Reviewed by Val K. Warke

Origins of Architectural Pleasure

by Grant Hildebrand
Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999

Flipping through this text, I found myself caught by the image above. I was first struck by the relentless diagonal of its composition, and then by the similarity of the scene to that viewed through the rear windows of my house: an edge of forest and stream receding on the diagonal, forested hills in the background, cows. The only difference was that the photograph is my backyard reversed. Piqued by its familiarity, I read the caption: “A meadow, woods, a stream, and cows, somewhere in England.” I began pondering the image, because something seemed odd: two of the cows were standing, staring at the photographer, while the rest were in repose. Now, the Holsteins beyond my house seem to recline only when they’re hot, in which case they would prefer being beneath the trees; or when they are ruminating, which they generally do at night. And whether sitting or standing, they tend to do it en masse. Certainly none would ever be so interested in me or distracted by the click of a camera that they would look up from their pasture. What brave, independent thinkers these English cows are! (Or could this be a symptom of madness?)

In other words, I was intrigued by this photograph for its composition, its familiarity, its deviation from familiarity, and its reflexivity. Reading the text, I discovered that the author proposes that I felt pleasure in the scene because the view from the edge of a forest into a clearing resonates with some forgotten survival-advantage trait. Well, maybe that, too.

Grant Hildebrand’s thesis in Origins of Architectural Pleasure uses Darwinian concepts of origin and evolution, sifted through recent theories of biophilia and transdisciplinary inquiries into humanity, to argue that the pleasure we experience in some architectural spaces is directly linked to various congenital behaviors (such as the hunter-gatherer instinct) used in the assessment of a place. Specifically, the author derives from survival-advantage behavior six characteristics—three sets of two—developed from these instincts. These form the root of a universal, species-wide pleasure principle: the desire to have a place of refuge from which one can survey a broad prospect; enthusiasm in being the subject of an enticement, tempered by an occasional delight in peril; and the need for the intellectually soothing, mildly stimulating antinomies of simultaneous complexity and order.

The result is a thoughtful, easily readable attempt to explain why we experience pleasure in certain specific types of architectural space. In a sense, he attempts what Owen Jones did for ornament in his canonical Grammar of Ornament. In his introduction, Jones argued for fundamental, cross-cultural principles that should inspire those in the decorative arts, and especially architects, to the production of new, universally accepted motifs. As a speculative amalgamation of Jones, Gaston Bachelard’s The Poetics of Space, Darwin’s Origin of Species, and Freud’s Beyond the Pleasure Principle, this text may be conse-
quenial to those interested in socio-biology, especially in evolutionary psychology.

What is most refreshing about *Origins of Architectural Pleasure* is that, ultimately, it values form. And there is an admirable bravery to the idea of taking on Pleasure as a programmatic obligation of architecture, much less as a subject that can be identified and circumscribed through analysis, with universal applications. Along the way, there are some tantalizing arguments and demonstrations. One wishes, though, for an expansion of Hildebrand's central contention that our historical enthusiasm for some architectural spaces resonate with our valuations of the qualities of various landscapes. While this particular hypothesis assumes that visual form dominates over other apperceptions (such as of material, olfactory, or aural phenomena), it could definitely lead to more mutual theorizations of architecture and landscape architecture.

And, in the development of his arguments for “complex order,” Hildebrand produces some very compelling and perceptive analyses of the complex unity encountered at the Piazzetta and Piazza San Marco, and of movement's role in our perception of the Pazzi Chapel. His analysis of the simultaneous spatial complexity and simplicity in the front rooms of Wright's Edwin Cheney House is a lucid example of “writing space,” always difficult in such texts (105). He also supplies some very valuable documentation of the formal agglomerations found atop some of the towers at the Cathédrale Notre Dame in Laon. There, he has us concerned not only with bovine posture (they’re all standing), but with the specific directionality of the oxen’s gazes (proclaiming the 45° geometry of the porches on the level below). Hildebrand incontestably establishes that, at Laon, we are the ones intended to be ruminating.

