

SCOGIN ELAM AND BRAY

Critical Architecture / Architectural Criticism

edited by Mark Linder



with essays by

Ann Bergren

Jeffrey Kipnis

Mark Linder

Alan Plattus

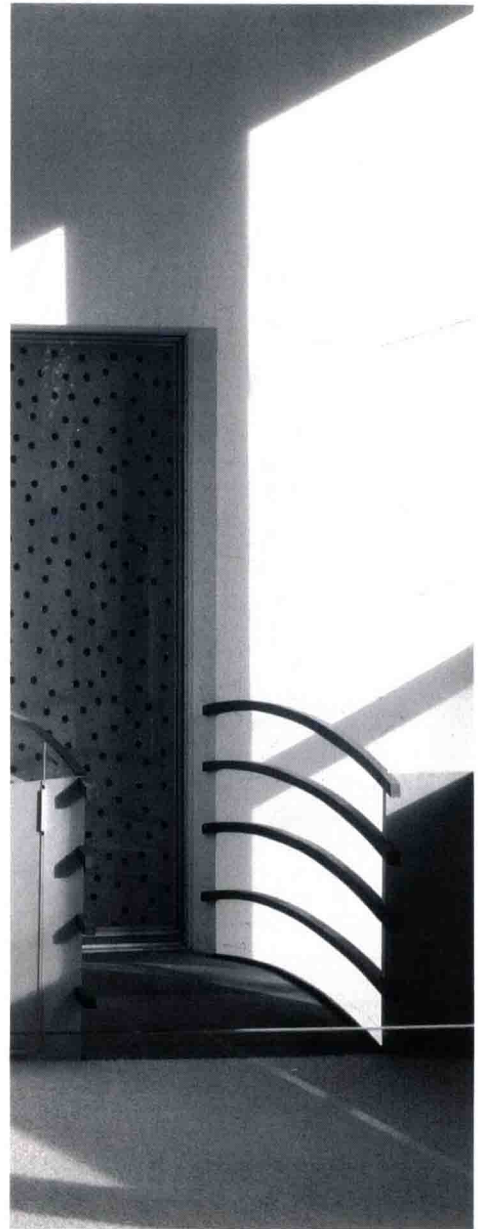
Anthony Vidler

Jennifer Wicke

SCOGIN ELAM AND BRAY

Critical Architecture / Architectural Criticism

edited by Mark Linder



with essays by

Ann Bergren

Jeffrey Kipnis

Mark Linder

Alan Plattus

Anthony Vidler

Jennifer Wicke

First published in the United States of America in 1992
by Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.
300 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010

Copyright © 1992 by Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

"Giving Critical Care"
copyright © 1992 Mark Linder.
"Picking Up the Pieces"
copyright © 1992 Jeffrey Kipnis.
"Building a Practice: Scogin Elam and Bray and Social Space"
copyright © 1992 Jennifer Wicke.
"Artemisia, Aristotle, and the View from L.A."
copyright © 1992 Ann Bergren.
"Dressing Down: Monuments and Material Cladding"
copyright © 1992 Anthony Vidler.
"The Architecture of Difference: Engagement and Representation
in the Work of Scogin Elam and Bray"
copyright © 1992 Alan Plattus.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced
in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing
from Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Scogin, Elam, and Bray:
critical architecture / architectural criticism /
edited by Mark Linder; with essays by Jeffrey Kipnis . . . (et al.).
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8478-1534-X (hc) — ISBN 0-8478-1535-8 (pbk)
1. Scogin, Elam, and Bray.
2. Architecture, Modern—20th century—United States.
I. Linder, Mark, 1960—. II. Kipnis, Jeffrey.
NA737.S365S37 1992 92-15638
720'.92'273—dc20 CIP

Front cover: Chmar House
Back cover (hardcover only): Buckhead Library
Photographs by Timothy Hursley

