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Architectural Criticism on the Art Market: A US-American Debate
Martin Hartung

As Paul Goldberger put it in 2005: «An architecture critic has a lot of authority but not much real power. Power is a much more raw and direct force. Authority is respect and trust. I don't think architecture critics have the power. It used to be said that ‹The New York Times› critic can close a Broadway show. Well, that's power. But nobody tears down a building if an architecture critic doesn't like it.»

One of the hottest debates touching on some core issues of architectural criticism in the last two years was triggered by a defamation lawsuit the architect Zaha Hadid filed against the New York Review of Books architecture critic Martin Filler in August 2014. To recall the prominent case: in a review of Rowan Moore's ‹Why We Build: Power and Desire in Architecture›, published on June 5, 2014, Filler accused Hadid that she «unashamedly disavowed any responsibility, let alone concern, for the estimated 1000 laborers who have perished while constructing her [Al Wakrah] project [in Qatar].»[1] Filler also quoted Hadid as having commented: «I have nothing to do with the workers [...] It is not my duty as an architect to look at it.»[2] Even though Hadid's lawsuit was regarded by many as morally questionable, Filler had to face the problem that he didn't check his facts. Not only was there no proof of any cases of death related to the building site—yet, the even higher number of 1.200 reported deaths of migrant workers in Qatar at the time, was (and remains) an issue. Most importantly, the construction of Hadid's stadium for the World Cup in 2022 had not yet begun when the critic made his statement. Filler apologized, Hadid's New York-based lawyer (Oren Warshavsky, also a lead attorney in the Bernie Maddoff case) released a statement and finally, in early 2015, the architect dropped the lawsuit.[3]

It was, however, not the first time an architecture critic got sued: In 1978, Allan Temko, who had introduced a new form of activist criticism in the 1960s, working for the San Francisco Chronicle, started a review of the local touristic shopping mall ‹Pier 39› with the memorable words: «Corn. Kitsch. Schlock. Honky-tonk. Dreck. Schmaltz. Merde.» At the time, ‹Pier 39›'s architect, the San Francisco-based Sandy Walker, sued Temko for two million US-dollars. With the help of the newspaper, the case was finally dismissed. In the mid-1980s, during a time of heavy debates on the legacy of modernism in architecture, it was Filler who recounted another prominent case: that of Donald Trump versus Paul Gapp in 1984. The widely respected architecture critic of the Chicago Tribune condemned Trump, who attempted to build the world's tallest building—a 150-story skyscraper in southern Manhattan—for his imposing egomania. In response, the critic had to face a 500 million US-dollar lawsuit against himself and the newspaper, which was eventually dismissed in court in 1985. Filler's elaborations shed light on the specific mechanisms of criticism in the field of architecture, in which «it is the creator, rather than the critic, who calls the tune».[4] Focusing on the complex power plays in the field, Filler assessed: «Historically, the establishment of a critical voice in architecture in this country has usually depended more on the support given the writer by a publication rather than his or her own evolution of a set of principles and values.»[5] Thirty years later, the lawsuit Hadid vs. Filler, more generally, drew attention to the responsibility of the critic as well as his or her exemplary role, and points us to the boundaries of the field, which the American philosopher, Stanley Cavell, defined as a recurrent «affront.»[6] According to Cavell, «[criticism's] only justification lies in its usefulness, in making its object available to just response.»[7]

I would like to draw attention to one specific field that began to occupy architecture critics in the seventies: architectural representations in the art market; a phenomenon that peaked in the United States in the 1980s, when architects were offered new ways of marketing their businesses in a handful of art and architecture galleries.[8] In 1978, an article in the magazine Architectural Digest concludes a survey of «architectural drawing as an art form» with the observation that it was «still something of a pioneer field for the collector [affording] a dual satisfaction: There is both aesthetic pleasure and intellectual stimulation in having direct contact with art that shapes our manner of living.»[9] Eight years later, the New York Times art critic, Grace Glueck, recapitulated in the ‹Home› section of the newspaper that despite fears over high prices—and a dispersal of documents—from organizations such as the Society of Architectural Historians, «architecture as a subject has become much more accessible, and architects not quite so anonymous.»[10] As a result, the art market for architectural drawings gradually collapsed

‹Architectural Studies and Projects›, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 13-May 11, 1975. Installation view.
© The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

in the early 1990s, coinciding with a new construction boom since the late 1980s and the institutionalization of more standardized, computer-aided drawing techniques that significantly limited the supply. In the long run, the specialized market proved to be closely related with the actuality of professional polemics as well as the sales and collecting efforts of a few key players, but not so much driven by the potential originality, rarity and standing of its commodities in the context of art.

My focus is on a case study, which relates criticism at the New York Times to activities in the art market at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to contextualize the way in which contemporary architectural drawings increasingly began to be observed as saleable commodities. How did a group of architecture critics serve as a vital source for evaluating this market within debates on disciplinary autonomy, and how intertwined are the markets of criticism with those of publicity?

