REVIEW

Reviews Winter 2021

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Vigotti, L. A review of Nadja Aksamija, Clark Maines, and Phillip Wagoner (eds.), *Palimpsests: Buildings, Sites, Time.* Turnhout: Brepols, 2017.

Grossman, M. A review of David Hemsoll, *Emulating Antiquity: Renaissance Buildings from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019.

Ramirez, E. A review of *Countryside, The Future*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 20 February 2020–15 February 2021.

Mandarin or Maverick? Reassessing the Architecture of Gordon Bunshaft

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Nicholas Adams, *Gordon Bunshaft and SOM: Building Corporate Modernism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 296 pages, 2019, ISBN: 9780300227475.

Gordon Bunshaft remains an oddly controversial figure in modern architectural history. Was he a consequential figure or a corporate shill? Was he 'The Establishment's Architect-Plus', as a 1972 *New York Times* profile labeled him, or an outsider who carved out a niche for himself on the inside? Does he deserve credit for the buildings attributed to him or, as some critics now maintain, were they largely designed by the senior designers who worked under him at Skidmore, Ownings, and Merrill (SOM)? Nicholas Adams, the author of a well-regarded monograph about SOM, *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: SOM Since 1936* (2007), answers all these questions and more in his new book about Bunshaft, *Gordon Bunshaft and SOM: Building Corporate Modernism* (**Figure 1**). Adams marshals a treasure trove of archival materials, including project files, interviews, travel diaries, transcripts, and oral histories, as well as his extensive knowledge of the inner workings of the firm, to disentangle myths and misconceptions about Bunshaft that have clouded our understanding of both his role at SOM and his place in 20th-century American culture.

The book's revelations are subtle but significant, and this has as much to do with Adams' judicious method as Bunshaft's character and the corporate politics of SOM.
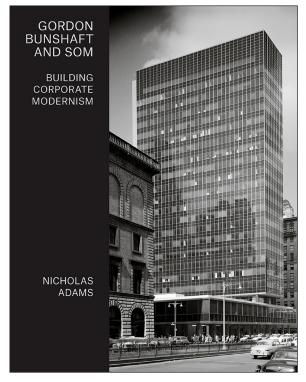

Figure 1: Cover of *Gordon Bunshaft and SOM: Building Corporate Modernism.* Photo Credit: Yale University Press.

One of these revelations comes in Adams' discussion of the Heinz Research Building in Pittsburgh, PA (1959). 'Bunshaft's architectural playfulness was rarely suppressed', Adams states, pointing to the way Bunshaft marvelously toyed with Miesian and Corbusian motifs on the building's street-facing façade (92). 'He could transform Mies's modern vocabulary in impish ways' (92). These are

not traits normally ascribed to Bunshaft or his architecture, but over and again throughout the book, by focusing attention on specific details, Adams shows him to be one of the great innovators of modern architectural style — and something of a maverick, too.

While Bunshaft 'always had a big idea' (according to Ambrose Richardson, whom Adams quotes), it was often up to SOM's senior designers to figure out how to realize the details (55). In a chapter titled 'Bunshaft's Hands and the Exquisite Details', Adams follows the trail of archival evidence to discern who at SOM did what on which projects. This leads at times to semantic discussions about how Bunshaft and his favored senior designers, including Nathalie de Blois, recalled the design process in later years (85–87). That said, Adams succeeds in giving us a clear understanding of how the process of design development worked at SOM, and why Bunshaft selected the senior designers he did for certain projects, and the roles they played. In the end, however, Adams leaves little doubt that Bunshaft was the driving design force at SOM and that the buildings credited to him are the realization of his aesthetic vision (252–253).

The buildings with which Bunshaft is most closely identified (e.g., Lever House, Connecticut General, Union Carbide, Pepsi-Cola) compose one chapter in his long career. Adams moves beyond these buildings — and the issue of the senior designers — to highlight Bunshaft's relationship with the engineer Paul Weildlinger, with whom he collaborated in the 1960s. A specialist in reinforced concrete, as Adams explains, Weildlinger provided both the inspiration and expertise that allowed Bunshaft to shift from glass curtain wall construction to experiments in concrete (126). In framing this transition, Adams suggests the buildings from this period are more significant artistically than the earlier works:

> The result was that Bunshaft's buildings, while remaining true to the principles of modern architecture, using structure and design to capture function, also became objects in a way that the curtain-wall buildings never could. Ultimately, as we will see, as Bunshaft thought more about these new architectural objects, he found inspiration in Le Corbusier and in Henry Moore and began to endow his own works with some of the qualities of sculpture, an approach that proved highly controversial. (126)

In a chapter titled 'Plasticity', Adams reveals the originality of the buildings from this period (e.g., Emhart headquarters in Bloomfield, CT; the John Hancock buildings in Kansas City, MO, and New Orleans, LA; Banque Lambert in Brussels, Belgium) through an evocative style of descriptive writing rarely found in books about modern architecture. Describing the concrete columns on the facade of the Heinz Administrative and Research Center, in Middlesex, England (1964), for example, Adams writes, 'The swelling of the columns is like a baluster or a block-and-turned leg on a neoclassical chair' (132). In a tour-de-force of descriptive analysis, he rebuts critics (including Vincent Scully) who found the Beinecke Rare Book Library at Yale

University troubling at the time of its completion in 1963; it is arguably Bunshaft's masterpiece and Adams compares it favorably with Mies's Seagram Building (150–155).

