REVIEWS

Reviews Fall 2018

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Traditionalism and Neo-Traditionalism in Urban Design

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Wolfgang Sonne, *Urbanity and Density in 20th Century Urban Design*, Berlin: DOM Publishers, 360 pages, 2017; ISBN 978-3-86922-491-6, 350 illustrations, hardcover [translation of Wolfgang Sonne, *Urbanität und Dichte im Städtebau des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2014].

Monumental in size and encyclopaedic in scope, *Urbanity and Density in 20th Century Urban Design* is a panoramic account of what might be called the traditionalist or classical wing of 20th-century urbanism (**Figure 1**). Referencing over 500 examples, with 350 illustrations from both Europe and the United States, the book traces what the author, historian Wolfgang Sonne, upholds as 'a conventional pro-urban attitude in modern urban design' (Sonne 2017: 12). He opposes this approach to that of the 'disurbanists', ranging from Garden City advo-

cates to the followers of the architectural avant-garde, exemplified by Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse, Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, or Archigram's megastructures. Deliberately omitting the radical experiments of the 20th-century avant-garde and their followers, the book effectively constructs an alternative canon in which figures such as Marcello Piacentini in early 20th-century Italy or Karl Meitinger in postwar Munich become the new protagonists in constructing or restoring the elements of a more traditional urban pattern, demonstrating that such examples 'recur throughout the entire course of the 20th century in Europe and North America' (2017: 7). The book builds on the author's previous scholarship, both on the history of early 20th-century 'dense' urban blocks as a model for building sustainable and compact cities today (Sonne 2009) and on early 20th-century civic art, from Camillo Sitte to the City Beautiful Movement (Sonne 2003). Sonne's choice thus to focus exclusively on examples from Europe and North America derives from his own particular expertise. That choice also inevitably reinforces a certain Eurocentric bias in the historiography of urban design by which urbanity becomes synonymous with the European classical ideal of *civitas* and its architectural manifestations, such as the forum or the agora, especially in the central districts of larger cities. Suburbia
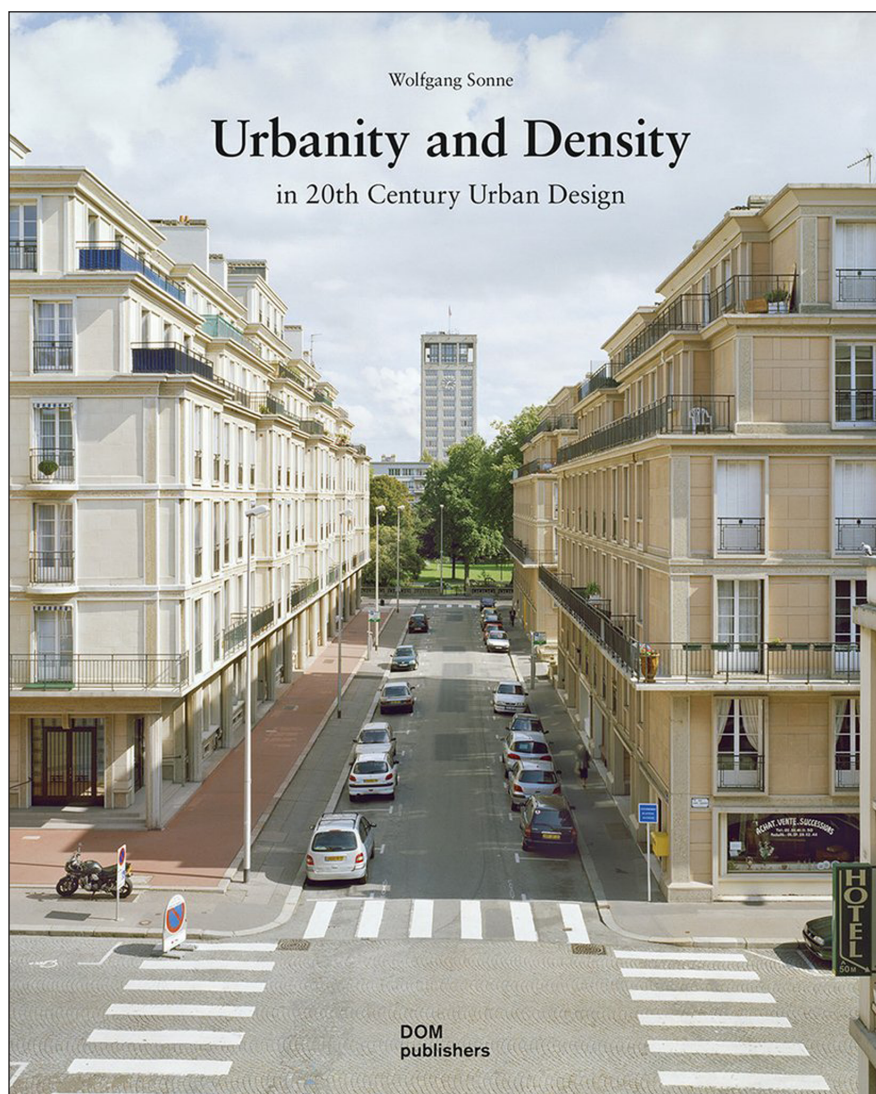
Figure 1: Cover of Wolfgang Sonne's *Urbanity and Density in 20th Century Urban Design*.

is likewise also excluded for its anti-urbanity, under the definition that Sonne pursues.