A comprehensive article by an architecture critic, which directly related to a sales exhibition of drawings by contemporary architects, was written by Ada Louise Huxtable in April 1975. In her piece, Huxtable, who became the highly respected first architecture critic of the New York Times in 1963, featured a drawing of ‹House VI› (1975) by Peter Eisenman. It was part of the exhibition ‹Architectural Studies and Projects›, held at MoMA from March 13 until May 15, 1975. With the help of Emilio Ambasz, then curator at the Department of Architecture and Design at MoMA, twenty-three international architects, including Peter Cook, Michael Graves, John Hejduk, Hans Hollein, Rem Koolhaas, Elia & Zoe Zenghelis, Adolfo Natalini, Cedric Price, and Ettore Sottsass, were each invited to submit between two and five drawings to the informal exhibition at the museum. It was only open to museum members and associates. The majority of the architects pursued teaching activities rather than working on building commissions at the time, mirrored by a shortage of commissions in the course of the oil crisis in 1973, which had increased a refined production of architectural ideas and representations. At the same time, as already evidenced by some architects' activities in the 1950s and progressively throughout the 1960s, a diverse range of elaborate architectural drawings made a comeback in the context of historical revisions after their widespread dismissal by Modernists in the early 20th century, who countered the Beaux-Arts tradition.[11]

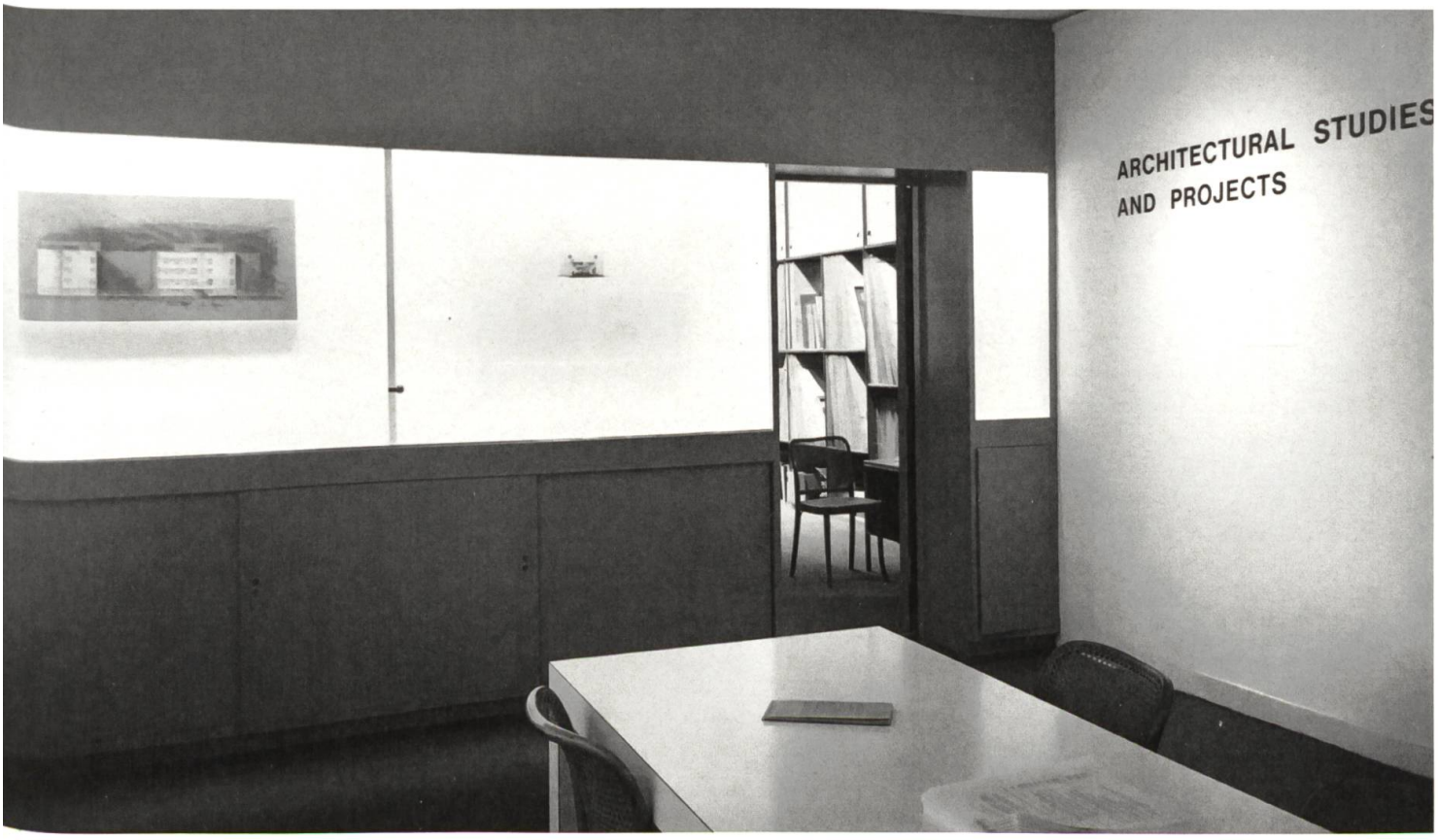
It was thus not a coincidence that Arthur Drexler, then Chief Curator of the Department of Architecture and Design, aimed «to re-examine our architecture pieties»[12] through large-scale, nineteenth century drawings in the exhibition ‹The Architecture of the École des Beaux-Arts›. Held from October 29, 1975 until January 4, 1976, the architectural drawing was placed center stage at a critically debated and long-prepared show by the preeminent cultural institution of Western Modernism, which promoted architecture as an art form since the opening of its Department of Architecture and Design in 1932.

