CHAPTER 2

A Voice from the Margins: Robin Boyd and 1960s Architecture Culture

Philip Goad

Internationally, the career of Australian architect and critic Robin Boyd (1919-1971), is today largely unacknowledged. But during his lifetime, and especially in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Boyd wrote as a respected critic and theorist across a wide spectrum of architectural concerns, with his work appearing in a range of international publication venues, from The Architectural Review (UK) and Architectural Forum (US) to Casabella (Italy) and John Donat’s series World Architecture (UK). He wrote two books on contemporary Japanese architecture, Kenzo Tange (1962) and New Directions in Japanese Architecture (1968), as well as important articles on what he termed “The Sad End of New Brutalism” (1967) and anti-architecture (1968). His 1960 book, The Australian Ugliness, predated Peter Blake’s God’s Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America’s Landscape (1964). In 1965 he wrote The Puzzle of Architecture, a theoretical summary of the state of world architecture. Published a year before Robert Venturi’s Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (1966) and reviewed positively internationally, Boyd’s book was an accurate depiction of the crisis of confidence in global architecture culture. But it has been overlooked in subsequent historiographical studies.

So why reexamine Boyd’s writings now? Why do they deserve to be reintegrated into a broader reading of the late 1950s and 1960s architecture culture? One of the key reasons is that Boyd was at the cusp of a generational and career shift for architects who wrote about architecture for architects.¹ At one level, as an architect, his model for writing and practice paralleled that of older American architects like Eero Saarinen (1910-1961) and Philip Johnson (1906-2005), who wrote actively about the state of contemporary architecture in the professional journals and taught sporadically but never held continuing academic appointments throughout their lives. At another level, Boyd’s writing career predates that of the slightly younger British architects turned critic-historian-academics—Alan
Colquhoun (1921-2012) and Robert Maxwell (b. 1922) – who served in World War II and shifted out of practice into the writing of scholarly history and theory from the late 1950s onward. Boyd never did that – he remained a practicing architect throughout. Further, Boyd’s professional allegiances and academic background differ from those of architectural historian/theorists Colin Rowe (1920-1999) and Reyner Banham (1922-1988), despite the fact that Boyd would often benchmark his own theoretical pronouncements against those of Banham.

Furthermore, while Rowe studied under Rudolf Wittkower in London and then Henry-Russell Hitchcock at Yale and Banham’s doctorate was supervised by Nikolaus Pevsner, Boyd had none of this pedigree. As an Australian and hence an outsider, he had the advantages and disadvantages of nonalignment. He was not steeped in the conventions of British, American, or European art historical traditions and was open to architectures of the East, namely Japan, and especially to the experimental architectures of the 1960s expositions. This gave Boyd a certain neutrality: he was able to comment objectively, frequently invoking a dialectic tradition of posing balanced commentary and asking critical questions of what he observed but not necessarily taking sides. At the same time, this critical relativity (often associated with the empirical strategies employed by British critics) also meant that his writings could not easily be identified as belonging to any specific aesthetic or ideological camp. If there was a weakness to Boyd’s position it was this: in historiographic terms, his lack of an adversarial viewpoint or a clear theoretical and aesthetic allegiance – combined with an early death – consigned his legacy to near invisibility. His relativist position as a critic was arguably too balanced for a profession at an intellectual crossroad and in need of direction. Today, however, that neutrality, written from the margins, has the virtue, even the humility of accuracy.

