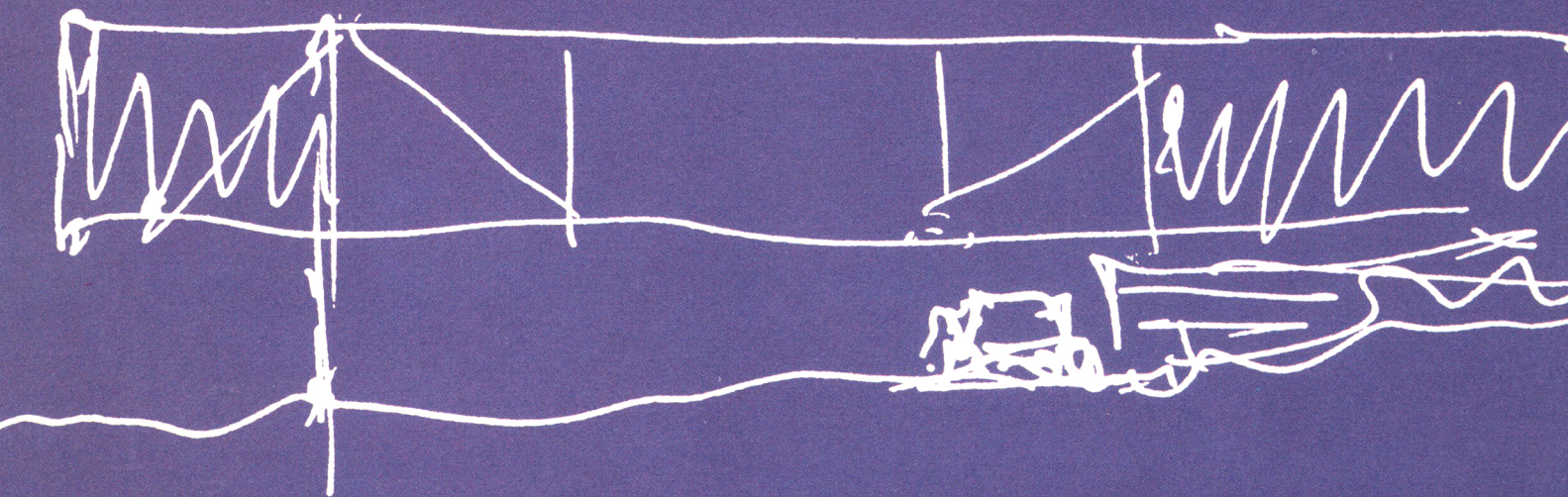


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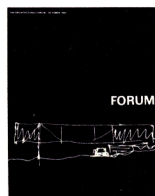
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**PERSPECTA 12.** The 1969 Yale Architectural Journal Published at intervals by students in the School of Art and Architecture, New Haven, Conn. Available at Wittenborn & Co., NYC. 172 pp. 9 by 12 ins. Illustrated \$8.75.

**THE BIG LITTLE MAGAZINE:** *Perspecta 12* and the future of the architectural past.

REVIEWED BY PETER D. EISENMAN

"It has rightly been said that theory, if not received at the door of an empirical discipline, comes in through the chimney like a ghost and upsets the furniture. But it is no less true that history, if not received at the door of a theoretical discipline, creeps into the cellar like a horde of mice and undermines the groundwork." This often referred to quotation from Erwin Panofsky's *Meaning in the Visual Arts* is helpful in attempting to understand part of the problem of contemporary architecture. For if architecture can be understood as an empirical discipline, then it can be said to require a series of ideas, a theoretical construct, as an informing essence, even if this essence is often manifest in the guise of an historical determinism. Any review of *Perspecta 12*, which is concerned with this relationship of ideas to architecture, must certainly touch on the role of the architectural journal, and in particular the "little magazine," in the development of 20th-century architecture. And while Denise Scott Brown would deny to *Perspecta* that which for some might be regarded as a rather dubious appellation (*In Little Magazines in Architecture and Urbanism she says "publications such as Yale's Perspecta and Harvard's Connection . . . can by no stretch of the imagination be called little magazines. They are well-produced glossies of high academic standing. . ."*), it will be argued here that it is precisely in its role as a little magazine that *Perspecta* has contributed to the development of modern architecture in America since the war.