Just about five months earlier, the informal, comparatively swiftly assembled, contemporary version of this exhibition in the Members Penthouse

marked the humble beginning of a series of more prominent architecture-related art gallery shows; held since the late 1970s in the United States, Europe, and Japan. In the US, the New York-based art galleries of Leo Castelli and Max Protetch ensured broad newspaper and magazine coverage of architectural drawings and models as commodities, which did not provide nearly as much income compared to the sales of artworks, but allowed for recurring profits in a developing attention economy. Protetch was quick to market architects and their image(s) in the most systematic way amongst the interested art gallerists, something which writer Lisbet Nilson recognized as an «important innovative coup for him as an art dealer», in a feature on the gallerist for the lifestyle magazine Metropolitan Home.[13] Nilson also emphasized that «many of the presentation drawings and theoretical sketches produced in the name of new architectural directions, are lovely even to a layman's eyes. As architecture, they are important cultural documents. Viewed as art, they are desirable objects of beauty.»[14] Not surprisingly, this focus on aesthetics with regard to architectural drawings—previously regarded as means to an end—triggered mixed feelings in architecture circles. The majority of commercial art gallerists that exhibited contemporary architectural drawings, shared an interest in positions associated with Minimal and Conceptual art, which featured documentation and administration-based art practices and thus opened up links to the referentiality of architectural drawings.

These unusual activities in the art market, which itself was undergoing structural changes in the wave of Neoliberalism, began with the direct involvement of some MoMA associates and trustees. As an informal exhibition at the Members Penthouse, ‹Architectural Studies and Projects› was orchestrated by the art collector and entrepreneur Barbara Jakobson, who attempted to help her architect friends in a time of scarce commissions.[15] Jakobson served as the head of the museum's Junior Council, an active funding source for the institution with a group of council members managing the institution's Art Lending Service. From 1951 until 1982, when it closed to the public, the Art Lending Service cooperated with a number of art galleries to rent and sell art to museum members in support of institutional affairs. Beginning in the mid-1950s, an exhibition series was programmed for the Members Penthouse. Under this umbrella, Jakobson and Emilio Ambasz, then curator of design at the museum, presented this first international sales exhibition for contemporary architectural drawings in New York.

It served as an occasion for a very personal statement by Huxtable, herself a former employee at the Department for Architecture and Design at MoMA, who became the first architecture critic to receive the prestigious Pulitzer Price in 1970. She remembered her fist years in the profession as «crisis-oriented».[16] In 1964, New York's Penn Station was demolished, a building the critic had called «a monument to the lost art of magnificent construction, other values aside.»[17] A year before the station's demolition, Huxtable emphatically expressed her disappointment: «It's time we stopped talking about our affluent society. We are an impoverished society. It is a poor society indeed that [...] has no money for anything except expressways to rush people out of our dull and deteriorating cities.»[18]



‹Architectural Studies and Projects›, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 13-May 11, 1975. Installation view.
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Left: Architecture critic Paul Goldberger and architect Charles Gwathmey during a dinner in a private dining room of The Four Seasons restaurant on the occasion of Gwathmey's 60th birthday in June 1998. Among the small group of attendees were Richard Meier and John Hejduk (to the right), Peter Eisenman, Michael Graves, and Philip Johnson. A private note to Johnson by Gwathmey's business partner, Robert Siegel, in a photo book, in which this picture is included, reads: «Dear Philip, Knights of the round table gathered; King Philip, Prince Paul, the reunion of the New York Five to celebrate commitment, respect and Charles' 60th birthday. […]». © The Philip Johnson Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Asked how the role of the architecture critic changed over the years, she replied decades later: «The role is the same, but the emphasis has changed. A critic has a lot of responsibility. It is largely informational and educational—to let the public know what's going on in the large and small issues and to let them know the difference between good and bad, how to distinguish a work of art. Today, I think the emphasis is too much on chasing celebrities, which has emerged all through society.»[19]

In 1975, Huxtable concluded her review of the MoMA show: «Architectural fantasies can be a lot better than building in a bankrupt society.»[20] Her associate Paul Goldberger, who had started to work as an assistant editor at The New York Times Magazine in 1972 at the age of 22 and became a junior critic in 1974, found a clearer tone in judging that the exhibition, «has little real insight into the state of architectural practice today.» He continued: «Its significance, rather, lies in its ability to remind us that architects do, in fact have imaginations, and when these imaginations are permitted to run free of the constraints imposed by actual building programs, the results can be exciting and often extraordinary beautiful.»[21]