Design and type composition by *Group* 

Printed and bound in Japan

CONTENTS

- 9 Preface
- 12 Giving Critical Care
Mark Linder
- 23 APPLING/MCGREGOR HOUSE
- 31 Picking up the Pieces
Jeffrey Kipnis
- 49 NEW VISIONS GALLERY
- 53 CHMAR HOUSE
- 70 Building a Practice: Scogin Elam and Bray and Social Space
Jennifer Wicke
- 75 TURNER VILLAGE, CANDLER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
- 102 Artemisia, Aristotle, and the View from L.A.
Ann Bergren
- 107 BRIDGE AT CONCOURSE
- 120 CLAYTON COUNTY LIBRARY
- 142 WQXI RADIO
- 146 Dressing Down: Monuments and Material Cladding
Anthony Vidler

149 BUCKHEAD LIBRARY

174 TALLAHASSEE OFFICE BUILDING

178 HIGH MUSEUM AT GEORGIA PACIFIC CENTER

187 The Architecture of Difference: Engagement and Representation
in the Work of Scogin Elam and Bray

Alan Plattus

191 ATLANTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

199 HERMAN MILLER, ATLANTA

210 HERMAN MILLER, MICHIGAN

212 Biographies

216 Bibliography

219 Design Awards

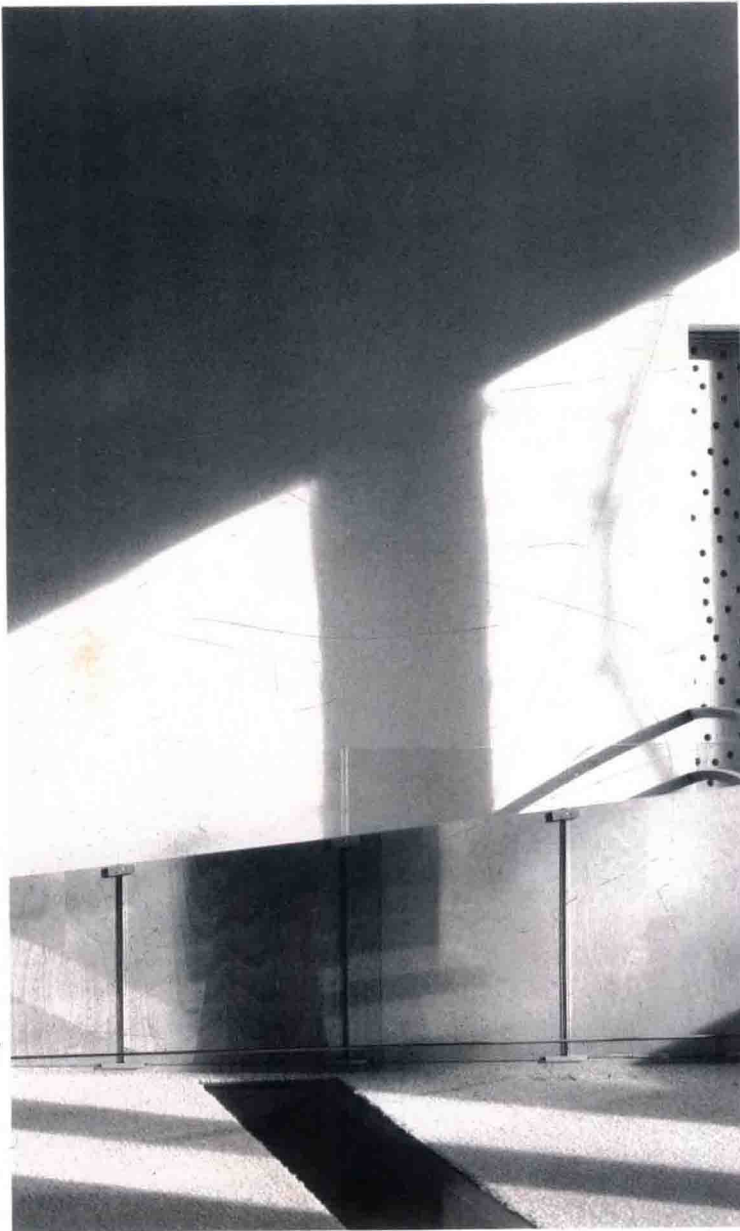
220 Project Credits

221 Photo Credits

222 Post Script

SCOGIN ELAM AND BRAY

Critical Architecture / Architectural Criticism

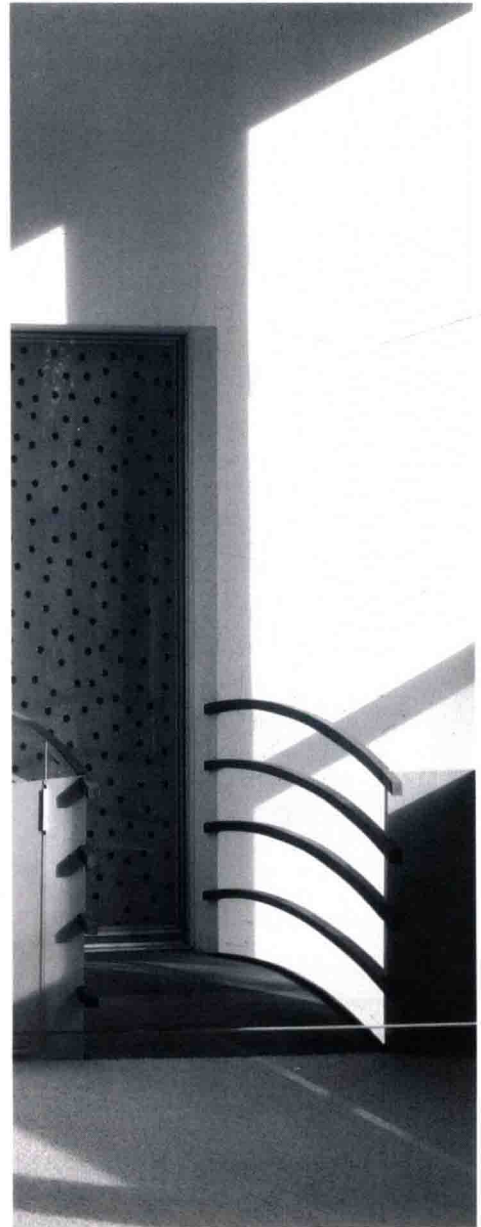


remembering Beppe Zambonini

SCOGIN ELAM AND BRAY

Critical Architecture / Architectural Criticism

edited by Mark Linder



with essays by

Ann Bergren

Jeffrey Kipnis

Mark Linder

Alan Plattus

Anthony Vidler

Jennifer Wicke

First published in the United States of America in 1992
by Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.
300 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10010

Copyright © 1992 by Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

"Giving Critical Care"
copyright © 1992 Mark Linder.
"Picking Up the Pieces"
copyright © 1992 Jeffrey Kipnis.
"Building a Practice: Scogin Elam and Bray and Social Space"
copyright © 1992 Jennifer Wicke.
"Artemisia, Aristotle, and the View from L.A."