We are also aware that Hildebrand had pleasure in writing this book. He writes, “If expectancies are confirmed, the model is reinforced, with a resultant sensation of pleasure” (95). This book confirms his expectancies: Hildebrand discloses that, from the time of his childhood, he enjoyed Gothic architecture and the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. And both Wright and the Gothic emerge as the principal heroes of *Origins of Architectural Pleasure*. If there were indeed symmetry of pleasure, as Hildebrand suggests (148), we should also enjoy reading the book.

Wright certainly was a brilliant architect, incontestably adept at transfiguring his interpretation of nature. And the Gothic periods were responsible for many prodigious architectural productions. But there are a few occasions when the author's apparent pursuit of validation not only impugns the ethos of the text but, perhaps more important, paralyzes the arguments and their development. For example, in demonstrating the intensification of a sense of refuge brought about through contrasting conditions, Hildebrand deftly cites an excerpt from *Moby Dick*, with Ishmael at The Spouter-Inn noting that if “the tip of your nose or the crown of your head be slightly chilled, why then, indeed, in the general consciousness you feel most delightfully and unmistakably warm. . . . Then you lie like the one warm spark in the heart of an arctic crystal.” Hildebrand's ellipses omit: “For this reason a sleeping apartment should never be furnished with a fire, which is one of the luxurious discomforts of the rich.” This sentiment, defining a specific displeasure, would not exactly support a Wrightian aesthetic (especially when the next photograph in the text is of Fallingwater, chock full of bedroom fireplaces), much less the contention that buildings built for the rich best represent our pursuit of pleasure (141; more about this later).

Then, unfortunately, despite the author's claim that his approach is neither exclusionary nor universal, and in a text that reads with a calm evenness, Hildebrand erupts into superfluous, unsound attacks on Le Corbusier and Mies, who are cast as the anti-Wrights. In doing this, he irreparably damages his text. In a demonstration of the notion that much of modern architecture is arcane and inaccessible to the layman, Hildebrand refers to a plan detail of the corner of the Seagram Building (actually, an awkward redrawing of the one found in the Blaser monograph), and declares that “the complexity that has made it an icon to the initiated is apparent nowhere except in the drawing.” Of course, we don't believe this for a moment. First, he is suggesting that it is the complexity of the building that has made it an icon: a highly reductive conception of Mies's role in modernity. Second, the “initiated”—indeed most of the architectural profession—realize that the Seagram Building's complexity is multifarious—multifarious in details, yes, but also proportions, rhythms, treatment of surfaces, elaboration of surface depths, use of materials, manipulation of light, and abundant subtle urbanistic operations, all contributing to its sophistication. Third, if we use some of Hildebrand's own (somewhat problematic) methods of identifying what he considers to be pleasurable buildings and places—those “that many lay and professional people of many cultures have made a considerable effort to see” (which proposes an uneasy combination of tourism and specialized inquiry, experienced by those with sufficient funds) and recent buildings “endorsed in serious critical journalism” (which, of course, is largely subjective and ignores the issue of audience) or “given significant professional recognition” (whereby the concept of “significant” is also subjective, and the notion of “professional recognition” is unreasonably considered immune to the impulses of fashion and taste)—we find that the Seagram Building scores rather highly. And fourth, for better or worse, there can be no doubt that the Seagram Building has been embraced as a model by countless future designers and developers, more than the cathedral in Laon. One of the fittest, it has survived.

