MODERN ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

*Modern Architectural Theory* is the first book to provide a comprehensive survey of architectural theory, primarily in Europe and the United States, during three centuries of development. In this synthetic overview, Harry Mallgrave examines architectural discourse within its social and political context. He explores the philosophical and conceptual evolution of its ideas, discusses the relation of theory to the practice of building, and, most importantly, considers the words of the architects themselves as they contentiously shaped Western architecture. He also examines the compelling currents of French rationalist and British empiricist thought, the radical reformation of theory during the Enlightenment, the intellectual ambitions and historicist debates of the nineteenth century, and the distinctive varieties of modern theory in the twentieth century up to the profound social upheaval of the 1960s. *Modern Architectural Theory* challenges many assumptions about architectural modernism and uncovers many new dimensions of the debates about modernism.

As a distinguished historian, Harry Francis Mallgrave has long dedicated himself to mining the architectural ideas of the past three centuries. For nearly two decades he served as the Editor of Architecture and Aesthetics for the highly acclaimed “Texts and Documents Series” of the Getty Research Institute, in which capacity he was engaged in the publication of more than twenty volumes devoted to theoretical matters. He has authored, edited, and translated numerous books, among which his intellectual biography, *Gottfried Semper: Architect of the Nineteenth Century*, received the Alice David Hitchcock Award from the Society of Architectural Historians. He currently resides in Vero Beach, Florida, and has returned to architectural practice.
To Susan
CONTENTS

List of Illustrations • xi

Preface • xv

1. Prelude • 1
   1. François Blondel and the French Academic Tradition • 1
   2. Claude Perrault and the Louvre • 3
   3. The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns • 6
   4. The First Project for the Church of Ste.-Geneviève • 9

2. The Enlightenment and Neoclassical Theory • 13
   1. The Enlightenment in France • 13
   2. Soufflot and the Church of Ste.-Geneviève • 15
   3. Marc-Antoine Laugier • 19
   4. The “Rediscovery” of Greece • 24
   5. The Historiography of Winckelmann • 28
   6. The Graeco-Roman Debate • 31
   7. Neoclassicism and Character • 36

3. British Theory in the Eighteenth Century • 44
   1. The Legacy of Jones and Wren • 44
   2. The Palladian Movement • 47
   3. The Origins of the Picturesque and the Sublime • 51
   4. The Scottish and Irish Enlightenment • 55
   5. Picturesque Theory • 59
   6. John Soane • 63

4. Neoclassicism and Historicism • 67
   1. Durand and Quatremère de Quincy • 67
   2. The Polychrome Debate • 74
3. Socialism, Romanticism, and the “Petite Révolution” • 78
4. Classicism and the Gothic Revival in Britain • 82

5. The Rise of German Theory • 91
   1. The German Enlightenment • 91
   2. Friedrich Gilly and Karl Friedrich Schinkel • 93
   3. Weinbrenner, Möller, Klenze, and Gärtnert • 102
   4. In What Style Should We Build? • 106
   5. Karl Bötticher and the Style Debate • 108

6. Competing Directions at Midcentury • 114
   1. The British Style Debate 1840–1860 • 114
   2. Viollet-le-Duc and the Debate in France • 123
   3. Gottfried Semper and the Idea of Style • 130

7. Historicism in the United States • 140
   1. The Tradition of American Classicism • 140
   2. Stylistic Pluralism around Midcentury • 148
      3. Emerson and Greenough • 153
      4. Davis and Downing • 155
      5. Richardson and Sullivan • 160

8. The Arts and Crafts Movements • 170
   1. The British Arts and Crafts Movement • 170
   2. Domestic Reforms on the Continent of Europe • 177
   3. Reform Movements in the United States • 185
   4. Camillo Sitte and Ebenezer Howard • 190