copyright © 1992 Ann Bergren.
"Dressing Down: Monuments and Material Cladding"
copyright © 1992 Anthony Vidler.
"The Architecture of Difference: Engagement and Representation
in the Work of Scogin Elam and Bray"
copyright © 1992 Alan Plattus.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced
in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing
from Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Scogin, Elam, and Bray:
critical architecture / architectural criticism /
edited by Mark Linder; with essays by Jeffrey Kipnis . . . (et al.).
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8478-1534-X (hc) — ISBN 0-8478-1535-8 (pbk)
1. Scogin, Elam, and Bray.
2. Architecture, Modern—20th century—United States.
I. Linder, Mark, 1960—. II. Kipnis, Jeffrey.
NA737.S365S37 1992 92-15638
720'.92'273—dc20 CIP

Front cover: Chmar House
Back cover (hardcover only): Buckhead Library
Photographs by Timothy Hursley

Design and type composition by *Group* 

Printed and bound in Japan

Acknowledgments

This was a complex project and there are many people without whom it would never have been completed. It would not have even begun without the contributions of the many students at Georgia Tech who helped to organize and implement the Critical Architecture/Architectural Criticism symposium: Stephen Amu, Ifhat Benayoun, David Green, Jean Heisel, Dawn Mixon, Caroline Reu, and Sam Van Nostrand. Most of all, I am grateful to Peter Green who spent many hours in the Scogin Elam and Bray archives, helping me to select numerous images and often saving me from my own bad judgement. Jeff Atwood of Scogin Elam and Bray helped me to find many drawings and always came through in a pinch. Jill Forte, the best administrative assistant ever, never balked at my piecemeal requests to transcribe the conference proceedings, and Jorge Delacova filled in admirably when Jill went on leave.