In 1963, Bunshaft was appointed to the Commission of Fine Arts, which advised on new federal building projects in Washington, DC. Using meeting transcripts, Adams relates Bunshaft's run-ins with young postmodernists, notably Ehrman B. Mitchell and Romaldo Giurgola, and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. In 1968, Venturi and Scott Brown produced a design, which Bunshaft hated, for a building on a site called Transportation Square. Adams wonderfully draws out their conflicting worldviews in his narration of the commission's meeting about the project. 'This is a hot rod who wrote a book', Bunshaft told the commissioners (196). In defending the design, Venturi deployed a jargon-laden argument and proved Bunshaft's point: 'it was by far the longest of any of the presentations in this period', Adams notes (197). The episode tells us as much about Venturi as it does Bunshaft. The irony of Bunshaft's conflagrations on the commission is that his own building for the Mall, the Hirshhorn Museum (1971), was compromised by bureaucratic haggling. In theory, it could have surpassed the Beinecke Library as a monument, but instead it became one of his less distinguished projects.

Adams considers a number of late works in a chapter titled 'Powers Matchless'. In an unrealized proposal for the State University of New York at Buffalo (1968), Bunshaft experimented with megastructural form. A timely design, it became a basis for the Philip Morris Administrative Headquarters and Manufacturing Center in Richmond, VA (1974). This building at first appears plain, but as Adams draws out in a beautiful analysis of its exterior forms and interior spaces, it has a pastoral quality and a 'strength and clarity' reminiscent of Romanesque architecture (220). The climax of the chapter — and to some extent the book — is a sympathetic reassessment of the elegant yet whimsical skyscraper Bunshaft designed for the real estate developer Sheldon H. Solow at 9 West Fifty-Seventh Street in New York (1973). Ada Louise Huxtable denounced it as 'belligerently antihuman' in the *New York Times*, but as Adams explains in a lovely meditation on monumentality, such attacks were more indicative of changing views of modernism than true appraisals of the building itself (224–229).

In 1952, Bunshaft and his wife, Nina, moved from Greenwich Village into Manhattan House, a white-brick luxury apartment building on the Upper East Side and one of SOM's showpiece projects. Ezra Stoller's photographs of the Bunshafts' two Manhattan House apartments represent the pinnacle of 1950s New York chic, with modern art on white gallery walls, accented by Knoll furniture, and sweeping views of the East River and the 59th Street Bridge. Adams devotes an entire chapter, titled 'Mixing Public and Private', to the Bunshafts' impressive art collection, which comprised works by Picasso, Miró, Léger, Giacometti, Calder, Moore, Dubuffet, and Frankenthaler, among others, as well as pieces of African and Asian art. Using Bunshaft's travel diaries, now housed in the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University, Adams explores how the couple grew the collection in concert with Bunshaft's rising profile. This leads to a discussion

of the place of art in Bunshaft's architecture, notably his collaborations with Isamu Noguchi. Adams' study of the collection is one of the book's greatest contributions, because, as he suggests, even more than the architecture, the collection is the key to Bunshaft's inner life.

Although sensitive to art, Bunshaft had a gruff, abrasive demeanour and a penchant for sarcasm. Stories of the way he spoke to women, including de Blois and especially his wife, present a caricature of 1950s male chauvinism (3, 161). Adams emphasizes Bunshaft's egotism, the way he periodically bristled at SOM's corporate ethos and pushed himself forward at the firm's expense (82, 160). He pinpoints instances where Bunshaft indulged in self-mythologizing, whether in a 1959 *Newsweek* profile ('*Designers for a Busy World*'), or his involvement in Carol H. Krinsky's seminal 1988 monograph, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill*, or a 1989 oral history conducted by Betty J. Blum (Bunshaft 1990) for the Art Institute of Chicago (3, 4).

Adams has laid out an entirely original account, which in its scope encompasses art and architectural history, biography, and cultural and social history. Spanning 80 years, his book brings an expansive cast of people to life, chronicles changing styles and mores, and resets our understanding of many of Bunshaft's buildings. Although corporate modernism features prominently in the title, the book ultimately convinced me that the label is too limiting to describe Bunshaft's oeuvre or the era as a whole. High modernism is more fitting.

A Global Approach to the Architectural Palimpsest

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Nadja Aksamija, Clark Maines, and Phillip Wagoner (eds.), *Palimpsests: Buildings, Sites, Time.* Turnhout: Brepols, 247 pages, 2017, ISBN: 978-2-503-57023-5.