The little magazine, or polemical journal, has proven in time to be a fairly accurate record, or pre-record, of a climate of opinion indicating a direction

for art in general, and for architecture in particular. Le Corbusier's buildings and projects of the late '20s and '30s could be predicted from his 1923 book *Vers Une Architecture*, a compilation of a series of articles that had first appeared in the little magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* a few years earlier. Equally, his synoptic prospectus and project "Ville Radieuse," which appeared in book form in 1935, developed from his articles which had previously appeared in the polemical magazines *Plan* and *Prelude*. Even Mies van der Rohe, who is not known as a polemicist, was on the editorial board of "G," the Berlin little magazine which he edited with El Lissitzky, which contains some of his most significant written statements. The little magazine, as opposed to the monthly professional journal, argues particular points of view, which in itself is useful, not only for its historical value, as representative of a period, but also for its theoretical value, as illustrating something of an essential condition of architecture itself. And while it would be simplistic to suggest any one-to-one correspondence between ideas and specific buildings, it might be regarded as unscientific and ultimately presumptuous to insist that there need be no correspondence whatever between specific ideas about architecture and the architectural forms which emerge at the same time.

It is difficult to judge in retrospect whether *Perspecta*, while purporting to be a reflection of history, was not in itself creating history. And while the making of history cannot, of course, be directly ascribed to *Perspecta*, one can practically trace the history of post-war American architecture through its pages, from the appearance of Paul Rudolph's early Florida houses in *Perspecta 1* to the Adler and Devore houses of Louis Kahn in *Perspecta 3*, which in a quiet way signaled a significant, if marginal, change in the course of the Modern Movement—the eclipse of the free plan and a return to a direct modulation of space through structure.

Equally important, despite their apparent lack of influence, *Perspecta* carried seminal articles from Vincent Scully's exegesis on Modern Architecture in *Perspecta 4*; to Colin St. John Wilson's "Open and Closed" in

*Perspecta 6*; to the still unexplored reaches of the Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky article, "Transparency," in *Perspecta 8*. (For an initial attempt at such an explanation see Rowe and Slutzky, *Bernard Hoosh, Transparency Le Corbusier Studien 1*, Birkhauser Verlag 1968.)

To characterize *Perspecta* as a little magazine is, in itself, a polemical gesture in terms of this review, for it allows one to raise several timely arguments which are particularly pertinent to this issue. For *Perspecta 12* is, in reality, much more of a little magazine than any of its predecessors. It breaks from the tradition of previous *Perspecta* of piecemeal, random contributions, and therefore non-ideological in attitude, to a definite polemic. While an initial examination of the table of contents may suggest a judicious selection of appropriate subjects and authors sympathetic to a popular current view of history, being as informed as it is a-polemical, the substance of the magazine reveals something quite different.

It is not by some happy coincidence, as the editors might imply, that one finds names like Sir Edwin Lutyens, J.N.L. Durand, Pierre Chareau, and Walter Benjamin in the same issue. Nor can almost 50 pages, including some of the most impeccable drawings illustrating one very "small" house be construed as a-polemical. Nor can one ignore the particular quality and orientation of the articles by Emilio Ambasz and Alan Colquhoun—all of which, when seen as a whole, spans over more than two-thirds of the magazine.