Without mentioning that the informal exhibition was only accessible to MoMA members, the critic further stated: «One of the objectives of the show has been to encourage public interest in architectural drawings as art, and on this level it is likely to be successful […].»[22] Rather than questioning the unprecedented market presence of these architectural representations, Goldberger highlighted, «extremely skilled drawings by more familiar New York architects such as Peter Eisenman, Richard Meier and John Hejduk»,[23] all of which had support of Philip Johnson, who was instrumental in financing Eisenman's Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) in New York. Early on, Goldberger would extensively cover the group of architects that had become known as the ‹New York Five›, but he also focused on newly emerging positions subsumed under the buzzword ‹Postmodernism›. Later, the critic acknowledged that, «one of the problems in perception of my criticism was that I didn't really take an absolute position completely on one side or another.»[24] In 1975, Goldberger's colleague, the Boston Globe's architecture critic Robert Campbell, expressed his disappointment by stating: «After the splashy review in the New York Times and the usual intriguing press release, I had somehow expected more from the new show at the Museum of Modern Art called ‹Architectural Studies and Projects›.»[25] The critic continued: «To begin with, most of the drawings don't even pretend to be visionary architecture as the show promises.»[26] Campbell concluded his review: «It was Ernest Hemingway who said that the most important equipment for a writer is a built-in, tamper-proof, copper-bottom crap detector (or something like that), and a show like this makes you wish the same for architects, who as a group possibly need it more. After you get through everything that hasn't even tried to be ‹visionary architecture› you are left with not an awful

lot.»[27] He further stated that «Real architecture is so much more complex, many-layered, exciting, alive, simply by trying to respond to the contemporary world instead of reducing it to someone's personal iconography.»[28] Two years later, during a presentation at IAUS, Campbell's suggestion to mount a different exhibition with buildable projects rather than reactionary drawings in order to «help educate the public in the one visual art it can't help living with», was reflected by the Boston-based critic and editor, Peter Blake, who, like Campbell, was also an architect.[29] In his public talk during the IAUS' spring semester, Blake made the point that «certified architecture critics in the US by large do not understand architecture, discuss it as an abstract art, and write not for an intelligent and interested and aware public, but for each other [...].»[30] Campbell took a very different stance to Goldberger—an example of how two critics with different backgrounds and contexts judge their subjects differently. Moreover, New York was Goldberger's «own backyard».[31]

His suggestion that, by encouraging public interest in architectural drawings as art, the exhibition was most likely going to be successful, was met by the critic himself, when he purchased at least one drawing from the show.[32] Although it was not the drawing Goldberger purchased, OMA's ‹Egg of Columbus Circle› (1975), the image featured in the critic's article, was offered at the museum for $780 (a buying power of about $3,600 today).[33] Overall, 43 drawings were for sale in the exhibition and nine clients—private individuals as well as members of corporations—purchased works. Not least, if this early example of criticism around an art market-related exhibition in the 1970s points to anything, then to the question whether any critic, through detachment, can ever be effective. Furthermore, it points to the position of the critic in a multi-tiered, commercial world. Martin Filler remembered with regard to operations of the professional magazine Architectural Record during the 1970s that «they had no sense of criticism. Their attitude was: if it gets built, it's good for the profession; [and] even in a place that permitted criticism [such as Progressive Architecture] there were always internal struggles about that.»[34] Criticism functioned differently in the other arts, «because in architecture the stakes are so much higher than in any of the other art forms.»[35] Likewise, architectural drawings in the art market represented an unusual phenomenon in the context of the profession.

Nevertheless, Goldberger's involvement with a ‹power elite›[36] would in itself trigger criticism from yet another critic: Michael Sorkin. In an article for the New York-based Village Voice in 1984, titled «Why Paul Goldberger is so Bad», Sorkin addressed and criticized the colleague sharply for his stance with regard to the planned re-design of Times Square.[37] Johnson and Burgee's proposal had been commissioned by the Park Tower Realty Corporation and would have featured four granite-color buildings of different sizes. Whereas many professionals opposed the project, Goldberger endorsed the endeavor and earned himself a raving response from Sorkin, who expressed his outrage in his typical writing style—«suspicious of the non-stop lifestyles of the rich and famous, [...] beach houses and Disneyland»,—by stating: «The main problem with architecture in this country is the stranglehold that people like Johnson and [Robert] Stern have on its institutional culture, the way in which schools, museums, patrons, and the press call their tunes, excluding so many others. America's architecture is too important to be held prisoner by a bunch of boys that meets in secret to anoint members of the club, reactionaries to whom a social practice means an invitation to lunch, bad designers whose notions of form are the worst kind of parroting. It is for being the unquestioning servant of these that I accuse Paul Goldberger.»[38]

Criticism does not happen in a vacuum. This is equally the case with regard to Sorkin, who, «under the spell of doughty Marxism»[39] would counter any elitist project. Sorkin, who until today is nothing short of criticism for the field, provoked in the early 2000s that, «The majority of critics nowadays are simply flacks: There are too many fashionistas and too few street fighters. We've been taken up into the culture of branding.»[40]

The architecture historian James Marston Fitch (Columbia University, New York), reviewed architectural criticism in the United States in 1976 and came to the conclusion, that «the iron-bound formalism of current architectural criticism is quite as dangerous to favored buildings as to favorite architects.»[41] Not even ten years later, Goldberger, who up to then had supported formalist, post-modern positions in architecture, announced in a headline for the International Herald Tribune that «The Celebrity Architect Arrives».[42]

When evaluating the case of Hadid versus Filler in 2014/15, Goldberger stated that «there is much to be unhappy about the way that the celebrity culture has infiltrated architecture»,[43] a development the critic himself participated in fostering. Accordingly, a market for architectural drawings, which repeatedly focused on the power of images rather than the technical feasibility of projects, was largely made possible through the coverage provided by critics: A solo exhibition of drawings by Massimo Scolari at the Max Protetch Gallery in 1980, which did not sell well, was extended for a week to allow Ada Louise Huxtable to review it. The architecture director of the gallery stated that «naturally we [the Max Protetch Gallery] hope that sales will increase if Huxtable does write about your work.»[44]