Born at Armadale in Melbourne, Australia, in 1919, Robin Boyd trained as an architect at the Melbourne Technical College and University of Melbourne and served in Queensland and Papua New Guinea during World War II in the No. 3 Field Survey Company of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). A gifted architect, he was also a brilliant and precocious writer, founding the student pamphlet *Smudges* in 1939; and between 1947 and 1953, as director of the RVIA Small Homes Service, he wrote a weekly newspaper column on contemporary architecture in *The Age* newspaper. In 1947 he published *Victorian Modern*, the first history of modern architecture in Australia, and in 1952, the important book *Australia’s Home: Its Origins, Builders, and Occupiers*. Remarkably, Boyd was not trained as an art or architectural historian: he was not a specialist. He was an architect who liked to write, and he was ambitious for his talent. Because they formally documented Australian architectural history in its infancy in the 1950s, Boyd’s two early books became surrogate histories even though they were stridently polemical. His aim was to jolt everyday Australians and architects into critical reflection on the parlous
state of design locally and at the same time, attempt to codify some sort of historical pedigree for what he considered to be the best of Australian modernism at that time.

From the outset, Boyd, purposely targeted his writing to specific readerships, ensuring reception at scholarly, professional, and popular levels, and within local, regional, and international spheres. His ability to cross these boundaries has, in Australia at least, not been equaled since and it can be argued that Boyd’s writing, which made him a public figure in Australia, constituted an architectural practice more persuasive than his own considerable talents as an architect. And it was a skill that he would consciously reflect upon in 1957 in an article entitled “These Critical Times” in the Journal of Architectural Education, which would show him self-reflectively describing his past and future methodological trajectory as a critic of contemporary architecture.

The search for architectural form

On his first trip to Europe in 1951 as part of a travelling scholarship, Boyd secured an introduction to the editors of The Architectural Review (AR) and from that date onwards until his early death in 1971 was a regular contributor to the British journal, not just as an Australian correspondent but also as an informed commentator on the state of contemporary architecture and theory. His first article for AR, entitled “A New Eclecticism?” – a term which he coined in 1951 to counter “New Empiricism” – was intended to argue the case for the validity of thinking about multiple forms of modernism. Supplementing his argument with references to earlier AR articles by Sigfried Giedion and JM Richards, both of whom were promoting expanded definitions of functionalism, Boyd’s thesis of a “New Eclecticism” was provocative in its balanced position. Its theoretical message was arguably too radical a concept for an architecture culture still intent on drawing battle lines between rational and organic approaches to the making of architectural form. Yet, others, like Eero Saarinen in his 1953 “Six Broad Currents of Modern Architecture,” would later pursue exactly the same argument. Undaunted, Boyd continued to expand upon the issue with articles in AR like “Port Phillip Idiom” (on regionalism and the modern Melbourne house, 1951), “The Functional Neurosis” (1956), and importantly, “Engineering of Excitement” (1958), in which he queried the viability of the new shape architecture of the 1950s. His introduction (complete with pun) captured the period’s expansive mood:

The plain but wholesome dough of modern architecture is being flavoured with more and more currants: buildings with warps, waves, folds, droops, and other unexpected shapes sharply outlined against the modular grid background.
For Boyd, these buildings, whose forms were predicated on a special structural principle, were not necessarily more functional or economical than a cube. Their shape was determined by the architect trying to “find something new to say” and, more significantly, by “a pendulum swing against the idea of universality in modern architectural theory and a hankering after the individual poetic expression.”

But the efforts to create new form resulted in yet another absence of canon: were these buildings valid, rational, or authentic bearers of a new monumentality? Boyd asked:

How can they and the glass box be right? No one answers these questions convincingly. Surveying the MIT auditorium and his mixed-up confreres of the postwar decade Eugenio Montuori said in 1955: “The mess is complete.”

These articles secured Boyd respect, and writers like Reyner Banham, JM Richards, and William Jordy made ready cross-reference to his writings and critique in their subsequent articles in AR. Boyd followed up his 1958 survey with another important review of structurally determined buildings in his 1963 article “Under Tension,” which considered the rise of tensile architecture in the light of Frei Otto’s recent book, Zugbeanspruchte Konstruktionen. He concluded it with the comment that “in this kind of ugliness there may be one of the first really new keys to an escape from the historical vision that has been offered since the eradication of ornament” – a comment that referred to Boyd’s own recent contributions to American journals on contemporary American architecture, particularly recent works by Edward Durell Stone and Minoru Yamasaki, writings which had also garnered the respect of his peers.