Palimpsest, a term originally used to describe the erasure and reuse of a papyrus or parchment manuscript for the inscription of a different text, has been extended in recent literature to indicate a similar process in the realm of architecture. *Palimpsests: Buildings, Sites, Time*, an edited volume, is the product of an international symposium organized at Wesleyan University in February 2014, with the intent of providing conceptual and methodological tools for future scholarship in several interconnected fields (**Figure 2**). Although the term palimpsest has been previously used in the field of architecture, this collection of diverse case studies aims to expand upon its geographical and temporal limits. In the introduction, the book's editors, Nadja Aksamija, Clark Maines, and Phillip Wagoner, discuss ways it has been mentioned by architectural historians and then focus on the methodological benefits of addressing a building as a palimpsest. They begin with the observation that, after the initial act of construction, every structure can be considered a palimpsest following any later demolition,

alteration, rebuilding, or expansion. While the historical phases of many buildings have been studied in spatial and experiential terms, the concept of the palimpsest emphasizes the temporal dimension of a construction, which is crucial for a full comprehension of a building or site. The editors also introduce the concept of 'cultural biography', which maps how the building has been seen and used during the different phases of its life. Finally, they seek to demonstrate that such concepts as spolia, adaptive reuse, and appropriation do not cover all the possibilities opened by addressing a building through the metaphor of the palimpsest, although 'spolia may be present as parts of a given palimpsest; adaptive reuse may describe a key process at work in shaping the palimpsest; and a desire to appropriate a site and its past may serve as the ultimate impetus for creating the palimpsest' (15). Therefore, the broader aim of these ten essays assembled in this volume is to provide 'a collection of chronologically and geographically diverse case studies to present a range of methodological possibilities' (18). These methods privilege — more than the moment of creation — how and when changes in appearance were linked to changing historical circumstances.

The term palimpsest was first adapted to architecture during the 20th century by archaeologists and architectural historians to discuss ancient and medieval buildings with evident traces of reconstructions or restorations (Giovannoni 1935; Coolidge 1943), and it is now employed by scholars studying different regions of the world (Flood 2003; Necipoğlu 2008; Cantatore 2000; Trachtenberg 2010). Since the 1980s, the use of the term has expanded to include landscape architecture (Corboz 1983; Marot 2003), history of cities (Adams 1994), museum buildings (Frampton 2009), and projects concerned with the renewal of industrial complexes. The term has also evolved to the point that it is used to describe new projects intended to facilitate their transformation in time. One of the first instances of this was Peter Eisenman's 1988 Wexner Center for the Arts at the Ohio State University, which was defined by the architect 'as a palimpsest. A place to write, erase, and rewrite' (19).

The editors aimed to present case studies of the most diverse variety in terms of their subjects' geographical breath, function, and formal characteristics. Of the ten essays, four address subjects in Europe, and two each consider structures in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The buildings' functions are evenly split between religious and non-religious. While the intrinsic idea of the palimpsest naturally favors structures with a long history, two examples from the twentieth century are included to demonstrate how the mechanics of erasure and reshaping can also happen in a short time.

The contributions are divided into four thematic sections. The first, 'Building Transformations', introduces three archetypal cases of architectural palimpsests. Philip Wagoner explores how the Deval Masjid at Bodhan in India was originally a Hindu temple before being transformed into a mosque in 1323. He argues that traces of the temple were purposely left visible in the mosque as a reminder of the ruler's conversion to Islam. The second essay, by Sheila Bonde, describes the multiple reuses of
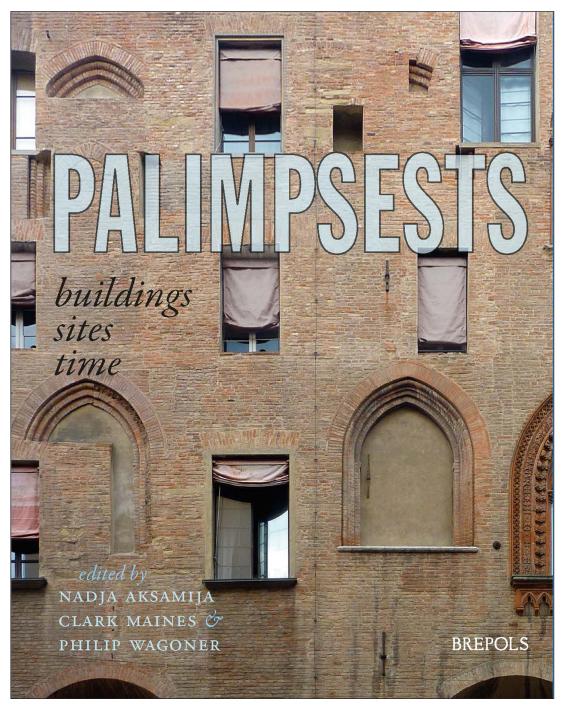
Figure 2: Cover of *Palimpsests: Buildings, Sites, Time.* Photo Credit: Brepols.

the Porta Nigra in Trier, from its original function of the city gate of the Roman city to its transformation into a medieval church and finally to its restoration as a gate under Napoleon. Porta Nigra perfectly illustrates the idea of heterotopia, first introduced by Michel Foucault to indicate 'a space that maintains relationships to multiple times and places' (43), an essential element of a palimpsest. The final study in this section, by Erik Gustafson, examines the transformed meaning of a portal that originally decorated a crusader church in Acre and was later transported as a war trophy to Cairo and inserted into the facade of a Cairene madrasa. Going beyond its established interpretation as an example of appropriation, the author cites the views of the patrons, designers, and builders to

'make an assertive statement of the sultan's power in the Mediterranean world' (80).