Architecture's—and the architect's—entanglement with a global, cultural infrastructure became more and more apparent since the late 1970s.[45] Accordingly, the critics had to adapt and to balance these powers against pure affirmation. As Goldberger put it in 2005: «An architecture critic has a lot of authority but not much real power. Power is a much more raw and direct force. Authority is respect and trust. I don't think architecture critics have the power. It used to be said that ‹The New York Times› critic can close a

Broadway show. Well, that's power. But nobody tears down a building if an architecture critic doesn't like it.»[46] Notwithstanding instances, in which critics had an impact on the built environment, it is fitting then that the ‹powerless› critic was able to flourish by covering the market of architectural representations, which featured hardly any buildings that could have been torn down in the first place.

1 http://www.architectmagazine.com/design/will-retracting-the-defamatory-article-be-enough-for-zaha-hadid_o. Retrieved: June 10, 2017.
2 Ibid.
3 See http://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/zaha-hadid-reaches-settlement-in-lawsuit-against-the-new-york-review-of-books-martin-filler_o. Retrieved: June 10, 2017.
4 Martin Filler, ‹American Architecture and Its Criticism: Reflections on the State of the Arts›, in: Tod A. Marder, ‹The Critical Edge. Controversy in Recent American Architecture›, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1985, 27–32, 28.
5 Ibid, 29. That publishers did not always readily protect critics is issued by Filler on p. 30: «In New York, Carter B. Horsley, whose incisive reportage on the real estate market had long been among the best writing on architecture in the ‹New York Times›, was demoted in 1982 to checking facts for wedding notices on the society page after his investigative coverage […] drew the wrath of the ‹Times› management.»
6 Stanley Cavell, ‹The Availability of Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy›, in: ‹Philosophical Review› 71, 1962, 67–93; quoted by William H. Hayes, ‹Architectural Criticism›, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism›, vol. 60, no 4, Fall 2002, 325. See also John Macarthur and Naomi Stead, ‹The Judge is Not an Operator: Criticality, Historiography and Architectural Criticism›, in ‹OASE›, vol. 69, 2006, 116–138.
7 Ibid.
8 See 4. In his essay, Filler notes «that because of self-imposed prohibitions of The American Institute of Architects, which remained in effect until only recently, architects in this country were traditionally barred from advertising their services, and therefore had come to view criticism—that is to say positive reviews of their work—as the only ethically permissible form of publicity open to them.» (p. 28) Another form of publicity, which Fuller does not explicitly mention in his essay, was the increasing exhibition of architectural representations in art galleries and museums.
9 ‹Art: Architectural Drawings. The Grace of Fine Delineation›, in: ‹Architectural Digest›, March 1978, 78–83.
10 Grace Glueck, ‹Architect's Drawings Lure Collectors›, in: ‹The New York Times›, February 6, 1986, C1/C10.
11 See Paul Goldberger, ‹Architectural Drawings Make Comeback to Respectability›, in: ‹The New York Times›, September 22, 1977, C16.
12 MoMA press release, published on October 29, 1977. Drexler served as MoMA's Chief Curator for Architecture from 1956 until 1986. He joined the staff in 1951. A debate on the exhibition with architectural professionals was published in Oppositions (Spring 1977:8, 160-175), edited at the Institute for Architectuare and Urban Studies (IAUS), which was founded in New York in 1967 and served as a center for debates on the autonomy of architecture under the directorship of Peter Eisenman.
13 Lisbet Nilson, ‹New Deals in Art: Marketing the architect's fine hand›, in: ‹Metropolitan Home›, February 1984, 34-105, 36.
14 Ibid.
15 Barbara Jakobson in conversation with the author (New York, October 28, 2014).
16 See https://archpaper.com/2005/11/on-criticism-2/. Retrieved: June 10, 2017.
17 http://niemanreports.org/articles/architecture-criticism-dead-or-alive/. Retrieved June 10, 2017.
18 Ibid.
19 See 16.
20 Ada Louise Huxtable, ‹Poetic Visions Of Design For the Future›, in: ‹The New York Times›, April 27, 1975. The article appeared about six weeks after Goldberger's shorter report on the exhibition and less than three weeks before its closing. Huxtable wrote in her carefully crafted critique: «What we get is not a picture of buildable building, or anything remotely resembling it except in the most lyrically perverse way. […] It is a kind of poetry.»
21 Paul Goldberger, ‹Architecture Drawings at the Modern›, in: ‹The New York Times, March 14, 1975. Goldberger remembered that in the 1970s, «The New York Times was so big and so essential and had so much advertising in it and was so thick, they were just desperate to fill space, so that anything I would write they would welcome.» (See 24.)
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Paul Goldberger in conversation with the author (New York, January 27, 2016).
25 Robert Campbell, ‹MOMA display weak, timid›, in: ‹The Boston Sunday Globe›, March 23, 1975, F14. In his critique, Campbell did not mention that the drawings in the exhibition were for sale.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 See 24.
30 Blake further stated that «the architectural profession in the US, individually and collectively, subverts and emasculates all intelligent criticism of architecture», through censorship, which also advertisers executed, if the coverage mentioned their products in a negative way. During his time as an editor-in-chief of Architectural Forum the magazine died three times. It ceased publication in 1974. (Peter Blake on the failure of architecture criticism, public talk at IAUS in the spring semester of 1977. Tape recording, Peter Eisenman fonds (AP143), Canadian Center for Architecture, Montreal.)
31 See Martin Filler, note 4. In his essay, Filler mentions Goldberger with regard to the lawsuit Trump vs. Gapp (Chicago Tribune). Although he «rightly ridiculed» Trump's plan to erect the skyscraper, the critic «nonetheless […] left it to Gapp to take on this development in Goldberger's own backyard.» (p. 28)
32 See Art Lending Service and Art Advisory Service Records in The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, ‹Architectural Studies and Projects› [MoMA Exh. #1091b, March 13-May 11, 1975].
33 See 24. From the show, Goldberger purchased a drawing by Ettore Sottsass, titled ‹Rafts for Listening to Chamber Music› (hand colored lithograph, edition of 17) for $340, which was one of the least expensive items in the exhibition. In his article, the critic describes the drawings' content as, «wonderful constructions, named for Mozart and Telemann, which float down a river.» (See 21.) Between 1979 and 1991, Martin Filler and his wife, the architectural historian, Rosemarie Haag Bletter, purchased a total of eight drawings from the Max Protetch Gallery. Asked about a potential conflict of interest, the critic stated: «I would not write a critique on a show and then buy something.» (Martin Filler and Rosemarie Haag Bletter in conversation with the author (New York, February 16, 2017).)
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 See Charles Wright Mills, ‹The power elite›, New York 1956. See also Kazys Varnelis, ‹The Spectacle of the Innocent Eye. Vision, Cynical Reason, and The Discipline of Architecture in Postwar America›, Dissertation, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 1994.
37 See Michael Sorkin, ‹Why Paul Goldberger is so Bad: The case of Times Square›, in: M. Sorkin, ‹exquisite corpse. Writing on Buildings›, New York 1991, 101–108. First published in ‹The Village Voice› in April 1985.
38 Ibid, 108. Goldberger later stated: «I rarely saw [the profession] in terms of power, even though, obviously, that existed, that was a force and factor in this job and I was not stupid. I couldn't have been totally innocent of it. But nevertheless, I don't recall feeling that it was terribly important to me […].» (See 24.)
39 See note 16.
40 Ibid.
41 James Marston Fitch, ‹Architectural Criticism: Trapped in Its Own Metaphysics›, in: ‹JAE›, vol. 29, No. 4, ‹Architecture Criticism and Evaluation› (Apr., 1976), 2-3. In his article, Fitch assessed that «architectural criticism seldom if ever deals with the full consequences of architectural intervention. Obsessed with formal rather than functional consequences, it dooms itself to fundamental irresponsibility.» (p. 2)
42 See Paul Goldberger, ‹The Celebrity Architect Arrives›, in: ‹The International Herald Tribune›, January 4, 1985, 7.
43 See note 16.
44 See letter by Fran Nelson to Massimo Scolari, dated May 28, 1980. Max Protetch Gallery Archive. In the end, the exhibition was not reviewed by Huxtable, who nevertheless frequently covered Protetch's exhibitions.
45 Against the backdrop of a rising number of architecture-related sales exhibitions, critics increasingly evaluated the market from different angles. In conjunction with the opening of the German Architecture Museum (DAM) one critic asked: «How much value does a mediocre drawing have?» (Nils ABC, ‹Francfort: ouverture du musée des Post›, in: ‹Libération›, 9/10 June 1984, 32–33.)
46 See note 16.