The main narrative is that of urbanistic continuity in the face of destructive change. Following a theoretical introduction, the book is divided into five roughly chronological sections. The first three chapters recount the continuity of a traditionalist urbanism from the 1900s through the years of the Second World War. These chapters focus mainly on particular urban typologies as they developed in various European countries and the United States between 1890 and 1950: 'Urban Residential Reform Blocks'; 'Squares and Streets as a Public Stage'; and 'High-Rises as Generators of Public Urban Space'. The last two chapters address, in the period from 1940 to 2010, conventional and traditionalist attempts to reconstruct war-torn cities in historically sensitive ways, as well as more recent projects that have sought to repair the 'extensive damage' to traditional urban fabric wrought by functionalist or avant-garde modes of urbanism (Sonne 2017: 270). The traditional or 'dense' city is thereby presented through a narrative of continuity, partial destruction, and triumphant but incomplete restoration. The point of view

is emphatically anti-avant-garde, 'asserting the existence of a conventional pro-urban attitude in modern urban design throughout the 20th century' that not only co-existed with radical 'anti-urban' experiments, but also proved their value over now discredited experiments and breaks with tradition (2017: 12).

The examples in the book almost all illustrate particular typologies, which are grouped together thematically. First and foremost, they are urban designs that enclose the traditional lines of streets and squares, formally shaping public space and sharply delimiting the boundaries between the public and private realms. Second, they suggest an urban continuity with the historical tradition of continental European patterns of perimeter blocks and boulevards. Finally, they are meant to activate public space through multiple stories and mixed uses, especially employing retail stores at the street level. *Urbanity and Density in 20th Century Urban Design*, therefore, constitutes a kind of engaged history, simultaneously analysing a particular subset of 20th-century urban designs whilst also advocating a distinct direction for urban design based on these examples. 'Writing history is often used to justify

one's own point of view', the author admits, while adding, 'This construction of a tradition of an urban, dense city in the 20th century does not pretend to be a prognosis and certainly not a program for the future along the lines of: as there has been this tradition it will continue in the future' (2017: 324). Certainly, however, the reader gains the impression that this book advocates that the type of urban design discussed here *ought* to continue, as such forms, according to Sonne, define the essence of a full urban life. This viewpoint is, of course, not new. It closely aligns with European neo-rationalist discourses, such as those of Rob and Léon Krier (Krier 1975, 1978) or Josef Paul Kleihues (Kleihues 1987), as well as with the Congress for a New Urbanism in the United States led by Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk (Duany et al. 1991), all of whom receive special mention in the final section of the book dedicated to the theme, 'Repairing the City 1960–2010'. Sonne also references various postwar critiques of CIAM functionalism, from the British Townscape movement of the 1940s and '50s to the polemical attacks of Jane Jacobs in the 1960s and the advocates of 'urban conservation' in 1970s West Germany. Indeed, the aesthetically conservative stream of planners, architects, and politicians has, in recent decades, sought to employ neo-traditionalist urban design to restore a lively street life and a dynamic public sphere, and they will now find plentiful historical documentation in this richly detailed volume to support their point of view.

Nevertheless, the major claim that certain urban forms epitomize what Sonne calls 'urbanity' remains questionable. Urbanity in this book becomes an overly burdened term, simultaneously signifying qualities of being: culturally refined; cosmopolitan; socially heterogeneous; politically democratic; economically diversified; and functionally mixed. Added to this blend of abstract qualities is the apparently necessary corollary of a specific urban form: 'A practical urbanity is dependent on architecturally defined spaces, accessible by foot, like streets and squares which are the indispensable physical basis of the intended cultural, social and political aspects of urbanity' (2017: 37). In fact, many of the urban design projects that Sonne praises for their aesthetic qualities of unity, continuity, and scale bear little or no relationship to these social or political significations of urbanity. The harmoniously designed civic centres of the American City Beautiful Movement, for example, were notorious for their exclusion of heterogeneous functions or activities, and Jane Jacobs, in fact, decried them in 1961 as barren, unused spaces. Moreover, the monumental squares of fascist Italy and Spain, or the Stalinist blocks and boulevards of Moscow and East Berlin, which are richly illustrated in this book, can hardly be said to share the same set of democratic ideals about public discourse in urban space. The relationship between politics and urban form is always slippery and contingent, and nearly identical urban forms can be labelled authoritarian or democratic under different circumstances, as when the grassroots activists in West Berlin in the 1970s reclaimed the 19th-century *Mietskaserne* (rental barracks) and perimeter blocks, nearly reversing the oppressive

meaning they had held for progressive socialists in the early 20th century. Conversely, it seems doubtful that the social, cultural, and political qualities of urbanity defined by Sonne can only be found within the urban typologies that he describes. 'Urbanity' is driven by many other factors than the specific shapes of streets or buildings, and the bustle of New York's Times Square or London's South Bank occur in spaces that are quite unlike the kinds of formal typologies illustrated in *Urbanity and Density in 20th Century Urban Design.*

Ultimately, the book remains more convincing on a formal, aesthetic level than on a political or social one. There is, in fact, little analysis of the politics driving the particular urban designs being described, but this is not really the book's main goal. The apolitical stance seems to serve another purpose, namely a re-focusing of historical and critical attention on 'the richness of successful 20th-century urban design forms' (2017: 325). Here again, 'success' seems to be a measure primarily of the *a priori* typological criteria that Sonne upholds as 'urban', rather than of any demonstrated spatial practice or social use. He is a master of formal analysis and reinterprets urban design aesthetics through the lens of historical writings on urban design from outside the modernist canon, reemphasizing qualities of visual scale and façade proportions that the architectural avant-garde had often discounted. The book is filled with perceptive descriptions of lesser-known projects, such as Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik's designs for bridges and squares in Ljubljana in the 1920s and 30s; and East German architect Kurt Leucht's design for the new industrial city of Eisenhüttenstadt in the early 1950s. The book also delves into some of the more obscure urban design treatises of the 20th century, such as *Good and Bad Manners in Architecture* (1924) by British architect Arthur Trystan Edwards, or *Renaissance im Städtebau* [Renaissance in Urban Design] by West German architect Albert Deneke (1946). Revisiting such treatises fills an important gap in the intellectual history of urban design theory, between the early 20th-century follower of Camillo Sitte and the neo-rationalist treatises of the 1960s and '70s.