The second thematic section, 'Restoration and Rewriting', contains two essays in fields that have resisted a palimpsestic approach. Sarah Newman applies the idea of palimpsest to the Mayan context, in which the idea of history was not linear but circular, examining two archaeological sites that stretch our concept of palimpsest by incorporating ruins in living cities, venerating invisible temples, and maintaining the original meanings in rebuilt structures. In the section's second contribution, Nadja Aksamija challenges the traditional scholarship of Italian Renaissance architecture, which has typically emphasized design and patronage over the issue of authenticity, showing 'immutable and

temporally static entities' (123) instead of their layered materiality. She describes the centuries-long process of continuous maintenance and rebuilding of structures as a 'restoration palimpsest', promoting a more comprehensive temporal perspective, and praising the few scholars who started to take this perspective into account.

The two examples in the third section, 'Buildings Inscribed', explore a subject in relation to the literal meaning of palimpsest, analyzing the addition and erasure of texts on buildings. Christopher Parslow analyzes the political and commercial graffiti painted on the properties of Julia Felix in Pompeii during the decade before the destruction of the city in 79 CE. He focuses on the intentionality of such inscriptions, made on buildings that were not intended to carry such messages, and their prominence in the political life of the city. In a parallel case, Clark Maines investigates the inscriptions added during the French Revolution to the Gothic portals of several Catholic churches in France, intended to transform them into 'temples of reason'.

The book's fourth and final section, 'Site Transformations', contains three contributions in which the idea of the palimpsest provides better insight into the complexity of contemporary building sites, at the level of landscape architecture. The multi-layered site of Kadwaha in India is described by Tamara Sears, who shows how a palimpsestic approach can help us understand buildings that have been recently destroyed or isolated from their context for conservation purposes, with the risk of losing their connection with the local inhabitants. Similarly, Annalisa Bolin uses a site of memory, the Presidential Palace Museum in Kigali, to demonstrate that Rwandan heritage can be exploited for contemporary political interpretations, and how the shifting meanings of memory might shape the country's future. Finally, Joseph Siry analyses the 'ground zero' site in New York City, from its early history as Little Syria, with the redesign of the area as World Trade Center, and after 9/11. He emphasizes the limitations on what the museum and memorial can display of the multifaceted history of the location.

This well-curated volume, rich in images, reveals the complexities of applying the concept of the palimpsest to the built environment and provides architectural historians, critics, and restorers — as well as a broader audience — with an innovative reading for a more comprehensive understanding of architecture. Following a recent trend in scholarship that includes the idea of identity and the 'effect of a doubling or bending of time' in works of art (Nagel and Wood 2010), *Palimpsests* successfully summarizes different avenues of investigation opened up by the historical application of the palimpsest concept. For the first time, in the limited space of a book, a comprehensive number of case-studies show differences in scale, time, and meaning, both physically and culturally, resulting in meaningful analyses that overlap physical, cultural, social, and temporal layers. This volume contributes to a renewed attention toward a methodological approach based on a layered temporality in architecture, ranging in scale from the single building to the city or a territory, and at the same time responds to the current interest in cross-cultural and multiregional approaches to architectural history, based more on global themes than local traditions.

Re-evaluating Classicism and Meaning in Italian Renaissance Architecture

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David Hemsoll, *Emulating Antiquity: Renaissance Buildings from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 352 pages, 2019, ISBN: 9780300225761.

Numerous studies over the last several decades have re-evaluated how Renaissance architects perceived ancient buildings and adapted their features in their projects. Since the time of Vasari, scholars have tended to highlight the *all'antica* innovations of individual masters. Brunelleschi is typically framed as the first builder to break definitively from medieval tradition, with his predilection for freestanding columns, fluted pilasters, and classicizing entablatures and his rigorous design methods. Subsequent architects, from Giuliano da Sangallo to Raphael, systematically built upon the accomplishments of their predecessors until Michelangelo, whom Vasari claimed was endowed with godlike creativity and powers of *disegno* such that he eclipsed all who lived before him, ancient or modern, took architecture to the highest pinnacle of achievement. The Vasarian schema, according to which architects saw ancient structures as models of excellence to be imitated, has been reaffirmed by Renaissance specialists to the present day with surprisingly little critical discussion of how and why individual architects actually engaged with antiquity.

