Visualizing Fascism

Eley, Geoff, Thomas, Julia Adeney

Published by Duke University Press

Eley, Geoff and Julia Adeney Thomas.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/73049.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/73049
The similarities between German architecture in the 1930s and that of the rest of the western world at the same time seem even more striking to me now than they originally did.
— Barbara Miller Lane

“Invisibilizing” Architecture

Within photography’s histories, photographic depictions of architecture occupy an ambiguous position. Often used as functional instruments that coupled word and image to disseminate information about buildings, architects, and clients, they also helped inoculate a humanistic profession from substantive technological change by substituting single images for concrete things. If a building looked like something modern, something traditional, or something ancient in a photograph, its technical aspects were less evident in its public reception. Building technology and architectural expression, already separate, were licensed by photography to part completely, recalling Oliver Wendell Holmes’s memorable words about the separation of skins from carcasses. Added to this disjuncture between image and constructed object,
media tactics could make entire historical fields vanish from discourse about buildings simply by excluding their photographs from magazines, journals, and books. The visual remediation of architecture layers editorial practice on top of image making on top of formal appearance, leaving much of the industry of architecture almost entirely to one side. Yet the economic force of publicity has made photography a powerful agent in determining architectural futures.

What did photographs of fascist architecture effect, then, both by presence and by absence, in histories written after World War II? Early national socialist publications depicted the monumental architecture of the new regime in bold compositions deploying visual tropes of the interwar avant-gardes: asymmetrical compositions, raking views, and liberal use of the wide-angle lens. Radial visual tropes promiscuously coupled with conservative building style provide just one example of fascism’s counter aesthetic, described so eloquently by Julia Adeney Thomas in the introduction to this volume. As the global political goals of the national socialist government emerged, so did national socialist architecture appear to concretize those goals, drawing from other states’ increasingly negative critiques of “the word in stone.”

Nazi buildings disappeared from much of the international architectural press after 1939. Similarly, historicizing architecture from the U.S. or the USSR also began to disappear, as if spirited away by visual association with the neoclassicism of the new Berlin. As fascist regimes broadcast “stripped classicism” as a house style in the press, so did the architectural profession elsewhere gradually release it. Both moves were part of media tactics largely unrelated to work “on the ground.”

Contemporary architectural polemics are, by definition, geared toward future production. Selected narratives of the past strategically influence professional futures. Two caveats integrate photographic architecture into a book on the visual modes of global fascism. First, staged professional photographs of buildings meant for propaganda and trade publications differ fundamentally from photojournalistic images like those by Robert Capa, in which political ideology is often clearly mobilized. In commercial photography of buildings, presumed photographic objectivity often obscures how composition and framing deliver rhetorical messages. Yet it is the success of the photograph as image, as much as other information about buildings, that determines the frequency of re-publication after an initial appearance. Readers and writers of images also conflate photographs with “three-dimensional
images” of carefully designed buildings, not seeing the complex tasks that buildings perform, which are invisible in photographs. Two formal tropes thus complicate architectural analysis: building form and photographic form. The latter often takes precedence over the former in historical and critical accounts.6

U.S. historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock (1903–87), accomplished reader of architectural photographs, understood this gap between image and object. A steadfast ally of practicing architects, Hitchcock creatively affiliated national socialist, U.S., and Soviet eclectic classicism, using photography to create associations among buildings in which function, political goal, construction technique, and aesthetic address differed fundamentally. Photography helped historians such as Hitchcock jettison a heterogeneous array of buildings for a more singular image of building that had developed in Europe between the wars and was associated with a limited number of architect auteurs. Al-

---

though a logical way to promote new architecture, this was a dubious way to write the history of the immediate present.

As international-style architecture became the avatar of U.S. imperialism during the Cold War and the beacon of Western capitalism, alternative responses to modernity—some more technologically modern than their external appearance suggested—disappeared from view. Thus we might trace what happened, not when national socialist architectural photographs were made and first published, but rather when they began to disappear, edited out of postwar architectural history for decades. This virtual Bildverbot, an editorial iconoclasm, was accompanied by equally striking textual ellipses, as if not seeing the unwelcome image would make it disappear. Miller Lane reopened this chapter of German history in 1968, yet we are slow to probe the impact of fascism on architectural history after World War II.

Using global politics as a fulcrum, postwar modernists of the 1950s and ’60s excluded important recent developments from architectural discourse. Industrialization and war had produced radical inventiveness in rapidly built daylight factories and innovations in concrete and steel building technologies prompted by shortages of materials and time. Recognizable visual regimes such as “classicism,” “gothic,” and “Mesoamerican” clothed buildings that exemplified significant economic and technical efficiencies. Overlooking these developments for a modernist aesthetic program equated with antifascism, the United States began its own campaign for global dominance against the USSR, using media tactics that are surprisingly familiar—as if the success of fascism’s counter aesthetic begot the hegemony of Cold War propaganda.

