Book Reviews

The Architecture of Landscape, 1940–1960
Edited by MARC TREIB
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
311 pages, illustrated
$59.95 (cloth)

During the past decade, no one has paid more attention to teasing out, analyzing, and consolidating the elusive history of modern landscape architecture than Marc Treib. The Architecture of Landscape, 1940–1960 joins his Modern Landscape Architecture: A Critical Review (The MIT Press, 1993) and Garrett Eckbo: Modern Landscape for Living, coauthored with Dorothee Imbert (University of California, 1997), as an illuminating compendium of essays in critical history. From the signature clarity of the graphic design to the ordering of the essays, The Architecture of Landscape attests to Treib’s commitment. His introduction and closing essay succinctly frame the work intellectually and geographically as “a mosaic of (landscape) issues, methods, observations and projects” emerging during a period that “redefined basic questions of human existence” (p. viii).

Treib has enlisted the help of very capable colleagues in this endeavor. Originally presented at the symposium “Landscape Architecture 1950: Recovery Into Prosperity (February 1997, University of California–Berkeley), the papers were developed by an international cast of scholars including Thorbjörn Andersson, Philip Goad, Gert Gröning, Dianne Harris, Malene Hauxner, Catherine Howett, Dorothee Imbert, Alan Powers, and Rossana Vaccarino. These authors detail aspects of national campaigns that, in part, demanded radically new orientations for landscape architects practicing in the decades surrounding World War II. In the process, students of twentieth-century design are introduced to an impressive pantheon of landscape projects, practitioners, and theorists, some of whom are already familiar names beyond the boundaries of the Americentric world. The only minor disappointments are occasionally murky archival images and the lack of a comprehensive list of references for each essay.

The content of the essays varies considerably in depth and treatment. The main thrust of the book demonstrates how, despite shared suffering and common cause in post–World War II Europe, United States, South America, Australia, and Japan, rebuilding programs addressed an extraordinarily wide range of landscape agendas, from national agriculture to nature preservation, from collective urban recreation venues to the apotheosis of the private home. National ideology, fear, denial, and professional obstinacy all conspired to materialize in remarkably different landscapes. For instance, Thorbjörn Andersson explains that forest lands were seen as a wholesome environmental tonic, balanced against the utopian urban models of postwar Sweden. There was little similarity between Sweden’s landscape ideology and, say, the more “empathic” Danish perspective on gardens, parks, and cemeteries described by Malene Hauxner.

As in Treib’s earlier work, respect is paid to formal description and analysis of images and built projects in the context of a broader contemporary discourse. Dianne Harris’s admirable analysis of themes in the postwar press (of the “House and Garden” variety) demonstrates the maturation of such contextual methods in American scholarship. Another strength of this book, exemplified in essays by Alan Powers and Gert Gröning, lies in its remarkable harvest of archival resources despite the rather ephemeral nature of the postwar discourse on landscape. Not yet codified within an organized professional literature, many social and practical theories of landscape architecture were still embedded within other debates about national and ethnic identity, moral and political rigor, and environmental character and health. At mid-century, the ethos of modern landscape architecture was contained less within texts and more in political and aesthetic conjectures.

In the Architecture of Landscape, the range of primary documents consulted by various authors offers a wealth of new material and, by extension, suggests new approaches to continuing research. The synchronic format of the essays sometimes gets a little out of hand. Treib wisely acknowledges the authors’ occasional drift into, say, the Art Deco Exposition of 1925, or the social upheavals of 1968, by remarking “history never falls into neat decades” (p. 310). As for geographical coverage, Treib’s own essay “Converging Arcs on a Sphere: Renewing Japanese Landscape Design” adds to the global scope of the book—from war-torn western Europe to the postcolonial western hemisphere to the Pacific rim.