The handsome volume *Emulating Antiquity: Renaissance Buildings from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo* by David Hemsoll provides a fresh look at the professional practices of several key masters, starting with Brunelleschi (1377–1446) and continuing through Michelangelo (1475–1564) (**Figure 3**). Hemsoll has spent the past thirty years at the University of Birmingham investigating the Renaissance art and architecture of major Italian cities, with an emphasis on architectural theory and design methodology. His wide-ranging explorations of both primary evidence and secondary literature have culminated in this novel study of how architects perceived and assimilated the antique. He deconstructs the teleological approach established by Vasari, replacing it with a nuanced analysis that incorporates contemporary developments in literature and philosophy while taking account of historical and cultural circumstances. Although the author's claim that his book is 'the first in any language to be devoted to the unfolding of Renaissance architecture's engagement with antiquity' (13) is a slight exaggeration, it nevertheless offers new insight into a field of inquiry that has been constrained by orthodox dogma for more than four and a half centuries.

Hemsoll assesses the various scholarly accounts of how Renaissance architects approached the antique. His
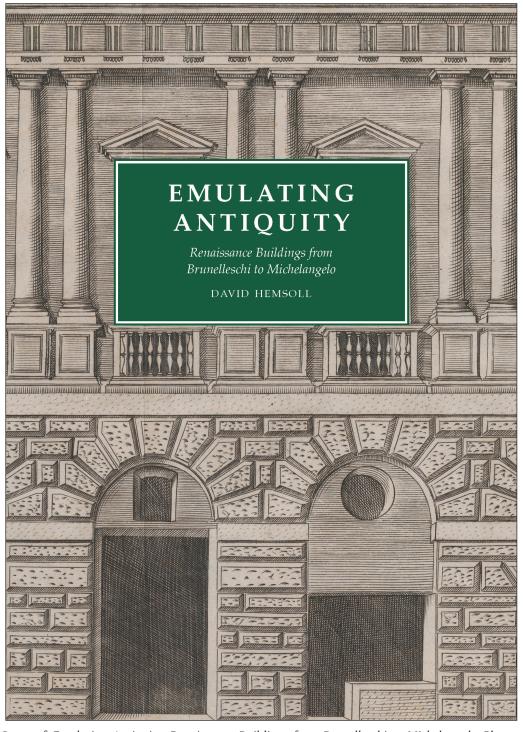
EMULATING ANTIQUITY

Renaissance Buildings from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo

DAVID HEMSOLL

Figure 3: Cover of *Emulating Antiquity: Renaissance Buildings from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo.* Photo credit: Yale University Press.

central thesis is that Brunelleschi, Giuliano da Sangallo, Bramante, Raphael, and Michelangelo — who are the focus of his book — employed strategies and methods for imparting meaning through classicism that do not fit neatly into the Vasarian model. He claims these architects never intended to merely replicate ancient structures but rather imitated or, more precisely, emulated prototypes 'very selectively and often very eclectically and inventively' (16).

This study is not a comprehensive survey of Italian Renaissance architecture; rather it focuses on the careers of the most impactful designers in Florence, Rome, and Venice between approximately 1400 and 1550. It is 'a charting of advances in architectural outlook and ideology, especially as regards the period's repeated re-evaluation of classical antiquity' (19). One particularly refreshing aspect of this book is its questioning of the semiotic theories put forth by Donald Preziosi (1979) and others, who insist that meaning in buildings relies upon the identification of signs and symbols, which in turn are rooted in tradition. Hemsoll posits that a building's 'meanings are perceived by way of its associations' and that these are 'expressed or recognized as similarities and differences between it

and other buildings' (22). In other words, we should strip away acquired interpretations and aim for a more accurate analysis of meaning, rooted in the political and cultural environment of the time.

The volume is organized into three richly illustrated chapters: 'The Early Renaissance in Florence', covering the period from Brunelleschi to Giuliano da Sangallo; 'The High Renaissance in Rome and Italy Beyond', treating Bramante, Raphael, and their followers in Rome and other Italian cities; and 'Michelangelo and his Contemporaries', focusing on the disparate visual cultures of Florence and Rome and the rivalry between Michelangelo and the circle of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger.

In the first chapter, Hemsoll guides us through Brunelleschi's major works, from the beginning of his career through his death in 1446. Vasari, whose bias toward the achievements of the Florentines is well documented, credits Brunelleschi with inaugurating the Renaissance in architecture and plotting a course in which successive designers imitated ancient models with increasing skill and accuracy.

After investigating the diversity of styles in Florence in the duecento and trecento, Hemsoll explains what he calls the 'Brunelleschi Conundrum' — how the architect struck a balance between Florentine tradition and *all'antica* innovation. This is hardly the first time that Brunelleschi's reliance on local tradition has been observed — Heinrich Klotz (1970) comes to mind — but here the phenomenon is examined with impressive precision. Hemsoll compares his buildings to a diverse array of earlier structures while meticulously documenting his utilization of classical features. The author's approach differs sharply from Ludwig Heinrich Heydenreich, Wolfgang Lotz (1974), and Christoph Luitpold Frommel (2007), who in their surveys of Renaissance architecture allege that Brunelleschi and his successors were principally concerned with reviving ancient forms.

