

Book Reviews

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Twentieth Century Architecture by Dennis P. Doordan (Upper Saddle River N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc. and Harry N. Abrams, 2001) 304 pages, illustrated, \$60.00 (hardcover) ISBN 0131833189

Twentieth Century Architecture is an introductory survey for college students and the curious lay reader with the admirable goal of demonstrating the diversity of modern architecture. Categorizing previous histories as either lists of canonical works intended to provide "paradigms of excellence," or surveys of building imagined deterministically as the result of new technologies and economic systems, Dennis Doordan attempts something different. He provides instead a pluralistic history of architecture in which "every building is an argument concerning how the world might be." This history, he claims, is informed by recent feminist, post-colonialist, post-structuralist and environmentally oriented criticism, in which architecture is not treated formally as an ideal model or a technological product. Rather it is imagined as the product of an on-going social debate, at the center of aesthetic, cultural, economic, technological and political concerns.

In this way, Doordan's survey is quite different to William Curtis' commonly used survey text, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (3rd ed. 1996), and Kenneth Frampton's *Modern Architecture, A Critical History* (1985). Whereas both Curtis and Frampton imagine modernism as an ongoing project (Curtis formally and Frampton ideologically), Doordan does not describe modern architecture as a homogenous movement with common and consistent aims. Rather, he sees it as a heterogeneous "range of responses" to the condition of modernity, defined through Marshall Berman as inherently contradictory, a perpetual struggle for unity in the face of disintegration and disorder.

While it is basically chronological, the book is structured around so-called "critical sets" of two, three, or four buildings. These are presented as a range of often-contradictory responses to common design issues. For example, Josef Oubrich's startling Secession Building in Vienna is placed next to Pope and Eggger's staid neo-classical National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., treating both as equally valid expressions of culture, rather than a forward-looking and a retrograde solution to the same problem of art display. As a result of this structuring device, substantially fewer projects are presented than in standard survey texts. It is not only projects usually considered secondary that are lost, but canonical projects as well. Louis Kahn's Richards Laboratories and Mies van der Rohe's Seagrams Building are not represented, for example. But perhaps more

importantly, this approach allows for theoretical, rather than merely formal, comparisons to be made. It largely allows Doordan to avoid considering architecture as a series of movements such as Constructivism, Brutalism and other "isms."

This structure presents architecture in its wider historical and social context, rather than as an autonomous discipline with its own internal history. Projects are considered in relation to buildings with similar social programs, rather than as parts of stylistically defined architectural movements. For example, the juxtaposition of Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye with Hans Scharoun's Villa Schminke and Alvar Aalto's Villa Mairea makes Le Corbusier's famous house seem less a unique and revolutionary work than one of a number of essays on a similar theme. Similarly the Unité d'Habitation is considered next to the Smithsonian's Golden Lane project in London and Per Ekholm and Sidney White's Baronbackara housing project in Sweden. Chandigarh is contrasted not with Notre Dame du Haut, but with post-war projects for the planning of Beijing and Berlin. As a result of this method, the choice of buildings is sometimes surprising, introducing the reader to some unexpected examples. Among the less widely known but fascinating projects shown here are Wivi Lönn's 1908 Central Fire Station in Finland, John Eberson's American theater designs from the 1920s, and the post-war rebuilding of Florence.

Sections on cinema and gas station design are particularly good in that they recognize not only the new patrons of architecture, but also the new technologies of everyday life to which it must adapt. By including examples of twentieth century display, including Norman Bel Geddes' General Motors Pavilion for the 1939 New York World's Fair and Charles and Ray Eameses *Glimpses of the USA* installation for the Moscow exhibition of 1959, Doordan opens the possibility of a pre-history of the virtual. Further discussion of the increasing convergence of architecture and electronic media in more contemporary work (such as that of Bernard Tschumi, Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio) would only strengthen this argument.

While the critical set model is extremely useful, it does sometimes render the structure of the book confusing. Some sections are arranged under typological headings ("Housing," "Factory Architecture" and "Railroad Stations"), and some are not ("European Developments," "The German Experience" and "Postmodernism"). The fact that this typological classification appears and disappears recognizes that architecture often exceeds the limitations of type. Certainly some of the more contemporary work discussed under the heading of "Deconstructivism" is predicated on breaking down disciplinary assumptions about the way architecture is supposed to be used, and the way it is supposed to look, rendering the value of typological distinctions debatable.

In the section entitled, "An Era of Pluralism,

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