

the manner that Russian Formalism defines the work of art (or, yes, poetry) as the exposure of the devices used to manipulate material, the pedagogy displayed in *Education I* and *Education II* not only emphasizes the importance of representation as an end in itself but also emphasizes the importance in identifying architecture as a form of representation and exhibits its meta-relationship to “building.” In this, the aim is not phenomenological “authenticity” à la Alberto Perez-Gomez any more than it is Eisenmanian “deep structure”; rather, it is a Lacanian understanding that, like language, both conceals and reveals architecture as a narrative of seduction and desire. It is a form of masquerade.

The relevance of this for today’s architectural education might seem negligible, given that, in this telling, it proves to be a very small subset of an American—nay, New York City—formalism that is already struggling to justify itself in the contemporary context of globalism, environmentalism, and recession-anxious entrepreneurialism. But not only does this subset correspond to Mark Wigley’s point (in his deconstructivist years) that architecture is essentially representational (representing its need to hide that it IS a masquerade), but more recently, and perhaps ironically, the concern for absolute and autonomous architecture. Both Pier Vittorio Aureli in his *The Possibility of Absolute Architecture* and K. Michael Hays in his *Architecture’s Desire* describe an architecture that self-consciously withstands absorption into its other—for Aureli, urbanization and for Hays, the world of “made things.” Aureli does not mention Hejduk or Cooper Union, but he speaks of the means by which architects such as Palladio, Piranesi, Boullée, Ungers, and Koolhaas achieve “a rationalism that was not in the spirit of calculus but one of subjective instrumentality” (173–74); that resists absorption precisely because it plays up the devices (abstraction, elementalism, and formal awkwardness) that are particular to architecture, as an absolute object. Hays sees the

work of Hejduk as an essential example of architecture’s ultimate desire to enter into the Real and enacts its own death drive, something achieved when architecture’s objects “were no longer construed as mere elements and assemblages of buildings, however complicated or sophisticated, but rather as a representational system—a way of perceiving and constructing identities and difference” (2). For both authors, the paradigm of an architecture of resistance is one that follows Hejduk’s pedagogy: the more architecture is emptied of its traditional role as building, the more it can exploit its power of rhetoric, and this through a grasp of its artifice.

Whether or not one measures these texts themselves as central to architectural education, it is impossible to disregard their influence in resurrecting the utopian project of architecture.

In his introduction to *Education I*, Ulrich Franzen wrote: “This reawakened interest of the possibility of new connections between eye and mind is, of course, wholly rejected by the new conservatism in architecture by Vincent Scully and others who are exhorting us toward reconciliation with the existing world. Only time can judge the impact of this book and its proposals, but one must salute a movement that treads where others fear to go for it may be the footprints of the future” (5). *Education of an Architect I* and *II* do not endure because they show work of a certain look or a certain moment in history. They endure because they think through architecture’s rhetorical limit and model a utopian project.

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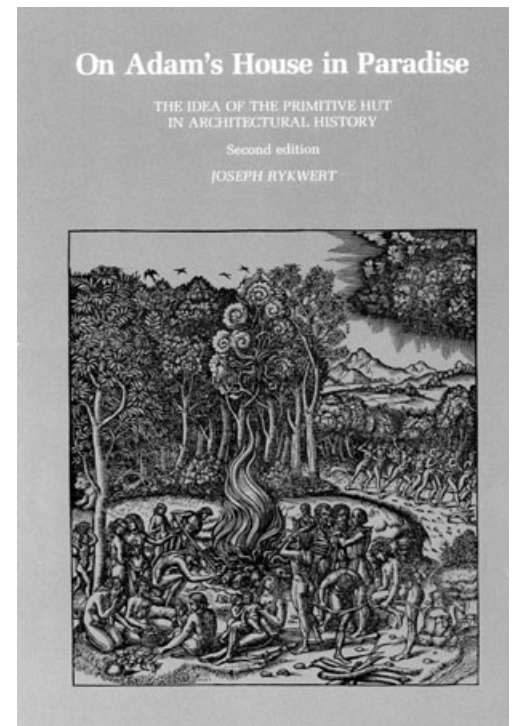
Note

1. Within this linguistic work, the socio-cultural aspect of language analyses were under attack, as the director of the IAUS, Peter Eisenman, championed the work of Noam Chomsky—who believes in the a priori universal capacity for language—over that of Ferdinand de Saussure (championed by Eisenman’s colleagues at the IAUS, Diana Agrest and Mario Gondalsonas)—who believed that language is shaped differently by different cultures.

On Adam’s House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History

JOSEPH RYKWERT

Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture
1972, 222 pages, 87 b/w illustrations; 2nd ed.
MIT Press, 1981, 240 pages, b/w illustrations,
softcover.



