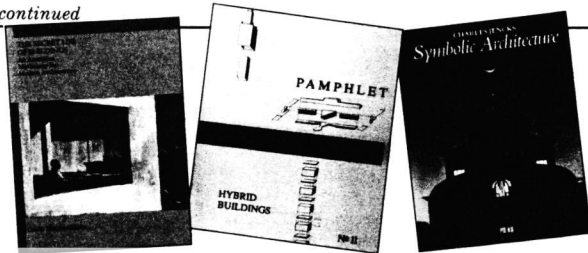


Books



who criticized the European adoption of the metric system because it was not based on the human figure, and who tried to unite the golden section with the body in *Modulor*?

Macrae-Gibson's definition of cultural memory is too narrow to address the work of the "lyricists," and his application of the idea of physical memory is at times far-fetched. For example, in his section on Robert Venturi, he illuminates—carefully and exceedingly well—how Wu Hall is under the tutelage of Jacobean predecessors; however, by working on a definition of cultural memory as formal architectural history, Macrae-Gibson misses how Venturi manipulates those forms into double references that also recall the American vernacular. Wu Hall's cafeteria is not only a medieval dining hall, but also a diner; the overmantel at the entrance is not only an Elizabethan gateway, but a collection of Playskool blocks arranged to look like some child's notion of home.

To support his idea that the human figures into lyric Modernist works, Macrae-Gibson tends to see man lurking in corners where I don't see him at all. Adam and Eve show up holding a bitten apple, supposedly the metaphor contained within Eisenman's L-shaped cube; three faces face Wu Hall, and ghosts inhabit its internal stairways.

In short, by developing the categories of physical and cultural memory to elucidate the problem of representation in architecture, Macrae-Gibson causes more problems than he solves; however sophisticated the notion is, it remains, in the theory of representation, a first step. Nevertheless, he is to be congratulated for elevating the level of discussion on this new phase of architecture, for with *The Secret Life of Buildings* Macrae-Gibson adds a highly literate and intelligent voice to the ongoing critical debate.

Hybrid Buildings, by Joseph Fenton. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985, \$7.

Reviewed by Paulina Borsook

The 11th in the series of Pamphlet Architecture chapbooks, *Hybrid Buildings* maps out a typology for mixed-used buildings. The author, architect Joseph Fenton, worked with Stephen Holl, the editor-in-chief and organizing force behind this set of art objects-cum-position papers, and his writing reflects the nativist ideology of that office. The book serves as an outline for a catalogue raisonné of mixed-use

buildings, an architectural morphology Fenton believes is uniquely American.

Each writer in the Pamphlet Architecture series has freedom of choice in layout, design, and content. Writers are restricted only by folio size (legal pad, folded in half) and to the treatment of a single concept, whether verbal or visual. The pamphlets are not edited in the traditional sense: Holl's vision for the works is an uninterrupted forum outside the mainstream of academic and commercial presses.

Hybrid Buildings is the third in a subset of pamphlets that Holl says concentrate on "the essence of American architecture, in an effort to provoke thoughts toward the spatial and programmatic renewal of American cities." *The Alphabetical City* (#5, 1980), already something of a cult classic, explored the correlation between building types and city grid patterns. *Rural and Urban House Types in North America* (#9, 1982) offered a collection of peculiarly American dwellings as an alternative to the tract house.

Hybrid Buildings turns out to be a revisionist treatise intent on rescuing the history of 19th- and 20th-century mixed-use buildings from obscurity. While the initial decline of combination buildings in part stems from the pronouncements of CIAM architects during the 1930s, the building type began to be ignored altogether in the post-World War II political and economic environment. By the 1970s, the phrase "mixed-use" itself fell out of favor, damned by association with structures whose segregation of function was felt to have contributed to inner-city deterioration.

As a result of one of those paradigm shifts Thomas Kuhn describes in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*—a change in the intellectual and cultural climate simultaneously stimulating the same idea by different thinkers—the term "hybrid building" is now coming into general use in a spirit of reform. The phrase turns up without attribution in current literature as a preferred neologism for the rehabilitated notion of mixed-use. Appropriating words of art from planning as a new way to talk about architectural form, *Hybrid Architecture* is the manifesto of a new coinage of an old idea.