The Museum of Modern Art

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NO. 14
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PRESS PREVIEW: March 12, 1975
-11am - 4pm -

Architectural Studies and Projects, an informal exhibition of 50 recent drawings by American and European architects, will be on view in the Members Penthouse of The Museum of Modern Art from March 13 through May 15, 1975. The exhibition is open to the public daily between 3:00 and 5:30.

The majority of the drawings on view are of visionary projects, imaginary creations never intended to be built. The drawings are, in many cases, not the plan or facade for a specific construction, but rather the expression of an idea, or an attitude towards architecture. As Emilio Ambasz, Curator of Design at the Museum, writes: "Paper projects have in many instances influenced architecture's history as forcefully as those committed to stone. Whether their intent is aesthetic, evocative, ironic, polemical, methodological, ideological, or conjectural, their strength has always resided in their poetic content."

Mr. Ambasz organized the exhibition by selecting 23 architects and groups who were invited to submit three works they considered representative of their ideas. Included are Raimund Abraham's ink and watercolor "House with Flower Walls," Friedrich St. Florian's "Himmelbett, Penthouse Version (with Holographic Heaven)," Superstudio's collage "Life/Supersurface--You Can Be Where You Like," and John Hejduk's "Villa of No Consequence." Among other works are Peter Eisenman's "House Six: Transformations #14," Gaetano Pesce's "Project for the Remodeling of a Villa," Peter Cook's "The Urban Mark as City," Cedric Price's "Thinkbelt," and Ettore Sottsass' "Temple for Erotic Dances."