Boyd’s breakthrough to an American readership had come with his tenure as Visiting Bemis Professor at MIT from 1956 to 1957, following introductions through John Ely Burchard and Pietro Belluschi, both of whom had visited Australia previously. Immersing himself in contemporary American architecture culture, Boyd contacted editors Thomas Creighton (Progressive Architecture), John Knox Shear (Architectural Record), and Douglas Haskell (Architectural Forum); subsequently, with a series of articles like “The Pursuit of Pleasingness” and “Decoration Rides Again” for Progressive Architecture, Architectural Record, Architectural Forum, and Harper’s Magazine, he secured himself a regular place in a broader international readership, even earning the respect of an architect like Eero Saarinen (one of Boyd’s idols) as well as a position on the Board of Contributors of Architectural Forum from 1965 until 1971.

In his writings, Boyd mapped the increasingly pluralistic path of postwar modern architecture, which the editor of Progressive Architecture Thomas H. Creighton would describe in 1961 as a movement and label as “Chaoticism.” Boyd highlighted not so much an era of “chaoticism” but the increasing need for architects to consider the
significance of design intention in an intellectual climate where questions of monumentality, form, structure, representation, and the dismantling of modernist canons were being accelerated by contemporary conditions of ephemerality, affluence, and spectacle. At this point in 1958, Boyd had determined two different aspects of post-war architecture – decoration and excitement – that begged for analysis and codification. Reflecting upon this in Architectural Forum (July 1959), Boyd asked, “Has success spoiled modern architecture?” and highlighted the reluctance of postwar architects (other than Stone) to openly acknowledge aesthetics and beauty:

It is not yet fashionable to admit purely esthetic motives. Grilles are justified on the grounds that they reduce air-conditioning loads – as tail fins stabilize a car. Nor is it popular yet to embrace symbolism publicly and un-selfconsciously. Churches shaped like fish are said to get that way inadvertently ….

Boyd concluded with “six different interpretations of beauty,” five of which were buildings designed by American architects Yamasaki, Johansen, Mies, Wright, and Saarinen and the sixth being Italian Vittoriano Vigano raw concrete Istituto Marchiondi Spaghiardi, Milan (1955-57), as if to underline the American preoccupation with aesthetics and formalism. Boyd brought these musings together for Harper’s Magazine in September 1959. In “The Counter-Revolution in Architecture,” he acknowledged “the abundant decade of the 1950s” that necessitated “a new affluence in architecture.” He suggested that, in reaction to tiring of the technique that had perfected the glazed box, architecture had split into two parts – “a search for new richness on the surface and a new excitement in form” – and that this split was best represented by the recent work of Stone and Saarinen, both of whom had recently graced the cover of Time magazine. Invoking buildings cited in previous articles, Boyd described Stone’s work as “International Style gift-wrapped” and the Huntington Hartford Museum “with its Venetian arcade and verd-antique marble medallions promising to be as exquisite as a superbly packaged chocolate box.” Saarinen’s aesthetic progress from Detroit to TWA was described with the important statement that “Saarinen, under the gaze of a lost, impressionable generation of younger architects, developed in a few years from reasoned rectangles to felt space.” Boyd went further, clarifying this idea of “felt space”:

The mutual advancement of the spatial expression and the psychological state of a sensitive occupant is more valuable than any ordained symbolism or poetic abstraction. Excitement, in short, should be pertinent.

