrutinized, and conceived with a critical edge, and rooted in a specific culture, with an eye toward the present and an avoidance of the superficial.

One of the book’s most compelling discussions for this reviewer concerns environmental issues. Wolf treats these in a very knowledgeable way, having already dealt with the matter in his Land in America (1981). Here, he suggests that the desire for cultivated land, pure air, and water are fundamental motivations for most migrations. About water, Wolf says,

Water is, of course, precious beyond compare. Any smart growth town must pay particular attention to its supply and quality. Unlike the air, the other critical ingredient of human and community life, water is generally obtained only with effort and expense, even after a reliable supply is secured. I believe water will be the natural resource most contentiously fought over in the twenty-first century, certainly west of the 100th meridian, which slices the country in half through the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Texas. . . . (163)

Cost for channeling this precious element into towns is becoming frightfully high, and the importance Wolf gives to the issue is welcome.

Another serious problem is sprawl. Setting boundaries for suburbs in order to elude American zoning laws is reprehensible. (Even Howard’s Garden Cities were limited to population of 32,000.) Here, Wolf offers helpful remedies. One is to have town governments or responsible citizens purchase lands in crucial places, thereby keeping developers from building on them. Former Governor Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey made such a purchase, but not all such ventures have resulted in success. Former Vice President Gore aired his concerns about sprawl, but, finding little electoral support, he dropped the issue from his platform. This is deplorable because, without some knowledgeable authority supporting such limitations, the sense of community will diminish if not disappear.

Hot Towns is uneven insofar as in the beginning it purports to deal only with the wealthiest Americans and then includes others deserving of record. Wolf, however, has related a tendency worthy of note and has offered some helpful suggestions to control growth. He also emphasizes the immediate significance of planning for better environmental conditions to protect our environment as ourselves. Wolf’s suggestions that we ban cars in town centers and that designers address architectural history in their work are positive aspects of his new urbanism. For my part, however, I would prefer the subtleties of modernist sensibilities and the maintenance of valuable cultures beyond copying historic form.

Suzanne Frank
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The True, the Fictive and the Real: The Historical Dictionary of Architecture of Quatremère de Quincy
Samir Younès
Andreas Papadakis, 1999
271 pages, 85 illustrations
$55 (cloth)

It is a commonplace in contemporary humanities and architectural theory that every reading has a specific point of view. Because the
theoretical position that precedes the reading determines the questions that asked when approaching a text, it also determines the outcome of the reading. This is certainly true of Samir Younés’s book about Quatremère de Quincy. It is precisely its perspective that makes the book an important contribution to the debate on the role of tradition in modern architectural practice. Although writers approaching architectural theory from the deconstructivist and poststructuralist position have been very prolific during the past decade, theoretical statements about contemporary traditional and classical architecture are rare.

The book contains five introductory chapters by Younés (an introduction, a survey of Quatremère’s theory, and two essays on important aspects of his thought—“Architecture and Language” and “Poetic Order”—and a biography). These are followed by translations of eighty-four articles from Quatremère’s Dictionnaire, the first time this material appears in English. The selection of articles was made according to their theoretical relevance. Those articles that concern factual material (architectural details, biographies of architects, and archaeological details) have been excluded from the translation, a reasonable approach considering that much of this material has been superceded by subsequent historical scholarship. The selection consequently generates a perspective in which the internal consistency of Quatremère’s thought is much more easily appreciated. With this clear presentation of his arguments, the book can be conveniently used in architectural theory classes.