Substituting an abstract aesthetic program historically affiliated with the Left for a historicizing one newly associated with fascism by the likes of Hitchcock, modern architects and critics unwittingly reprised the semantic violence that inhered when building style, or photographic image, became instrument of political ideology, as in global fascist movements. Other essays in Visualizing Fascism suggest how images (included or excluded) reveal historical developments with sometimes surprising directness. Here, the absent historiography of fascist architecture reveals an unwelcome postwar legacy, as photographs again obscured as much as they revealed of a new global order advanced through architecture. The genie of dominating ambition could not be contained by the bottle of world peace. Considering eclectic architecture, increasingly invisible in the media as the war passed, opens a complex chapter of North American architectural history, one that begins here a year before the 1933 election in Germany. The intertwining of historiography and
professional practice shows the past annexed to the present, retarding any effective “coming to terms” with difficult history.

**Hitchcock, 1932**

In 1932, Hitchcock co-curated the influential exhibition *Modern Architecture: International Style* at MoMA, bringing to U.S. audiences European architecture along with select North Americans such as Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959), and providing a visual narrative for a new way of building. A formalist tour de force, the exhibition included detailed architectural models and photographs closely trained on the buildings they depicted. Two years later, Hitchcock reclaimed an august heritage for twentieth-century architecture in print. His “Romantic Classicism in Germany” focused on architects Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781–1841), Ludwig Persius (1803–45), and Leo von Klenze (1784–1864) (figure 11.2).

A second essay on Baroque garden design and a third on the city of Potsdam affiliated late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century romantic classicism with architectural modernism, specifically that of the mid-1920s. This trio of articles appeared in the *American-German Review*, established by the philanthropic, business-oriented Karl Schurz Foundation in 1930 in order to promote German culture to U.S. audiences. In the 1932 exhibition and later articles, Hitchcock steeped modernism in historical precedent, not revolution. Similar shifts of rhetoric in modernist polemics have been noted elsewhere. Historians and critics eager to establish architecture as a patronage art like painting, and to distance major public buildings from the political regimes they embodied, increasingly overlooked modernization processes in favor of historical genealogy. Photographic mediation aided and abetted this aim.

For historians before and after the war, the architectural eclecticism of the second half of the nineteenth century—Lewis Mumford’s “brown decades”—interrupted a stylistic evolution from neoclassicism (romantic or “revolutionary” classicism, ca. 1800) to modernism. The stripped classicism of Schinkel’s Greek and Roman designs, by contrast, threw a line backward and forward at once, connecting ancient and modern and stabilizing contemporary developments. Hitchcock’s articles in the *American-German Review* belong to an entire literature on this topic. In all of these instances, the old authorized the new, bestowing legitimacy and authority on newly produced work, despite implicit conflicts with the revolutionary program of the radical avant-gardes.
At roughly the same time, however, traditional architects in Germany laid claim to similar territory. The place of Schinkel in the genealogy of Nazi architecture disrupted the historical claims of Hitchcock and others. The former responded in the *Architectural Forum* with a scathing review of the German contribution to the 1937 World’s Exposition in Paris, roundly condemning Nazi architecture and culture policy. Of Albert Speer’s oversized exhibition pavilion, Hitchcock wrote, “this is certainly the worst building in Paris” (figure 11.3).

Thus unfolded before World War II a competition for cultural capital that prefigured similar skirmishes during the Cold War, if with different players. For both sides, affiliation with the past was a means to claim legitimacy in the present, an invaluable if intangible justification for “Architecture” in the eyes of clients, publics, and public officials. The authoritative past was also a blind
in the present, one that placed architecture on a historical continuum while simultaneously elevating it above the politics of its own day, “unmoored from history” like other hegemonic (fascist) practices.\(^\text{16}\)

Hitchcock consistently rejected the deployment of historical architecture as an overt political symbol. The defeat of national socialism also did not end his condemnation of architects who used historical styles to design twentieth-century buildings. Rather, one enemy (Germany) gave way to another (the USSR) as he and other U.S. cultural actors began a coordinated strategy of resistance to communist culture—to both the megalomania of Soviet classical monuments and the instrumentalization of mass-produced prefabricated housing blocks. Cultural production on both sides of the Cold War conflict supplied a political weapon underwritten by state power, but in the U.S. this was masked by universalizing modernist rhetoric.\(^\text{17}\) Tracing Hitchcock’s postwar writings reveals how this particular fight was waged as the Cold War accelerated. Seeking to disconnect architecture from politics, Hitchcock emphasized aesthetic judgment as if it was independent of eco-
nomics, class, or ideology, and of the architect as its arbiter. Paradoxically, the success of architecture as a political force in society came to reside in its aggressive refusal of party politics. Apolitical modernist architecture became the perfect vehicle for advancing imperialism—through-building, at home and abroad, throughout the years of the Cold War.18