The term architecture appearing in the curious title of this book is certainly as much a metaphor as the word landscape. Used by Gyorgy Kepes in The New Landscape in Art and Science (1956), landscape signaled “an inclusive metaphor for the connection of visual and functional appearances on a wide variety of scales, moving from a single viewpoint in space to seeing through the microscope and the telescope at once” (Alan Powers, p. 79). In this collection, Thorbjörn Andersson writes that, in postwar Sweden, “the scientist and the politician...
occupied places on the same side of the table, the very same side where the architect also sat . . . suggesting that the title architect applies to those who create social or economic schemes as well as to those whose design buildings” (p. 4). In linking these concepts, The Architecture of Landscape, 1940–1960 also changes our perspective on those schemes, along with various interwar and Cold War ideologies that continue to govern the appearance, the function, and the social limits of the global landscape.

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Modern Arcadia: Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Plan for Forest Hill Gardens
SUSAN L. KLAUS
University of Massachusetts Press, 2002
207 pages, illustrated
$39.95 (cloth)

Suburban Space: The Fabric of Dwelling
RENEE Y. CHOW
University of California Press, 2002
193 pages, illustrated
$44.95 (cloth)

Suburbanism and the Art of Memory
SÉBASTIAN MAROT
AA Publications, 2003
88 pages, illustrated
£15.00 (paper)

The amount of research and writing on historic and contemporary exurban culture and its built environments has accelerated since the mid-1980s. Much of it laments the socially and environmentally unsustainable character of sprawl’s relentless advance. Other writings focus on the clever and often humorous ironies found in exurban life and its space. This second breed of commentary has become a rather predictable, even reflexive, formula for discussing the subject in popular and critical literature, film, art, and architecture.

Three new books by Susan Klaus, Renee Chow, and Sébastain Marot resist this facile tendency and offer new ways out of the cul-de-sac of sardonic reactions toward exurbia. As articulated by Carol Burns in her seminal essay “On Site,” each benefits from an increased awareness of site, either as an urban or open terrain, that is a rich and culturally “constructed condition.” Each author approaches the problem through different means, exposing the true complexity and potential sophistication of designing exurban built environments.

Susan Klaus’s book, Modern Arcadia: Fredrick Law Olmsted Jr. and the Plan for Forest Hill Gardens, is an extensively researched history of one of America’s most influential suburbs designed by the underrated son of Central Park’s codesigner. The book is filled with the backgrounds of Forest Hill Gardens designers, organizers, and patrons, the meetings and correspondence that lead to the project’s development and realization, as well as lengthy descriptions of various architecture and landscape elements. Although the casual reader may find this detail tedious, the scholar will value the text as an essential resource on the subject. Olmsted Jr.’s design for Forest Hills Gardens fits into a body of pre–World War American urban and landscape design that offer, even today, numerous strategies for developing more civically and spatially connected exurban infrastructures. Forest Hill Gardens is the first among communities like Shaker Heights and Mariemont in Ohio, Radburn in New Jersey, and the New Deal Era’s three Greenbelt towns that were informed by Ebenezer Howard’s “Garden City Principles.” While there is discussion of both British and American garden cities in the book, Klaus could make more of the influence of Howard, the subsequent Parker and Unwin design for Letchworth Garden City on the development of Forest Hill Gardens as well as the subsequent influence of the project on the constellations of the aforementioned exurban designs. At the very least, more plans and images of these projects would allow readers to make additional comparisons on their own.

It is precisely the use of original comparative drawings and photographs that distinguishes Renee Chow’s Suburban Space: The Fabric of Dwelling from the increasing number of books on the subject. For the first time, there is a graphic method for comparing suburban built environments at the scale of the house and site. This is a historically significant accomplishment. By examining the relationship
of dwelling to immediate site and adjacent lots, Chow addresses the cultural nitty-gritty of how and why projects like Rudolph Schindler’s Pueblo Ribera and Sachs Apartments create a socially sustainable and interrelational domestic fabric of space and program. By using a comparative method, she is able to illustrate why the typical practice of casually tossing a “McMansion” in the center of a Scott’s Turf-Built® lawn is so spatially, functionally, and socially problematic. Chow argues that the lawn should be more than a mere green skirt framing a hermetic domestic volume decorated with traditional and comforting semiotic form. It should instead be viewed as a two-dimensional “fabric” that has the potential to connect spaces, purposes, and cultures of inside and outside as well as the mediate space and relationships among lots of a given neighborhood. Some may find Chow’s technique to contain shades of architectural theory influenced by behavioral science of the 1960s. However, her use of widely recognized projects by some of the best architects in the twentieth century avoids the valorization of orthodox behaviorism, a movement that frequently seemed to reject even the most sensitive work of well-known and self-conscious designers. In addition to intelligent comparative drawings, Chow’s sophisticated text is written in a highly organized and refreshingly direct style. This no doubt will broaden the influence of her work to include audiences outside the disciplines of architecture, landscape, and urban design. Renee Chow sets a much needed example for architecture and its allied fields, disciplines that often use language and techniques that are inaccessible to the general public and thus contribute to the growing irrelevance of our efforts to affect significant change in the built environment.

