

REGIONAL NEWS

NOUVELLES RÉGIONALES

ONTARIO

The University of Toronto, in conjunction with the O.A.A. and the Toronto Society of Architects is sponsoring a lecture series to be held at 8:00 p.m., Room 3154, Medical Sciences Building, U of T. Further information: 9785038, John Van Mostrand

- November 25 Allen Brooks, "Jeanneret before LeCorbusier". Room 2158.
January 15 George Baird, "Alvar Aalto-Current Lessons"
January 22 "The James Bay Project"
February 5 Susanna Torre, "Towards an Architecture of the Public Realm".
February 12 Morden Yolles, Engineer
February 19 Richard Sennett
March 12 Ken Frampton, "The -Isms of Contemporary Architecture".
March 19 Douglas Richardson, "... Canadian architecture before Confederation".
March 26 Andrew Metcalf, "Planning the New Capital of Australia".

Architectural Exhibitions, 230 College St., Toronto

- December Douglas J. Cardinal. Exhibition of his work.
January Alvar Aalto Memorial Exhibition. To be held at Ontario Science Centre.
February M.S. Yolles and Partners, Engineers
March Thomas Lamb, Industrial Engineer
April Graduate Work, Department of Architecture

The School of Architecture, Carleton University will hold a lecture series in the "Architecture Pit", at 6:00 p.m.

- January 14 George Baird, "Recent Projects".
January 21 Thomas Hubka, "Vernacular Design Principles".
January 28 Melvin Charney, "Monuments and Constructions".
February 4 Kenneth Frampton, "18th Century Rationalism and Louis Kahn".
February 18 Gulzar Haider, "Islamic Architecture in Search of Itself".
March 18 John Hejduk, "Masques".

The Children's Museum, Dundurn Castle, Hamilton is sponsoring the exhibit "Architecture - Then and Now", until mid-December. Information: 5499285.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

SSAC member Irene Rogers has recently published Walks in Charlotte Town. The two walks in this attractive booklet are "a condensation of part of a larger work on Charlottetown now being completed". The illustrations were drawn by Robert Tuck. The 32 page booklet is available for \$3.95 from the PEI Heritage Foundation.

NOVA SCOTIA

Two books have recently been published on the architectural heritage of Nova Scotia. Still Standing: Cape Breton Buildings From Days Gone By, by Terry Sunderland, features drawings and histories of 32 buildings which reflect both building types and regions of the island. College of Breton Press, \$7.95, 65 pages.

A Walk Through Old Lunenburg, by the Lunenburg Heritage Society, relies mostly on photographs, both contemporary and historical, to illustrate its text. Well researched, the book discusses structures in their original form and with the accretions of time. Seventy-two pages, \$2.95.

GENERAL

The most extensive exposition and festival of Canadian art ever mounted outside Canada will open in Berlin during the first week of December, 1982. Hosted by the Akademie der Kunst, Berlin and designed and funded in cooperation with the Canada Council and the Department of External Affairs, the eight-week event will feature an exhibit of 19th and 20th century art and architecture. George Baird, Toronto architect and a professor of architecture at U of T, is organizing the section on architecture.

George Kapelos, SSAC President, has been hired as one of two administrators for the event. Information on the project may be obtained from 35 Britain Street, Toronto.

Memberships (as of 1 December 1980)

\$ 5	Students/Étudiants
\$15	Individuals/
\$20	Organizations/

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Suckle, Abbey, editor. By Their Own Design. New York, Witney Library of Design, 1980.

It has been argued that full-length books by or for architects are no longer possible; that we visual thinkers can sustain no verbal line of thought longer than an article in Progressive Architecture Magazine. Abbey Suckle's cut and paste concoction called By Their Own Design; Ten Architects Discuss Their Process of Design and Construction unfortunately enforces this argument. She has compiled vague and general essays by ten international exponents of what might be called the leading technical edge of mainstream modern architecture. The list includes Englishmen Richard Rogers and Norman Foster, Australian Harry Seidler, Dutchman Herman Hertzberger and the American Cesar Pelli, the sameness of many of their buildings providing daunting evidence of the internationalism of Late Modern Architecture. Arthur Erickson is the fortunate exception to this tendency to blandness with a literate and balanced essay on his design of the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia.

"The frames formed by channel and pier [in the UBC Museum of Anthropology] bear an uncanny resemblance to the aboriginal house frame, abstracted and repeated as a sequence of portals, which contributes to the ritualistic feeling of the great hall. It is not just the space, but the massive carvings, the space, the structure, and the setting which combine to achieve this effect. The structure is forceful, but not more than the space, nor the space more than the objects shown therein."¹

The ten share an ability to win contracts for the design of large buildings for both private and public clients. Suckle's miniscule introduction and resume-reciting biography for each architect does not, on the other hand, play up the differences between these architects. What we are left with is superb photographs and tantalizing analytic drawings of their built projects with bland written extemporization on the nature of the design process. There are few things duller or more misleading than architects talking in broad terms about the design process. Suckle would have done better to ask each architect a set question about the entrance foyers of one of their public buildings than the babbling ramble which fills this otherwise handsome book. Architecture, like Mies van der Rohe's God, is in the details.