Censoring the Historical Present

Hitchcock distanced both national socialist architecture and nineteenth-century building from the work of Persius and Schinkel. So have modern architects. Walter Gropius implicitly addressed national socialist appropriations of German neoclassicism in 1935: “I belong to a Prussian family of architects in which the tradition of Schinkel . . . was part of our heritage. . . . ‘Respect for Tradition’ does not mean the . . . . the acceptance of domination by bygone aesthetic forms.”19 Interpreting the use of period styles by national socialist architects as a return to the historicism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made national socialist building appear safely arrière garde. The Architectural Review, for example, called the 1937 Paris contribution “the tragedy of Germany,” captioning a small photograph of the pavilion, “Germany has deliberately turned her architecture back to the time of Bismarck”—tragic in relation to the early development of modern architecture by Peter Behrens (1868–1940) and Gropius himself.20

Hitchcock, unusually and deeply immersed in the history of nineteenth-century architecture, carefully nuanced Gropius’s critique, claiming that Germany’s was a recent return, out of fashion more than revivalist.21 After describing the emigration of Gropius and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), he characterized German architecture as follows: “Those German architects who remained at home turned backwards in their tracks, though not very far backwards. . . . Very little of [it] deserves specific mention.”22 Affiliating the 1930s with the period 1900–1914 helped him emphasize lack of development and stylistic obsolescence.23 Not only retrograde, national socialist building stemmed from a set of developments that were not deserving of “specific mention” because they were irretrievably flawed and aesthetically mediocre, in addition to being thoroughly outmoded. Hitchcock thus excluded it from the story altogether, as a nonorganic style incommensurate with its own historical moment.24 Paul Mebes’s influential Um 1800, a book that connected twentieth-century German architecture to the “revolutionary classicism” of the French revolution in France and Germany, for example, was not even
mentioned in Hitchcock’s compendious *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* of 1958.\(^{25}\)

**Hiding in the Historical Past**

If postwar historians presented national socialist architecture as quaintly backward-looking, so did Nazi theorists themselves.\(^{26}\) Architect and polemicist Paul Schultze-Naumburg (1869–1949) narrated a genealogy remarkably similar to that of the Neues Bauen, linking romantic classicism to national socialism by stepping backward to turn-of-the-century reform movements, and from there to architecture “around 1800.” Like that of modernism, this genealogy skipped over mid- to late nineteenth-century historicism, when architects adopted revival styles to narrate building function, context, or manner of fabrication through the use of a set of established references that ranged over space and time.\(^{27}\)

Yet revival styles that persisted from the nineteenth to the twentieth century clad technologically modern buildings.\(^{28}\) As complex consumer products that take a long time to make, twentieth-century buildings increasingly required different orders of architectural production: aesthetic, technical, and propagandist. A highly articulated productive apparatus developed under national socialism, where historical styles related to building program (function, use), desired propaganda image, economic constraints, or all three.\(^{29}\) Celebrating German ethnicity in *Heimatstil* architecture (“homeland style”) was only one option from a heterogeneous stylistic mix that also included modern abstraction and monumental antiquarianism.\(^{30}\) This is not nineteenth-century relativism, where building style was didactic and ethically coded, as in the work of A. W. N. Pugin. Instead, the hierarchical application of style under national socialism privileged unsubtle messaging about use, symbolization, and building economy.\(^{31}\)

If arguments about style and its derivation could be debated endlessly and without conclusion throughout the first half of the twentieth century, they camouflaged an ongoing debate about relationships between architecture and technology. Here, modernists and national socialists parted company. The former projected transparency of form, use, and construction, with buildings as ostensible demonstrations of new building practices mediated by photography and graphic arts. National socialist architects, by contrast, used stylistic diversity as message carrier mediated by photography and graphic arts. For Nazi architects, technological innovation would advance an efficient building
industry within local economic constraints. Construction technology and external appearance (style) belonged to different administrative realms and were not necessarily correlated, even as they coincided in buildings.

Miller Lane’s important 1968 book made this claim, just as more recent studies have deepened it. The integrated propaganda apparatus of the state (only possible through the systematic policy of coordination known as Gleichschaltung) set media priorities for architecture and building that differed dramatically from technical priorities. The differences between propaganda needs and the requirements of useful buildings represented a newly schismatic condition that was not unique to Germany at this time. As the twentieth century passed, architecture was increasingly articulated around sophisticated demands for publicity and propaganda, in response to complex building tasks and developing technology, and as symbolic aesthetic practice. Miller Lane notes with regard to the first that “admiration for individualism and nostalgia for a hierarchical society and a preindustrial economy emerge from the party’s architectural propaganda between 1930 and 1933.” Similarly, Hitler conflated two manners of construction that are often understood separately—that of a state and that of a work of art—so that the symbolism of architecture added yet another charge. At the same time, the practical challenges of building grew more complex under the material and labor shortages that characterized wartime escalation.