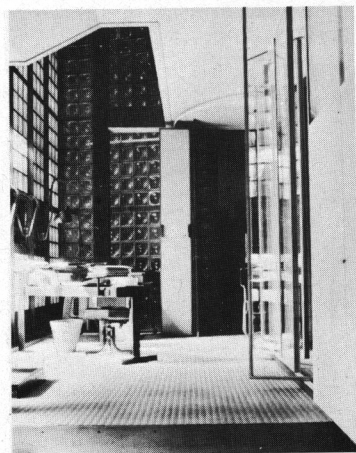
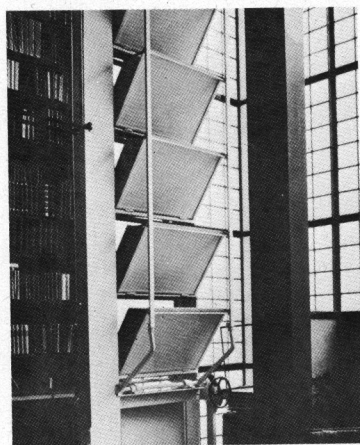
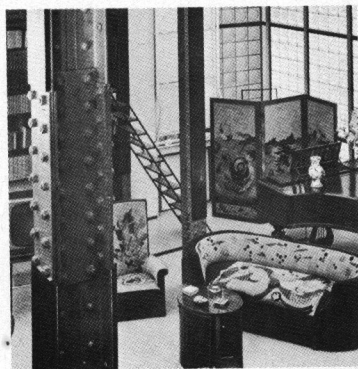
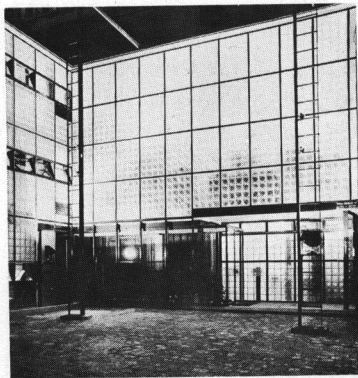
This is not to imply that the remaining articles are not of interest, nor to cast doubt upon their high quality. Rather it is to register the presence of so much unexpected material, which seems in retrospect to be curiously out of focus with the *Perspecta* continuum. It is the curious coincidence of this material, and its particular form and content in this one issue, which seems significant and worth some speculation.

It is not only the selection of the articles, but also their style and quality, their particular attitude to history as an analytical and theoretical medium, rather than as a descriptive discipline, which characterizes this *Perspecta* as polemical. It is in the context of *Perspecta 9* and *10*,

and 11 that the unexpected stance of *Perspecta 12* emerges. And while an article-by-article comparative analysis would no doubt be necessary to demonstrate this judgment, the following comments will serve to expose those articles which make this discontinuity and contrast most explicit.

There has unfortunately flourished, since the war, around the Modern Movement, a body of secondary literature which has tended not only to obscure some of the original ideas adherent to this movement, but also in some cases, in a search for an oversimplified version of history (and because of highly simplistic criteria of explanation), created an idealized picture of it—which can hardly be regarded as a representation of reality. Thus, Kenneth Frampton's article on Pierre Chareau's *Maison de Verre*, both in its style of presentation and its choice of material, can be seen as a break from this tradition. And while such a documentation of this building, as well as other canonical works of the Modern Movement, is long overdue as a contribution to the history of the recent past, it is the quality and scope of the documentation which commands our attention. Here is a set of precise, hard-line drawings, restrained, elegant, almost in the genre of the building itself, which certainly must establish a standard for such a presentation. But further, it is the abstract style of drawing in itself, the emphasis on plan, section, and axonometric view, which makes them useful for an analytical approach to the building. It is important to note that it was Frampton who had these drawings made in this particular manner; first, because they probably did not exist, and second, because they present the building and the ideas inherent in it in a way that is not possible to retain, even when one is confronted with the actual fact.

The polemic lies not so much in retrieving the images of the 1930s to serve as models for the future, but rather in the analysis of a realised work, as a basis for understanding the relation between ideas and the formal invention of an architecture. If there is fault to be found with the Frampton article, it is in its establishment of such an elaborate framework in the face of an ultimate withdrawal, leav-



The 1932 *Maison de Verre* designed by Pierre Chareau for Dr. and Mme. Dalsace. Views from top: exterior by night, main salon with furnishings by Chareau, ventilating louvers to salon, foyer to Dr. Dalsace's office.

ing both drawings and text in a descriptive state, and the critical job of analysis incomplete.

Alan Greenberg's article on Lutyens is potentially another example of the historical phenomenon correctly subjected to an analytical process. One has had the feeling for some time that an investigation of the projects and plans from the period of around the turn of the century, prior to the so-called "tabula rasa" of the Modern Movement, would reveal an understanding of the value of the architectural plan. In the rush to embrace the tenets of "modernism," and to sweep away Beaux Arts academicism, the importance of the plan as a conceptual device has been all but overlooked in the education of young architects today. One would welcome, for example, a similar investigation of the development of the plan in another architect of that period, the Englishman, Bailie-Scott.

It is somewhat unfortunate that Greenberg has attempted to condense what is, in its own right, material enough for a necessary and pertinent book into a rather diffuse article. He is not helped by the minute size of the reproductions, which makes an appreciation of these plans, and of Mr. Greenberg's comments, difficult. Rather than using a single plan as a model for his discussion, which in the end is a virtue in Frampton's presentation, Greenberg attempts to fill us in this one article with the full range of his discovery.