Brad Collins and Diane Kasprowicz were remarkable for their willingness to collaborate on the book's design and their persistence at turning my diagrams—however involuted—into a layout that works. Finally, I owe a special debt to Mack, Merrill, and Lloyd for their willingness to embark on this project and their consistent enthusiasm for its idea.

Grants and assistance from several sources made the symposium and book possible: the Architects' Society of Atlanta (special thanks to Jim Winer and Geddes Dowling), the Georgia Tech Foundation, the Architecture and Doctoral Programs at Georgia Tech, the Fulton County Arts Commission, and the High Museum of Atlanta. Corporate sponsors of the symposium include: Beers/BCB, Daugherty/Anderson Landscape Architects, Eberly and Associates, George Heery, Holder Construction, Humphries and Company, J. A. Jones Construction, Jones Nall Davis, Metric Constructors, Newcomb and Boyd Engineers, Palmer Brick and Tile, Pruitt Eberly Inc., John C. Portman and Associates, Reece Hoopes and Fincher, Land Planners-Landscape Architects, ROSSER FABRAP International, J. Ted Hall, and Gabriel Benzur Photography.

CONTENTS

- 9 Preface
- 12 Giving Critical Care
Mark Linder
- 23 APPLING/MCGREGOR HOUSE
- 31 Picking up the Pieces
Jeffrey Kipnis
- 49 NEW VISIONS GALLERY
- 53 CHMAR HOUSE
- 70 Building a Practice: Scogin Elam and Bray and Social Space
Jennifer Wicke
- 75 TURNER VILLAGE, CANDLER SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
- 102 Artemisia, Aristotle, and the View from L.A.
Ann Bergren
- 107 BRIDGE AT CONCOURSE
- 120 CLAYTON COUNTY LIBRARY
- 142 WQXI RADIO
- 146 Dressing Down: Monuments and Material Cladding
Anthony Vidler