There are some interesting quirks in Hemsoll's book, such as his assertion that Brunelleschi designed the Pazzi Chapel (convincingly disputed by Trachtenberg (1996)) and that he rejected Gothic because of its negative associations with Milan. Also noteworthy is his argument that the Ospedale degli Innocenti, considered by many to be a novel invention, is actually rooted in tradition, as, he maintains, are the Old Sacristy, San Lorenzo, and Santo Spirito.

The second half of the first chapter turns to Giuliano da Sangallo, often characterized as a transitional figure whose particular fusion of Florentine tradition with the antique lay midway between Brunelleschi and Bramante. Some have argued that Sangallo was essentially a conservative who clung to orthodoxy, but for Hemsoll he was a forward-thinking visionary whose style was well adapted to the sophisticated taste of the Florentine elite at the time of Lorenzo de' Medici. In his designs, he imitated a carefully chosen selection of ancient prototypes while embracing idealism and regularization, and his methods had a philosophical parallel in the writings of Alberti, Cristoforo Landini, and Poliziano.

Chapter two focuses on Bramante and Raphael in High Renaissance Rome. Although their achievements were downplayed by Vasari, Hemsoll contends that Bramante's arrival in Rome in 1499 heralded a new era in Renaissance design. Much like Brunelleschi, Bramante developed his personal style over time, and it is argued that his Roman works did not represent as sharp a break with the past as Heydenreich, Lotz, Frommel, and Arnaldo Bruschi (1969) imply. In his early Roman works, Hemsoll notes, Bramante 'was not intent on reviving antiquity but on establishing a new and distinctively different style for the city of Rome' (126). His specific contributions can be hard to decipher because so many of his works — such as the Cortile del Belvedere and St. Peter's — were altered repeatedly, but Hemsoll deftly reconstructs the original projects. In addition, he resolves a number of persistent chronological problems, especially with regard to the Tempietto and the Palazzo Caprini. In the course of the papacy of Julius II, Bramante increased his reliance on ancient prototypes in order to match the imperialist strategy of his cultivated patron, who famously fashioned himself as a new Julius Caesar.

Hemsoll next turns to Raphael, drawing parallels between the master's architectural practice and the literary theories of Bembo and Castiglione, who sought to imitate select works by ancient Latin writers and recombine their features into a unique synthesis. Likewise, Raphael assimilated specific ancient models into his designs, expanding his repertoire of *all'antica* motifs while aiming for a new Roman style. The chapter concludes with a general treatment of Giulio Romano, Sanmicheli, and Sansovino, who introduced High Renaissance classicism to northern Italy. Thanks in part to Serlio's writings, the new trend spread to nations beyond the Alps.

The third and final chapter is devoted to the architectural works of Michelangelo and, to a lesser extent, his rivalry with Antonio da Sangallo the Younger and his followers. The bibliography on the architecture of Michelangelo is extensive, yet Hemsoll manages to shed new light on his adaptation of the antique. He insists that Michelangelo did not develop his architectural style in a vacuum but, in fact, drew from Florentine tradition while absorbing and reinterpreting the *all'antica* innovations of Bramante and Raphael. Furthermore, it is claimed that after his arrival on the Roman scene Michelangelo gradually freed himself from convention and embraced a highly creative design process, much to the dismay of Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, who restrained his creativity in favor of imitating the antique more faithfully. Of course, Vasari was filled with praise for Michelangelo's *fantasia*, citing his God-given mission to improve the arts, his 'unchallengeable powers in *disegno*', (210) and his *licenzia* to diverge from *all'antica* orthodoxy. Although there are distinct echoes of James Ackerman (1961) and other specialists in Hemsoll's analysis, he takes us through the artist's architectural career in a completely original manner, correlating his design approach with philosophical and rhetorical concepts promoted by Ficino and Poliziano.

Hemsoll's writing is lucid and precise and thankfully devoid of the abstruse technical jargon that plagues so many architectural history studies. His analyses of the buildings, especially his scrupulous examination of the numerous plans and elevations, is masterful and never tedious. One comes away with a fuller understanding of the development of Renaissance classicism in quattrocento and cinquecento

architecture and a deeper appreciation for the historical and cultural circumstances that informed design decisions.

A Neglected Realm at the Museum Mile: Visiting Countryside, The Future

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AMO, Rem Koolhaas, *Countryside: A Report*, Cologne: Taschen, 352 pages, 2020, ISBN: 9783836583312.