Despite its heavily European focus, the sheer scale and scope of research of *Urbanity and Density in 20th Century Urban Design* is impressive, and all historians of modern architecture and planning will find it a useful reference work for further study. In the end, the reader will perhaps wish that the author had taken a more critical and less aesthetically doctrinaire approach to the book's main themes — historicizing the 20th-century debates over 'urbanity' and 'density' in their varied national and planning contexts, rather than presenting these terms mainly as vague abstractions uneasily fitted to a particular set of formal, urbanistic ideals. Doubtless, however, the examples described in the book will serve as a spur, perhaps less to direct the agenda of contemporary urban planning, and more to encourage in-depth case studies of urban design history, extending to the divergent political and cultural contingencies of their genesis and construction.

Exhibit A

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Léa-Catherine Szacka, *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale,* Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 264 pages, 2016; ISBN: 978-88-317-2672-6.

Léa-Catherine Szacka's *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale* provides a thorough and seductive reading of an architectural *bête noire*: postmodernism (**Figure 2**). The author insists on the pivotal role of the Strada Novissima as an era-defining architecture exhibition and milestone introducing postmodernism to a large audience by some of the main protagonists of what became known as the postmodern movement in architecture. *Exhibiting the Postmodern* is the result of Szacka's doctoral thesis 'Exhibiting the Postmodern: Three Narratives for a History of the 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale', presented at The Bartlett School of Architec-

ture in January 2012. The book has won the 2017 Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion from the SAH GB and it is the starting point for Szacka's numerous activities addressing issues related to the history of postmodernism. It brings to life the phenomenon with all its complexities and contradictions, on the basis of comprehensive archival research, interviews with a stellar cast of architects, and a stunning collection of photographic documentation. The result is a book that is crucial both in revising the history of that infamous exhibition and in offering critical reflection on the conditions in which postmodern architecture was exhibited.

The Strada Novissima consisted of twenty facades lined up to make a street in the Corderie dell'Arsenale — a gallery of architectural self-portraits, as the director Paolo Portoghesi imagined it. As Szacka argues, the exhibition unleashed the prevalence of 'image' over 'tectonic and spatial qualities', which became a 'topic of contention for the last thirty years' (2016: 15). Her book is part of a new wave of research on postmodernism that gained momentum with such landmarks as Charles Jencks's review of 50 years of postmodernist architecture in *The Story of Post-Modernism* (2011), the V&A exhibition

Figure 2: Book cover of Léa-Catherine Szacka's *Exhibiting the Postmodern: The 1980 Venice Architecture Biennale*.

'Postmodernism: Style and Subversion, 1970–1990' in 2011–12, and its catalogue, published in 2017. Research gained new traction with recent publications such as *Postmodern Buildings in Britain* (2017), by Geraint Franklin and Elain Harwood, and *Revisiting Postmodernism* (2017), by Terry Farrell and Adam Nathaniel Furman. The V&A proposal in particular — where fragments of the Strada Novissima were rebuilt — along with the recent publications mentioned above do not dwell on the acrimony that was prevalent when the concept first surfaced in the late seventies, or when it was first evaluated back in the mid-'80s. In this new context, Szacka's book contributes centrally to the debate, given its scientific qualities and fresh look.

Szacka privileges a detailed reassessment of the exhibition display techniques over an analysis of the contentious propositions of the Strada Novissima. She writes, for example, that the installations, 'more than reflecting a *style …* herald many of the characteristics of the architectural and more broadly cultural period we are still experiencing today' (2016: 29; emphasis in original). Given the difficulty extricating issues of 'style' from 'substance' in relation to the concept and phenomenon of postmodernism, she shows how the exhibition has been a turning point in architectural history, something that is confirmed by the polemics of its reception. The book demonstrates how the Strada Novissima extravaganza provided some of the 'fundamentals' of what became known as architectural postmodernism.

Revisiting *The Presence of the Past* — the global name of the First International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice Biennale — through Szacka's lens feels like an archaeology of the future. The iconic craze of many contemporary starchitects is anticipated in many of the funny and poetic street-facades built by set designers and technicians of the Cinecittà studios in Rome. The surrealist tone of most facades, with historical motifs turned into delirious textures, meant not only 'the end of prohibitionism', as Portoghesi wished for (1980: 9), but also the beginning of something as yet to be defined. Globalization was just around the corner. Architectural postmodernism equals pre-globalization.

The originality of Szacka's book lies in two points that she proposes are key to understanding the legacy of *The Presence of the Past*. The first idea is that the 'architecture exhibition', which became omnipresent in architectural culture since the Strada Novissima, was an intrinsic component of postmodernism. The second point she makes is that the postmodernist compulsion to blur the boundaries between 'reality' and 'representation' redefined not only exhibitions but architecture itself. Very aptly, Szacka quotes Gianni Vattimo: 'If there is a passage from modernity to postmodernity, it seems to lie in a wearing away of the boundaries of the real and the unreal' (2016: 22).

Well documented and rigorous, agile and versatile, *Exhibiting the Postmodern* portrays the very features of the postmodernist beast. It starts classically with the famous Habermas remark about the first Architecture Biennale as 'an avant-garde of reversed forms', which meant that architectural postmodernism went right to the centre of the philosophical debate, after Jean-François Lyotard's architecturally unaware *La Condition Postmoderne* (1979). But Szacka then contextualizes the origins of the event in the political and cultural Italian scene of the mid-'60s. It is a well-established fact that the disenchantment with politics after May 1968 is one of the decisive factors of the emergence of postmodernism. In the chapter entitled 'From Demonstrations to Discotheques', she describes the Italian '*riflusso* (backward surge)' as a return from the urge to mount public manifestations back to 'private' feelings (2016: 92) that is key to understanding the postmodernist turn.

'No Future' was the punk motto. Irony was a way to deal with pessimism. And there is a lot of irony in the Strada Novissima: the way out of 'prohibitionism' seemed to rely mostly on distorted comic book motifs, familiar narratives turned uncanny and sinister. What *Exhibiting the Postmodern* demonstrates vividly is that a defining modus operandi of postmodernism was to put architecture back in the public arena, to reach wide audiences while simultaneously providing intellectual debate, a recipe that Jencks coined as 'double-coding' (Jencks 1991: 2).