Boyd’s argument for the functional relevance of “excitement” even garnered Saarinen’s approval. As Eeva Liisa Pelkonen has discovered, Saarinen, in response
to *Progressive Architecture*’s Thomas Creighton’s 1959 cataloguing of formal strategies as “The New Sensualism” wrote to Creighton saying:

I have read your “New Sensualism” article … and I think you have made too large an umbrella encompassed by one name. (Egocentrically I prefer the division Robin Boyd made in *HARPER’S*). Just under two years later in his next article for *Harper’s Magazine*, entitled “The New Vision in Architecture” (July 1961), Boyd further expanded his analysis of postwar architecture, describing yet more categories of design strategy in contemporary architecture in simple terms, such as “the suitcase and the bunch of grapes”; “twinship and circle”; and grouping together Le Corbusier’s Monastery at La Tourette and Louis Kahn’s Medical Research Buildings at the University of Pennsylvania as “singleness out of confusion.” While taxonomic in explanation, Boyd was not throwing up his hands in despair at the increase in choice offered to the designer but rather documenting (not endorsing) an updated and ever-increasing spread of possible architectural directions and avoiding the standard surveys which focused on the work of individual architects. As Boyd had said earlier, “the intellectual rat race is faster now. Everyone would like to be a one-man avant-garde.”

The significance of these two readerships in British and American journals at a critical moment in postwar architectural history – 1957-1962 – is noteworthy. Boyd is a respected participant at a moment of contemporary crisis in the search for architectural form.

**Ugliness and the visual landscape**

There were two further outcomes from Boyd’s American sojourn. The first was his 1960 book, *The Australian Ugliness*, in which he reflected upon what he regarded as the blight of American consumer culture as it affected Australia’s design culture and visual environment. This was also the text in which Boyd coined terms like “Austerica,” “featurism,” and “arboraphobia,” the latter referring to the Australian tendency to indiscriminately lop or remove any existing tree. *The Australian Ugliness* was the logical next step after Ian Nairn’s 1955 “Outrage” articles in *The Architectural Review*. Significantly too, it was a bridge between “Outrage,” Peter Blake’s (then editor of *Architectural Forum*) 1964 *God’s Own Junkyard*, and Belgian architect Renaat Braem’s 1968 *The Ugliest Country in the World* (*Het Lelijkste Land ter Wereld*). Blake’s book drew much from Nairn’s agenda but it is also difficult not to draw comparisons between the covers of Boyd’s and Blake’s books; we may even observe that Boyd’s earlier hand-drawn caricatures had the same subject matter.
While Boyd’s book went into multiple reprints, even as recently as 2010 – and came to resemble more and more Blake’s book – and had significant aesthetic influence in Australia in terms of affecting everyday house design and an emerging environmental consciousness in the 1960s and 1970s, God’s Own Junkyard – particularly its photographs, most of which were taken by Blake himself – had an interesting side effect in the United States. As Blake noted in the 1979 introduction to his book’s reprinting:

In some ways God’s Own Junkyard seems to have provoked a number of interesting polemics. It didn’t just (predictably) mobilize the garden clubs; it also mobilized the pop-garde. Its members felt that much of what I had assailed was, in fact, not to be sneered at, at all!

The power of Blake’s photographs in America had a completely different effect from that of Boyd’s caricatures, which were a combination of Osbert Lancaster’s satirical drawings of the 1940s and Gordon Cullen’s drawings for Ian Nairn. Robert Venturi, for example, though he’d written much of Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture in 1962, had in its eventual publication in 1966 famously appropriated – among others – Blake’s photographs of the commercial strip. But Boyd’s The Australian Ugliness was different. It was not just an assault on the visual plight of the Australian urban environment but also a damning commentary on the state of Australian popular taste. What makes it therefore original for the period was the combination of its book-length interpretation of Ian Nairn’s Outrage (1955) images but made in text, John Betjeman’s withering critiques of British taste, Osbert Lancaster’s caricatures of style, and Russell Lynes’s important 1954 book, The Tastemakers: The Shaping of American Popular Taste.