Frank, Ellen Eve. Literary Architecture. Berkeley; University of California Press, 1979.

and

Harbison, Robert. Eccentric Spaces. New York; Avon Discus Books, 1980.

There is every sign that architecture, after its long hibernation in the crystal cave of modernism, is returning as a topic of lively concern to western culture. This movement is borne out in a review of the recent Paris Biennale show of the visual arts reviewed by Le Monde writer Jacques Michel;

"Ordinarily it has been painters, whose studio-bound work is more propitious to experiment, who have functioned as the early integrators of the progress of modernism. This time it's been the architects, who are closer to the phenomenon of mechanisation. They were the first to display the manifest disenchantment with the modern world at which the lith Paris Biennale seems to point a finger. This means a bigger part is played by architects this year. They demonstrate more explicitly than painters do the return to historical styles."

The 1980 Biennales in both Paris and Venice show architecture is no longer the square and dull boy of the arts, but a field of increasing divergence, innovation and inspiration.

These two subtle and important books herald the return of architecture as part of the broader world of ideas, and it is a welcome return. Both Frank and Harbison are American writers who, like a similar and more developed group in Europe, are inspired to write by the forms, decoration and abiding mystery of buildings which for them capture the shaded nuances of cultures past and present. As Michel emphasizes in his review, this inspiration for the new architecture lies in a review (or more accurately, re-view) and more sensitive interpretation of history. There is a fresh contrast of method in the ways by which each writer has chosen to read architectural history.

Ellen Eve Frank, an instructor in the literature and the visual arts at Berkeley, seeks in the imagined literary architecture of Walter Pater, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust and Henry James an analogy, a parallel, a means of reading other buildings and cultural artifacts. Frank concludes her book with a summary of these fertile comparisons:

"For Pater and Hopkins, architecture helps them to describe controls which would resuscitate language; for James, it helps him to reveal, retrospectively, his craftsmanship, how he trained and restructured organic, germ growth into constructed fictions; for Proust it suggests that he could build with an old language, as with aged stones, but build so that readers would respect and acknowledge the past and his care in reconstructing it. Architecture is the only art object we actually live in. However, we live in another construction—we do not commonly call it art—also of our own making: consciousness. Literary architecture is a gesture toward that."²

Frank's book is beautifully printed, illustrated with some wistful nineteenth century photographs of French architecture. Like many dissertations become text, the book wavers into occasionally pedantic tone and language. More objectionable are its frequent lapses into California mellow-speak in the last chapters dealing with literary architecture and consciousness. Even the schematic flow-charts are worthy of French semiologists or the Rand Corporation which Frank includes in these chapters cannot seriously detract from a book rich with the resonance of neglected ideas.

Literary architecture is the topic of but two of eight amazing journeys of inquiry which fill Robert Harbison's Eccentric Spaces. Harbison's book, while in every way the intellectual equal of Frank's, retreats from extended analysis and theoretical explanation for a more descriptive and sensual recreation of a variety of gardens, rooms, machines and cities in his first four chapters. Like French critic Gaston Bachelard (The Poetics of Space), Harbison has a gift for the deft sketch of spacial forms and experiences in a few words. Of the remaining four chapters, half deal with literary architecture; he shares a passion for Pater and Henry James with Ellen Frank, but expands his treatment of literary buildings and cities to those crafted by Robbe-Brillet, Joyce, Jane Austen, Poe, Hawthorne and George Elliot:

"Like Victor Hugo's bird's-eye Paris of the fifteenth century, George Eliot's Florence is more full of features than any real view; everything stands out, people organize themselves by groups—students, washerwomen, lawyers—and keep more to distinct quarters of the city than now.

We have the strange feeling of knowing it better than our own world because this more orderly society is a huge family, the whole place friendly and familiar as no actual place can be. We can be nostalgic for something we never know because it is the ideal of a flourishing vastness as comfortable as the dinner table, an endless experience of familiarity."³

With his sensitive and sometimes whimsical method established with comments like these, Harbison concludes with two final essays on the imaginary worlds of maps and museums. This quote concerning the first of these two sums up the progression in his book:

"From cities of brick to cities in books to cities on maps is a path of increasing conceptualization. A map seems the type of the conceptual object, yet the interesting thing is the grotesquely token foot it keeps in the world of the physical, having the unreality without the far-fetched appropriateness of the edibles in Communion, being a picture to the degree that that sacrament is a meal."⁴

While they are unabashed admirers of that great spanner of literary and architectural worlds, John Ruskin, both Harbison and Frank lack a knowledge and appreciation of contemporary architecture to make their forays comparable to those of the supreme critic of the Victorian world. But their efforts prepare the way for the emergence of a new criticism with the eloquence, sweep and influence of The Stones of Venice.

¹Arthur Erickson in Abbey Suckle's By Their Own Design, page 17.

²Ellen Eve Frank. Literary Architecture, page 259.

³Robert Harbison. Eccentric Spaces, page 113.

⁴Ibid., page 124.

It should be noted that the name of the SSAC/SEAC Newsletter has been changed from "News/Nouvelles" to "Bulletin". The numbering of the issues will continue as normal.