Architectural Studies and Projects, the first of a series of exhibitions, is made possible by a grant from Pernod, and organized by the Museum's Art Lending Service, a project of the Junior Council. All of the drawings are for sale, ranging in price from $200 to $2000.

The Art Lending Service is a sales/rental gallery with selected works in various mediums from galleries and independent artists. Works are on sale to members and non-members; rental is a membership privilege. Rental fees, for a two month period, are approximately 10% of the value of the work and can be applied to the purchase price.

Additional information available from Michael Boodro, Assistant, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7504; 7501.

‹Architectural Studies and Projects›, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, March 13-May 11, 1975. Press release.
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NYT 3/14/75

Architecture Drawings at the Modern

"The Egg of Columbus Circle," by Elia and Zoe Zenghelis, at Museum of Modern Art

By PAUL GOLDBERGER

"Architectural Studies and Projects," which opens today in the Penthouse of the Museum of Modern Art, deals with the most peripheral, yet perhaps the most luxurious, aspect of architecture: the making of purely visionary drawings, schemes that have no connection with reality.

As such, the exhibition, sponsored by the museum's Junior Council and organized by Emilio Ambasz, curator of design, has little real insight into the state of architectural practice today. Its significance, rather, lies in its ability to remind us that architects do, in fact, have imaginations, and when these imaginations are permitted to run free of the constraints imposed by actual building programs, the results can be exciting and often extraordinarily beautiful.

One of the objectives of the show has been to encourage public interest in architectural drawings as art, and on this level it is likely to be successful—even though the most interesting drawings are, in most cases, the ones least related to real building schemes, which has the effect of suggesting that plans and elevations of built works are somehow less interesting as objects on their own.

The exhibition has the European bias that the Museum of Modern Art frequently displays in architectural matters. But the lack of more American representation is less regrettable here than it might be in another type of show, since it has led to the inclusion of some splendid work by a number of visionary architects little known to the American public.

Among the best objects in the show are a genuinely witty set of three projects by Ettore Sottsass from his 1972 series "The Planet as a Festival," including "Temple for Erotic Dances" (a huge fantasy version of a machine); "Rafts for Listening to Chamber Music" (wonderful constructions, named for Mozart and Telemann, which float down a river), and "A Gigantic Work" (a serpentine building winding through a jungle).

Equally notable are Gaetano Pesce's two water-colors of a project for remodeling an Italian villa, which include gutting the house and filling it with a great stair running down to the nearby waterfront, and Raimund Abraham's stunning drawings for his "House With Three Walls" and "House With Flower Walls," a proposal for a house with flowers growing between double panes of glass.

There are also some splendid fantasy views of New York by Elia and Zoe Zenghelis and Rem Koolhaas, as well as extremely skilled drawings by more familiar New York architects such as Peter Eisenman, Richard Meier and John Hedjuk.

The exhibition will be on view from 3 to 5:30 P.M. daily until May 15.

Paul Goldberger, ‹Architecture Drawings at the Modern›, in: ‹The New York Times, March 14, 1975. Art Lending Service and Art Advisory Service Records. © The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York/Scala, Florence.

F14 BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE, March 23, 1975

MOMA display weak, timid

ARCHITECTURE/ROBERT CAMPBELL

After the splashy review in the New York Times and the usual intriguing press release, I had somehow expected more from the new show at the Museum of Modern Art called "Architectural Studies and Projects."

The show is a collection of what used to be popularly known as futuristic drawings, all more or less related to architecture.

According to the show's creator, Emilio Arbasz, "the majority of the drawings on view are of visionary projects, imaginary creations never intended to be built. Paper projects have in many instances influenced architecture's history as forcefully as those committed to stone."

That's true, especially in recent times, when a lot of "visionary" creations so caught the imagination of later designers that they had an enormous, often undeserved, vogue. You think of the pre-World War I Italian Futurists, with their cartoons of roller-coaster cities with overhead trains speeding through them, drawings that established for all comic strips the idea of what the future city would look like.

Or the dry, nearly empty interiors of Mies van der Rohe, the skyscrapers-in-a-park of Le Corbusier's "Radiant City" drawings, the 1960s pop concoctions of the English group, Archigram, or the American Robert Venturi, or the wonderful biological-looking visions of the Japanese Metabolists. All contained real ideas, commanding images, and had important results in the buildings of the real world.

Measured against that tradition, this show is so timid and weak that it makes you wonder whether all our vitality has gone or was this just a bad selection?

To begin with, most of the drawings don't even pretend to be visionary architecture as the show promises. They simply belong in other categories. Some are elegant, rather tired variations of earlier periods of painting and graphics, for instance Michael Graves' variations on synthetic cubism or John Hejduk's on Purism, movements that had their big day by 1925. Others, more contemporary, are conceptual art, for instance the amusing "Gigantic Work" by Ettore Sottsass: "A panoramic road for viewing the Irrawaddy River and the jungle along its banks; this road is more or less as long as the Great Wall of China, but it is a harmless, frail and useless great wall. One walks or cycles along it, stopping for picnics."

Still other drawings are examples of that most intolerable of all art forms, the simple graphic with the pretentious caption ("the non-homogenous grids operate at the metonymic level"). And others are much more like Surrealism than anything truly architectural, for instance the elegant "Fountain House: Facade" by Rodolfo Machado (reproduced here), which would be the ideal dust jacket for a contemporary Gothic horror novel.

