Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture: Advances in Assisted Living
Edited by Benyamin Schwarz and Ruth Brent
Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
311 pages

Designing for Alzheimer’s Disease: Strategies for Creating Better Care Environments
Elizabeth C. Brawley
John Wiley and Sons, 1997
313 pages

With the increasing interest in the environmental design of settings for older persons and the significant challenges the aging baby boomers will present over the next thirty years, it is both timely and worthwhile to consider the state of gerontological design. Every ten years or so, a classic publication on design for the aging seems to emerge. In 1970, Leon Pastalan and Daniel Carson edited Spatial Behavior of Older People. In 1980, M. Powell Lawton brought us Environment and Aging, a landmark publication, which, sadly, just recently went out of print. Two colleagues from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Uriel Cohen and Gerald Weisman, published Holding on to Home in 1991—a design guide specifically addressing the needs for those with dementia of the Alzheimer’s type. Each of these publications, in its own way, advanced the state of the art in gerontological design. Now, the end of the millennium brings us two new publications addressing the environmental concerns of the elderly, Designing for Alzheimer’s Disease, by Elizabeth Brawley, and Aging, Autonomy and Architecture, edited by Benyamin Schwarz and Ruth Brent.

These two books have very different ambitions, representing the breadth of aspiration found in current architectural research in this area. Designing for Alzheimer’s Disease takes a classic user needs approach to developing specific suggestions for design guidance. Beginning with a clear and concise description of general age-related changes to functional abilities, such as reduced visual acuity and deceleration in mobility, Brawley suggests that Alzheimer’s disease is another level of complexity added to these already significant issues for design. Here, this book offers a unique entrée into the world of dementia, for Brawley discusses the impact her mother’s Alzheimer’s disease had on the family. This broadens the definition of user to include another social world, that of families, so often overlooked in gerontological environment studies. With this added perspective, Brawley revises and extends a list of therapeutic goals, developed initially by Cohen and Weisman, that should guide the design of special care units for people with dementia.

Unlike Cohen and Weisman, who concentrated on the spatial planning implications of such therapeutic goals, Brawley again extends the design guidance available in the literature by focusing on what she terms, “the sensory environment.” In this section, Brawley expresses her concern for the lack of sensitivity exhibited in many gerontological facilities for the unique lighting needs of the elderly; issues of color and pattern follow naturally from this discussion. Part of this lack of sensitivity is a result of the flawed process by which the “Recommended practice for lighting and the visual environment” produced by the Illuminating Engineering Society was developed. Issues of glare and daylighting are also meaningfully addressed, but rely upon anecdotal evidence and “professional intuition” rather than implications arising from critical inquiry. This is an area of inquiry that needs much development by architectural researchers.

The remaining sections cover design suggestions ranging from the creation of spaces that are familiar in nature and facilitate autonomy (both interior and exterior) to specific guidance on the selection of furniture and finishes. It is clear throughout the book that Brawley adheres to the paradigm that suggests that user needs, here extended to include family members, should inform a set of goals to be facilitated through environmental design, and that these goals can guide the design decision-making process. Other approaches to design theory are certainly at variance with this paradigm, such as many phenomenological approaches where design intent is developed internally and expressed in materiality. What use would such designers have for design suggestions developed within the user need paradigm? Perhaps this reflects a weakness in such solipsistic approaches where one cannot assume the same level of ability as that possessed by the designer. Yet another potential difference is that many normative design theories of architecture have been argued to be espoused theories, rather than theories-in-use. Perhaps the paradigm Brawley adapts is reflective of a practitioner’s theory-in-use.

Within this context, the book Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture offers an interesting section that includes three case studies of assisted living environments written by practitioners. Interestingly, all three case studies reflect a theory-in-use of developing goals (also called objectives or criteria) early on in the project to guide the process of design. The case study of Woodside Place, a facility for thirty-six residents with dementia in Pennsylvania, written by David Hoglund and Stefani Ledewitz, most clearly reflects how those goals informed specific design decisions. The other two case studies are not nearly as richly detailed nor as compelling, but still
make a useful addition to the body of available cases from which architectural practitioners have learned to glean useful design strategies. While one might have expected this section on the design implications of research to be the denouement of the collection, it is instead the weakest section of the book.