In a JAE issue dedicated to beginning design, it may be worthwhile to revisit *On Adam’s House in Paradise*, about the beginning of design. Joseph Rykwert, the Paul Philippe Cret Professor Emeritus of Architecture and Professor of Art History at the University of Pennsylvania, needs little introduction. Nor, perhaps, does this book. First published in 1972 and reissued in 1981, the book was one of the first studies on the idea of the primitive hut in architecture. More comparative analysis than

operative criticism, Rykwert attempts to locate how the idea of a primitive hut was expressed by various cultures and shows that even across time and context, there has been a desire for renewal by a return to origins. Either by way of nature or through divine intervention, Rykwert finds that architects have looked back to some sort of origin to guide making in the present. It is, by Rykwert's own admission, a Proustian exploration as "all paradises are lost paradises." The value of the work is not that he is able to precisely delineate the original primitive hut; he does not. The import is, however, in the exploration of a single strand of an architectural idea through the vast quilt of history and the demonstration that such ideas may still impact contemporary discourse.

The chapters are loosely organized in reverse chronological order from the present to the past. The study begins with the twentieth century: Le Corbusier, Gropius, Loos, and, even, Tarzan. For Le Corbusier, according to Rykwert, the "primitive" offers a mode of action not distracted by prejudice, but based in first principles and produced by unadulterated reason. Here the engineer is praised, although less by Rykwert than by Le Corbusier. Rykwert then continues with a discussion of the *Blockhaus*—a large log cabin designed by Gropius and then disowned from his oeuvre. Although Gropius distanced himself from the notion of the primitive, Rykwert connects the idea of primitivism back to Gropius by way of Konrad Wachsmann. The connection relates to the mode of construction and use of materials, and prefaces a call for authenticity in architecture. Within his review of the discourse of the early twentieth century, Rykwert distinguishes between on the one hand the primacy of reason and on the other a hidden wisdom concealed from the privileged and accessible only to the "primitive." Both, however, called for a return to the preconscious state of building for architecture to be renewed.

Rykwert then looks to the nineteenth century: Semper, Riegl, Pugin, Ruskin, and Viollet-le-Duc.

Semper explores the primitive through his discussion of origins, of both artifact and architecture. Riegl does not completely agree and focuses on the technique that stems from artistic intentionality. For Rykwert, the discourse of the nineteenth century continues to evolve around the craftsman and specifically the relationship between the "thing" and how it is made. Pugin, for example, argued for two essential conditions of architecture: one, all components of building be necessary for convenience, construction, and propriety, and two, that all ornament be considered as an enrichment of the essential construction. Pugin saw this ideal form in medieval Christian architecture, and this, he argued, is the point to which architecture should return. Ruskin also saw a return to the Middle Ages, but his interest was more material-based in that he was focused on the surface of a material and the way in which it was worked. Inherent to this position, according to Rykwert, is a critique of mechanization. Making for Ruskin is also connected to place. The country cabin, for example, was made "naturally" and was part of the world in which it was set. This setting is then related to an emergent national identity, an issue first raised in the eighteenth century and this is where Rykwert turns next: Laugier, Lodoli, Piranesi, and Milizia. Here is the primitive hut that most architects know. Rykwert acknowledges this, but also explores the idea past the icon of Laugier's hut to establish the issues surrounding it; that is, the superiority determined by the look back. If a hut as an original idea did exist, did it develop into an Italian architecture by way of Etruscan roots or was its heritage Greek? The development of the hut with relation to materials, specifically stone and wood, is a key component to the either Greco or Roman authority and the notion of the hut. As a counterpoint to the look back, Durand mocks the idea of the primitive hut and Laugier is the butt of Durand's joke. The issue, for Durand, is less the idea of the primitive hut, but rather the imitation of such an artifact, which, he argues, must be avoided at all costs.

After an excursus into the Gothic, Rykwert gets to the textual source of so many primitive huts: Vitruvius. He reads the hut across the Renaissance and then shifts textual sources—from Vitruvius to the bible. The Escorial, by way of Solomon's Temple, gets great press. The final two chapters demonstrate the importance of hut building across a range of cultures: Greek, Roman, Hebrew, Egyptian, Etruscan, and Japanese. Essential to each is a distinction Rykwert makes early in the book that building by animals differs from that of humans. Animals, he claims, do not think before they build. They have no sense of metaphor and this is a key difference for Rykwert. Thus, when looking to the amazing array examples offered in the final two chapters, he is careful not to diminish the role of ritual in the act of making. Indeed, the relationship between rituals and making that is not included in more contemporary accounts is revealed in the reverse cyclical re-telling. It is in the final few chapters, then, that we might reconsider the beginnings of design and beginning design. Rykwert's analysis makes it clear that architecture was always more than construction and shelter. Recognizing this, how might we approach the first few years of an architectural curriculum? It is, of course, an open question and not one that falls within the scope of this book.