Regarding the Villa Savoye, Hildebrand strains to present the building as compliant with his theses (let’s ignore the chasm in logic here) so that he might valorize Wright:

Photographs of the Villa Savoye taken over the years also often show the terrace as a container garden [as on the roofs at
Pessac]. These are additions. Typically in Le Corbusier's work the distinction between the fabricated and the natural is crisp and clear, and no provision is made for including plant material within the architectural fabric. In this respect (as of course in many others) Le Corbusier's work differs sharply from that of Wright. The interweaving of architecture with site and the specific provision for plant material in the architecture are hallmarks of Wright's work. Motifs deriving from plant forms are also often used in the architecture itself, as in the frieze of Hollyhock house... (41)

Not only are the planters throughout Savoye not additions—they are present in the earliest sketches and are often integrated with skylights—but also neither are the plants. Lucien Hervé's early photographs of the building emphasize the numerous incidents—neither “crisp” nor “clear,” but with conspicuous ambiguity—whereby trees beyond the frames of the villa's ribbon of apertures mingle with shrubbery meticulously composed within the precinct of the house itself. Hildebrand's misprisioning of Savoye is used to promote Wright's use of decorative plant-like motifs as a more adequate reference to nature. But regardless of these points, what matters is that Savoye is indicted only because it might represent a failure to conform to Hildebrand's thesis. There are two photographs of the Villa Savoye in the book: one of the salon, the other of the exterior. Savoye's salon is the only interior shown here without furniture. It is cropped to exclude the planters on the terrace. As if to illustrate the lack of resemblance between this Savoye and the real one, Hildebrand's photograph of the exterior is, significantly, published in reverse.12

Nevertheless, if one wishes to construct a universal concept for pleasure, one is as obliged to outline what is pleasant as to point toward the unpleasant. Both operations can lead to some necessarily subjective, even peculiar assertions, as well as to the suppression of abundant counterexamples. Regarding images, Hildebrand feels that photographs capture more fully the experience of a building or landscape than do plans or sections, the only limitation being that they are two- rather than three-dimensional. What Hildebrand does not admit is the extent to which photos are also abstractions: monocular images composed, framed, cropped, and often manipulated. And, as has often been pointed out, architectural drawings are in many ways less misleading than photographs in that they do not feign realism. That most of the photos are Hildebrand's own only reinforces the autobiographical, testimonial aspect of the text, raising further doubts about the amplitude of his observations.

Much of the refuge/prospect point13 as illustrated in the photographs, for instance, can be redescribed in terms of “foreground-middleground-background” composition. Some photographs used in the book are taken diagonally through cloistered spaces, for example, suppressing the peripheral nature of the occupation of such spaces in favor of Hildebrand's alternate designation of foreground/refuge, middleground/prospect, with background/secondary refuge being the other side of the same cloister. The term “settings” is even used to describe places in nature; in this way, Hildebrand manages to smuggle into his descriptive language the implication of fixedness, frame, and theme, thereby authenticating his photographs. Even purely transient phenomena fixed only by the photographic image are consumed by Hildebrand's theory: he uses “mist” in an image as evidence of spatial phenomena; atmosphere (like fog) in a photograph is described as “magical,” and is presented as a demonstration of the capacity for a “setting” to entice by withholding information.

The text also contains some curious declarations. For example, to prove his thesis that we have an inherent preference for nature, Hildebrand cites the “continued popularity of such activities as camping, bicycling, hiking, skiing, fishing, and golfing, often undertaken with great effort and considerable expense” (money again) as a source of “abundant... evidence of our liking for natural settings” (xvi). Not only are these activities difficult to perform inside, but what about the ample evidence of our infatuation with manmade settings for ice hockey, fencing, basketball, poker, gymnastics, and, quite often, football? Does the developing popularity of indoor soccer and indoor virtual golf indicate a mutation within our species?14

To argue the innate appeal of repetition, Hildebrand maintains that “our walking or running steps are rhythmic, as are those of the animal world; even birds that arrest wing movement to glide on the wind resume wing movement to a regular rhythm” (96). Actually, most species of mammal are constantly varying their rate of motion in response to ever-changing environmental stimuli and rates of fatigue. Similarly, he proclaims that Brunelleschi's Santo Spirito is superior to his San Lorenzo because, in Santo Spirito, all four elevations of an aisle bay are similar, while in San Lorenzo, the exterior wall has another order inserted into it, being “radically unlike the other three” (120). There are many reasons for preferring Santo Spirito, but the “radical” difference of San Lorenzo's aisle wall actually initiates a series of perspectival depths, another form of order. Repetition is not necessarily evidence of quality.15