Boyd’s The Australian Ugliness therefore needs to be seen, as scholars such as Aitchison, Heynen, and Gosseye have recently begun to do, within a broader international context of various and sometimes linked regional discourses that in the period 1955-1967 broached the common question of popular taste and the status of urban environment as a visual landscape – a discourse that should naturally include Christopher Tunnard, Ian Nairn, Gordon Cullen, Jane Jacobs, Peter Blake, JB Jackson, Donald Gazzard, Renaat Braem … and Robin Boyd.

One of “the army of scribes”

The second outcome of Boyd’s American stay was a recommendation through Walter Gropius for Boyd to be commissioned as an author for the 1962 monograph on emerging Japanese architect Kenzo Tange in the George Braziller
“Makers of Contemporary Architecture” series. Boyd had been a regular correspondent with Gropius since the latter’s 1954 visit to Australia; in Boston, their friendship was cemented and then consolidated through more than a decade of correspondence. It was clear that the elder statesman of the profession held Boyd in high regard. The book on Tange placed Boyd in a new position, aligning author and subject with orthodox contemporary American architecture culture. In 1962, Tange joined Buckminster Fuller, Philip Johnson, Louis Kahn, and Eero Saarinen as leading contemporary architects; simultaneously, Boyd joined John McHale, John Jacobus, Vincent Scully, and Allan Temko as a leading contemporary commentator. Boyd thus joined the growing band of Western writers commenting – albeit often with limited knowledge and with narrow and often biased views – on contemporary Japan, like Udo Kultermann, John Ely Burchard, JM Richards, and Peter Smithson, and he would continue to write as a balanced commentator on contemporary Japanese projects for American journals throughout the 1960s. While this reflected a general global shift in attention toward postwar Japan, in Boyd’s homeland his writings encouraged a new generation of Australian architects to look not so much to Great Britain and the United States for inspiration but to their immediate region, and especially to Japan. Boyd also wrote the book *New Directions in Japanese Architecture* in 1968. In doing so, he took part in another series devised by George Braziller, side by side with other notable international contributors such as Royston Landau, Robert Stern, Vittorio Gregotti, and Stanislaus von Moos.

In reviewing *Kenzo Tange* and other books in the series, English architect Fello Atkinson grumbled at Braziller’s choice of architects, exclaiming, “why such a Yankee bias – four Americans and one Japanese?” Yet, while Atkinson was critical of Boyd’s writing style, he could not think of others who might justify inclusion in the series other than Arne Jacobsen and Egon Eiermann. Atkinson at least acknowledged the significance of the series, writing that through it “modern architecture not only becomes international but inter-cultural.” In reviewing the subsequent Braziller series, the “New Directions in Architecture” monographs, Reyner Banham in 1970 was similarly intellectually snobbish and unkind about the idea of a nationally focused series (which he argued demonstrated “sloppy thinking”) but did admit to Braziller’s commercial success with mini-monographs during the 1960s that have:

proven highly profitable both to publishers and to the army of scribes that has penned the prefatory essays and selected bibliographies that are the sandwiching around the slices of architectural photography that form the real meat of most of them.
For Banham, the “New Directions” series “so far – contains more original hits than routine misses”; furthermore, he reserved fair praise for Boyd, describing him (despite his “off-shore view” of Japan) as:

A deeply involved tourist with strong professional connections in the field (as architect for the Australian exhibits at the Osaka Expo), and his present relationship to the Japanese situation seems almost ideal for a summary interpretation of that situation’s present condition. The result is the most straightforwardly readable and most directly satisfying of the four texts under consideration, but whether it will stand up as an historical document in ten years time (as Gregotti’s will) remains to be seen.53

What Banham in fact was alerting readers to was the dearth of and the limits of criticism to be found in the proliferation of the scholarly picture book, indicative of a particular phenomenon where discourse of the day was largely to be found across a brace of journals, and with multiple voices – of which Boyd was one, and who also appeared in two Braziller series as one of “the army of scribes.” For the architectural historian today, this phenomenon between c. 1950 and 1970 highlights the importance of international journals in this period as a key locus of discourse and serves as evidence that voices from the margins, like Boyd and others, were able to participate and make a substantial contribution to a global conversation.