If Renee Chow’s book examines the strategies for dwelling in exurbia, Sébastien Marot’s book, Suburbanism and the Art of Memory, explores the deep semiotic motivation of why we as a society crave it both consciously and, more often than not, unconsciously. Void of the usual, too-easy derision that absorbs much of the recent writing on the topic, Marot is not afraid to return to the Old Testament and the psychoanalytic couch of Sigmund Freud to try and get to the bottom of why we as a middle-class materialist society have such an unrelenting appetite to dwell in the reconstructed Edens we call “suburbia.” The book applies the concept of “collective memory,” first used in texts about traditional cities, and employs the history of gardens and the concept of urban and landscape palimpsest to reach back to common repressed memories and our desire to re-represent important events, ideas, and values. Marot’s book also examines the early travels and work of Robert Smithson and a Swiss suburban landscape project by the Geneva-based designer Georges Descombaz as a set of useful artistic and professional examples of his suburban memory theory in action.

In effect, Marot argues that “suburbia” is mostly about reconstructing collective mythologies and the mental life of its inhabitants through idealized natural settings. He argues this is most engaging when a strategy of layering strata is employed. This real or imagined palimpsest represents the fourth dimension of time, an aspect that is all too often missing in the common “tabula rasa” approach to producing contemporary exurbia. Chow’s book in comparison argues that exurban richness can come from developing formal and spatial techniques for accommodating an ever increasingly varied social and cultural life in such settings. Susan Klaus attempts to point the way to a better exurban environment by giving us a detailed case study of one of the most successful examples of an infrastructurally integrated design in the last 150 years. One hopes that those who read any or all of these three books will better imagine and design contemporary exurban communities and space. It is clear that to do this one needs to envision large-scale exurban design and its architecture as accepting the collective narratives that drive its built environment and see such efforts as part of a larger urban, social, and environmental ecology that can span dense city centers and open countryside. Exurbia must increasingly nurture the cultural diversity
that is now reshaping its previously homogeneous, but nonetheless ubiquitous, terrain.

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Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City
MATTHEW GANDY
The MIT Press, 2002
358 pages, illustrated
$34.95 (cloth)

The Lower Manhattan Plan: The 1966 Vision for Downtown New York
CAROL WILLIS (editor)
Princeton Architectural Press, 2002
368 pages, illustrated
$25.00 (paper)

Beyond the Edge: New York’s New Waterfront
RAYMOND W. GASTIL
Princeton Architectural Press, 2002
208 pages, illustrated
$21.00 (cloth)

It has been two years since New Yorkers and the world witnessed the mass murder at the World Trade Center. Although not specifically written as responses to this tragedy, each of these three books affords a useful framework for reflection in its effects and visions for the future. The scholar-historian Matthew Gandy provides a fascinating overview of New York City’s technological and social infrastructures through the lens of a shifting, artificial, social construct of manufactured “nature.” Carol Willis, the founder of the Skyscraper Museum, has republished the 1966 Downtown Vision Plan in the hopes that its multiuse vision for a twenty-four-hour, vibrant community set in parklands will influence the current downtown debate. Raymond Gastil, the director of the Van Alen Institute, presents a series of projects for new public spaces and parks along the deindustrialized waterfront that are of obvious relevance to the redevelopment of the tip of Manhattan.