For a phenomenon always under attack for being evasive, elusive, and indefinable, postmodernism is a result of a set of circumstances, 'aesthetic, historical, political, economic' (Szacka 2016: 29). The very divisive debate on postmodernism and on the Strada Novissima remained firmly anchored in architectural practice and criticism throughout the years. This book demonstrates that the historical distance has reached a point where it is time for architectural historians to build the archives of postmodernism and write nuanced yet comprehensive analyses of that era. As the resentfulness towards 'bad taste' or 'fairground' architecture has become part of the history of postmodernism itself, *Exhibiting the Postmodern* attests to the critical importance for architectural history to reassess Exhibit A of a chapter in history that has not yet found its conclusion.

Architecture and Modernization in Turkey During the Cold War

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Despite the great volume of architectural history on modern Turkey — dissertations, articles, and books — only a limited corpus of works is published in English, reaching a global audience. Most of this Anglophone literature (with the exception of Esra Akcan and Sibel Bozdoğan's *Turkey: Modern Architectures in History*), focuses on the first half of the 20th century and the dramatic transformation from the Ottoman Empire to Republican Turkey. Edited by Meltem Ö. Gürel, *Mid-Century Modernism in Turkey* breaks

this mold (**Figure 3**). Casting light on Turkish architecture in the period that immediately followed World War II, years that coincide with the country's early foray into pluralist democracy, this book is a coveted addition to architecture history.

According to Gürel's introduction, the book aims 'to rethink and re-read post-war architectural culture and its global effects beyond simplistic, canonical, and ontological explanations, while demonstrating the fluidity of architectural practices globally' (1). Different societies and cultures respond to modernization in unique ways that contradict the universalist theories of modernization projected in the 1950s. The critical reading of Turkish modernization offered in the book provides further proof of 'the plurality and heterogeneity of multiple modernities across the globe', as Sibel Bozdoğan explains in her essay, 'Turkey's Postwar Modernism: A Retrospective Overview of Architecture, Urbanism, and Politics in the 1950s' (12). In contrast to much of Europe, which suffered severe war-related demolition during World War II and had to face the problem of urban reconstruction, Turkey never entered combat, and officially took sides only after the Allies' victory was evident. At the same time, the young republican state was itself still 'under construction', seeking to modernize in the face of the territorial losses and infrastructure problems of the former empire. In examining the advanced phase of the republic's 'construction' efforts, therefore, it becomes clear that the eight essays collected in *Mid-Century Modernism in Turkey* play a significant role in Turkey's cultural history.

The second introductory essay, by Sibel Bozdoğan, sets the stage for the six ensuing case studies, tracing the remarkable similarities in policy and outcome between contemporary Turkey, under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), and 1950s Turkey, under the Democrat Party (DP). According to Bozdoğan, Turkey's recent history was heavily shaped by a 'political divide between a conservative but pro-American, capitalist right versus a secular but more nationalist and statist left … deeply rooted in the 1950s' (12). Under the aegis of the DP's populist conservatism, the 1950s were defined by the young republic's need to position itself within international alliances and the subsequent influence of consumerism, as its NATO membership pulled the country closer to Western Europe and to its largest ally, the United States. As a direct result of industrialization, agricultural
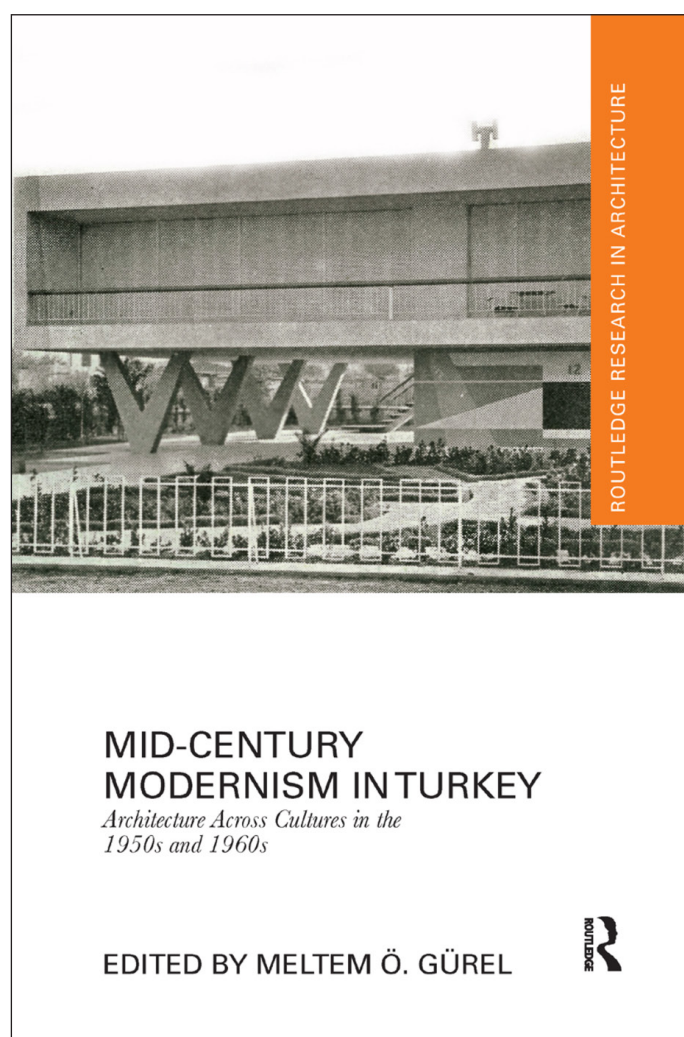

Figure 3: Book cover of Meltem O. Gürel (ed.), *Mid-Century Modernism in Turkey (Architecture Across Cultures in the 1950s and 1960s).*

mechanization, and the creation of a new highway infrastructure — all of which were supported by foreign aid mechanisms — the urban populations of mid-century Turkey boomed. So did architectural production — both in the country's major cities and in the countryside. Gürel's case study essay, entitled 'Seashore Readings: The Road from Sea Baths to Summerhouses in Mid-Twentieth Century Izmir', calls attention to building boom that developed on the largely rural western and southern coasts of the country, resulting in housing types such as the *gecekondu*, the *apartman*, and finally the *yazlık* (the Turkish variants of the squatter house, apartment block, and summer house). While new roads made it possible for the middle class to reach the seaside in their cars and made the land accessible for building, a new culture of summer recreation developed with the introduction of affordable domestic appliances. In narrating how this summer culture proliferated around the western coast, Gürel argues that architects found a new ground for experimentation in the summer house.