**Complexity and contradiction in The Puzzle of Architecture**

Boyd’s architectural relativism, tinged always with a “moral anchor,” was brought together in his 1965 *The Puzzle of Architecture*, a book positively reviewed by Philip Johnson among others but emulated in graphic format and eclipsed a year later by the New York Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) publication of Robert Venturi’s *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966).54 The problem with Boyd’s book was that while it was accompanied by his relaxed journalistic writing style and personable sketches and was stunningly accurate in its chronological account of 1950s and 1960s architecture culture, it reached no firm conclusion. It was no manifesto.

Johnson’s review of *The Puzzle of Architecture* was glowing, stating that “[Boyd’s] description of the situation today in the world of architectural design is completely convincing.”55 He recommended that “every architect read every word” and that “every architect must have this book.”56 Apart from criticism of Boyd’s occasional moralizing tone and a telling correction of Boyd’s startling omission of the axially symmetrical entrance door to his own Glass House, Johnson concluded with the comment that “postage stamp size photographs would surely have done as well”
as Boyd’s hand-drawn sketches (the only illustrations in the book),\textsuperscript{57} including just such photographs in his own review article as if to prove the point.

Venturi’s book, almost certainly in layout stages at the time of the Johnson review, followed the latter’s advice directly. In layout, it was almost identical to Boyd’s text, but glossier and with postage stamp-sized photographic images; it was also published by MoMA, a more powerful launderer of discourse than Melbourne University Press. Unlike Boyd’s book, it was not a historical account of form but an analytical account of design approaches to the latter, and its first chapter had as its title “Nonstraightforward Architecture: A Gentle Manifesto.” Complete eclipse of Boyd’s work however was clinched by Venturi’s inclusion of twelve of his own projects in the conclusion to his book, in effect demonstrating his thesis through design.

Despite positive reviews, part of the problem of Boyd’s book was its lack of penetration in terms of distribution. Published by an Australian university press, the book was doomed to face a largely local readership, where the breadth of Boyd’s scholarship would not have been appreciated. The book’s lack of photographs and, significantly, its inability to articulate a future design direction for architecture would have been frustrating to the practicing architect. As such, \textit{The Puzzle of Architecture} was in large part a commercial and critical flop. At the same time, both the books by Boyd and Venturi may be seen as capping moments to the late 1950s search for architectural form that catalyzed around 1962, rather than as polemical projects that suggested future action. Indeed, Venturi, in his 1977 note to the Second Edition, stated that he wished that “the title had been \textit{Complexity and Contradiction in Architectural Form}, as suggested by Donald Drew Egbert. In the early 1960s, however, form was king in architectural thought, and most architectural theory focused without question on aspects of form.”\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{Expos, exhibitionism, and anti-architecture}

Boyd’s \textit{The Puzzle of Architecture} could be regarded as being stranded at a theoretical frontier – the English end of a fading Brutalist discussion just at the moment when English critic Reyner Banham published his 1966 book on Brutalism, an endpoint which Boyd himself recognized (see for example, his 1967 \textit{AR} article “The Sad End of New Brutalism”\textsuperscript{59}), the waning influence of the American formalists (Paul Rudolph, John Johansen, and Edward Durell Stone), and the end of the postwar functionalist debate perpetuated by Sigfried Giedion and Boyd’s mentor Walter Gropius. Boyd’s writings, while openly aware of the Smithsons, excluded Team 10 and the Italians. He also excluded Vincent Scully and Robert Venturi, even though he knew of their emerging influence. But like older critics such as Arthur Drexler and JM Richards, Boyd included Japan and, like Giedion, he also included Jørn Utzon.
Perhaps chastened by the mixed reviews of *The Puzzle*, Boyd in the late 1960s focused his international criticism on expo design, “anti-architecture” and the ongoing debacle of the Sydney Opera House,60 i.e., on things closer to home and on areas in which he himself had international design interests such as in his role as exhibits designer for the Australian pavilions at Montreal (1967) and Osaka (1970). For example, his Fishbowl Takeaway Fish restaurant, South Yarra, Victoria (1969), bore an uncanny resemblance to the base of the 1958 Brussels Atomium.