The rise of the Port of New York, from its foundation by a Dutch colonial trading company, its conquest by the British, and liberation in the Revolution, has always involved global trade and migrations, whether forced, voluntary, or circumstantial. New York’s ecological footprint from the start extended from Holland to Africa and the Caribbean, as well as up the Hudson to Albany for furs and down the coast to the American south for cotton. In four succinct chapters, Gandy outlines the shifting relationships between the city and its “natural” setting. He describes how city engineers overcame the limits of its water supply, constructing a huge Croton reservoir system and then doubling it in the distant, upstate Catskill/Delaware Watershed (restricting development in hundreds of thousands of acres to ensure water quality). The symbolic landscape at the center of the city in Central Park demonstrated the city’s dominance over nature and the power of an elite to shape nature in a picturesque mould, while simultaneously encouraging real-estate speculation in northern Manhattan. Gandy explains how the city further expanded its reach beyond streetcar and railway suburbs through the construction of parkways in the 1920s and 1930s that encouraged personal mobility and the car later in the century.

The effect of this continual expansion and the “hollowing out” of the inner-city ring of industrial suburbs forms the subject of Gandy’s last two chapters. Gandy presents a highly nuanced picture of the city in this phase of mass suburbanization, de-industrialization, and financial crisis. Garbage was piling up high in the Puerto Rican barrio of East Harlem when the local Young Lord street gang took on the city and won temporary improvements. Gandy portrays the Young Lord’s drive to organize a coalition of street people, addicts, and the unemployed and dispossessed with their stress on environmental justice, trash collection, street cleaning, food kitchens, and asthma as a healthcare issue. From this start in the late 1960s, he traces the growth of the environmental movement and its various conceptions of natural ecology and the city. In his final chapter, he highlights the unlikely alliance of Puerto Rican street people, Hassidic Jews, and Irish and Polish immigrants from Williamsburg that stopped the construction of an enormous trash incinerator plant by an international conglomerate in the abandoned Brooklyn Naval Yards. Gandy notes that this in many ways admirable, not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY), grassroots response killed New York’s last chance of dealing with the closure of the
Staten Island Freshkill Landfill through a large-scale, “technologically sublime” solution that had long been the city’s tradition.

The gigantic scale of the World Trade Center, begun in 1966, represented the highpoint of the “technological sublime” tradition. It also symbolized the attempt of New York to reconstruct itself as a global financial center focusing on finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE). In *The Lower Manhattan Plan: The 1966 Vision for Downtown New York*, Ann Buttenweiser describes the background of the plan, originally intended to improve traffic circulation in lower Manhattan, giving better access to the World Trade Center site. A new highway, anticipating the strategy of the later Westway project, would be depressed around the edge of the island and partially financed by the sale of air rights for new developments on the neighboring landfill.

Paul Willen and James Rossant, two of the original architects involved in the plan in late 1964, comment in retrospect that the plan came one year before urban design truly came to the fore under the Lindsay administration. The characteristic “new brutality” of the plan bears the imprint of Rossant’s hand. In their Manhattan plan, a neighborhood unit of park, housing, and office towers, at a large scale, terminated both ends of Wall Street. There were similar park-based ziggurat residential units to the north and south on both rivers, housing eighty to a hundred thousand people. Against these cellular units, the World Trade Center generated a megastructural grid that covered the entire landfill of 96 acres. Battery Park City would eventually be built on this landfill following the competition of 1978, won by Alexander Cooper and Stan Eckstut with their more traditional layout of streets, blocks, and setback regulations. Ultimately, Westway was never built.

As Carol Willis points out in her Introduction to *The Lower Manhattan Plan: The 1966 Vision for Downtown New York*, the plan was a transitional design that was critical of the megascale of the twin towers, but had not yet accepted the popularity of historic preservation or moved toward Jane Jacobs’s appreciation of the small-scale, street-based neighborhood. The virtual bankruptcy of New York ended the age of megastructural planning, coinciding with the city council’s rejection of the Lindsay administration’s master plan in 1968 and rise of the participatory planning movement, based on neighborhood community groups (as recounted by Gandy). This was also the era of special district planning, zoning for special interests, and business improvement districts (BIDs). Other interest groups specializing in design and historic building types, like the Van Alen Institute and Skyscraper Museum, emerged in the 1990s to enrich the urban discourse. Both Willis and Gastil have been exemplary leaders in this respect, organizing exhibitions, conferences, and debates available to the general public on well-designed websites (www.vanalen.org and www.skyscraper.org).