The relation between the city and the country is a topic that continues to bedevil critics, historians, and writers of all stripes. This 'problem of perspective' was, of course, the subject of Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), which envisioned the rural as a realm that was, for all practical purposes, ideologically, temporally, and even physically distant and that still informed our understanding of modernity. Williams's own observations and criticisms did not operate in a cultural void. They were part of a rich and distinguished body of literature that includes important contributions by social historians and literary critics. This is an enviable and lengthy roster, one including E.P. Thompson's 1967 essay 'Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism', Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), the writings of the American agrarian historian James C. Scott, and recent art historical treatments such as W.J.T. Mitchell's *Landscape and Power* (1994) among its ranks. One way to look at this body of work is to understand the distinction between city and country (or rural and urban) not so much as a false dichotomy but rather as a process of agonizing fits and starts. Modernization was *punctuated* (to borrow paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould's terminology) by periods of stasis and change (Gould 1989: 54). Although this point of view is almost certainly historical, its scope is always at issue. The narrator of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1872), for example, was loath to worry about large sweeps of historical time, instead opting to focus on 'this particular web' of pre-Reform Bill rural England, and not the 'tempting range of relevancies called the universe' (Eliot 2015: 135). And for novelist L.P. Hartley, the past is more than just a bygone epoch: 'The past is a different country: they do things differently there' (Hartley 2002: 17).

For Rem Koolhaas, the country is not different, but an altogether 'neglected realm' that merits the attention of architects and urbanists (**Figure 4**). At least this is the central conceit underlying *Countryside, The Future*, his latest show at the Guggenheim Museum. Developed with AMO's Samir Bantal and Troy Conrad Therrien, the Guggenheim's curator of architecture and digital initiatives, *Countryside* was billed as an installation in the museum's rotunda designed to 'explore radical changes in the rural, remote, and wild territories collectively identified here as "countryside," or the 98% of the Earth's surface not occupied by cities'.[1] When the show opened almost a year ago, it was touted as a kind of alembic through which Koolhaas, AMO, and the Guggenheim viewed environmental, social, political, and economic issues. And yet it was a project that was wholly, unmistakably born from the kind of boundless, energetic research to be expected from OMA and AMO.

What the audience will find, however, is a hastily assembled and conceived installation. Featuring research conducted at various architecture schools throughout the world, *Countryside, The Future* transforms the Guggenheim's signature rotunda into a spiraling billboard teeming with montages, diagrams, visualizations, as well as a hay bale hanging from the ceiling, and — most famously — a robotic vacuum cleaner brandishing a life-size cut-out of Stalin. The materials are arranged in roughly chronological sequence. Upon entering, a visitor will be greeted by wall-sized images of phalansteries, landscape gardens, and other schemes mined for their ability to deal with a scale that would not be recognizable as 'urban'. Or rather, these appear as spatial artefacts that operated in some kind of idealized space outside population centers and yet provided much of the energy that came to dominate and typify urban life in the modern era. That is to say, these are the spaces of agricultural production, resource extraction, and even political experimentation. The installation continues with topics organized more or less to themes concerning environmental, social, and technological issues. There are plenty of arresting collections of images and data on display. However, the connective tissue that is supposed to bind these into a unified theme — that is, the 'countryside' — only *appears* exhaustive. It is treated glibly, devoid of any resonances. *Countryside* is an exhibition to be consumed as a kind of confection, a weightless and fleeting criticism that leaves us starving for something more substantive.

There are reasons for this. Perhaps the most obvious is that the rotunda was a literal, architectural constraint. This irony is deeply felt, however, as the Guggenheim is no stranger to Koolhaas or to exhibitions that deal with the rural. In 2009, a maquette of Broadacre City was featured in *Frank Lloyd Wright: From Within Outward*. Readers familiar with Koolhaas' earliest sojourns in New York may recall that audiences first encountered OMA's 'City of the Captive Globe' as part of the 1978 *The Sparkling Metropolis* exhibition at the Guggenheim. And as an installation meant to display architectural thinking, or rather, to explore ways in which architectural thinking can be brought to bear on a subject as expansive as the 'countryside', *Countryside, The Future* confronts the museumgoer with low-resolution montages blown up to the point of distortion, and more regrettably, a relentless amount of wall text. No surface of the rotunda was spared from sound-bite length pronouncements conjured by Koolhaas and his research teams. Even more maddening is that the exhibition was left unfinished, a misguided evocation of the kind of 'open work' imagined by Umberto Eco to be completed by readers. Indeed, there are different parts of the installation designed to remind visitors that the exhibition is a work in progress. For example, a piece of wall text on a bare wall reads, 'Originally left fallow to allow
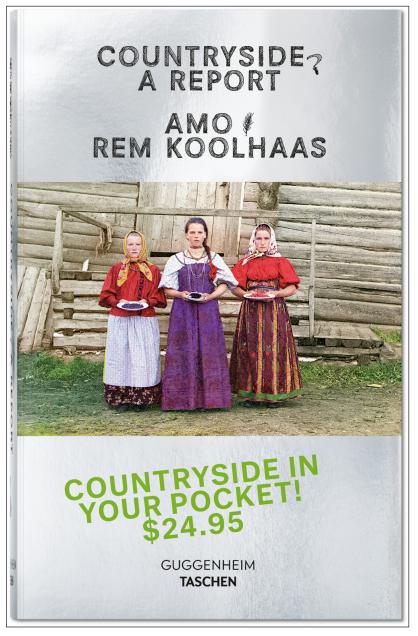
Figure 4: Cover of *Countryside: A Report*. Photo Credit: Taschen.

for an update to the exhibition during its run, this section was developed for the fall 2020 reopening'. Sometimes, an audience does not want to be left wanting for more.