**Product Placement**

Using various styles to sell similar consumer products was commonplace in the 1930s, whether the relevant currency was political-symbolic capital or money. We need not turn to the nineteenth century for precedents. In 1923, the year in which Henry Ford’s *My Life* made its debut in Germany, Alfred P. Sloan became president of the General Motors Corporation in Detroit, which soon diversified car models in a family of brands (to include Opel from 1929). Increasing the company’s consumer base, *gm* challenged the “purist” manufacturer of the Model T, which produced only one car model at a time until the second half of the 1920s. Sloan offered consumers automobiles in a multitude of styles and colors and at a range of prices, effectively spreading the demand for automobiles by applying stimuli. Such articulation lies at the core of successful commercial marketing.

The 1920s diversification of consumer markets in Detroit and the diversification of building typologies and stylistic wrappers that occurred in Ger-
many after 1933 share a similar phase of capitalist development with a host of other consumer products. Paul Jaskot notes how “SS architects were responding like developers and engineers everywhere to contingencies of politics, war, and material shortages (let alone labour).”36 Another way in which national socialist builders responded to market pressures concerned working-class housing. Abandoning large-scale mass dwellings for political reasons, the state turned to single-family dwellings “on the rural side of the plant in which [laborers] work.” This was not only a planning decision or a strategy of deurbanization in Nazi Germany. Putting workers on land to grow food even as they also worked full-time in factories amortized the costs of such building and muted workers’ political voices.37 New housing policy was intended to make factory workers self-sufficient through land cultivation, an economic benefit.38 Compared with the racially selective home mortgage system sponsored by Ford Motor Company, in which monthly payments kept workers tied to their paychecks, German workers experienced different manners of social control. In both cases, architecture provided a mechanism.39 The modernity of national socialism is well understood in relation to propaganda, building technology, cultural politics, and economic modeling. Reducing it to backward-facing antiquarianism tamed its threat, rendering the state’s lethal nature familiar and easy to dismiss. Such moves disguised the equally lethal role that architecture had played, whether in accommodating prisoners in barracks, providing enclosures in which they worked to their deaths and were gassed or burned, or housing the ministers who debated the lives of others over cocktails at Wannsee Lake. But the straw man erected by Anglophone critics to account for Nazi building during the war or immediately after it was not only historically inaccurate. It also had knock-on effects.

Let us turn back to Detroit. An essay by Hitchcock on postwar U.S. architecture shows how architectural images—how architecture as image—migrated across geographic and political boundaries to be flexibly deployed as a political tool. Hitchcock’s reference to “Nazidom” in 1947 relates the work of Detroit industrial architect Albert Kahn (1869–1942) to that of national socialist architects a decade and a half earlier. As improbable as any close comparison of these two turns out to be, made so in part because of Kahn’s Judaism, his thriftiness, and his lack of formality (in building as well as in organization), the association merits attention here.

By 1947 Hitchcock was an influential voice in Anglo-American architectural history (along with Lewis Mumford, and Nikolaus Pevsner in the U.K.), co-curator of the 1932 “International Style” show and a prolific writer.
In “The Architecture of Bureaucracy and the Architecture of Genius,” he compared Frank Lloyd Wright to Kahn, carefully distinguishing architecture from more prosaic building. The “architecture of bureaucracy” provided a revenue stream for architectural practices; the “architecture of genius,” by contrast, contributed to culture. Hitchcock’s postwar campaign, of which the essay was part, further articulated a distinction that Pevsner laid down in 1943: “A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture.” Lest architects lose access to industrial and commercial building and the “bread and butter” income that such work provided, Hitchcock carefully distinguished the manner of building that sustained architects financially from that which elevated them within cultural spheres. Architects might build utilitarian buildings to generate revenue for their offices; only geniuses such as Wright would build for posterity. This critical scheme to safeguard professional architecture subsidized the unpredictable phase of architectural work—that of design—with more predictable tasks such as producing working drawings or supervising sites. Genius architecture was expensive; mundane work could amortize its cost. For these reasons and others, Pevsner’s bipartite definition of architecture as either vernacular building or fine-art architecture was not sufficiently complex for postwar markets.