Boyd’s 1968 article entitled “Anti-architecture” and his series of articles on expos and exhibitionism reveal an openness to architecture’s changing profile in the late 1960s.61 Writing on Habitat, Frei Otto, and the Japanese architects at Expo 70, Boyd is cautious, even ambivalent in his attitude towards rapidly changing definitions of architecture. Admitting that “anti-architecture promises a more radical revolution than that of any new style,” Boyd was among the first (in 1968) to attempt to make distinctions between Archigram (which he classified as “anti-architecture”) and the Japanese Metabolists (which he classified as “architecture [far out, but loyal to Vitruvian principles”]); between Venturi (“edging always closer to anti-architecture and [who] will finally eliminate his own contradictions only when he actually achieves it”) and Charles Moore and “all the New Barnists.”62 In March 1970, in his article “A Glimpse of the Future” in *Architectural Forum*, Boyd described Noriaki (Kisho) Kurokawa’s Takara Beautilion,63 a free-form steel pipe frame multistory assembly at Expo 70, as “a glimpse, as through a glass polarized darkly, of what a building of the future might look like.”64 Boyd was speculating on what mechanisms and design tactics were brought to bear to destroy the architectural identity of a system. Here, Boyd offered the most frank and prescient critique of what contemporary Japanese architecture was offering to the world:

Suffocation by its own servants may be the future of architecture: a Frankensteinian end, as many have been hinting. The Takara building actually demonstrates the possibility for the first time; and demonstrations like this are among the best justifications for World Fairs.65

**Listening to the margins**

Robin Boyd died in October 1971 – aged 52 – too early and with no time in which to develop his various theses and pithy commentaries into longer polemical works. At one level, it could be argued that his strength in capturing contemporary aesthetic concerns in eloquent smaller texts was not translatable into an authoritative voice internationally – despite his sustained presence in journals and various book series over more than twenty years. His early death, his commitment to
architectural practice, and his lack of a full-time academic position at a time when architectural history and theory had become specialized disciplines in university education all meant an irrevocable positioning at a hinge point in a shifting landscape of discourse. In 1971 contemporary architectural discourse and its framing had simply moved on. At the same time, his contribution was on some level recognized as internationally significant. In 1973 the American Institute of Architects awarded him posthumously the AIA Architecture Critic’s Medal. Since that time there has been no detailed international review of Boyd’s theoretical and critical contribution to postwar architectural discourse. His biography (1995) by historian Geoffrey Serle was authorized by the Boyd family, and documentation and analysis of his work, both built and written, has largely been undertaken by Australian scholars in the form of journal articles and conference papers.

The centers of discourse framing architecture culture are necessarily biased. But today hindsight requires acknowledgement of a broader selection of voices to be heard. For Anglophone architecture culture, Boyd’s criticism of global architectural events and the simultaneous promotion of Australian architecture were important. As an impartial observer, he was a key bridge between 1960s British and US architecture culture. His voice also represents a different axis of architecture culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Boyd is important as representative of, as in his own words, “Australian culture [as] something like a sturdy little boat battling across lonely waters surging with cross-currents from Europe and America.” At the same time, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, and hence places like Canada and South Africa, deserve inclusion, and recent scholars like Mark Crinson, Łukasz Stanek, Chang Jiat-Hwee, Anoma Pieris, Peter Scriver, Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, Justine Clark, and Paul Walker have made important contributions to constructing postwar histories for locations that lacked a figure such as Boyd.