Again it is the particular historical document selected by Antonio Hernandez as a model which is of interest. J.N.L. Durand was one of the first so-called "rationalists," and the relationship of his almost forgotten, "Precis des Leçons," to the development of an implied argument in *Perspecta 12* is no accident. This idea which Hernandez puts forward when commenting on Durand, is quite simply: "... there are times when it is progressive to systematize and to rationalize." And while several pages of plans from the "Precis" are presented, Hernandez states a similar warning to the one implied by Frampton: "The plans of specific building types must not be taken literally, they are to be appreciated as expressive of suggested ideas, . . ."

And, if these three articles can

be said to use history as a theoretical device, then the two articles by Ambasz and Colquhoun can be considered as theoretical, establishing a precondition for a future history.

This is especially true of Emilio Ambasz's "Formulation of a Design Discourse," which, through the rigor of its presentation, puts forward a range of speculative premises which demand examination. Mr. Ambasz has taken a series of processes, not common to present architectural thinking, from such various disciplines as information theory and decision theory, and has abstracted from them a strategy which he applies to the problem of architectural design method. First, as a taxonomy of the design method, Ambasz clarifies many of the processes which too often remain in a rather mystical and semi-articulate state. It is interesting to note that while his framework may seem to be on first inspection "holistic," he very precisely limits the domain of the designer to the consideration of type. It is again this kind of clarification which isolates and defines for us the often loosely referred to terms of type, prototype, and archetype, which distinguishes this piece. Second, and probably more significant, are the particular categories which he chooses to articulate. And while he does not pretend to answer all of our questions (and indeed he quite explicitly states that this is not his intention) it is in the part interestingly titled "Conclusions and Future Directions," where Ambasz makes his strongest point. It is point 4, a theory of residue, and point 5, the idea of a "Meta-Methodological" approach, which are obviously closest to his passion and unique to his thought, and also serve to remind us that intuition and method can exist in some form of coalition.

As an introductory note explains, this piece is but the first in a series of four lectures given at Ulm. One must now urge someone to take that same "lonely leap" into the process of design, and begin the elaboration of both the transformational rules and the meta-methodology.

Following Mr. Ambasz's article, as if it had been conceived in sequence, is the more restricted focus of Alan Col-

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## BOOKS

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Colquhoun's "*Typology and Design Method*," which elaborates a different concept of typology. Although Colquhoun has been a design critic both at Cornell and Princeton, his critical writing is virtually unknown in this country. This article, which first appeared in England in 1967, and a criticism of Reyner Banham's book, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, which appeared some ten years earlier, stand as positive examples of his position. Colquhoun is concerned with expanding the scope of the architect's design method. To this end, he introduces yet another range of potential material for the development of a formal typology, from formal linguistics, and structuralist thinking in general. Colquhoun, although he develops his argument in a different manner than Ambasz, by moving around his subject and viewing it from many different filters, still adds a further dimension in the demand for a more rational framework for architectural ideas.

It is significant that the last two articles are on Walter Benjamin. First, because the publication of the article on "*Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century*" has only appeared once before in English, in the *New Left Review*. And second, because its inclusion could be seen as an attempt to structure the first part of *Perspecta* with the second. The need for such a coalition, which is obviously a problem for the editors, is further articulated by the Benjamin work. One could only hope that more such informed social commentary as Benjamin's, achieved through the discriminating recollection of history, rather than by invention, with the particular style, wit, and intellect possible with such a method, had been available to the editors.

*Perspecta 12* presents us with a structure for the future, if not the basis for an architectural curriculum. But, far from predicting the future, it returns to history, not in a deterministic sense, but rather as a vehicle for ideas. And, if one refuses to ac-

cept the polemical bias of these ideas, one can certainly not refute their quality. If one wishes to accept the criteria, put forward by Denise Scott Brown in her review of *Perspecta 9* and *10* (A.I.P. Journal, Jan. '67.), then *Perspecta 12* might be seen as a far more subtle, far more pervasive, and ultimately richer basis for a theoretical framework than its predecessors. Even if its ideas are not presented as "iconoclastic dogma," nor in the all too literal manner of today's social realist—"young spirit of reform," they can nevertheless be regarded as polemical. If their mode of argument can be construed as informative and germane to a rational architectural discourse, then *Perspecta 12* will have made its contribution.

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