The greatest addition of this book to the environmental gerontological literature is its underlying and unstated quasi-critical theory underpinnings. Quite simply, Schwarz and Brent challenge readers to contextualize their actions broadly; to recognize the systemic relationship between physical environment design decisions and the other dimensions of context; and in so doing, to take a step back and examine critically the sociocultural context in which place-making of assisted living occurs. Probably most reflective of this perspective is Ben Schwarz’s own chapter, “Assisted Living: An Evolving Place Type,” which stimulates careful consideration of the historical and philosophical origins of assisted living as a concept and the resulting heterogeneity of built form that has ensued. Carefully choosing the wording of the title of his chapter, Schwarz illustrates the limitations of thinking of assisted living as a building type, suggesting that instead it is something richer and more dynamic—a place type.

The first three sections of the book also reflect this more critically engaged approach to a socially constructed understanding of places. The first section, aptly named “Idealism and Realism,” offers three chapters by leaders in the field on the state of assisted living. The second section, “Attributes of Place and Behaviors of People,” is the true heart and soul of the collection. The third section, “The Provision and Consumption of Care,” provides a useful glimpse into the challenges and opportunities of care provision and the impact they have on environmental design.

Stephen Golant’s chapter, subtitled “A Cautionary Essay,” is a splendid summary of the first section and explains the critical fissures that exist in the assisted living place type:

a) the fact that only 10 percent of the elderly population can afford assisted living;
b) that the supply appears to be far outracing the demand, suggesting that the next five years may see bargain-hunting consolidation in the industry;
c) consumer confusion over what assisted living is; and
d) the fact that although these places are designed to be home-like, they simply are not home—the preferred place to grow old.

This final point is the core discovery presented in the third part of the book. Jacquelyn Frank’s interpretative analysis of interviews conducted with residents in assisted living facilities reveals that there is a significant difference between a home-like setting and a home. This aspect of people’s experiences with their environments remains a fertile area for architectural inquiry.

The heart of Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture, is the second section, which focuses on the relationship between people and their environmental experiences of assisted living. Ruth Brent’s narrative analysis of life stories of older people, coupled with a careful integration of a range of work, from Yi-Fu Tuan’s to Cassirer’s, raises poignant issues and experiential attributes that thoughtful designers of assisted living environments should find creatively stimulating. John Zeisel illustrates the importance of thinking systemically about such places, including organizational considerations beyond the individual and physical. Taking this a step further, Margaret Calkins and Gerald Weisman offer a framework for conceptualizing the place of assisted living that integrates the systemic view of Zeisel with the experiential emphasis of Brent. Such models prove useful in joining the efforts of research, evaluation, and design together in a meaningful and comprehensive fashion.

Together, the different parts of the Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture collection reflect the necessity of a systemic approach to the development, design, and assessment of assisted living environments. The underlying user needs approach found in much of the environmental gerontology literature is here challenged to include other social worlds such as families, care providers, and administrators; to include institutional dimensions such as historical, regulatory, and financial contexts; and most importantly, to extend the concept of need to consider the meaningful and experiential content of such places.

Seidel discusses two aspects of utility that architectural research holds for architectural practice. Instrumental utility, in which specific guidance is made available and utilized in architectural design, and conceptual utility. Designing for Alzheimer’s Disease possesses instrumental utility, although it strikes me as needing its compatriot Holding on to Home by Cohen and Weisman to have fullest instrumental impact. Aging, Autonomy, and Architecture, on the other hand, is lacking in terms of instrumental utility, but is rich in conceptual utility. The Schwarz and Brent anthology provides much fodder for critical reflection for practitioners, theorists, and researchers alike. Seen in this light, Brawley’s book is a welcome contemporary addition to any practicing designer’s bookshelf, but it is the Schwarz and Brent collection that provides the most potential for challenging assisted living design and thereby advancing the dialogue regarding assisted living as more than a building, but a place.

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Architecture and Modernity: A Critique
Hilde Heynen
Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1999
280 pages, 103 illustrations
$44.00

At a moment when many architects, exasperated by the excesses of contemporary theory, have turned away from philosophical questioning altogether, the publication of Hilde Heynen’s Architecture and Modernity is an important event. The book offers a responsible alternative to antitheoreticism. Heynen’s subject is the question of modernity and her book is both accessible and compelling.