It was Ernest Hemingway who said that the most important equipment for a writer is a built-in, tamper-proof, copper-bottom crap detector (or something like that), and a show like this makes you wish the same for architects, who as a group possibly need it more. After you get through everything that hasn't even tried to be "visionary architecture" you are left with not an awful lot.

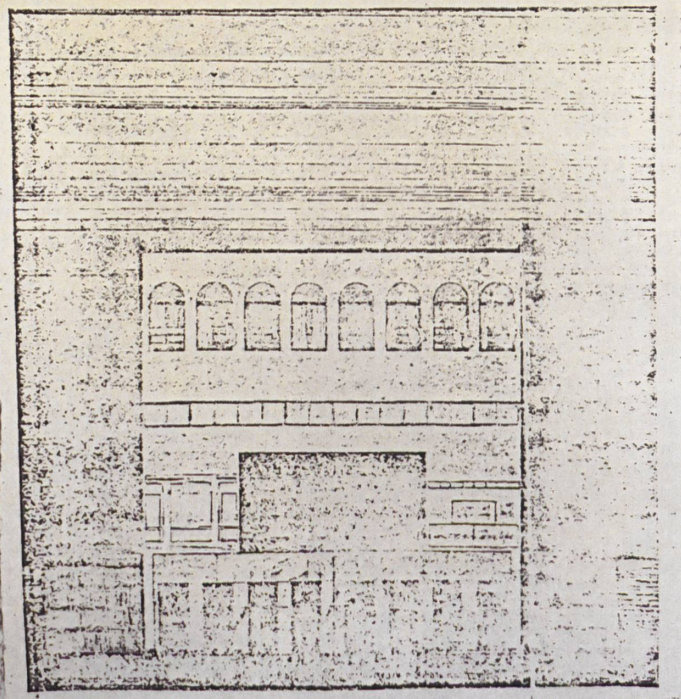
A few drawings do qualify, but what they make you realize, paradoxically, is that being a visionary in architecture today means being a member of a very traditional role, like being, say, Georgian Revivalist. Like Georgian Revivalism, visionary-ism is basically reactionary.

The drawing by Peter Eisenmann (reproduced here), for example, is reactionary in the sense of being a throwback, though modified, to works of the Dutch De Stijl group of the 1920s, and it's also a trivialization of architecture in the sense that it leaves out practically everything you might want to see in the actual built environment, except a game of intersecting transparent planes.

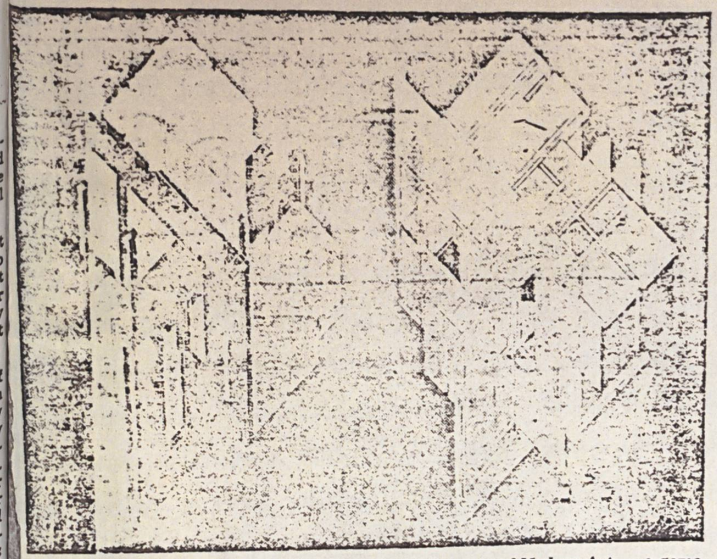
As Mark Twain might have put it, the visionary game has been pretty well worked in this century. There isn't much future in it. If this show proves anything it proves that. Real architecture is so much more inclusive, more complex, many-layered, exciting, alive, simply by trying to respond to the contemporary world instead of reducing it to someone's personal iconography.

It would be immensely valuable if some museum would find a way to put that kind of architecture on display, and give it the kind of comparative, interpretive exhibition that the other arts get. It wouldn't be easy, as some recent tries here have shown, but it would help educate the public in the one visual art it can't help living with.

MOMA's show is in the Member's Penthouse, an innovation, and is open to the public from 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily until May 15. There's also a depressing exhibit in the design section of the museum, of chairs shown, as usual, as if they had been primarily intended as sculptures.



'Fountain House: Facade' of Rodolfo Machado ... ideal dust jacket for a contemporary Gothic horror novel.



Peter Eisenmann drawing on view at New York's Museum of Modern Art ... a game of intersecting transparent planes.

Francis J. McGee, of Marblehead, past president of the Eastern Mass. Chapter of the Society of Real Estate Appraisers, has been appointed vice governor of this region by the board of directors of the National Society of Real Estate Appraisers.

Robert Campbell, ‹MOMA display weak, timid›, in: ‹The Boston Sunday Globe›, March 23, 1975, F14. Art Lending Service and Art Advisory Service Records. © The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York/Scala, Florence.

Architectural Criticism on the Art Market: A US-American Debate