Kahn, in contrast to Wright, had contributed to modern architecture by perfecting the rapid delivery of factories, institutions, and commercial buildings. Kahn’s modern architecture, shockingly different from anything coming from Europe in the 1920s, was based on a systematic reorganization of architectural work to adapt to the increasingly uncompromising demands of industrial clients. These clients were not primarily interested in aesthetics. Rather, they sought any economic advantage that might be gained over aggressive competitors in an intensely competitive market. Worker productivity (for which more carefully designed architecture that better accommodates a range of human needs might be consequential), functionality, and predictability of costs displaced aesthetics. Kahn’s handful of articles and speeches testify to the degree to which he had absorbed these values while retaining a belief in the value of design despite its imperviousness to clearly measurable standards.

Kahn’s work had inspired European modernists as early as the 1910s and 1920s, when his “Crystal Palace,” Ford’s Highland Park factory, was widely published by authors such as Gropius, Adolf Behne, and Werner Lindner. Part of a widespread “Amerikanismus,” or interest in American innovations, Kahn’s work was greeted as the latest technological building for large industry (figure 11.4).
The raw material that Kahn provided was then crafted into “Architecture” by Gropius and others. Yet, in his 1947 article, Hitchcock used the retrograde term “bureaucracy,” a word associated with nineteenth-century governmental inefficiency and the rationalization of state organizations, to detail the manner in which the work of Kahn’s firm could, as a function of its organization, produce undistinguished but highly competent buildings. Hitchcock understood bureaucratic building as an outgrowth of the war and postwar reconstruction. As European theorists signaled the need for a “new monumentality” after the war, Hitchcock instead accepted a fait accompli: that U.S. military might was based on U.S. industrial capacity. He
merely tried to work around this seemingly unavoidable fact, carefully se-
questering “bureaucratic” architecture from the art of building. Yet the term
“bureaucratic” inadequately describes an architectural practice organized
around mechanization and automation. Rather than bureaucratic proce-
dures, Kahn’s office strategically adjusted standard practices.

Counterposing individual authorship with the lack of individual agency
that is characteristic of bureaucracy, Hitchcock ends with a note: “The public
monuments of Nazidom might serve as a warning. Moreover, England and
America have their own horrible examples of twentieth-century bureaucratic
monuments.” The retrograde “-dom” neutralized a lethal term and a recent
and very modern threat, locating it in the distant past of kingdoms or fief-
doms, even as the second sentence in the same note summons past, present,
and future—“twentieth-century bureaucratic monuments.”

Notions of ap-
plied style as distinct from organic or integrated style (such as that found in
modern architecture) reject theories of dressing or cladding that were staples
of steel- and concrete-framed building and of twentieth-century architectural
theory, and that remained popular among practicing professionals in the U.S.

Distancing modernization from the unfolding project of modernism,
Hitchcock’s polemics collided with the demands of writing history or criti-
cism, as he himself acknowledged. Tunnel vision pushed “Nazidom” back
into the distant past, where it could drag with it manners of building that
Germany shared with other modern states, including the United States.
Through such means, Hitchcock characterized Kahn’s work as retrograde
and obsolete, like national socialist architecture. Fred Turner convincingly
relates postwar reinvestment in the perceived power of individual experience
to fears of mass psychology instilled by the success of Nazi propaganda and
techniques of mass persuasion. Both are also part of the phase of capitalism
that prevailed after World War I. Herein lies the most obvious reason to af-
filiate two such disparate cultural actors as Albert Speer and Albert Kahn: if
you correlate them to the same general threat constituted by modernity itself,
you can use one to dismiss both.

How close was Kahn’s superficial stylistic eclecticism to the architecture
of national socialism? Kahn’s buildings were carefully calculated, reducing
the quantity of material used in order to minimize cost. Stone was a cladding
material attached in thin sheets to the steel frames of buildings and held by
metal anchors, screws, mortar, and gravity.

The firm pioneered new building technology across a range of materi-
als, seeking economies of scale through the use of thinner cladding, less re-
inforcing in ferroconcrete, and less ornamentation; these were not removed entirely, but to an extent that would reduce cost while maintaining appearance. Thus rondels on many Kahn buildings remained unsculpted, like blank spots where one would typically find figurative reliefs or inscriptions. Economy was particularly important in industrial buildings, although one finds it everywhere in Kahn’s practice—as in the Hatcher Library reading room at the University of Michigan, where a false barrel vault of canvas, wood, and plaster hangs from the steel trusses that span the reading room and support the floors above.