Even more troubling is the way in which the installation dealt with sensitive issues. This was especially evident in those parts of the show dedicated to politics. A case in point is a space featuring cropped and edited images of Mao Zedong, Nikita Khrushchev, Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Adolf Hitler, Muammar al-Gaddafi, and Herman Sörgel signing papers or reading documents. Here, Koolhaas is making an important point: namely, that many of the transformations that altered the physical, social, and economic makeup of the 'countryside' occurred under the aegis of institutional control. The wall text reads, 'Authoritarian and democratic states alike took colossal risks attempting to increase productivity and food security, and remake rural society. They harvested success and failure, famine and overproduction ... We live in a society still deeply marked by

these Promethean efforts'. This should give readers pause, as it uses the spatial artefact that is the putative subject of the installation — the 'countryside' — to equalize the actions of these world leaders. There is nary a chance to get any kind of historical perspective on their deeds. Whether meant to excite or outrage, this material is only dealt with as a collection of images that may or may not catch visitors' eyes as they continue their path through the installation. And in some instances, the topic is handled unevenly. When it comes to the treatment of Herman Sörgel's Atlantropa (1922–1952) at the museum, Koolhaas appears to relish this scheme to dam and drain the Mediterranean Sea in order to create fertile farmland for its sheer audacity. Gaze at the large maps and archival images, blown up into a larger-than-life size information visualization, and you too may forget that Atlantropa was a geospatial solution to reclaim, protect, and feed White Europeans. Atlantropa is there in all its strangeness, left for audiences to mull over and forget.

Fortunately, there is solace to be found in the accompanying catalogue, designed by Irma Boom. Tiny, bounded with a reflective cover, and filled with small print, *Countryside: A Report* packs a collection of essays written by historians, critics, and writers. It does not absolve the exhibition of all its dalliances but manages to confront some of the larger implications brought to bear on 'the rural'. Like the exhibition, the book touches on these themes tacitly, or even vaguely. And yet there are moments where this presentation format does work. Among the more successful examples is Niklas Maak's account of rural hamlets in the Mannheim region and abandoned open mine pits, a well-honed account of the countryside as a site of dynamic change and relentless opprobrium. Others tread on more well-worn routes — literally — as in the case of Anne M. Schindler's report of a road trip through the American desert, a chance for the author to ruminate on the various abstract, global forces that become more concrete only in the expansive realm of the rural. In all, *Countryside: A Report* speaks to connections and digressions better than the installation, which is itself constrained by a delicate editorial agenda that barely manages to keep the text from spiraling out of control. This approach once secured Koolhaas's legacy as a designer who trafficked in boundless ruminations that became confused for a kind of intellectual journey. Beginning with *Delirious New York* (1978) and onward, Koolhaas showed himself a deft and cunning writer whose ability to locate theoretical platitudes within loose historical frameworks has been wildly influential. We would never claim that *Delirious New York* is 'historical', and yet we are all too happy to assign it an equation and locate its point within the great curve of architectural history and theory.

The same cannot be said for *Countryside*. The historical examples are only that, instances of things that happened before in an inert, idealized, and isotropic space otherwise known as 'the rural'. This may have been lost on audiences who had the benefit of seeing the show in February 2020. *Countryside* opened on the heels of one blockbuster show (the Guggenheim's *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*) and near another (the Met Breuer's stellar and comprehensive *Gerhard Richter: Painting After All*). Both exhibitions showcased a fierce curatorial ambition that was as engaging as it was provocative. And this begs the question: what is *Countryside* in these days? What are we to make of an exhibition that few have seen, and that now appears merely as the setting for ancillary programming, such as the Institute of Queer Ecology's *H.O.R.I.Z.O.N. (Habitat One: Regenerative Interactive Zone of Nurture)*, a participatory online multiplayer game 'attuned to the intelligence of ecology, queerness, and sovereign living', and a residency for The World Around, the yearly symposium founded by Beatrice Galillee? *Countryside* is now closed, and yet its conceit seems not quaint, not misguided, nor irrelevant. Only small, shrinking to something quiet, to something infinitesimally small. In all, the past year has shown that it is not the countryside, but rather a virus, that has connected and disrupted the world, that traveled aerial routes and shipping lanes, that skip-traced the air currents throughout our cities and, yes, countrysides.

Note

[1] Guggenheim Museum, 'Countryside, The Future' website, https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/countryside.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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