According to Heynen, modern architecture has suffered from a certain conceptual provincialism. The architectural modernisms that finally produced the International Style arose largely from a narrow philosophical lexicon, one formed by a combination of technological determinism and a neo-Hegelian historical sensibility. The avant-gardist ferment out of which the more orthodox modernisms of CIAM and its progeny arose was always far more interdisciplinary—arising from historical movements like Futurism, Dada, and Constructivism that rejected both academicism and the disciplinary restrictions of the arts.

Thence an important task: to return to the kind of grappling with modernity characteristic of architectural modernism prior to its orthodoxy. The key for Heynen seems to be a recovery of the full set of philosophical possibilities for modernism excluded by the triumph of the Modern movement and its eventual institutionalization. In part, this is a matter of recording the discussion itself. To this end, she offers a series of extraordinarily lucid readings of philosophical positions with implications for architectural practice. It is on the strength of these nontechnical and yet rigorous interpretations that Heynen can make the justified claim to have written a kind of “textbook,” introducing critical theory in its most important historical representatives to students of architecture today.

Architecture and Modernity also offers its own theory of the modern. The thesis here, presented using Marshall Berman’s theoretical language, is that any responsible conception of modernity must be counterpastoral, that is, based upon ambiguity, ambivalence, and even aporia. For Heynen as for Berman, the modern condition resists simple embrace or rejection. Her central claim is that, both in its almost exclusive focus upon technological modernization and in its claims to programmatic scientifcity, mainstream modern architecture has too easily forgotten this complexity of the modern. It is this preference for what Heynen calls the “programmatic” (modernity as “project”) over the “transitory” (say, Baudelairian) dimension of modernity that underlies the crisis of architectural modernism after the Second World War.

A central question of Heynen’s book is that of modernity and place. If, as the traditional argument goes, modernity commences from and produces a series of displacements and decenterings in everyday experience, if a certain dimension of the modern consists of a loss of place” and dwelling, then a self-consistent “modern” can only respond authentically to modernity by rejecting place, comfort, hominess, etc. Thus, according to thinkers as varied as Peter Eisenman, Martin Heidegger, Massimo Cacciari, and Christian Norberg-Schulz, to be modern is to be not at home. This shared metaphor can lead either to a demand for authenticity in the face of homelessness or to an antimodernism, i.e., a movement of return to place and home, but, either way, it sets out from the demands of consistency and clarity in understanding the modern condition.

In her argument for a counterpastoral modernism, Heynen rejects this entire tradition and suggests that it may be possible for the modern to undercut our traditional sense of place and dwelling while still leaving room for a genuinely modern alternative place and inhabitation. The last two chapters of Architecture and Modernity—moving toward her interpretations of Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin and Rem Koolhaas’ proposed Sea Terminal in Zeebrugge—amount to a kind of polemic for Walter Benjamin’s vision of a transitory condition as the foundation for social and political redemption and against the pessimism of the Venice School. For Heynen, the task of the architect today is not to remind us of the impossibility of dwelling but rather to articulate a genuinely new sense of it.

While this is a compelling argument, Heynen’s analysis raises a number of questions. Her proposition of a divide between a prewar experimental, socially engaged modernism and a postwar formalism is itself too reductivist. In fact, too much of what Heynen applauds, for example, with her use of Siegfried Giedion’s early (1928) concept of interpenetration already looks forward to later modernist orthodoxy. On the basis of such a link between early and late, one would have to reexamine the whole argument about “dwelling” and modernity that runs through Heynen’s book.

Perhaps the key would be to return to the distinction between programmatic and transitory conceptions of the modern. Modernisms do swing between the experience of a displacement (the transitory) and a reflection upon (and knowledge of) the preconditions for such an experience (the programmatic). But Heynen’s distinction also calls programmatic the view that modernity is a project and that any experience of decentering should be for the sake of this project. The transitory, then, must lack such a goal. But, when it’s a question of dwelling, a practice (for which we commonsensically
demand an end or purpose), this second implication of the transitory is forgotten. In embracing the displacement so dear to Nietzsche and Baudelaire, Architecture and Modernity implicitly allows the transitory to become the goal of modernism, thus precisely repeating the mistake of Giedion’s interpenetration. With Heynen’s dwelling as “permanent quest for an ever-new enclosure” (p. 222), we seem a long way from the promise of the counterpastoral.