Such histories require looking transnationally, across boundaries, away from the canons and asking whether intellectual and design sustenance was to be found elsewhere. Architectural history and theory continue to perpetuate gaps in the theorizing and documenting of architectural production, especially in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific, where the concerns often were and continue to be different from those of the Anglo-American and European mainstream. Like architectural design culture, which lionizes its design geniuses, so too architectural history culture perpetuates the celebration of its own creators. For too long, figures like Nikolaus Pevsner, Sigfried Giedion, and Henry-Russell Hitchcock dominated the construction of modernism’s discourse. Their inheritors like Reyner Banham and later Manfredo Tafuri amongst others did much to broaden the discussion in the 1960s and 1970s, but, in many respects, they consolidated an already canonical
reading of modernism. The globalization of postwar discourse and the mechanisms of its dissemination require broader and more complex networks of diffusion to be recognized and documented.

Robin Boyd played a key role in trying to place Australian architecture in an international setting, attempting to insert one form of local production into the prevailing international conversation. He sought to describe the situation as it was, not as it should be. He took part in a sustained dialogue about architectural form that was focused heavily within architectural journals in the late 1950s and 1960s. He took part in an emerging discourse about the visual landscape of urban environments. He was part of the phenomenon of the 1960s scholarly picture book. He documented the 1960s move toward the dissolution of the architectural canons, especially through Expo 67 and Expo 70 and his familiarity with and sustained exposure of contemporary Japanese architecture. He was not without flaws, but he was a constant presence. And he was not alone. Like the voices of several others – Udo Kultermann, Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, and Noburo Kawazoe, to name just a few – those of an apparent critical second tier, Boyd’s voice, albeit from the margins, deserves to be heard in the ongoing documentation and analysis of 1950s and 1960s architectural discourse.

Notes

1. The phenomenon of architects writing about architecture for architects forms the basis for the historiographic periodization of two key anthologies of postwar discourse: Joan Ockman, ed., *Architecture Culture, 1943-1968: A Documentary Anthology* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993) and K. Michael Hays, ed., *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998). While these volumes include some articles written by architects, most of the contributions were written within an academic field by architectural theorists without a personal grounding in practice.


7. At the time of the publication, for example, of Boyd's _Australia's Home_ in 1952, Morton Herman's _The Early Australian Architects and Their Work_ (1954) had not been published and it was not until 1968 that J. M. Freeland's _Architecture in Australia: A History_ appeared.


11. In proposing a “New Eclecticism,” Boyd was supporting Sigfried Giedion’s insistence upon the ability “to leap from the rational-functional to the irrational-organic” and JM Richards’s call for “the logical next step, the functionalism of the particular,” wherein Richards stated “There is no call to abandon functionalism… but to (relate) it ever more closely to the essential particulars of time and place and purpose.” See Sigfried Giedion, “Alvar Aalto,” _The Architectural Review_ 107, no. 638 (February 1950): 77-84 and JM Richards, “The Next Step?” _The Architectural Review_ 107, no. 639 (March 1950): 170-78.


31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 47.

33. Ibid., 47-48.
42. For example, the architect-designed project house phenomenon that thrived in the 1960s with progressive, affordable modern houses provided by commercial builders such as Pettit and Sevitt in New South Wales and Merchant Builders in Victoria and their accompaniment with indigenous designed landscapes was profoundly influenced by Boyd’s *The Australian Ugliness* (1960). See Judith O’Callaghan and Charles Pickett, *Designer Suburbs: Architects and Affordable Homes in Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2012). A more immediate influence could also be seen in Ian McKay et al.’s survey of Australian housing, *Living and Partly Living: Housing in Australia* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1971).
56. Johnson, Review of Robin Boyd, 72, 73.
57. Ibid., 93.
63. The Takara Beaulitlon at Expo 70 in Osaka was the pavilion of the Takara Group of four furniture companies.