

Anthony D. King (ed.), *Buildings and Society: Essays on the social development of the built environment*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1980), 1984. x + 318 pp., illus., \$98.00 (cloth). \$28.00 (paper)

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This book can be praised mostly for the evocative and provocative power of its title. It suggests a wealth of illustrations and information coupled with a profound understanding of art, culture and history on a global scale over a period of five or more centuries. In relating to pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial contexts, it strains the limits of any particular discipline or writer. The book is not a broadly synthetic work, and Chandra Mukerji would have been well-advised to clearly establish her own frames of reference in order to avoid disappointment or confusion. It is perhaps unfair to criticize the author for her theorizing, bias, omissions and distortions. Although she may present a bird's-eye view of her own nest, she raises nevertheless the challenge of an intriguing book yet to be written.

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ANTHONY D. KING (ed.) *Buildings and Society: Essays on the social development of the built environment*. London. Routledge and Kegan Paul (1980), 1984. x + 318 pp., illus., \$98.00 (cloth), \$28.00 (paper).

Sociologists and anthropologists step in, it would seem, where architectural historians fear to tread. Their quest is the uncertain territory of cultural, sociological and political determinants upon design; their achievement also uncertain, in part due to the chosen historiographical and linguistic formulae – quasi semiotic is perhaps the best definition – employed by a number of the contributors to this collection of essays. Both are epitomized nicely by the editor's reference in the Introduction to the 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' approaches to the evolution of certain building types. These terms are supposed to describe the concepts of analysis through time and across cultures, but rather hinder than elucidate understanding.

In this Introduction, Anthony King does acknowledge some of the disputed aspects of such responses to the history of architecture. He explains the purpose of the nine essays as the exploration of the 'relationship between social forms and built forms, between the society and the built environment it produces.' A sojourn of five years at Delhi, confronting daily the differences between the ancient

Indian city and modern Imperial capital, quickened his fascination with the cultural and sociological factors that generated the contrasted architectural reactions to the same climatic conditions. The anthropologically based writings of Amos Rapoport, notably *House Form and Culture* (1969), provided a new mode of addressing the subject he argues, together with the urban sociological studies of the 1970s – acknowledged to be essentially theoretical and often Marxist in bias – and historical works like Nikolaus Pevsner's *History of Building Types* (1976). This last, however, is judged to be preoccupied with major edifices and architects, and hence with individuality and style. Thus he sought to publish a series of essays which would not only examine the impact of social values on design but also establish 'new methodological approaches for the understanding of the built environment,' and even to suggest 'a preliminary framework for the understanding of the built environment both through time and between different cultures.' Nevertheless, in garnering contributions King decided to confine the historical perspective to modern Western industrial society, mainly British, the major exception being Amos Rapoport's temporally and geographically free-ranging 'vernacular architecture and... cultural determinants of form.'

The first essay by Andrew Scull founds the theme of the book. He seeks to interpret the design evolution of the Victorian Lunatic Asylum in terms of the changes in the social comprehension and organization of madness 'from a vague, culturally defined phenomenon' into 'a uniquely and essentially medical problem.' The nineteenth-century predilection for categorization and systematic solution (an outgrowth of the empirical analysis and social idealism of the Enlightenment) is held to have created, then compounded, the asylum and the specialization of the psychiatry within the medical profession. The advantageous professional and convenient storage features of the capacious 'pavillon' plan hospital are similarly stressed in Adrian Forty's piece on the modern hospital in England and France. He contends that this building type was governed more by the emergence of the medical profession than by advances in medical science, not least since he considers that the Boards of Governors were as much concerned to prevent malingering as to effect cures in the patients who were

generally of inferior social status. A more extreme application of paternalistic improvement through the agency of architecture is described in Heather Tomlinson's review of the 'separate system' in the contemporary British prison. Her thesis, however, is propounded with close reference to the specific design elements and less speculation about their ideological motivation.

The next two essays present a shift in geographical location and historical period. Susan Lewandowski discusses the urbanization of the Hindu temple in South India, while John Hancock argues that the apartment building in the United States has perpetuated rather than diminished social segregation. Lewandowski compares the large pre-industrial temple complex like the Minakshi Temple in Madurai, designed to accommodate the devotional path of salvation, with the compact arrangement of their modern equivalents, necessitated by economic constraints such as land prices. Where once the city revolved around the temple, now the temple is compressed by the city. To Hancock, the emphasis upon owner-occupied, single family housing in the American city has caused the apartment to be the preserve of the transient, usually poor or abnormal members of society. While this disregards the recent popular growth of condominium or other lower cost alternatives, Hancock provides an illuminating picture of distinct class graduations in the superficially classless North-American social order.

That theme, supercharged with interpretations of the legacy of capitalism and sexism, courses through the subsequent examinations of leisure housing, 'places of refreshment,' and office buildings. The first two concentrate upon Britain and the third upon the United States, with sallies into England and West Germany. King's 'A time for space and a space for time: the social production of the vacation house,' once beyond a homily on the differentiated system of social stratification, places the holiday bungalow and cottage squarely within the framework of urban, industrial society – as much status symbol as extension of the Georgian villa or reflection of pantheism. The plates are especially well selected to sustain this particularized view, dipping into those journalistic resources which architectural historians seldom exploit: in an ironic anticipation of Le Corbusier's endeavour to marry aircraft design and architecture, one plate shows a conser-

vatively styled 'Week-End Cottage' with an 'Italian pattern iron roof' advertised in 1905 by the later famous aviation company Boulton and Paul of Norwich.