One wonders, in the light of this problem, whether the only way to fulfill the task Heynen articulates, to present a vision of modernity that is genuinely complex, would be to give up on the priority of practice. Perhaps the truth created by global capitalism is that the complexity and irony of the modern condition can only be thought, not built. Here the very idea that Heynen fights to stave off in her critique of the Venice School reemerges: what if there might be a possibility for a genuinely critical modernist knowledge (“negative thought” [Cacciari] or “negative dialectics” [Adorno]) whose very existence was, at the same time, the denial of the possibility of a critical modern architecture? There is not room here to argue for such a reality, but the interstices of the argument in Architecture and Modernity suggest that it must be considered again, no matter how unpalatable it might be for architects today.

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Teaching in the First Person: Understanding Voice and Vocabulary in Learning Relationships
Elijah Mirochnik
Peter Lang, 2000
145 pages
$22.95 (paper)

Fittingly titled, Teaching in the First Person examines the interaction between three architecture instructors and their entry-level design students. Elijah Mirochnik effectively explicates the current relationship between learner and teacher by positioning the everyday-studio-day education of architects within a complex theoretical history of knowledge. In his introductory chapters, Mirochnik offers an overview of how theories of knowledge have historically coincided with paradigmatic shifts within science, poetry, and education. He presents a synopsis of the emergence of traditional and nontraditional conceptions of knowledge, as vocabularies, and the current application of knowledge theory within teaching practices.

The central three chapters are written as ethnographic vignettes of the individual studio teachers in action, with a concluding chapter that analyzes the metaphorical significance of his findings.

The author’s analytic framework asserts that various teaching philosophies and practices have, at their root, the instructor’s implicit definition or theory of knowledge. Positioned as a determinant of teaching style is whether one adopts the vocabulary associated with either the traditional notion that The Truth as objective, universal knowledge is waiting to be discovered or the non-traditional message that truths emerge and are constructed individually. Mirochnik maintains his analysis throughout the entire book exclusively at the postmodern level of language, vocabulary, metaphor, text, etc.

To illustrate his thesis Mirochnik, applying qualitative research methods, observed studio critiques offered by the three part-time design instructors at the University of California, Berkeley. His goal was to obtain a “mobile assemblage of qualitative portraits” through the description and analysis of the instructors’ educational vocabularies or “first person voices.” Utilizing an interpretive analysis, he sought the theoretical knowledge or foundation for the metaphors that the teachers employed in discussion with students. He first observed student-teacher interaction in the studio setting. At later interviews, he asked the instructors to reflect upon these experiences and recorded their conversations for analysis.

For each of the three teachers’ narratives’ Mirochnik constructed a set of metaphors that characterized their particular perspectives about themselves as teachers, and their perceptions of various students’ learning processes. Deftly contrasting one instructor’s teaching “metaphors of self,” with another’s “metaphors of separation and control,” the third’s “metaphors of balance and connection,” the author creates an effective tool to explain whether the architect’s teaching was grounded in a traditional or a nontraditional theory of knowledge. Also of great insight were the characterization offered by two of the three teachers who pointed out “good” students who readily took to their teaching methods and “problem” students who questioned the prescribed process for design. In all cases, the author noted that the problem students happened to be nontraditional architecture students.

Although he did not uniformly apply this method to each of the three instructors, for me, the most illuminating narratives occurred when the author compared the students’ interpretations of the studio instructors’ language with the teacher’s own interpretation. The contrast was often glaring, indicating a distinct pedagogical blindness to differing metaphors, values, attitudes, and beliefs.
This text is an especially important read for instructors of architecture who have not had the opportunity to reflect upon the impact of their educational language and its consistency with their personal philosophy of knowledge and design. Many studio critics may find resonance with the comparison between their explicit learning objectives and with their actual pedagogy. In addition, a theoretical investigation at the level of everyday teaching is long overdue for architects, who often feel isolated in their individual studios. The author documents the intense intellectual, psychological, and emotional energy that design studio demands.

I had great sympathy for the thesis that pedagogy-as-metaphor is embedded within theories of knowledge. However, Mirochnik sets up his research framework with a reliance on postmodern critique or the literary turn that essentially poses all interaction as a series of texts, narratives, or vocabularies. Citing Kuhn and Rorty among others, the author rather benignly suggests that competing vocabularies change when practitioners get used to speaking a new way, as he writes, “over incredibly long periods of time.” Suggesting that architects will get used to speaking the non-traditional (and for many, revolutionary) language, as a matter of habit or fashion, is a rather apolitical stance. It seems to me that the field of architecture is far from recognizing that knowledge is socially constructed, not because it isn’t used to that language, but because those who dominate architecture have a lot to lose if there is a paradigm shift. Further, to suggest that competing value systems apparent in studio interaction between learner and teacher are merely a set of differing ways of knowing, without recognizing the power imbalance (one of the actors can fail the other) is to take away the material conditions of that context. If, as this author suggests, all language is relative, and there are no rights or wrongs, we should at least acknowledge that there are political consequences to the vocabularies that we adopt.