Our fascination with ruins, the author claims, is a function of our species' survivalism, our instinct for knowing that behind the tiger's head emerging from the brush is the whole rest of the tiger. But fascination with ruins could just as persuasively be presented as a sentiment occurring usually during certain periods (particularly spells of romanticism and neoclassicism) and representing culturally influenced intellectual speculations—the sophistication of a past culture, the magnitude of a disaster, traces of something once beimlich dragged into the dominion of the unbeimlich, the ubiquity of entropy, to name a few.

In this text, flowers in a hospital room or cathedral are understood to be symbolic of our intuitive desire to bring nature into our environment, rather than as an index of having absent friends and family, or as a manifestation of conspicuous consumption and/or conspicuous...
ous waste. The last explanation is particularly dangerous to the thesis of Origins of Architectural Pleasure, for it would open the door to fashion, style, and taste, and to their operations within a specific culture and society. Fashion is one of the most powerful engines of longing. The satisfaction of desire is a powerful form of pleasure. And, while the passion for fashion and its accessories may be genetically encoded, its manifestations produce substantial variations in how we construct our environment.  

Strangest of all is the deterministic explanation for the absence of early and vernacular examples in this book: technological and economic handicaps prevented most early people from achieving the six principles of pleasure. Hildebrand points out that, until the recent industrial production of glass, the concept of the “prospect” was limited. And, he says later, only very rarely can one find the proper site requirements necessary to fully carry out these constructs. He concludes that only those with prodigious budgets could afford to indulge their pleasure drives (139); and this is why buildings for the “wealthy” best represent an epoch’s preferences (141).  

Herein begin the tautologies. At the center of the text we find the six concepts. But what are their opposites? What would be a recipe for displeasure? The opposite of “from my refuge I over-see a prospect” might be something like, “in my exposure, I spy an enclosure.” Isn’t this a return to home? The opposite of “enticement” is “warning,” or in the extreme, “repulsion.” But aren’t both terms, in the end, just different modes of enticement? Aren’t we often attracted to the subject of a warning, or the object of repulsion (car accidents, performance art)? The opposite of “peril” must be “safety,” and isn’t that the basis of “refuge”? And the opposites of “complex order” include “simple order” (which is certainly acceptable on occasion) and “complex disorder” (which if, at its extreme, means chaos, certainly has its supporters), all of which are collapsed by Hildebrand himself: “what seems to be simplicity may more usefully be called order; and that on careful reflection such examples will be seen to include complexity as well” (99). Perhaps true to the nature of all speculative ventures, few declarations in this text are not spackled by retraction or caveats.  

For example, despite identifying the pleasure that comes from the confirmation of expectancies, and affirming that “we seem to like informational abundance and redundancy” (94), Hildebrand still asserts that overturned expectations are adapted by the brain, which then is pleased by the altered version; and later, that “we are disappointed when we encounter an entirely familiar example” (136). (Although little in the history of human events suggests that pleasure comes so readily to those whose expectations are disappointed.)  

Perhaps the greatest evasion of proof is supplied by the “subconscious.” In support of his proposition about our enthusiasm for discontinuous order, Hildebrand says that, when moving through Lutyens’s Little Thakeham, our memories realign the symmetrical axis of entry with that of the garden, despite visual discontinuity and having been jolted off axis several times in the process. We then perceive “consciously or subconsciously, . . . some degree of delight in these perceptions” (125). This means that not only can perceptions be unconscious, but so, too, can delight. It’s a good bet that, when pleasure can be subconscious, pleasurable events can be found anywhere.  