Somatic Economy

In contrast to this laboratory of reduced construction costs, the national socialist building program developed an economic model founded on slave labor from camps such as Flossenbürg and on a dearth of steel combined with
plentiful masonry supplies, as Jaskot has shown. Large public buildings in Germany from this time are in many cases actually load-bearing masonry buildings, an extravagance in any open-market building economy. They were economically possible only because the labor that provided the stone was cheap, if not free (requiring only that concentration camp inmates be monitored by guards and fed a minimal diet); the quarries themselves were government owned, and steel was unavailable for construction during wartime. But not only manufacture distinguishes these architectures. Whatever superficial stylistic similarities might be identified in photographs, the buildings have a different affect across the board, as Hitchcock knew well from his personal experience at Pratt and Whitney. One could argue that Kahn’s buildings are “background” buildings that generally don’t draw sustained visual attention. Speer’s buildings, by contrast, present monumental stone architecture as urban ensemble, megastructure designed to draw attention, not deflect it, and meant to constitute a public that is subservient to the will of the state. Both literally and figuratively, it is the relative weight of these two kinds of buildings that distinguished one from the other at the end of the 1930s, even as their images could be superficially affiliated, particularly as they vanished from the press, vilified but no longer supplied.

Hitchcock, 1958

Hitchcock continued to publish after 1947, just as his frequent publishing between 1929 and 1947 was interrupted only once, when he paused to write technical manuals for aircraft engines in a building designed by Albert Kahn. His 1958 Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries was a major reference work for architects and historians thirty years in the making, and it went through six editions and multiple reprints. The passage cited above, on German architects after 1933, focused on Peter Behrens and constitutes most of the discussion on national socialist architecture between 1933 and 1945. Titled “Behrens and Other German Architects,” the chapter includes Paul Bonatz (1877–1956), German Bestelmeyer (1874–1942), and Wilhelm Kreis (1873–1955) among those favored by the Nazi party. The same paragraph describes Oskar Kaufmann (1873–1956), who fled to Palestine in 1933, with no mention of a divergence of paths; indeed, the chapter title suggests that nothing much happened to architecture in Germany after 1933, beyond the work of a few genius creators, the most important of whom (Behrens) died in 1940.

The penultimate chapter of Architecture, “Architecture Called Traditional
in the Twentieth Century,” is as good as its word. One sentence mentions Albert Kahn before a multipage discussion of prominent British colonial architect Edwin Lutyens, a core member of the European “canon,” according to consensus, even though his biggest projects were sited in British India.\textsuperscript{57} The text explains that traditional architecture “is primarily an instance of survival; and cultural survivals are among the most difficult problems with which history has to deal. Their sluggish life, sunk in inertia and conservatism, is very different from the vitality of new developments” (392). Hitchcock thus dismisses the North American architectural scene that was ongoing when MoMA first began its campaign for modern architecture in the 1932 show; he equally mischaracterizes the construction juggernaut that engulfed Germany under Hitler.\textsuperscript{58} The fact that Kahn’s buildings were, in terms of building construction and technology, as modern as any that had theretofore been built—that historicist styles were merely draped over technologically modern buildings—was precluded from Hitchcock’s analysis both because of events in Germany and despite them.

**Modernizing Architecture**

Historians hardly need question the ongoing prominence of formalism in architectural history or the inherent restrictions that formalist aesthetics impose. Yet we live with the negative consequences of positive decisions—decisions made for architecture, not against history. Traditional architecture, so called, “includes the majority of buildings designed before 1930 in most countries of the western world and a high but rapidly decreasing, proportion of those erected since,” and yet its popularity did not merit sustained examination.\textsuperscript{59} The ellipsis of national socialist architecture in Hitchcock’s book is mirrored and echoed by an equal silence about what is arguably the most critical and poorly understood achievement of modern building (but not “modern architecture”) in mid-twentieth-century North America: the unprecedented output of offices like Kahn’s that fueled industry leading into World War II. These offices built factories, office buildings and skyscrapers, cultural institutions, and homes. By omitting such buildings from architectural history, polemists of modernism set cultural capital apart from finance and scientific capital, erecting a barrier between culture and its sites and means.\textsuperscript{60} Parallel exclusions of national socialist and U.S. architecture from history are striking; they may be explained in part by Hitchcock’s own history.
Johnson noted, in a *Festchrift* of 1982, that “from the architect’s point of view, what stands out in Russell’s scholarship is his use of primary visual sources. I can bear personal witness that from his first travels in 1930, to the latest for his German Renaissance book, Russell saw every extant building he writes about.”

Not only conscious of distinctions between load-bearing masonry and steel- or concrete-frame construction, Hitchcock was also a sophisticated reader of photographs. By embracing selective formalism he erected a levee against the surge of modernization, fully aware that style was irrelevant to the juggernaut of industrial capitalism even as he opposed nineteenth-century *styles* with twentieth-century *style*. While Giedion and others explored the difficult proposition that the essential medium of architecture was space in time (and thereby, in some sense, the negation of form), Hitchcock pursued an alternative proposition. For him and many others, style represented an authoritative cultural signature, the defining feature of an age—and of a personality. Lest this seem hopelessly irrelevant today, recall the working relationship between Hitchcock and Johnson, and that between Johnson and contemporary architect Peter Eisenman (b. 1932). Eisenman’s influence over generations of architects should not be underestimated, in part because the progressive credentials that drape a sophisticated cultural conservatism based on architecture as elite practice camouflage that political belief far more effectively than Kahn’s neoclassical styling of the steel-framed GM Building.