The chapters by Emre Gönlügür, Burak Erdim, and Annabel Jane Wharton trace the impact Turkey's relationship with its western allies had on its architectural production in different scales. In 'Exhibiting American Domestic Modernity at the Izmir International Fair', Gönlügür outlines the promises of 'good life' American consumerism conveyed in the 'Ridgewood' model home at the fair. From archived press reports of the United States' Department of State, he examines how the display was perceived by its designers and different audiences in a global arena that brought together Turks, Soviets, and Americans. He also shows how this architectural prototype left an indelible warning sign on the Turkish psyche, if ever the country were to swerve toward the socialist alternative. Gönlügür tells us how the Turkish press, visiting crowds and even the Soviets, exposed to American middle class affluence, were enchanted by the model home display.

Burak Erdim's essay, 'Under the Flags of the Marshall Plan: Multiple Modernisms and Professional Legitimacy in the Cold War Middle East, 1950–1964', further explores Turkey's postwar geopolitical conundrum via the history of the Middle East Technical University. The Western Bloc's interest in positioning Turkey as an outpost in order to calibrate its relationship to the Middle East and the Soviet Union had a direct impact on the founding of the university as an institution of influence in the Middle East. The campus's initial masterplan and the academic curriculum designed by University of Pennsylvania's Gregory H. Perkins not only set a precedent for other campus designs and curricula in Turkey, but also reinforced the perception of the university as a forum for academic independence and critical thinking. The perception of direct American intervention in the university's founding, however, led to a reactionary development that for decades was to seal the university's identity as a left-wing stronghold. Erdim concludes that 'the transnational history of METU reveals much that has been hidden in terms of the way the links between architecture, technical education, planning, and

development were contested and spatialized in the organization of a postwar university' (136).

Following Erdim, Annabel J. Wharton, in 'The Istanbul Hilton, 1951–2014: Modernity and Its Demise', argues that the Hilton company did not have to spend much of its own budget for the realization of its Istanbul branch, as the Turkish government and the American Economic Cooperation administration were more than willing to cover a substantial portion of the costs. The American government saw Istanbul as the 'real crossroads of the East and West' (151). The Hilton, in turn, saw the city as a major opportunity for American capital's eastward expansion, while the Turkish government saw in it a landmark occasion to fulfill its election promises of becoming 'little America'.

While welcoming foreign aid and opening the country to the cultural influence of 'Americanization', the DP continued the ethnic homogenization policies which coincided with the dissolution of the multi-ethnic empire in the last century. İpek Yada Akpınar's essay titled 'Urbanization Represented in the Historical Peninsula: Turkification of Istanbul in the 1950s' points to the conflicted and incoherent nature of DP's political program. Based on some striking archival research into title deeds, İpek Yada Akpınar questions whether the large-scale demolitions and expropriations for a new transportation infrastructure, led by prime minister Adnan Menderes in Istanbul in the 1950s, had any conscious links to ethnic homogenization.

In this period of rapid internationalization, a younger generation of Turkish architects gradually detached themselves from the wartime nationalist politics of architectural identity, and instead, adopted a view of architecture and planning as a problem of scientific expertise. In the essay 'Architecture as Advertising: The Istanbul Reklam Building', İpek Türeli attempts to understand this shift. Built for Istanbul's biggest advertising company in the first private architecture competition, the Reklam building was a deliberate attempt to house state-of-the-art facilities for the burgeoning advertising industry; its architects adopted neo-brutalism as a direct reference to contemporaneity. In a country slowly adapting to consumerism, the client and the architects saw the building as an opportunity to raise their firms' professional profiles and to provide for the expansion of Turkish advertising from print media to include film, as a new building program had to be written by the architects to house necessary facilities.

In common with many edited compilations, *Mid-Century Modernism in Turkey (Architecture Across Cultures in the 1950s and 1960s)* promises more than its contents can reasonably cover of this rich and diverse period. Nevertheless, *Mid-Century Modernism in Turkey*'s strength lies in uncovering facets of Turkey's response to international influences that shaped its modernization efforts, acquainting us with its distinctive features. The book introduces new topics, avenues, and questions that are sure to encourage further studies on the ongoing story of global modernization.

Aldo Rossi and the Conundrum of the Analogy

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Aldo Rossi: The Architecture and Art of the Analogous City, Princeton University School of Architecture, Princeton, New Jersey, USA, February 5–March 30, 2018.

An exhibition on a selection of postmodern works by the famed Italian postmodernist Aldo Rossi, entitled *Aldo Rossi: The Architecture and Art of the Analogous City*, was on view at the Princeton School of Architecture from February 5 to March 30, 2018. The exhibition, conceived as part of a larger research effort and curated by Daniel Sherer, probed several works by Rossi in depth while also asking larger questions about the international intellectual roots of postmodernism. Much of the critical understanding of Rossi's importance began to emerge in the US in the 1980s as institutions recognized the importance of postmodernism and sought to identify a handful of flagbearers.