9. Excursus on a Few of the Conceptual Foundations of Twentieth-Century German Modernism • 195

10. Modernism 1889–1914 • 204
     1. Otto Wagner • 204
     2. Realism and Sachlichkeit • 207
     3. Endell and van de Velde • 211
     4. Olbrich, Hoffmann, and Loos • 213
     5. Berlage and Wright • 218
     6. Garnier, Perret, Jeanneret, and Sant’Elia • 223
     7. Muthesius and Behrens • 226

11. European Modernism 1917–1933 • 235
     1. Spenglerism versus Taylorism • 235
     2. Soviet Rationalism and Constructivism • 238
     3. De Stijl and Dutch Modernism • 241

viii
CONTENTS

4. Expressionism and the Bauhaus • 244
5. Le Corbusier and Giedion • 253
6. The Breadth of the Early Modern Movement • 261
7. Weissenhof and CIAM • 271

12. American Modernism 1917–1934 • 279
1. The American Skyscraper • 279
2. Wright: The Lost Years • 287
3. Schindler and Neutra • 290
4. Mumford and Fuller • 293
5. The International Style Exhibition • 298

13. Depression, War, and Aftermath 1934–1958 • 305
1. Totalitarianism in Germany and Italy • 305
2. Prewar Theory Elsewhere in Europe • 312
3. American Practice and Academic Reforms, 1934–1941 • 316
4. The 1940s and 1950s in the United States • 325
5. Postwar Modernism in South America, Asia, and Europe • 342

1. CIAM and Team 10 • 355
2. The Italian “Retreat” from the Modern Movement • 361
3. Banham, Archigram, Metabolism, and Other Utopianisms • 364
4. Phenomenology, Structuralism, and Semiotics • 369
5. Ungers, Sterling, Scarpa, and Rossi • 373

15. Challenges to Modernism in America • 380
1. Mumford, Jacobs, and the Failure of the American City • 380
2. From a Pattern Language to the I-Ching • 387
3. Louis I. Kahn • 391
4. Colin Rowe, Peter Eisenman, and CASE • 394
5. Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture • 398

Epilogue • 404
1968 • 404

Notes • 417

Index • 483
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Claude Perrault, from *Artist Portraits: Scrapbook, 1600–1800* • 4
2. Lifting of the Louvre Pediment Stones, 1674, engraving by Sébastien Le Clerc • 5
3. Iron reinforcement bars in Louvre colonnade • 5
4. Jacques-Germain Soufflot, exterior view of Church of St.-Geneviève, Paris • 16
5. Jacques-Germain Soufflot, interior view of crossing in the Church of St.-Geneviève, Paris • 17
6. Marc-Antoine Laugier, frontispiece to *Essai sur l’Architecture* (1753) • 21
7. James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, view of the Parthenon • 26
8. David Le Roy, view of the Temple of Minerva (Parthenon) • 27
10. Giovanni Battista Piranesi • 31
11. Title page of *Osservazioni sopra la lettre de M. Mariette* (1765) • 34
12. Plate IX from *Osservazioni sopra la lettre de M. Mariette* (1765) • 35
15. Claude-Nicholas Ledoux, pavilion for Mlle Guimard, Paris, 1769–72 • 39
16. Title page of Claude-Nicholas Ledoux, *L’Architecture considérée sous la rapport de l’art, de moeurs et de la legislation* (1804) • 43
17. Inigo Jones, from *Artist Portraits: Scrapbook, 1600–1800* • 45
18. Christopher Wren, from *Artist Portraits: Scrapbook, 1600–1800* • 45
19. Andrea Palladio, frontispiece to *The Architecture of A. Palladio in Four Books* • 49
20. Grotto in Alexander Pope’s Garden • 52
21. William Kent, from *Artist Portraits: Scrapbook, 1600–1800* • 53
22. Plate from William Chambers, *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines and Utensils* • 55
ILLUSTRATIONS