Although the author describes the ethnicity, age, sex, and formal education of the participants in the study, he rarely suggests how their identity impacts how others respond to them, as if there are no role expectations. The findings are positioned as a series of equal narratives. With the rich data that Mirochnik has gathered, I hope that his next study will recognize the political implications of what he is describing.

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Albert Frey, Architect  
Joseph Rosa  
Princeton Architectural Press, 1999  
148 pages, 264 illustration  
$35 (paper)

Albert Frey/Houses 1+2  
Jennifer Golub  
Designed by Simon Johnson/Praxis,  
Princeton Architectural Press, 1999  
84 pages, 93 illustrations  
$17.50 (paper)

Joseph Rosa’s Albert Frey, Architect is an invaluable document concerning an important architect. Frey’s work had been virtually ignored until the book’s first publication by Rizzoli International in 1990. This reissue provides a reorganized format of the original text and a new postscript.

The book is essentially a biography and the text is principally a description of Albert Frey’s life and buildings, which are documented by drawings and photographs. The portrait drawn is that Frey evolved from his European tutelage to find a truly personal and significant American “desert style” in his Palm Springs period from 1940 to 1990. This smooth evolution is not completely born out by the work presented, which has seminal buildings in the early years as well. The introduction by David Gebhard also contradicts this theme by describing Frey’s architecture as working on at least three different agendas. He argues that separate projects pursue either an expressionistic approach to the machine aesthetic, a “refined” modernism with careful attention to proportion, or an homage to vernacular architecture in California. This analysis allows us to understand differences in the work, as compared to Rosa’s evolutionary interpretation, which insists that all the work is of consistently high quality.

Each chapter concerns a period in Frey’s life. Chapter one, “The Early Years, 1903–30,” traces his life before coming to the U.S.A., including his work in Belgium and Switzerland, and, for Le Corbusier for fourteen months, in Paris. It was an important moment in Le Corbusier’s office with the Villa Savoye and the Centrosoyas building being designed and Charlotte Perriand in the studio.

The second chapter, “America, the East Coast, 1930–39,” contains his early work with Lawrence Kocher, editor of Architectural Record, including the Aluminaire House of 1931, the Canvas Houses of 1932, and their realization in the Kocher Weekend
House of 1934 and the Kocher-Samson Building, 1934–1935. These are important buildings in Frey’s oeuvre and demonstrate his European heritage as well as a passion for the exploration and expression of “off-the-shelf” American building products. They also demonstrate an interest in modern progressive issues of housing; low-cost, efficient construction; and functional design. Perhaps his most important project, the Aluminaire House, received more attention than any other of his works. It was presented to the American public as an exhibition pavilion in New York City, and then re-presented in Hitchcock and Johnson’s “Modern Architecture, an International Exhibition” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and their book, *The International Style*, both in 1932.

Chapter three, “America, the West Coast, 1939–55,” reveals Frey’s turn to forms and spatial investigations that resemble the early work of Mies van der Rohe, as well as his contemporaries Neutra and Schindler. Frey’s work distinguishes itself in its continued exploration of materials, principally light metal and glass, and a minimalist spatial expression. The climate and sites on the West Coast were an obvious influence and the work shows a strong concern for light and shade, and natural colors. The Frey House I of 1940 and its space-age addition of 1953, Hatton House of 1945, and the Raymond Loewy House of 1946–1947 are the significant buildings of this period. The Villa Hermosa housing of 1946–1947, another important project, relates back to Frey’s earlier forms and social concerns.

The last chapter, “America, The Late West Coast, 1955–86,” presents the final production in which the Frey House II of 1963–1964 is the most significant product. The Tramway Station 1960–1963 and Tramway Gas Station, 1965 and the late Mirrored Pavilion of 1986 are interesting projects that illustrate Frey’s continuing ingenuity.