Younés believes that many of the Dictionnaire’s lessons remain valid and useful—a view that may sound strange, but Quatremère himself believed that artistic knowledge lay beyond the historically contingent. Younés finds a strong train of Platonism, of an idealism that takes principles outside the time, running through Quatremère. The idea is that certain artistic values are not historically dependent but have universal validity, the way mathematical theorems can be true or false regardless of what we know about them. One of the most direct implications of this concerns the relationship between visual and verbal thinking. Things seen, says Younés, are not necessarily things as they are; visuality should not preclude discussion about what things should be like. Platonic forms belong to those things that can be thought about but not seen. (Younés argues that such is the notion of type.) If architecture is judged according to these standards, then verbal thinking must take priority over visual. This line of thought, derived from Plato’s dialogues Cratylus and Phaedo, denies that meanings of words are social/cultural conventions, rather that they too represent ideal types. In order to claim, as Quatremère does, that there are artistic values that are not historically contingent, it is necessary to claim that some words and symbols are not conventions.

This position is clearly controversial: many people today would deny the possibility of meanings that are not social conventions. Yet one should bear in mind that Younés is trying to overcome a problem widely present in contemporary writings on art and architectural theory. On the one hand, it is widely believed that aesthetic evaluation depends fundamentally on meanings and verbal thinking. On the other, it is commonly assumed that art and architectural historians can agree about the relevance of objects studied by their disciplines. Similarly, architectural educators imply that they give grades for studio work on the basis of some objective criteria. None of this would be possible if evaluation depended always on meanings that are always culturally relative. To avoid this problem, one has to either follow Geoffrey Scott and assume that in some cases at least evaluation can be based on purely visual properties of an object and thus be independent from our verbal thinking, or one may want to preserve the relevance of meanings and verbal thinking in artistic evaluation, in which case it will be necessary to postulate that some symbols have meanings by themselves. The great achievement of Younés book is that it fully explores this second approach.

When opposing the idea that meanings are always conventional, Younés has two additional intentions. Because it is the words of architectural theory with which the mind orders the ideas manifest in architectural form, then a dictionary, as conceived by Quatremère, is the perfect means to structure architectural theory. Younés also maintains that by opposing the view that meanings are conventions, Quatremère forecast the work of such critics of modern technology as Jacques Ellul and Martin Heidegger. Younés reminds us that Heidegger believed that we inhabit the world through the word. Although Younés still warns that spatial thinking (“image”) is necessary for the appropriation of the world as an object, his hope is that the recovery of the word of architectural theory will liberate architecture from the constraints of technological determinism.

Younés does a good job when it comes to explaining how a reading of Quatremère from the Platonist position concerns the status of imitation in the visual arts. One difficulty with approaching Quatremère in this way concerns the status of imitation in the visual arts, which he regarded as ways of representing “the universal model in nature.” But architecture, unlike other visual arts, has no direct model in nature. Imitation here relates to an idea about its origin. Quatremère says directly that architecture’s imitation, “being purely ideal, is not material or factual; she draws some imitative analogies from nature and from the arts as her evident imitation; but she imitates no reality; her form is for the mind, only a combination of relations, proportions, and reasons which please inasmuch as they are simply expressed.”
Samir Youné’s attempt to read the *Dictionnaire* as a theoretical text in its own right—and from the point of view of its potential instrumentality in our contemporary situation—is commendable, indeed brave. Many people will not share his optimism that Quatremère is of programmatic value today. (The opponents of the classical tradition would not call such a belief *optimism* in the first place.) Even if we are to read *Dictionnaire* as a historical document, we shall not understand what it says, if we do not understand the kind of architecture it advocates. In his book, Youné gives us not only the translation and commentary of Quatremère’s *Dictionnaire*, but the key to understand it in our contemporary situation.

**Branko Mitrovic**

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**Other Publishing News**

Since its founding in 1990, DOCOMOMO (Documentation and Conservation of the Buildings, Sites and Neighborhoods of the Modern Movement) has devoted itself to the recognition and preservation of significant works of the modern movement. Part lobbying organization and part research consortium, DOCOMOMO has 38 regional “working parties” or chapters. Since 1996, the organization has resolved to expand a program of publications, the results of which are only just becoming available.