23. Robert and James Adam, ceiling of music room, Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, Saint James Square, London • 59
24. Design from John Soane, Sketches in Architecture • 65
25. Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand and Jean-Thomas Thibault, Temple of Equality • 69
26. Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, plate from Précis des leçons d'architecture • 71
27. Detail of the painted entablature of the Temple of Theseus • 75
29. Charles Robert Cockerell, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1841–5 • 84
30. Plate from Jon Britton, The Architectural Antiquities of Great Britain • 85
31. Medieval title page from Pugin's Contrasts • 88
32. Mock Soanian title page from Pugin's Contrasts • 89
33. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Berlin Playhouse, 1819–21 • 97
36. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, Berlin Bauakademie, 1831–6 • 103
37. Leo von Klenze, Glyptothek, Munich, 1815–34 • 105
38. Friedrich Gärtners, Ludwigskirche, Munich, 1828–44 • 107
39. Karl Bötticher, plate from Die Tektonic der Hellenen • 113
40. The Crystal Palace, Great Exhibition of 1851, exterior view • 117
41. The Crystal Palace, Great Exhibition of 1851, interior view • 119
42. Plate from John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice • 123
43. Title page from César Daly, Revue générale de l'architecture et des Travaux • 127
44. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, plate from sixth lecture, Entretiens sur l'architecture • 129
45. Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, plate from twelfth lecture, Entretiens sur l'architecture • 131
46. Assyrian winged figure from Austen Henry Layard, The Monuments of Nineveh • 133
47. Gottfried Semper, “Carib” hut from Trinidad, displayed at the Great Exhibition • 135
48. Gottfried Semper, portrait by W. Uingers, 1871 • 137
49. Gottfried Semper, second Dresden Hoftheater, 1870–8 • 138
50. View of the Capitol and Washington, D.C., in 1810 • 142
51. The White House from Pennsylvania Avenue • 142
52. Thomas Jefferson, campus of the University of Virginia, 1817–26 • 143
54. Richard Upjohn, Trinity Church, New York, 1839–46 • 151
55. Alexander Jackson Davis, view of the veranda and grounds at Blithewood, residence of Robert Donaldson • 157

xii
ILLUSTRATIONS

56. “A Cottage Villa in the Bracketed Mode,” from Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences* (New York, 1842) • 159

57. Henry Hobson Richardson, Allegheny County Courthouse and Jail, Pittsburgh, 1883–8 • 165

58. Plate from Louis Sullivan, *A System of Architectural Ornament According to a Philosophy of Man’s Powers* • 168

59. Plate from Owen Jones, *The Grammar of Ornament* • 173

60. Christopher Dresser, cover of *The Art of Decorative Design* • 173

61. Richard Norman Shaw, Leyeswood, Sussex, 1868–9 • 175

62. Georg Gottlob Ungewitter, house design from *Gotische Stadt- und Landhäuser* • 179

63. Georg Hirth, room design from *Das deutsche Zimmer der Renaissance* • 181

64. Stave church, from Johan Christian Dahl, *Denkmale einer sehr ausgebildeten Holzbaukunst aus den frühesten Jahrhunderten in den inneren Landschaften Norwegens* • 182

65. Eliel Saarinen, Herman Gesellius, and Armas Lindgren, living hall within the complex at Hvitträsk, started 1901 • 183