149 BUCKHEAD LIBRARY

174 TALLAHASSEE OFFICE BUILDING

178 HIGH MUSEUM AT GEORGIA PACIFIC CENTER

187 The Architecture of Difference: Engagement and Representation
in the Work of Scogin Elam and Bray
Alan Plattus

191 ATLANTA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

199 HERMAN MILLER, ATLANTA

210 HERMAN MILLER, MICHIGAN

212 Biographies

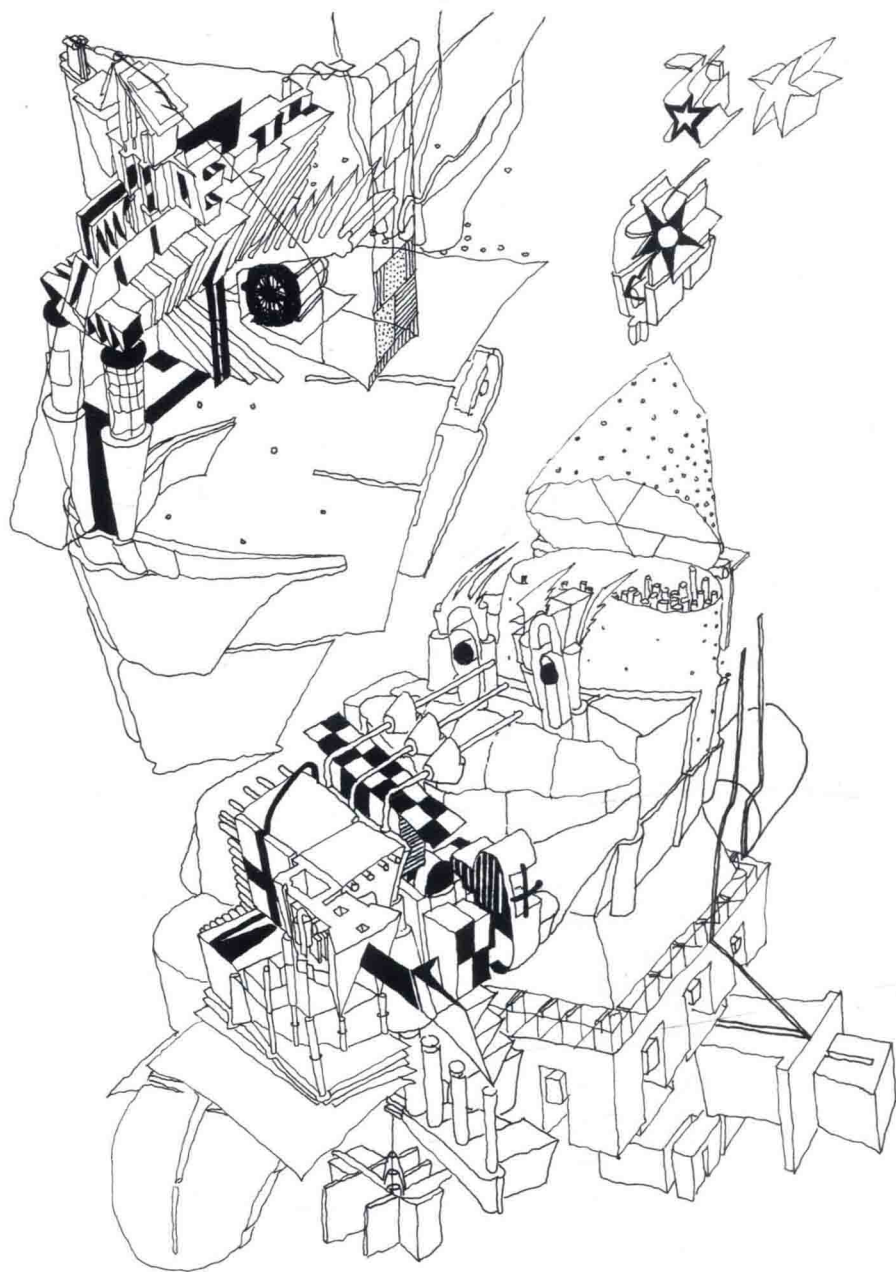
216 Bibliography

219 Design Awards

220 Project Credits

221 Photo Credits

222 Post Script



Preface

This book was conceived with a double purpose: it is a monograph on the architecture of Scogin Elam and Bray as well as an anthology of contemporary architectural criticism. The parity of this doubling constitutes a truly unusual union; because monographs conventionally focus single-mindedly on the presentation of architecture, their texts are subordinated (as commentary or description) to the images and drawings. In this book the writing and the architecture are conceived as equal partners that question the entirely common but nonetheless reductive tendency toward ranked oppositions, such as creativity over criticism, or theory over practice. The essays in this volume are not simple explanations of the architecture, just as the photographs and drawings are not readily revealed through written descriptions.

The very concept of a critical monograph assumes an active complicity between architecture and writing, responsibility and desire, criticism and design, taste and judgment, and so on—a complicity that is extremely complex and at times necessarily oblique. This book begins with the explicit recognition that architecture is implicated in the workings of a diverse and often confusing culture. The essays then bring that diversity to bear on the architecture of Scogin Elam and Bray (which itself exemplifies a kind of multiformity) with a desire to disseminate but not determine meaningful interpretations of the buildings, the practices that produce them, and the discourses that influence them.

It is an awareness of the intricacies of this transaction which convinces us of the value of this project, which began on May 12, 1990, as a symposium entitled “Critical Architecture/Architectural Criticism: The Work of Scogin Elam and Bray” at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta. By concentrating upon the architecture of a single firm, the conference established a forum in which to represent and discuss the difficulties and deficiencies inherent in the critical evaluation of architecture, to question accepted approaches to criticism, from the journalistic to the esoteric, and to offer a glimpse of the diversity of contemporary critical practices, including the professional practice of architecture. The proceedings of the symposium (six lectures, followed by a panel discussion), the questions raised there, and a complete presentation of the work of Scogin Elam and Bray make up the contents of this book.