An early work is *Modern Movement Heritage* (Routledge, 1998), which is edited by Allen Cunningham and provides insights into the early efforts of the organization. Initial chapters outlining theoretical and practical issues are followed by case studies that chronicle restorations of individual works such as Duiker and Bijvoet’s Zonnestraal Sanatorium in Hilversum, and Sant’Elia’s Nursery School in Como. The appendices contain useful information on the organization’s activities, including preservation campaigns, the creation of regional building registers, conferences, and newsletters.

Recently, DOCOMOMO has published a more comprehensive work, *The Modern Movement in Architecture: Selection from the DOCOMOMO Register* (2000), edited by Dennis Sharp and Catherine Cooke. This book presents an overview of DOCOMOMO’s registered works, that is, the significant buildings of the modern movement as determined by the working parties. It documents some six hundred registered projects with accompanying photographs and brief descriptions. Also a brief overview of modern architecture is given for each of the thirty countries included. This book may find U.S. distribution in the near future; at present, copies can be ordered from www.010publishers.nl for about $40.

Because a large part of DOCOMOMO’s work is the preservation of buildings constructed using experimental technology, advancing preservation techniques is a major project of the organization. Outside of the proceedings of its international conferences, the organization has published three books emanating from conference seminars on technical subjects. These technical dossiers include *Curtain Wall Refurbishment: A Challenge to Manage, The Fair Face of Concrete: Conservation and Repair of Exposed Concrete*, and *Reframing the Moderns: Substitute Windows and Glass*. Published in 2000 by the organization’s headquarters at the Delft University of Technology, these books contain the details of the restoration of DOCOMOMO-listed buildings throughout the member countries. The dossiers can be ordered from the International Secretariat. The cost is $15 to $20 each.

No effort exists to publish DOCOMOMO area studies in an organized way (such as the Society of Architectural Historians has been doing for each of the United States); rather, regional publications are the product of local initiative. As a result, DOCOMOMO publications vary in format, expense, and quality. Nevertheless, such efforts have produced some substantial works, notably *Modern Movement Scandinavia—Vision and Reality* (1998). Available in English, the book contains an introductory essay and a catalog of DOCOMOMO-designated buildings. Studies like this one are especially valuable as reference works, providing a catalog of extant buildings and their addresses. A few other countries have produced similar works, such as Brazil and Estonia. It is best to contact individual member countries to inquire as to their publications. (Look to the DOCOMOMO Web site for the contact numbers.) My thanks to Kathleen Randall of the New York DOCOMOMO chapter, and the people at the DOCOMOMO headquarters in Delft in helping me compile information for this column.

A new reference work—the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, edited by Michael Kelly and published by Oxford University Press—has much to offer those concerned with theory and the intersection of art and architecture. The entries range across a broad spectrum, surveying the arts and related interpretive fields such as linguistics and psychology, and western and non-western traditions. If the encyclopedia has a bias, it is toward the artists and movements of the twentieth century. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the
field, the choice of topics and subjects is inevitably idiosyncratic and the editor has pointed up the wide divergence of approaches to aesthetic subjects in his choice of the more than five hundred authors. Thus, although not comprehensive in the scientific sense—the Encyclopedia of Aesthetics is a trove of thought-provoking articles. The four-volume set is $225.

One of the great diarists of the seventeenth century and a prolific writer and encyclopedist, John Evelyn is remembered for, among other things, his plan for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666, and for his proposal to plant a grove of lime trees to the north of London to sweeten the air. The University of Pennsylvania has published the first-ever edition of his Elysium Britannicum, or The Royal Gardens ($75), in which Evelyn hoped to set forth an authoritative compilation of the theory and practice of gardening as a gift to the restoration king. His topics range from the technical arts of hydraulics and propagation, to recording the use, medicinal and otherwise, and features of individual plants, as well as instruction on achieving the “Mysterie of Arte” through garden ornament. The massive work lay incomplete at the time of his death, and portions were presumably lost; it is now reconstructed by editor John E. Ingraham.

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