66. Louis C. Tiffany, window design • 186

67. McKim, Mead & White, Boston Public Library, 1888–95 • 187

68. Greene and Greene, Gamble House, Pasadena, 1908 • 191

69. Otto Wagner, Postal Office Savings Bank, Vienna, 1903–12 • 207

70. August Endell, illustration from “Formen Schönheit und dekorative Kunst” • 213

71. Adolf Loos, title page from first issue of *Das Andere* • 217

72. Hendrik Berlage, Amsterdam Exchange, 1897–1903, pin-joint detail • 221

73. Antonio Sant’Elia, The Futurist Manifesto • 227

74. Hermann Muthesius, row houses in Hellerau, 1910 • 231

75. Peter Behrens, turbine factory, Berlin, 1908–9 • 233

76. Vesnin Brothers, Palace of Labor competition project, 1923 • 239

77. Gerrit Rietveld, Schröder House, Utrecht, 1924–5 • 245

78. Title page of the Arbeisrat für Kunst manifesto • 247

79. Cover of the fourth issue of *L’Esprit Nouveau* • 255

80. Le Corbusier, Ozenfant studio, Paris, 1920–3 • 257

81. Giuseppe Terragni, Novocomun apartment building, Como, 1927–9 • 263

82. Siegfried Giedion, cover of *Befreites Wohnen* • 265

83. Image of the Weissenhof housing exhibition on the cover of Walter Curt Behrendt’s *Der Sieg des neunen Baukunst* • 275

84. Hugh Ferris, four sketches depicting New York City’s new zoning ordinance • 283

85. Frank Lloyd Wright, design for National Life Insurance Company, Chicago, 1924 • 284

86. Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer, Chicago Tribune Tower competition entry, 1922 • 285
ILLUSTRATIONS

87. Bernard Bijvoet and Johannes Duiker, Chicago Tribune Tower competition entry, 1922 • 285
88. Rudolf M. Schindler, vacation house, Newport Beach, 1922–6 • 291
89. Buckminster Fuller, Dymaxion house, 1928 • 297
90. Cover photograph of the exhibition catalogue: Modern Architecture: International Exhibition • 303
91. Giuseppe Terragni, Casa del Fascio, Como, 1932–6 • 313
92. Le Corbusier, model of La Ville Radieuse, 1936 • 315
93. Henry Wright, cover of Rehousing Urban America • 317
94. Frank Lloyd Wright, model of a car house • 321
95. Eliel and Eero Saarinen, Dynamometer Building, General Motors Technical Center, Warren, Michigan, 1945–53 • 331
96. Mies van der Rohe, IIT Minerals and Metals Research Building, Chicago, 1941 • 331
97. Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen, House #8 (1945) • 335
98. Louis I. Kahn, Richards Medical Center, Philadelphia, 1957–61 • 341
99. Bruno Zevi, title page of Verso un’architettura organica • 347
100. Sven Markelius, house, Kvinge, Sweden • 351
101. Roberto Gabetti and Aimaro d’Isola, Bottega d’Erasmo, Turin, 1953–6 • 363
102. James Sterling, Engineering Building, Leicester University, 1959–63 • 375
103. Peter Blake, two contrasting images from God’s Own Junkyard • 385
104. Cover of Martin Anderson’s The Federal Bulldozer • 387
105. Paul Rudolph, Walker guest house on Sanibel Island, Florida, 1957 • 393
106. Louis I. Kahn, atrium of Phillips Exeter Academy Library, 1965–72 • 395
107. Page from Robert Venturi’s article “Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture” • 401
108. Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, image of Las Vegas, from “A Significance for A&P Parking Lots or Learning from Las Vegas” • 409
109. Title page of first issue of Oppositions • 413
An encounter with the architectural ideas of the past few centuries is a little like rushing upon a sleeping Proteus—the mythical sea god and herdsman of seals who (to Odysseus) had the power to take all manners of shapes. One has to hold on fast as theory evolves through its many guises until at last it is forced to reveal its true identity. In the seventeenth century, it was codified and was more or less restricted to one or two academies; its main ideas were expounded through lectures and treatises. During the Enlightenment, it steps out into the public forum for the first time, and nonacademic viewpoints begin to challenge accepted academic dogmas. The rise of national identities and the availability of architectural journals in the nineteenth century vastly expanded and facilitated theoretical discourse. And of course the manifestos of the twentieth century were usually short, minimalist polemical statements, sometimes cogently reduced to axiomatic diagrams or simple sketches. We shall take architectural theory in its broadest sense and define it simply as the history of architectural ideas, literary or otherwise. Further, as every generation possesses the need to define itself in relation to what exists, architectural theory has almost always been a reaction to the past.