In the decision to be biographical and inclusive, the book lacks a critical stance. The brief forays into commentary are generally unsubstantiated and sometimes misleading; for instance, the insistence on Frey’s unqualified greatness. Frey’s work was quite uneven, yet the author treats every project with nearly the same emphasis. It is the same with the images: photographs appear in different sizes without regard to their importance. Many important ones are too small to be decipherable and others are too large for their content. Furthermore, not all the images are labeled nor all the projects dated. In the end however, the reader must be pleased with the sheer amount of visual documentation.

Jennifer Golub’s *Albert Frey/Houses 1+2* is an interesting attempt to explain buildings by means of images alone. The book sets out to document Albert Frey’s House I of 1940, its addition of 1953, and House II of 1963–1964, all in Palm Springs, California. It begins by introducing photographs taken by Frey from 1930 to 1935 from Long Island to the California desert. (We wonder if this is just a random sampling?) We are then presented with images of House I, colored photographs taken by Frey, and black-and-white photographs, previously published elsewhere, by Julius Schulman. These are interspersed with Frey’s diagrams and drawings; frames of 8mm films that he made of plants, materials, and details; and cost sheets. The addition to House I and House II are presented the same way. At the end are some photographs of the desert and Frey memorabilia. The overall impression is of materials, color, and desert flora interspersed with architectural notations.

As a linear documentation set up by pages in a book, the sequence of photographs and the interweaving of other material do not construct an apparent narrative. We are left with an impressionistic sense of the work rather than a constructed explanation. These reviewers found it frustrating to find no plan or section of the original House I, the plan of the later addition cropped, and no site plans or elevations. The interviews at the end of the book reinforce the sense of a stream-of-conscious structure, like a casual conversation. Here again the questions put to Frey do not appear to have been derived from a clear structure. The first seven are about color, there are only two in the forty-three questions about materials, and four indirectly about site.

Overall, the argument of the book appears to focus on Frey’s use of color in response to the desert. It is interesting to note that the colors that Frey used here are the same ones he used on the 1931 Aluminaire House in New York, and not very different from the ones Le Corbusier was using in his architecture and paintings when Frey was in his Paris atelier.

Golub’s book presents an impressionistic view within a limited range that does not express the breadth of Frey’s work. It is possible that Golub wished to make a response to Rosa, to show “the other side” of Frey. That is, an appreciation of his adopted landscape and his interest in color. Yet the work would be incoherent without knowledge of Frey’s work through Rosa’s book. In the redesign of Rosa’s book by Princeton Architectural Press, the ordering of images with the text is improved, yet the redesign does nothing to better describe Frey’s work. Rosa’s book, as a monograph on Frey’s career, is naturally a more thorough and more useful tool. Yet it has a disappointing aspect: having brought Frey’s work out of hiding, one wishes that Rosa had used the occasion to illuminate it further through analysis and an emphasis on the truly great work.

*Albert Frey/Houses 1+2* is of interest for its search to explain architecture through the visual image alone. The importance of
Albert Frey, Architect lies in its archival presentation, which is a valuable contribution to the history of modern American architecture.

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The Culture of Building
Howard Davis
Oxford University Press, 1999
395 pages, 267 illustrations, notes, bibliography, index
$45.00 (cloth)

This book describes building cultures (the complex systems of values and customs and their relationships to settlement patterns), building types, and techniques that shape the built environment in a specific place and time. The author, Howard Davis, is currently Professor of Architecture at the University of Oregon, and since the mid-1970s has worked closely with the Center of Environmental Structure headed by Christopher Alexander. He is also coauthor with Alexander and others of The Production of Houses (1985). This new book, The Culture of Building, is an extension and elaboration of the work of the Center, and is a most welcome contribution to the field.

The book is organized into three parts that address buildings as cultural products, rules of and knowledge about building, and the transformation of modern building cultures. The author argues that “large-scale improvements to the built world do not depend solely on the individual acts of architects and city planners; instead, they depend largely on the gradual transformation of the building culture—the coordinated system of knowledge, rules, and procedures that is shared by people who participate in the building activity and that determines the form buildings and cities take. . . . The idea that increased knowledge about the building culture might lead to the improvement of the built world is the central purpose of this book” (pp. 3, 4).

The book is embedded in the culture and experience of England and the United States; its primary beneficiaries will be audiences in these two countries, and possibly in other English-speaking countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The anchor for the book’s primary cultural sphere lies in chapter two, “Four Building Cultures in History: From Medieval London to Modern New York,” which presents in reasonable detail examples from medieval London and other locations in England of the 1300s, Renaissance Florence, London of the 1700s, and New York in the 1890s. Examples from numerous locations around the world—Italy, Japan, Tunisia, India, and others—help to illuminate the descriptions of the primary examples from England and the United States.