These works of criticism and the project represented by the symposium and book would not be possible without a compelling and rich critical object. Because it is neither programmatically theoretical nor insistently pragmatic, the architecture of Scogin Elam and Bray offers an uncontestedly intriguing object for critics and theorists. Their practice is markedly unconventional, but still participates in and reinterprets numerous architectural conventions, from modernism and economy to regionalism and the proprieties of professionalism. This ambitious work and the skillful subtlety of its forms provoke a reconsideration of what makes architecture critical, as well

as a reformulation of prevalent approaches to architectural criticism.

My own essay clarifies and qualifies the conception of criticism that motivated and influenced the direction and objectives of this project. A preliminary version of that essay was given to the invited participants, along with a collection of slides and articles on Scogin Elam and Bray. Drawing upon these materials, each participant constructed a distinct approach to the practice of architectural criticism as well as to the practice of Scogin Elam and Bray. Jennifer Wicke offers a reading of the current critical scene that invokes the writings of David Harvey, Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, and criticizes the incessant allegorization of architecture inherent in so much contemporary theory. Her perspective, as a literary scholar, directs the discussion of criticism from the more specific, disciplinary concerns addressed in my essay toward more general conceptions of culture, space, and postmodernity. Anthony Vidler's essay develops an intricate historiographical discussion of monument and ornament (from Hegel to Vattimo) inspired by, yet external to, the specific practices of Scogin Elam and Bray. Alan Plattus, on the other hand, deploys a broadly conceived theoretical framework to explain how two of the firm's projects in Atlanta, the Chamber of Commerce building and the Herman Miller Showroom, manifest seemingly extreme concepts of difference in architecture. Jeffrey Kipnis discusses some of Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam's earliest projects—mostly competition entries—and argues against the idea of a critical architecture. His observations are presented here in the manner of a talk, a form of presentation which subtly complicates the interpretive framework instigated by the symposium and here revised by the format of the book. Ann Bergren instigates still more reconsideration of the format in her essay, which was conceived as an intricate *conférence* between incommensurate disciplines (classical mythology and architectural design), representational types (writing and photography), and cultural voices (the new South and Southern California). While the text printed here is basically a re-presentation of her lecture, the relationship of the words to the images has been fundamentally changed: when presented as a lecture, the images were more numerous and included fragments of the text and images of work by Scogin Elam and Bray as well as of seemingly extraneous material, some of which is retained here.

Thus, the book, through its design, encourages readers to participate in the speculative interplay of critical practices. While a relatively conventional reader may focus on the images and use the text to supplement an understanding of the architecture, a reader who is more interested in the problems of contemporary criticism will compare the various strategies, thus diverting primary attention from the architectural object. Still others will discern a conflict between the differing concerns of education and the profession (in both the critics and the architects), and perhaps some readers will consider the multiple voices as a microcosm of the current and competing

¹ See Umberto Eco, "Function and Sign: Semiotics of Architecture," *Via* 2 (1973): 132.

visions of contemporary architectural practice.

Each page is divided into three regions, each of which organizes a distinct type of information or material. In the center portion of each page and scrolling continuously through the book is the text; often it is displaced partially or entirely by *images* of the architecture of Scogin Elam and Bray. The relationship between the text and the images is not determinate: the images are not referenced specifically in the text and only rarely have captions. The images are organized to present each project on its own terms with varying degrees of correspondence to the discussion occurring in the text. Each project is introduced by a title—equivalent to those for each essay—and a small model photo. If one chooses to see the book as a collection of illustrations rather than a collection of illustrated essays, the text recedes into the background, yet the text has a background of its own. The bottom of each page contains the *context*; context entries are referenced in the text by bracketed letters, and page positions are established as purely visual relationships: that is, the context entries are located in line vertically with the bracketed letter. Context entries include excerpts from the symposium panel discussion [a.], extended notes to the text [b.], and selected short pieces of writing and illustrations other than those of the architecture of Scogin Elam and Bray, among them examples of the snapshots that the architects call their "favorite things" [c.]. Occasionally, if the amount of context material exceeds its normal boundaries, it encroaches upon the text region. Thus the text operates as the visual ground of the page and simultaneously assumes verbal priority. Finally, the *index* occupies the top of each page; it includes footnotes to the text and to the context text and/or images on the same page. It is ordered according to what Umberto Eco, after Charles Peirce, has called indexical signification, that is, its placement is determined by the relative position of the item it supplements.¹

While the interplay of the four systems—text, image, context, and index—cannot definitively

resolve the negotiations between criticism and architecture, and may even appear to exacerbate the problems that isolate those two practices, this book brings the rivals to the same table. The multiple order of the book's design reasserts, allegorically, the differences that frustrate architects and critics (not to mention historians, theorists, clients, and users) in their efforts to establish simple and direct means of collaboration. Perhaps only such seemingly devious intricacies of structure can elicit intimacy among estranged parties.