Gastil’s *Beyond the Edge: New York’s New Waterfront* is a broad record of activities at the Van Alen Institute where he has over several years pursued a program devoted to waterfront design, associated with an exploration of new public space design. In his book, he assembles a valuable selection of examples of new waterfront design from major port cities from around the world. Gastil includes well-known examples from Bilbao and Barcelona, Spain, as well as less-known examples from Amsterdam (Borneo-Spoorenbarg housing), London (Millenium Riverwalk, including London Eye and Tate Modern), Rotterdam (Erasmus Bridge and Kop Van Zuid district), and Yokohama (International Port Terminal).

The emphasis on waterfront design points to Gastil’s deep understanding of the importance of the long planned deindustrialization of New York, as well as the ecological and design opportunities that opened up with the defeat of Westway by community groups after a fifteen-year battle. *Beyond the Edge* includes a survey of American waterfront projects, looking at Boston, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. Gastil contrasts the protracted master planning process of Boston with the more flexible, small-scale “performative” urbanism of Jim Corner and Field Operations proposal for the redevelop-
ment of the Philadelphia Navy Base and Shipyard. This proposal is based on small “patches” of urbanism, housing, public space, and landscape that create “River City as a mixed-use mosaic.”

Gastil ends his book with a wide-ranging selection of projects from around the New York waterfront. The book’s cover cleverly unfolds to reveal a concealed map with sites and images of the projects. The cover/map provides a wonderful overview of a potentially very different New York, with a waterfront mainly devoted to recreation, leisure, and residential uses. These range from the Gantry State Plaza, realized in Queens in 1998 to Victoria Marshall’s and Steven Tiju’s proposal for a reconstitution of the wetlands of the East River and Michael Sorkin’s utopian proposal for a memorial at the World Trade Center site linked to regional subcenters throughout the city.

Each of these books serves as a reminder of the symbolic and conceptual importance of cities in our culture, dispersed as they may be, across vast, megalopolitan city-regions, ever dissolving into “nature.” Each of these authors in their own way loves New York with a passion that bears witness to its continuing, transformative power.

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The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America
HYUNGMIN PAI
MIT Press, 2002
430 pages, 128 illustrations
$49.95 (cloth)

How does the common but unexamined practice of surreptitiously sliding glossy architectural magazines under the desk while designing compare with the early twentieth-century practice of tracing over published plates to compose an esquisse? By considering questions such as these as appropriate and important to investigate, Hyungmin Pai’s book, The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America, which is based upon his MIT dissertation, contributes to redirecting theory and history to working within, rather than about, architecture.

Leaving behind the well-worn path of modern exemplars, Pai provides a history of the emergence of modernism in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s through the examination of the discursive practices of architecture. The book’s many illustrations aid in revealing this story of changing architectural practices described through a careful study of architectural journals, writings, published images, architectural photography, and handbooks including those still in print such as Architectural Graphic Standards and Time-Saver Standards. Pai’s use of historical materials from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century examines questions of architectural practices relevant today and thus outlines an auspicious direction for future architectural research.

Beginning with the premise that the way our discipline tends to produce its artifacts largely defines how architecture is conceived, Pai examines the change of discursive architectural practices in the 1920s and 1930s to those that constitute American modernism. The book’s key element is the shift from the Beaux-Arts esquisse compositional sketch to the modern functional design diagram. Following Walter Benjamin, Pai describes the change in the architect from a painter/magician to a camera-man/surgeon. He explains that the richly suggestive lines of an esquisse sketch invite consideration of the full range of architectural concerns whereas the modern diagram provides only a thin, restrictive fragment of functional information. The expressive esquisse is replaced by the factual diagram, bifurcating architecture into fact (diagram) and appearance (image).