The vagaries of taste in the elite and the mass, spiced by a timely *souçon* about the accommodation of single women, constitute the meat of Robert Thorne's report on the transformation of the inn and chop-house into the restaurant of mid-Victorian London. In another side dish, so to speak, Thorne contends that the compartmentalization of the late-Victorian pub was neither dictated by the innate class sense of the British, nor by the publicans' desire to discourage rowdiness, but in order to secure privacy for patrons worried by their shameful public image. Equally contentious is Francis Duffy's quest to 'reveal the values of those who build... and work' in office buildings. He compares three pairs of offices, including the famed Larkin and Scagram high density, compartmentalized Temples of Mammon, but ending with the apparently liberalized, open plan Ninoflex office at Northham, to assert that these 'tell us far more about the societies which built them than about their architects.' And so to Rapoport's contribution, which King summarizes in this sentence: 'Built environments encode or give expression to a particular set of cultural rules and also influence both social and cognitive environments.'

Yet Rapoport, unwittingly, undermines instead of reinforces the preceding essays by proposing that 'Modern' societies have been 'ineffective' in manifesting and comprehending the 'cognitive schemata,' or cultural codes. Now, besides several questions concerning Rapoport's logic and language, and serious reservations about his belief in the relevance to the analysis of sophisticated societies of information culled from those essentially tribal, the process of 'coding' has ever been highly complex. The earliest historian of world architecture, James Fergusson, bewailed the disjunction between style and actual technical facility and cultural values in the Victorian era upon which most of the essays concentrate. The history of art as well as architecture is crammed with cases of erroneous assumptions about 'meaning,' especially related to style. Robert Mills, for example, liked to describe himself, and by implication his architecture, as 'altogether American,' even though it was solidly founded upon Colonial Georgian Palladianism.

Contrary to Duffy's asseveration, architects and patrons have moulded the environment, not infrequently as much as social and economic factors. Thus the Larkin office at Buffalo was tailored around the unique mail order operation devised by its chief executive, but also according to F.L. Wright's expertise and idiosyncratic aesthetic. There is no evidence to support the inference in the latter part of the caption beneath the photograph of one of the clerical desks which reads: 'Here, design control is in league with work study; the seat hinged to the clerical desk restricts freedom of movement, saves space, is entirely rational, and effectively expresses the degradation of the clerk.' Prejudice has here supplanted objectivity, for if Wright's design might be criticized on the grounds of elevating efficiency above comfort, his intentions were quite the reverse of degradation. Like the European Modernists he was to inspire, Wright correlated functional form with reform in the workplace and a fairer social order. The Larkin Building included a public viewing area because the conditions of employment were then regarded as progressive and humanitarian; the employees of the Johnson Wax Company, for which he later designed a less grandiose open plan office at Racine, Wisconsin, reportedly preferred its environment to their own homes, notwithstanding the more recent adverse reaction to that type of architectural arrangement.

While that is but one instance of arguable interpretation, the caption represents a serious problem which recurs throughout the text, namely insufficient concern for historical material. A closer reading of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century writings, legislations and records of the governing bodies concerned with the asylum, hospital and prison demonstrates that technical conventions, architectural and scientific, were certainly as important as social attitudes. Moreover, many of those who designed or financed the buildings were inspired by idealistic, if misinformed, motives and not merely by ideas of repression (cf. my *William Wilkins 1778-1839* [1980], or Pierre du Prey's *John Soane. The Making of an Architect* [1982]). And if the intention is to disclose the sociological determinants, where is the discussion of the many-faceted religious revival of the nineteenth century which exerted quite as fundamental an influence as

secular and political radicalism. Beyond the factual constituent of history, necessarily embracing specialized matters such as the evolution of building types and stylistic fashion, the contributors tend to disregard that empathy for other times required to achieve fair judgment. In other words, their approach imposes as many restrictions as the method it presumes to supersede.

These criticisms, which apply to the misnamed 'New Art History' (Hauser, to cite but one, sought to confine the comprehension of artistic creativity within the bounds of social and political factors in the 1940s), should not be regarded as an entire rejection of the sociological and semiotic approach, instead of its presumption of superior truth. For these essays will serve to hone the thinking of those attempting to illuminate the fascinating and heterogeneous history of architecture.

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NORMA BROUDE and MARY D. GARRARD (eds.) *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*. New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1982. 358 pp., 309 illus., \$24.95 (paper).

ESTELLA LAUTER *Women as Mythmakers: Poetry and Visual Art by Twentieth-Century Women*. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984. 267 pp., 15 illus., \$16.95 (paper).

At certain times in the development of art criticism and art history there appear subtle sways or sudden shifts. Scholars and critics, examining works of art from given points in their culture, label and analyse, proclaim success or failure, while the artists themselves set standards or follow leads in the intricate pattern we eventually call art history. Often this pattern changes slowly but sometimes, as with the 'discovery' of primitive art at the beginning of the twentieth century, the shifts have dramatic and lasting effects. For example, the repercussions of the discovery of primitive art are still very much with us as evidenced by the interest (both praise and criticism) in the recent New York exhibition, *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art*.

The growing concern for women's art is a new interest, or 'discovery,' that may also change art and the way we