Mark Linder, Princeton, N.J.

SCOGIN *I am not sure architectural criticism is existing any longer and I'm not sure there's any critical architecture. But it seems to me that we, my partners and our associates, could take a responsible role in helping to present the issue. I think that's the reason that we thought we would do this. To be honest, I am more uncomfortable right now than I think I have been in years for all sorts of reasons. To expose yourself in all the ways we allowed ourselves to be exposed. . . . I really can now understand why a lot of people don't do this. And I know damn well I won't do it again.*

KIPNIS *So you enjoyed it?*

SCOGIN *Well I did enjoy it.*

KIPNIS *The pleasure was too great; frightened by the pleasure you'll never do it again.*

SCOGIN *Well, I don't think that you're talking particularly about our work. But, I think our work was just the point of departure. I thought this was going to give us a certain level of comfort, which it didn't. It did make me think a lot about the history of our practice, the history of our experience in architecture, and sometimes that's pretty painful.*

a.

Most context entries have been selected by the book's editor although some—such as this one—are extended footnotes written by the essay's author (who in this case is also the editor). In Ann Bergren's essay almost no context entries have been added by the editor.



b. c.

Giving Critical Care

Mark Linder

12 This book and the symposium from which it has grown are efforts to devise and initiate a mode of intellectual production (or, to put it crudely, to fashion a criticism) that is neither complacent nor aestheticized and that evades the elitism, the scholasticism, and the star system of the present theory club, of which I must admit I am a junior member.

The dearth of contemporary discourse on architecture is rarely critical; architectural criticism will not be found in *Architecture*, *Progressive Architecture*, or *Architectural Record* because it is not promotion, information, or documentation. Although we may fashion criticism, criticism is not mere fashion. Neither is criticism gossip, commentary, or journalism. It is not harsh, negative, or unpleasant. Criticism *is* prospective and promising. Criticism is a project.

Whether architectural criticism builds upon the specifics of a site or uses a particular piece of architecture as its place of departure, actual architecture is the material of criticism, the fabric from which it is cut and toward which it weaves. Criticism spins yarns. Architectural criticism claims a specific complicity with the unraveling of architectural events. It *involves* writing: (as though) architecture matters, in the sense that we are often compelled to discuss “family matters” or “business matters.” Criticism assumes that the matters of architectural fact are its family business. So, in every sense of the word, criticism gets involved.

I offer this description of criticism as a departure from or an alternative to (but certainly not a condemnation of) the continuing onslaught of what academics, practitioners, and commentators continue to call theory because, to be as direct as possible, theory in its current forms is feeble. Paradoxically, its weakness lies in its strength, which is to say, its clarity and its feigned disinterest, hence its inability to transform, reform, or inform. Architects in recent years have been struggling, with increasing signs of desperation, to deal with a proliferation of theoretical activity in architecture that has arisen to explain the new architecture and the conditions that have fostered it.

But the house of theory stands divided. On one side of the theory debate are those who desire that theory determine the form, and constitute the core, of architectural investigations. These (who might be called “traditional”) theorists, in attempting to guide the actual process of design and to justify regulating the procedures of practice, tend to construct proposals aimed at situating and defining architecture; yet in spite of theoretical rigor their generalities fail to address the breadth of the architect’s task. For the most part production of traditional theory has decreased in the last decade, as a second group of theorists has arisen that positions itself in the margins as an assemblage of commentators and adjudicators. These theorists speak broadly and persuasively about the conditions of intellectual culture at large and make compelling connections to other disciplines, yet the very extensiveness of their project rarely produces proposals