The present work seeks to narrate the main lines of modern architectural thought from 1673 to the troubling year of 1968. These dates may appear arbitrary, but they have a foundation. To start with, the words theory and modern both first came into prominence in the late seventeenth century. The Greek and Latin word theoros—related to the Greek words theoreos (spectator), theos (divine being), and theatron (theater)—had several meanings in early antiquity. It could refer to a person consulting an oracle, someone participating or assisting in a religious festival, or (perhaps most anciently) the experience of looking at a god. Reflecting on this fact, David Leatherbarrow, in a discussion of the poetic meaning of theory, highlighted someone experiencing a religious epiphany or turning one’s life around. In later antiquity, the term came to mean “looking at, viewing, or contemplation.” Aristotle, for instance, employed theoria to signify “to contemplate, to consider,” as well as to refer to an “object of contemplation.” Cicero, in a letter to Atticus, used the Greek word loosely in this sense, but this interpretation remained relatively rare in Latin until the word was applied to philosophical matters during the Middle Ages. The Roman architect Vitruvius, in making his famous distinction between theory and practice, for instance, employed ratiocinatio for the former, a word meaning “the process of reasoning, calculation, ratiocination, or theorizing.”

The Italian word teoria appears occasionally in artistic literature in the late Renaissance. In the 1558 edition of Le vite (Lives), Georgio Vasari used teorica at the beginning of his sketch of Alberti to refer to a set of theoretical beliefs that an artist should successfully marry with pratica (practice). One year earlier, Daniel Barbaro, in his Italian translation of Vitruvius’ De Architectura, translated ratiocinatio as discorso. Because the Italian words calculatione and ratiocinazione were the preferred terms for translating ratiocinatio earlier in the century, Barbaro was probably following the lead of Jean Martin, who in 1547 had translated this term into French as discours. In any case, it was not until the next century that theorie became widely adopted into French, theory into English, first in the sciences. In 1656, Blaise Pascal, in his seventh Provincial Letter, used theorie entirely in the modern sense, that is, to
refer to the opposite of practice. More importantly, Claude Perrault, in his 1673 translation of Vitruvius, chose théorie for the Latin ratiocinatio. This term and its variants almost immediately became standard in architectural discussions throughout Europe. An English translation of an abridged version of Perrault’s text, published in 1692, first established its architectural usage in this language. Theory seems to have fit the body of architectural thought so well that, in a reprint of this book eleven years later, the title was changed to The Theory and Practice of Architecture; or Vitruvius and Vignola Abridg’d. Conveniently, modern also came into usage around this time. Its Latin root modernus first appeared in the late fifth century a.d., although other words in early antiquity were used to express the same concept. Its use finally became prevalent by the eight or ninth century, in such forms as modernitas (of the present day) and moderna (modern people). It was the “quarrel of the ancients and moderns” in the late seventeenth century, however, that popularized modern as an art term. The “quarrel,” an artistic and literary controversy of the 1670s and 1680s, was crucial to the formation of modern theory. It pitted those who defended the artistic superiority of the classical Greek and Roman periods against those who espoused the superiority of modern artists, with their more “reasoned” rules and refined tastes. The “ancients,” to put it generally, preferred the “ornaments” devised in classical times to newer and more modern inventions. The “moderns,” while acknowledging the profit to be gained by studying the past, dared to criticize antiquity for its “imperfections” and sought to improve on them. And whereas this quarrel in most studies is generally consigned to the late 1680s, it really began in architectural circles as the result of a single footnote – again found in Perrault’s 1673 translation of Vitruvius.