When first published in 1972, Ernst Gombrich unflatteringly reviewed *On Adam's House in Paradise*.¹ He critiqued Rykwert's writing as simply a "cluster of ideas" with no signposts to guide the reader and complained that his methods were those of a psychoanalyst more than an historian. Gombrich then identifies series of omissions in the text.² His point is well taken, but Rykwert's approach is more hermeneutical than psychoanalytical, and, any work that spans two thousand years is bound to skip a few references. With the hindsight of thirty years, this review is less a question of value, but of worth. The book was published only a few years after Herrmann's landmark study of Laugier and after (and in

response to) Rudofsky's *Architecture Without Architects* exhibit at MoMA (1964).³ Within the context of an emerging postmodernism in the 1970s, a careful look back at how architects have looked back was timely. Since then, architectural discourse has certainly changed. With the rise and fall of post-modernism (stylistic or other), the development of a discourse around critical regionalism, a renewed interest in the vernacular, the emergence of post-colonial theory and identity studies, and even our ongoing fascination with all things digital, this work seems relevant, but strangely out of time. Perhaps this says more about current scholarship than the work itself. Would this book be published today? By whom? MIT press, the publisher of the paperback edition, has almost all but disappeared from the architectural publishing scene. MoMA publishes work related exclusively to exhibits. That said, might we still ask if the issues that Rykwert poses are indeed useful and timely. In other words, why read Rykwert today?

While Rykwert may have been irritated by Rudofsky's Cycladic musings in the 1960s, one can wonder whether he is similarly annoyed with the recent fascination of all things parametric. Just as Rudofsky questioned the design decisions of architects in favor of an architecture without architects, today we find architects adopting new tools of production, project management, and even form finding that question architectural authorship. Greg Lynn's Embryological House, for example, is not a house per se, but rather an unlimited series of mutations based on the deformation of a sphere along twelve points. In this way, the forms produced are not the result of a determined author, but rather are the result of an automated design process with the potential to yield thousands of iterations. It is interesting to note that Lynn uses the term "primitive" to refer to the original sphere that is the generic form from which all iterations unfold. In either case—architecture of the everyday (Rudofsky) or

architecture of formal mutation (Lynn)—there seems to exist a critique of, or at least a fear of, architectural intentionality. What Rykwert's book repeatedly demonstrates is that even as there has been a recurring call to a return to the primitive, this was not a turn away from reflection, authored action, responsibility, and/or architectural intention. Although the discourse may have changed, *Adam's House* may still offer refuge for those seeking more than a return to an authorless vernacular, or blebs and blobs and is certainly worth a (re-)read.

The book has inspired a legacy of scholarship, and the primitive hut continues to act as inspiration for a number of student projects, competitions, and professional work. *The Primitive: Original Matters in Architecture*, an edited collection of essays by Jo Odgers, Flora Samuel, and Adam Sharr stands out. As does Ann Cline's *A Hut of One's Own*. There have been multiple studies on Le Corbusier's own hut in the gulf of Roquebrune and the Maisons Jaoul in Neuilly-sur-Seine. These studies, and others, have shown that the idea of the primitive is deeply embedded in Modernism. Even in popular culture, the notion of a primitive hut persists. Michael Pollan, when not defending food in print, has built his own primitive hut and, of course, written a book about it.⁴ Matt Emery, the self-described "author and caveman," promotes the primitive as a way of living. His website explains, "My name is Matt Emery and I'm just a guy who stumbled on a way to lose weight, stay fit, and be constantly energetic—simply by studying primal man."⁵ Maybe Rykwert, who is in his mid eighties and continues to publish, has known this all along.

Marc J. Neveu

Notes

1. Ernst Gombrich, "Dream Houses," *New York Review of Books*, November 29, 1973.
2. Omissions, according to Gombrich, include the Baptistery Doors in Florence by Ghiberti that show a primitive hut; *The Gothic* by Paul

Frankl with reference to tree/column analogy; *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas on the idea of the primitive in general; and most importantly Cicero's *De Oratore* from which Gombrich quotes at length.

3. Wolfgang Herrmann, *Laugier and Eighteenth-Century French Theory* (London: A. Zwemmer, 1962).

4. The book was originally called *A Place of My Own: the Education of an Amateur Builder* and was re-issued ten years later in 2008 as *A Place of My Own: The Architecture of Daydreams*, most likely in response to his recent popularity.

5. <http://www.cavemanpower.com/> (accessed 10 June 2011).

Rethinking Technology: A Reader in Architectural Theory

WILLIAM W. BRAHAM and JONATHAN A. HALE, editors

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