In 1990 Aldo Rossi received the Pritzker Prize, and was cited by the jury for his championing of a return to formal concerns in architecture throughout the last four decades of the 20th century, his engagement in the relationship between theory and practice, and his role as a leader of the Neo-Rationalist movement. In his acceptance speech he noted that he had 'never believed that any profession could be disjointed from culture', certainly not architecture (Rossi 1990). Rather, Rossi promoted the autonomy of architecture while also avoiding framing autonomy as a reactionary position. This holistic ethos, most indelibly inscribed in his book *L'architettura dell città* (1966), marked an architecture that was remarkably divorced from fashion and neither fully modern nor postmodern. A quote from Rossi appears prominently silkscreened in the exhibition: 'I cannot be called postmodern, since I was never modern' (Rossi, Hannesen, & Geisert 1994). It was, if anything, an endeavor of principled art, which may explain why Ada Louise Huxtable once said that Rossi was 'as much a poet as he is an architect' (US Copyright Office 1989).

The exhibition is ostensibly centered on the poetry of his architecture and the role of the rhetorical device of analogy herein, a role that has been thoroughly and, one might argue, exceedingly explored in Anglophone scholarship. Analogy, as Sherer argues familiarly in his accompanying essay, could function as a 'bridge between different forms of knowledge' (Sherer 2018: 8). For Rossi, analogy is a tool that creates connection rather than juxtaposition, which in turn allows bridging theory and architecture, history and memory, the city and the building. Through this lens we can understand Rossi's profound love for platonic form, less as a dogma and more as a will to communicate and resonate with the hearts and minds of the public and their collective experience. The exhibition, in its presentation of both well-known and lesser-known projects by Rossi, explores the tension between a rigorous and profoundly personal artistic practice and a desire to reach the public.

The exhibition is organized around different phases of Rossi's career, both chronological and thematic. Several original drawings, models, and other documents originating from a handful of different international archives and collections, offer attractive, if somewhat incomplete, documentation of projects like the Gallaratese (1967–1972), the Modena Cemetery (1971–1984), the Teatro del Mondo (1980), the Villa Borgo in Ticino (1973), and the Casa dello Studente in Chieti (1977). Important international projects, like the apartments for the Internationale Bauausstellung (IBA) (1979) and the Berlin Block (1981–1988) in Berlin, the Bonnefantenmuseum in Maastricht (1995), and the Scholastic Corporation Headquarters in New York (2001), are omitted in favour of a focus on Rossi's work in Italy, a decision that goes curiously unexplained. Their omission is somewhat disappointing as it fails to allow the visitor to test the universality claim of Rossi's urban theories when applied to urban contexts that are historically and geographically different from Italian cities. Universality of ideas is, of course, bound to geography. For Rossi '[t]he contrast between particular and universal, between individual and collective, emerges from the city and from its construction, its architecture'. (Rossi 1984: 21).

Nevertheless, all of these projects, and their stunning drawings, sufficiently demonstrate how the position Rossi staked in architectural discourse proffered a truly radical turn in architectural form-making, emphasizing the rich resources for urban design, drawn from a panoply of urban tropes and types. Rossi's insistence on memory rather than history, on experience rather than a prescribed program, and on imagination rather than positivism is just as vivid in the array of drawings and models as it is in the buildings in situ. Why, then, the preoccupation with analogy?

The power of the analogy is forcefully projected onto the Teatro del Mondo project, a structure in which Rossi found a productive synergy between the openness and urban roles of the amphitheatre and that of the barge to create something wholly new: a floating theatre. The theatre was anchored for the 1980 Venice Biennale at the Punto della Dogana, the place, according to Rossi, 'where architecture ended and the world of the imagination or even the irrational began' (exhibition wall copy; from Rossi 1981: 66). As Sherer puts it, the 'Teatro is at once a continually displaced architectural signifier, a part of a shifting cityscape of Venice, and a built demonstration of the figurative power of analogical thought' (Sherer 2018).

To underscore Rossi's key role in bridging theory and design in Euro-American discourse, Sherer displays architectural documents that seek to shed light on seminal texts about Rossi and the intellectual impact he had with different scholars. Most prominent in the exhibition are the writings of Manfredo Tafuri (Tafuri 1980), who stressed themes of historical materialism and structuralism in Rossi's work, a curatorial choice that somewhat backgrounds the more formalist readings of Vincent Scully (Arnell et. al. 1985) and Peter Eisenman (Rossi 1984) and generally marginalizes non-English-language scholarship on Rossi. A series of interesting panels does highlight briefly Rossi's interlocution with Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Adolf Loos, and Ezio Bonfanti.

Figure 4: Exhibition installation view of *Aldo Rossi: The Architecture and Art of the Analogous City.* Photograph by Josh Reynolds.

At first sight, the exhibition seems both worthy as an effort in bringing Rossi's impressive drawings, models, and other works together as well as a curatorial (as opposed to purely scholarly) exploration of Rossi's affinity for analogical thinking and the discursive projects he both elaborated and initiated (**Figure 4**). There is, however, a lack of equanimity in this co-exhibition of design and theory, a strategy I suspect is structured around the very dichotomous interpretation of analogy that Rossi himself tried to supersede. The texts, those in the exhibition and the essay itself, weigh too heavily on the objects and ask them to do too much representative work in the service of a very narrow yet erudite essayistic curatorial statement. This leaves little room for an encounter with Rossi's design records and objects which conjure aspects that he found of crucial importance in architecture: memory, experience, and imagination. With analogy as both the subject and object of the exhibition, one can't help but feel somewhat trapped in an established rhetorical loop, however serene the architecture of that entrapment may appear.

Mies and Stirling in The City

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Mies van der Rohe + James Stirling: Circling the Square, The Architecture Gallery, RIBA, March 8–June 25, 2017.

In 2017 the Royal Institute of British Architects staged a comparison between two historic projects, one by Mies van der Rohe and the other by James Stirling, for a historic site in London's financial district known as The City, by displaying models, architects' drawings and sketches, articles from the popular and professional press, and letters to and from interested parties (**Figure 5**). The exhibition looked back in time to events of the mid-1980s, revealing how Mies's unbuilt modernist design for an office tower and open plaza had actually paved the way toward realizing a building by James Stirling, the one that sits on the site today, known as No. 1 Poultry (1994–97), and which has recently been listed by Historic England as an exemplary postmodern monument. The exhibition is interesting for its curatorial bias because, although it appears to be about a historical subject, it resists setting that subject in a structured narrative, its stated intention being solely to compare the design methods of the subject architects.