Fenton breaks down hybrid buildings into three types: fabric, graft, and monolith. The categorizations do not follow any specific chronology, reflecting the author's thesis that hybrid buildings have persevered over time and are not merely archaic curiosities.

Fabric hybrids generally conform to their surroundings, and their exteriors may make only modest reference to their internal variety of function. Graft hybrids clearly express their variegated program through the direct grafting of one building type onto another. Monolith hybrids differ from fabric hybrids mostly in terms of scale, a case where quantitative changes become qualitative changes; these monumental cities-within-a-city refer more to themselves than to the city around them.

Fenton uses the term *thematic* to describe related functions, such as teaching, nursing, and eating within a hospital. *Disparate* functions spring from the economic advantages that accrue, for example, when a church gains income from the rental of office space in the tower above its sanctuary.

Hybrid buildings are not unique to the Western Hemisphere, but there are probably more of them in North America than elsewhere, due to the proliferation of skyscrapers, the advent of structural framing, and the opportunities offered by the sheer size of high rises. Hybrids flourished from their introduction in the 1880s to the Depression of 1929. Whether their formal organization followed along social lines (Jarmowsky's Bank on New York City's Lower East Side, which combined tenement housing and banking) or developed as a homage to commerce (Chicago's Daily News Building, which incorporated newspaper production and railroad offices), they benefited from the complex new technologies represented by elevators, telephones, and electrical wiring.

Hybrid Buildings is a tacit plea for an American species of architecture. Implicit in the text is a response to Postmodernism that argues for a native American solution to the crisis in contemporary architecture. Rather than exchanging one European tradition, the Bauhaus, for another, be it the Gothic, the Classical, or the Chippendale, the technique of hybrid building presents a case for an architecture grounded in American custom. In its photographs, drawings, and exploded sections, the pamphlet amply documents a building methodology based on American historical precedent.

Hybridism implies vigor and genealogy. *Hybrid Buildings* illustrates a way of solving economic and design problems so that remedies are embedded in function and history, rather than in style and theory alone.

Paulina Borsook is a writer based in New York City.

Towards a Symbolic Architecture, by Charles Jencks. New York: Rizzoli, 1985, \$50.

Charles Jencks's new book is a curious hybrid—a lavishly illustrated coffee-table book, a critical essay, and a manifesto for Postmodern or, as Jencks calls it, "symbolic" architecture, with a title that paraphrases Le Corbusier's famous statement. Jencks lays out the historical and philosophical basis for symbolic architecture in a brief introduction and in Parts I and II, which, along with the epilogue, are the only sections of the book that deal with anyone else's work but his own. It is here that Jencks assails Modern architecture for lacking the symbols that identify a building's function and express society's values. He advocates a return to the good old days before Modernism came along and stripped architecture of the "clear symbolic and iconographic directions which used to be an implicit part of the building contract," citing such historical examples as the yin and yang symbols in Chinese architecture and Thomas Tresham's 1593 Triangular Lodge, which, in its geometry and ornament, represents the Catholic Trinity.

Although the book is set up as a partisan but disinterested critique, Jencks's decision to discuss his philosophy only in light of his own work puts him in the awkward position of being his own critic—and he gives himself very good reviews indeed. Much of the book is devoted to loving descriptions of four of his projects: the Garagia Rotunda, an artist's studio; the Elemental House in Los Angeles; a farmhouse addition in Scotland; and Jencks's own Thematic House. Through Richard Bryant's beautiful color photographs, Jencks elucidates his design process (complete with discarded solutions), revealing the obsessiveness of his symbolism. From the large volumes to the smallest tile, each detail contributes to the expression of whatever "meaning" he has assigned the structure. The iconographic tradition to which Jencks claims to be heir grew out of long, evolved relationships between images and the significance of buildings. But his meanings seem as arbitrary and his vocabulary as idiosyncratic as anything Modern architecture has spawned. The Elemental House, for example, was designed to express the "Four Californian Elements"—air, water, fire, and earth—and two poems by Milton. While it is interesting to trace the author's creative process, the book is more a picture of his self-absorption than a convincing argument for a new theory of architecture.

Julia Lichtblau