In such a schema for architecture, it really only matters how buildings *look* in order for their value as cultural actors to be affirmed. How they are built, are inhabited, and age were within Hitchcock’s purview, but primarily insofar as these affirmed decisions made during the design process. For this reason, the interchangeability of the photograph for the building is revealing. Like photographs, building style is literally superficial, accounting for building surfaces, whether inside or out, but without any necessary reference to internal organization (generally deciphered in the plan) or construction (sometimes associated with the section). The image of architecture is its photograph because the photograph dutifully records all of the stylistic attributes that the camera’s eye can graze. This tautology partly explains the agency of photography in twentieth-century architecture; today it underpins a great deal of architecture and its history.
Conclusion: No Politics in Architecture
Equals No Architecture in Politics

Hitchcock’s 1947 article and his 1958 book are Cold War histories. The first used recent catastrophe to undermine interwar building in the U.S. by associating its image with wartime German architecture. Yet the so-called architecture of bureaucracy was an important part of the U.S. building industry, a key force in the development of urban and exurban landscapes of the United States and a linchpin of military-industrial power. It required careful study. Hitchcock’s 1958 book left this material out of the historical picture entirely. The stripped classicism of “bureaucratic” architecture continued unabated nonetheless, in buildings whose executors cared little for architectural discourse. Hitchcock’s cordon sanitaire around genius architecture protected a small percentage of building, not necessarily in the United States. By erecting it, he (and others) sought to protect professional elites, not to deploy architecture for a more democratic “surround” in the built environment.

The historian, attempting to secure agency for and yet simultaneously indemnify the architect from political responsibility, helped hand away both responsibility and agency, foreclosing a better correlation between politics and the places in which they occur. In fear of what had already happened, he (not she) removed architecture from discourse on public life and turned it into a fiction about itself. Construction at scale went on unabated, carried out by those who saw buildings as machines that modulate economics, politics, form, and material for a variety of ends. Architects who removed themselves ever more fully from a public discourse that they could not control contrast with working architects such as Kahn who built the fabric of U.S. industry, which was then still largely urban.

More worrying still is the notion that investing architecture in questions of style and image—not technology, economic output, use, or means for living—though intended to avoid the hubristic demonstrations of national socialism, led to similar hubris in a different register, one less immediately lethal and more successfully global. The obliteration of German architecture from historical consideration contributed to this repetition. Hannah Arendt sounded an alarm in 1950 when she wrote,

> We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion. The subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dig-
nity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live. And this is why all efforts to escape, from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are vain.  

Yet as these words were written, architects were hard at work burying the past and embracing stylistic coherence in buildings throughout the U.S. and its international territories in the 1950s and 1960s.

U.S. architects and critics celebrated high-rise glass and steel office buildings and monumental sculptural buildings designed for civic functions—as organic representations commensurate with the challenges of modern postwar life, and as fundamentally nonpolitical representations. Intentionally or not, however, these agents of economic superiority and Cold War politics at home and abroad wielded an image of stylistic coherence that was inseparable from and associated with U.S. political influence. Would stylistic heterogeneity have altered global politics? Almost certainly not. Late modern architects took then-obsolete experiments of the 1920s as the basis for a new architectural style for high-cost buildings, a style that “trickled down” through the economy of the built environment. Such consistency reinforced the interests of the state, whether through private capital (Hilton hotels, corporate office towers) or public buildings (U.S. embassies worldwide, corporate campuses, and concert halls at home). The refusal to historicize—and visualize—fascism during the immediate postwar years condemned U.S. architects to repeat its mistakes, limiting new possibilities in the present and restraining the capacity of architecture to shape political life.  

Notes

1 I thank historian Jean Hebrard for coining the term “invisibilizing architecture.”
3 See George Sylvester Viereck, ed., A Nation Builds: Contemporary German Architecture (New York: German Library of Information, 1940); Werner Rittich, New German Architecture (Berlin: Terramare, 1941); Albert Speer and Rudolf Wolters, Neue Deutsche Baukunst (Prag: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1943); Gerdy Troost, Das Bauen im neuen Reich (Bayreuth: Gauverlag, 1938). Also see Rolf Sachsse, Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen: Fotografie im NS-Staat (Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2003); Otto Thomae, Die Propaganda-maschinerie bildende Kunst und Öffentlichkeits-


5 See Nadya Bair’s contribution to this volume.


toral dissertation, “Spätbarocker und romantischer Klassizismus” (University of Munich, 1922), covers a slightly earlier set of developments (1770–1830).