To accompany the exhibition, a small debate was staged that brought together a panel of 'experts' to discuss the merits of Mies's Mansion House Square design versus those of Stirling's No. 1 Poultry ('The Inquiry', 2017). The discussion was framed as a simple 'pro' or 'contra' argument, where those in favour of Mies tended to dislike the very same features and qualities that those favouring Stirling enjoyed, and vice-versa. In Mies's favour was the futuristic, reductive, unadorned quality of his design and the idea of a large open square, combining a solution to problems of congestion with a potential place of festival and assembly. In Stirling's favour was the bumptious, quasi-historicist, jokey quality of his design and the idea of an open interiorized rotunda at the heart of a dense urban block as a place of transition for people crossing the site. A further point of comparison was Mies's use of rectangular geometries and the organizing principle of the grid, as opposed to Stirling's more baroque geometries and his use of collage as a strategy of composition.

At the end of the debate the audience was asked to vote. The outcome was inconclusive, which raises the question: given the impossibility to decide in strictly formal terms, what were the circumstances of the past that led to the preference of Stirling's design over Mies's? Anyone
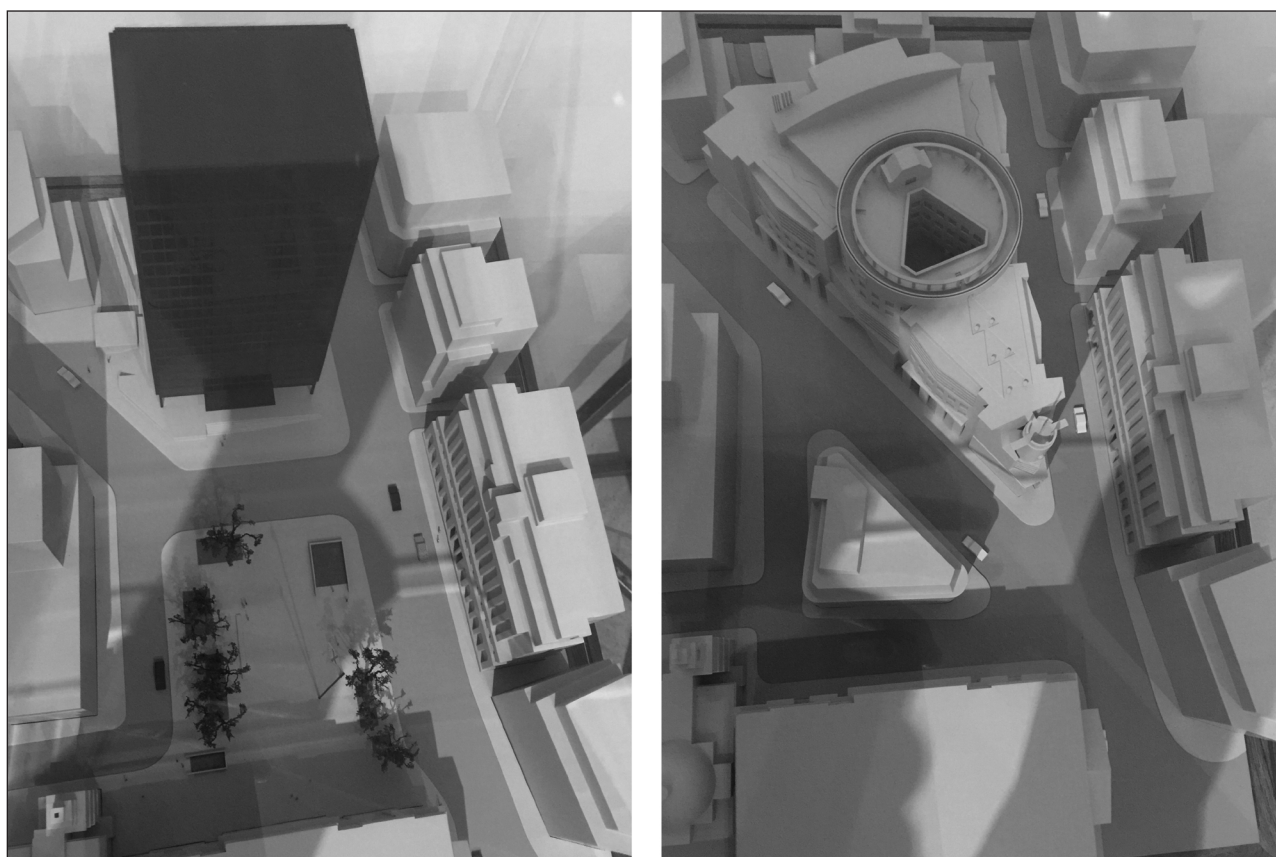
Figure 5: *Mies van der Rohe + James Stirling: Circling the Square.* Models on view at the exhibition: left, Mies' stridently modern Mansion House Square, and right, Stirling's playfully postmodern No. 1 Poultry. Photo by the author.

expecting the exhibition to supply an answer would have been disappointed. Aside from a few selected letters and press cuttings, the material on show was explicitly for the purpose of formal comparison, including architectural drawings, models, sketches, and material samples.

Looking for an answer elsewhere, one reads in Detlef Mertin's monograph, *Mies* (2014), how the formal lineage of his unrealized design for the Mansion House Square can be traced back to the Seagram Building in New York (1954–58). Mertins argues that Mies's design for the Seagram Building set the precedent for the architectural type of combined office tower and open plaza development, which after its construction 'triggered a change in the zoning bylaw' of New York City and indirectly 'encouraged the construction of more public plazas'. Mertins reads Mies's London design as having failed because the urban typology of the office tower and open plaza was 'too controversial in its modernity to be realized in that city' (Mertins 2014: 423). Mertins' assessment is correct in that the modernity of Mies's design was a contributing factor to its eventual rejection, but that was not the main reason the project failed; it was rather the quite considerable delay in the procurement process.