Christopher Alexander, in his early works, A Pattern Language and The Timeless Way of Building, referred to “the quality without a name”; more recently he uses the term “wholeness.” Although Davis does not specifically mention these qualities of wholeness, I suspect that he assumes that they are achievable by means of a “healthy building culture,” the term he uses throughout the book. In fact, part two of the book comprises seven chapters, each of which addresses one aspect of a healthy building culture, including the widespread sharing of building knowledge, decentralized production, regulation based on common sense, craftsmanship at all scales, and autonomy and interdependence with respect to the larger culture.

In part three and in the conclusion, the author presents various examples to demonstrate healthy building practices in contemporary cities, but the relationship between these examples and the attributes of a healthy building culture, discussed earlier in part two of the book, remains unclear. Further, the author does not specifically develop or suggest remedies for unhealthy building practices, or policies for achieving healthy ones. Even an outline of such courses of action addressed to specific aspects of the predominant building culture in the United States would have clarified, to a great extent, what is needed for future success. Instead, the author suggests that we accept the ad hoc experiments and occasional innovations that occur in a pluralistic society such as that of the U.S. What is needed, in my view, are suggestions that address architectural education, practice, and accountability that affect the workings of the public and private sectors in shaping the built environment. There also remains the overarching problem of how to achieve a minimum set of shared ethical principles in society so as to achieve a balanced and healthy building culture.

This is a difficult subject to write about, and the author can be congratulated for attempting this daunting task, and for opening up opportunities for others to tackle and elaborate on the various issues presented in this book. I strongly recommend it for professionals whose work is related directly or even indirectly to building and construction. It also has the potential for use as a text in courses dealing with the relationship of building and culture, particularly in schools of architecture and urban planning.

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Other Publishing News

Incomplete at the time of his death and after thirteen years’ labor, *The Arcades Project* by Walter Benjamin has remained an enigmatic and tantalizing prospect. Benjamin’s *Urgeschichte*, or primal history, of bourgeois culture would challenge traditional narrative histories with an artifactual and impressionistic account of the late nineteenth century, and centered around a materialist study of the Parisian arcades and a bewildering array of the phenomena of everyday life. These diverse and fascinating phenomena are collected in the “Convolutes” section and are cross-referenced with various of Benjamin’s related drafts and essays. In 1982 a German edition of the existing fragments was published by Suhrkamp Verlag as volume five of his complete works. Rolf Tiedemann’s collation and his informative introduction were translated and prepared for this English edition by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. The book is published by Belknap Press of Harvard University.

*Hypnerotomachia Poliphili. “The Strife of Love in a Dream”* by Francesco Colonna is available in a new edition produced by Thames and Hudson, translated by Joscelyn Godwin. First published in 1499, this Renaissance allegory has had a persistent influence on architecture and architectural theory. Brimming with classical and esoteric references, explicated in part through architectural devices, the book recounts the tale of the love of Poliphilo for Polia. The first book is much concerned with architecture and gardens encountered in the hero’s search of his beloved. There is extensive commentary on the buildings and their details in text and beautiful woodcuts. The large format faithfully reproduces that of the original.

Le Corbusier’s *Modulor* and *Modulor 2* have been reissued in facsimile editions by Birkhäuser Publishers. First published in 1949 and 1954, the two books had a profound influence among modernists of the postwar period. Combining heroic biographical discussions with “scientific” ruminations all in prose tinged by the manifesto, the two volumes give unique insights into his theoretical, political, and architectural propositions. In the first volume Le Corbusier introduces his system of proportion and measure based on the familiar male figure with its upraised arm. *Modulor 2* follows with a response to his critics and more explication of the modulor’s use. Both works are illustrated with his sketches and tabulations, and contemporary photos of his work.

E & FN Spon of Routledge have produced *The Multilingual Dictionary of Architecture and Building Terms*. This reference work of terms used in building design and construction in German, Spanish, French, and Italian will prove very useful for anyone who has struggled with construction terminology in other European languages, words not generally found in the usual dictionaries. The book does not provide definitions but rather correlates parallel terms in each of the five languages. The words are alphabetized in English, but there is an index for each of the other languages.

Susan Henderson