14 Matthias Schmitz, Caspar David Friedrich: His Life and Work (New York: German Library of Information, 1940).


16 Julia Adeney Thomas’s introduction in this volume.


23 Nazi architecture was flexible and stylistically eclectic in part because of ambiguous policies. See Miller Lane, Architecture and Politics, chapter 8.

24 Hitchcock, Modern Architecture, 160; for an earlier rendition of a similar idea, see Nikolaus Pevsner, Pioneers of the Modern Movement: From William Morris to Walter Gropius (London: Faber & Faber, 1936).


H. Hubsch, *In welchem Stil sollen wir bauen?* (In What Style Shall We Build?) (1828) is a classic example.


See Miller Lane’s review of Speer’s *Inside the Third Reich*, in which she argues convincingly for Mesopotamian and Egyptian models being knowingly deployed despite their Semitic roots: *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 32, no. 4 (December 1973): 341–46.


Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany*, 167.

“By 1933, Hitler . . . had come to think of art and politics as essentially the same. This was so, he explained at the Party Congress of 1936, because both art and the state are the products of a creative force . . . The interpreters of this creative force were, according to Hitler, the artist on the one hand and the politician on the other. Characteristically, he often spoke of the two in almost interchangeable terms.” Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany*, 187–88, 265. Also see Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).


38 “The minimum of land for the new subsistence homesteads is 1250 sq. meters, every inch of which must be profitably cultivated under expert direction through the labor office—even the shade trees and the hedges must be fruit-bearing.” Gray, “Highlights of a Housing Tour.” Tooze notes the inadequacy of this effort in *Wages of Destruction*, 157–61. Miller Lane comments in *Architecture and Politics*, chapter 7.


47 His experience of this manner of building was gained firsthand; from 1943 to 1945
he worked in a Pratt and Whitney factory built by Kahn’s firm, writing technical manuals for how to assemble aircraft engines.

48 Jayne Choi has shown how the firm’s organization required constant adjustment—Kahn likened his role to that of the conductor of an orchestra, refining processes by which architectural projects were completed. See Jayne Choi, “Cybernetic Industriousness: The Production of Albert Kahn Associates, 1918–42” (unpublished manuscript, September 20, 2016).

49 Similarly, a decade earlier, “the traditionalists . . . had worked out a formula of adaptation of the styles of the past which was not too completely ludicrous; following a line very similar to that of the Romans who so generally clothed their brilliant engineering with the shopworn and vulgarized fragments of Greek architecture.” Henry-Russell Hitchcock, “The Architectural Future in America,” Architectural Review 81, no. 488 (July 1937): 1–2. For “Nazidom,” the Oxford English Dictionary records five occurrences in journalistic contexts (1933, 1935, and 1941) and two in fiction (1947, 1971). Dietrich Neumann notes that Ayn Rand used the term. A cursory word search of The Fountainhead does not reveal its use: https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015054079721. Accessed May 2019.

50 “From this point on the ideal objectivity of the historian . . . is inevitably colored, if not cancelled out, by the subjectivity of the critic writing of events he knew at first hand.” Hitchcock, Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 380.

51 Turner, The Democratic Surround, introduction. The Fountainhead also manifests this fear.

52 Jaskot, “Building the Nazi Economy.”

53 See the unpublished paper on industrial architecture, Hitchcock Papers, Archives of American Art.

54 See Scobie, Hitler’s State Architecture, chapter 4.


57 Kahn receives two other mentions: in reference to Detroit’s Fisher Building and in a note on reinforced concrete.

58 Hitchcock’s co-curator, Philip Johnson, was also an acknowledged anti-Semite who joined the American fascist party, hoping for a leader in first Huey Long and then Father Coughlin. William Shirer writes of Johnson as “an American fascist . . . spying for the Nazis” in Berlin Diary (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1940] 1979), 213.

59 Hitchcock, Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 392.

60 Here, Daniel Abramson notes, “a rearguard aesthetic, stylistically, could stand in capitalism’s vanguard, ideologically, precisely by reutilizing and revaluing residues and castoffs.” Yet the modernization described here may call for a more nu-


62 During World War II, Hitchcock applied to work at the OSS photographic library. He was assiduously careful with photographs and curated photography of buildings. See correspondence files, Henry-Russell Hitchcock Papers, Archives of American Art.


64 Also see Peter Eisenman, *Ten Canonical Buildings 1950–2000* (New York: Rizzoli, 2008), all attributed solely to successful white male Euro-American auteurs.

65 Sachsse, *Die Erziehung zum Wegsehen*; Thomae, *Die Propaganda-maschinerie bildende Kunst und Öffentlichkeitsarbeit im dritten Reich*.