The choice of the year 1968 to conclude this study also deserves a few words. To begin with, this year was chosen not because it signifies an end to modernity or the death of architecture, nor because it signifies some greater paradigm shift within the conceptual development of global thought. This book will not debate the relevancy of the culture industry, the notion of an avant-garde predicated on the “scars of damage and disruption,” or even the montage of artistic life suspended in a Benjaminian postauratic world. Francesco Dal Co recently pointed out the odd coincidence of the current success of theory in academe with “a depletion of theoretical production on the part of practicing architects and with an increasingly accentuated autonomy claimed by historical research.” This suggestion – that theory prospers where theory in practice falters, and vice versa – is indeed an intriguing one because it highlights the resistance of a theory to overly conceptualized modeling. Architectural theory is perhaps better seen as a relatively closed body or culture of ideas formed over centuries, ideas that remain remarkably stable in the face of constantly changing contexts. And in this sense it can certainly be argued that architectural discourse moves quite seamlessly through the late 1960s and early 1970s with no discernible sign of a rupture or breakdown of thought.

Nevertheless, the year 1968 is more than a convenient resting point. It was a year of dramatic social confrontation and upheaval characterized by a dislocation of strategies and sensitivities comparable to what would result from a war or a severe economic downturn. The year and its events challenged the relevancy of the current body of architectural theory and, in the process, injected a measure of intellectual, social, political, and cynicism into the discourse – even if these features resonated with very different political overtones in Europe and Asia than in North America. We also should not overlook feelings of anger and futility and the widespread loss of confidence on the part of architects in their timeless desire to change the world. If theoretical deliberation in the 1970s moves, on the one hand, to resanctitize forms and, on the other hand, to desemanticize their former content, both efforts can be seen as born of the very same impulse. Theory did not change in 1968, but its context radically shifted.

I also want to stress that a history of theory is different from a history of architecture. The emphasis in the former is on ideas, and some major architects have had only a small effect on the course of theory whereas some minor architects have had a large impact. Thus, the pattern of theory is different for that of history. Similarly, if I have privileged certain movements or institutions – such as the De Stijl movement and the Bauhaus in the 1920s – it is not because I necessarily give historiographic preeminence to them within the context of this decade (as, admittedly, many historians have done in the past) but rather because they had a larger and more immediate influence on the theoretical terrain than other contemporary events. Further, although this study can by no means be comprehensive, I have striven to provide a balanced account of the development of Western theory in both its European and (somewhat later) North American manifestations.

Every book takes on a life of its own. The efforts that led to this book began with an invitation to the Clark Art Institute study center, and for this I owe a considerable debt to...
Michael Conforti and Michael Holly and to the library staff at this idyllic facility in scenic Williamstown. The final chapters of the book were completed at the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal, and I wish to thank Phyllis Lambert for her invitation and generosity and to express my gratitude to Louis Martin, Martin Bressani, Mario Carpo, Dirk De Meyer, and Spyros Papapetrou for many discussions. The book owes much to the bibliographic resources of this great institution, supervised by Gerald Beasley, Pierre Boisvert, Renata Gutman, Suzie Quintal, Paul Chenier, and Françoise Roux. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Christina Contandriopoulos for her work on the illustrations. Also providing invaluable assistance at the Canadian Centre for Architecture were Nathalie Senecal and Aliki Economedes. I express my appreciation to Peg Wilson at my local library for her interlibrary-loan assistance. A very important grant from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Study in the Fine Arts allowed me at one point to work full time on the project. I also owe a debt of gratitude to many other people for discussions over the years relating to this study, among them J. Duncan Berry, Marco Frascari, Barry Bergdoll, Henrik Karge, and Joan Ockman. Perhaps the strongest supporter of this enterprise was Beatrice Rehl, the distinguished editor at Cambridge University Press.

One final editorial note: I have in my citations employed the original spellings and accentuation even when they differ from modern usage. Also, a book of this historical scope can only be built on the historical investigations of many others. I have striven in all cases to recognize the sources I used, but the large scope of this enterprise makes it impossible to recognize in every case the efforts of those who shaped aspects of my own work over the years and to construct a comprehensive bibliography. I therefore apologize to all historians whose work I have not cited.