It was in the 1960s that Mies, then in the last phase of his career, had been commissioned by the property developer and art collector Peter Palumbo to propose a Seagram-type development for the site next to the Mansion House. At the time the design was granted outline planning permission. In those days it was not necessary to actually own the property rights in order to apply for planning permission for some particular site, and it was understood that full permission could be granted at a later date on the basis of the same outline design. But it took Palumbo about twenty years and cost him £10 million to acquire the twelve freeholds and 245 leaseholds necessary to acquire the full property rights to develop Mies's design. So it was not until 1982, by which time Mies was dead (he passed away in 1969) that Palumbo was in a position to apply for full planning permission. When he did apply, permission was refused. Palumbo appealed against the refusal on the basis that he already had outline permission and had acquired the necessary property holdings in good faith. The appeal led to a public inquiry, launched by the British Government in 1984. The proceedings were long and protracted but the outcome was no different; again permission was refused.

Although the two decades of delay had been necessary for Palumbo to acquire full property rights, the delay also meant that the typology of the office tower and open plaza was by then perceived to be old-fashioned and out-of-date. This was the main reason permission was refused. The type seemed especially out of date to contemporary conservationists who valued tight streets, medium-rise building blocks, and the eclectic historicism of the predominantly Victorian and Edwardian building stock. In other words, Mies's design no longer carried the same cultural values of the 1960s, when it was greeted with enthusiasm and when the necessary approvals were easily

given. Furthermore, and perhaps of greater detriment to the success of the project, was the fact of Mies's death. In the criteria for valuing works of architecture, the building is assumed to be the architect's unique product; the architect is thought to relate to the building rather in the way an artist relates to an artwork, that is, as the original author of the work. In fact we can see this assumption at work in the recent listing of No. 1 Poultry, where one of the criteria states the building is of architectural and historic importance because it is by James Stirling.

At the time of the 1984 public inquiry, Mies's followers and fans tried to rebuff the authorship-based criticism by arguing it was the design and not its execution that constituted Mies's original contribution, pointing out how, by the time of his death, the design had been fully explored and represented in models and drawings and that Mies had left behind sufficient information for the building team to go ahead with the construction in conformity with his intentions. (The team included Mies's office in Chicago, the UK-based architects Holford Associates, and Peter Carter, author of the popular book *Mies van der Rohe at Work* (1999). Carter had been the project architect for Mansion House Square under Mies; he eventually moved back to the UK and continued his involvement in the project through his own practice). But this way of arguing only exacerbated matters, making it seem as if the act of posthumous construction would constitute yet another resurrection of Mies, a kind of twin to the one that was currently taking place in Barcelona, where Mies's temporary pavilion of 1929 was undergoing reconstruction. Especially, if not exclusively, those who were not fond of modernist architecture found the idea of resurrecting Mies at Mansion House unbearable.

One item on display at *Circling the Square* (exhibit 14) strongly evidenced anti-Miesian sentiment — a letter dated 21 April 1985 from the 'young fogey' architectural historian, journalist, campaigner, and conservationist Gavin Stamp to the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. In his letter Stamp rudely refers to Mies as a '99-year-old German from another age who is dead' and to his Mansion House Square design as an example of the 'inhuman megalomania of architects'. He concludes by suggesting the site be developed 'by younger, talented and *British* architects' (emphasis his). There is no reason to suppose that Stamp's letter had any effect on Thatcher, but she would have been against the idea of the plaza simply because it raised the spectre of mass political protest and rallying at the heart of the capital; and against the tower because she wanted to encourage commercial high-rise development out at the newly designated enterprise zone on the Isle of Dogs in London's Docklands, better known today as Canary Wharf.

Circling the Square demonstrated how Palumbo's site was developed according to James Stirling's low-level urban block design in striped shades of pink and buff stonework, with its embedded circular atrium in place of Mies's open plaza, but what was not clear was that Stirling's design came after the public inquiry of 1984. The exhibition showed how, effectively and knowingly, Stirling's design reversed the urban figure ground pattern of Mies'

prismatic form set in open space. And it mentioned how, at the time of the public inquiry, Stirling's career was on an upward trajectory. In 1984 he had just completed the widely acclaimed Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, thought to be exemplary of the new postmodern attitudes to form and space in architecture and urbanism that had been emerging in the international architecture culture of the 1970s (Girouard 1998). This building too consists of an interiorized yet open rotunda, with an architectural promenade cutting through a substantial building mass. Like No. 1 Poultry, the Stuttgart building displays amusing architectural motifs, including fake Cyclopean walls in stripy stonework with garishly coloured handrails. And, stooping to the jingoistic level of Gavin Stamp's letter to Thatcher, it might even be argued the formal resemblances between No. 1 Poultry and Stuttgart expressed a preference for German rather than British values in architecture. Be that as it may, in the mid-1980s Stirling could rely on the success of his Stuttgart project to persuade the city authorities and arbiters of taste that his design for No. 1 Poultry was sufficiently fashionable and up to date to merit construction.

Today it is largely forgotten that London almost had a building by Mies at its centre. It was only because of the historical contingencies, unfolding across time, in which both architects and their projects were immersed, including the economics of property development and the human desire for novelty that The City ended up with a Stirling and not a Mies, a circular hole through which to pass rather than an open plaza. *Circling the Square* is to be commended for having staged the two richly documented projects for contemporary public viewing. However, the exhibition understated the projects' temporal relations, which are crucial for understanding this history. The fact that reality momentarily manifests some condition X and not Y is a crucial aspect of architectural history and urbanism. Neglecting past realities, even with the best of intentions, can only be detrimental to the understanding of our own contemporary condition.

Competing Interests
The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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