Pai’s otherwise insightful study becomes problematic when he allows the idea of a discursive shift to precede careful assembly of historical evidence. To establish the discursive shift from portfolio to diagram, Pai writes that it was “in the 1930s that the new functionalist diagram emerged” (p. 179), despite his statement that the claim of historical origin is unnecessary. Pai marginalizes earlier architectural books using diagrams to fit this timeframe. For example, Pai describes Notes on the Art of House Planning (1888) as a nonarchitectural
“advice book” (p. 177) even though its author, Charles F. Osborne, was an accomplished architecture professor and editor and derived his book from Robert Kerr’s influential The Gentleman’s House (1864).

Architectural practices have included diagrams since ancient times, as Pai acknowledges but does not elaborate upon. Plato described Daedalus, the mythic first architect, as a maker of elegant diagrams, and the lost illustrations in Vitruvius’ treatise were diagrams. More appropriate than to attempt to restrict architectural diagrams to a particular architectural period would be to inquire how diagrams changed in the 1930s.

Pai rightly criticizes the thinness of many modern diagrams, but fails to recognize that this is not inherent in the nature of modern diagrams. Many functional diagrams can be richly productive. Although diagrams appear to be visually precise and inexpressive, even simple diagrammatic lines can suggest a great expressive density to the architectural imagination. Pai’s example of Paul Nelson’s architectural designs is a case in point. Nelson’s work, based on design from diagrams, is not reductive, but richly imaginative because it translates functional diagrams into imaginative structures, intrinsically ordering dramatic experiences and building material. The thinness of much modern work is not solved with rejecting diagrams, but with rejecting the professional mythology of factual diagrams that frustrates the recognition of their richer interpretations. Pai argues for the return to thickly meaningful architectural images, but this does not imply the need to return to the esquisse. The myth of the diagram presents them as purely factual and functional, but the reality of practice demonstrates that the diagram, if attended to, can be a rich resource of values and expression.

With the recent resurgence of interest in diagrams for design, The Portfolio and the Diagram is a timely and valuable reminder that reflecting on the historical uses of diagrams enables more-informed future practices and, hopefully, avoids the separation of fact and appearance that continues in too many architectural practices today.

Paul Emmons is an architect and assistant professor at Virginia Polytechnic and State University’s Washington–Alexandria Architecture Center and recently completed a dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania, The Image of Function: Architectural Diagrams in Handbooks and Normative Practices in the Twentieth Century.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

In the article, “Just How Public Is the Seattle Public Library?” in the September 2003 issue of JAE, Shannon Mattern quotes, in a very misleading way, from an article I authored regarding the OMA design for the Seattle Central Library that appeared in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer on Sunday, February 6, 2000. In the second paragraph of my essay, I cited examples of statements that had already appeared in the press; my complete sentence was: “However, a few dissenting voices have been heard — letters to the editor and one guest column have criticized the design as ‘self-important,’ ‘an example of media hype,’ or a ‘receptacle for irony and data.” In the article in JAE, only the statement “an example of media hype” is quoted, and the footnote (number 39) ascribes this to me, not to the original source. Since my article makes it very clear that I only quoted this as an example of the overheated rhetoric that had accompanied the design (not as a statement with which I agreed or disagreed), to ascribe this statement to me, as the JAE article does, completely misleads the reader as to what I actually wrote. (My article is also cited in footnote 45, but the sentence to which this is attached is ambiguous so the link to my essay is unclear.) In fact, my Post-Intelligencer essay, “Fusing Form and Function,” a full-page, front-page, guest column, was a lengthy discussion of the sources and character of the design, and was intended to get at design issues that had been lost in the overheated prose that had made up most of the public discussion carried in the newspapers to that point.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Karl Ochsner
University of Washington
School of Architecture

Response from Shannon Mattern:

“My purpose was neither to mislead the reader nor to misrepresented Mr. Ochsner’s views. I intended not to attribute the quote to Mr. Ochsner, but rather to refer readers to Ochsner’s and Cheek’s articles for a variety of critical comments, including the two phrases quoted in my article. I regret the misunderstanding and apologize for my error.”