The central difficulty is posed by the problem of identifying “pleasure” itself. Words Hildebrand uses as synonyms of pleasure—happiness, likes, excitement, reposes, contentment, satisfaction, gratification, delight, affinity, and specialness (as the opposite of commonplace)—actually identify a vast range of emotions and reactions, of speculations and reveries. This range of pleasures cannot easily be conflated into a singular construct. While pleasure (or the reduction of displeasure) may be considered a fundamental biological principle, and we may agree that being too hot or too cold is unpleasurable, my too hot may be your too cold. I may find my son’s antics delightful, but you, in the seat in front of him in the airplane, may not feel the same way.  

I propose that, beyond the notion that reducing displeasure is instinctive, many forms of pleasure are probably located at the level of a culture or subculture. Indeed, the diverse constructions of a range of pleasures and displeasures adopted by one social group operating discursively with or against the different pleasures and displeasures of other social groups may actually constitute the primary identification of a culture or subculture. And our individual collection of specific pleasures and displeasures—adapted from the range delimited by our social groups—may be not just individual, but the sole template of our psychological selves. Therefore, prescribing a singular circumference for pleasure can occur only on the broadest, most ontological level.  

When having to evaluate pleasure in a “work,” many seem to come to the same conclusion: it is particularized. W.H. Auden has said that, “Though the pleasure which works of art give us must not be confused with other pleasures that we enjoy, it is related to all of them simply by being our pleasure and not someone else’s.” And Roland Barthes notes that “Whenever I attempt to ‘analyze’ a text that has given me pleasure, it is not my ‘subjectivity’ I encounter but my ‘individuality,’ the given that makes my body separate from other bodies and appropriates its suffering or its pleasure: it is my body of bliss I encounter.” Since ease and comfort easily sponsor their own forms of discomfort, boredom, and inertia, one finds that individual preferences in suffering supply the requisite complement. To resuscitate discomfort, humans delight in a variety of self-abusive activities: labyrinths and mazes, rigid frame motorcycles, camping, personal trainers, rock festivals, dental floss. . . .  

Because of pleasure’s intrinsic individuality, the search for an architecture of public pleasure is onerous. Any building that sets out to be construed as a signifier of pleasure must inescapably
address a reductive notion of mass appeal. It must eliminate any aspects that might resist concepts of average comfort and the reinforcement of a culturally authorized self-image. One of the few successful examples, of course, is the Disneyland franchise. It is clean—cleansed of dirt, crime, politics, pain (for instance, insects), culture (the other), and the encumbrances of the past.

Paradoxically, a resistant reading of Origins of Architectural Pleasure—reacting as an outsider to the ostensibly public pleasures illustrated in the text—may lead one to uncover the figuration of one’s own pleasures. Certainly, the possibilities for alternative conclusions abound. What if, for example, rather than continuously rediscovering instinctual urges, our use of precedents transfers embedded spatial forms and phenomena to other works, thereby perpetuating certain aspects of the familiar? And, assuming that we accept Darwinian adaptation, wouldn’t one conclude that, as the sources of threats have evolved, our refuge responses have also? And that so too have the related conceptions of pleasure?

And what if I consider my most indispensable pleasures to be in that superlative territory of pleasure Barthes has described as jouissance and that his translators have had to denote to “bliss”? Then I might discover a pleasure that goes beyond the individual, that leaves the self completely behind. Following on a thought of Barthes’s, in basic pleasure, one enjoys the reinforcement of the consistency of one’s individual identity; in bliss (jouissance), one seeks, finds, and delights in the loss of one’s selfhood.

Hildebrand pirouettes about the erotic when he discusses the importance of “withholding” as an ingredient of pleasure and “concealment” as a prelude to “enticement.” Rather than descriptions of a landscape, these could be the definitions of a striptease. But in his wonderfully dry sentence, “There is no reason to think that early Homo sapiens engaged in sexual activity knowing offspring would result; the behavior was undertaken for pleasure, as it still is” (9), Hildebrand still misses the opportunity to present this particular type of pleasure as more than just a pleasure, as the absence of utility.

What is missed is the chance to develop a hypothesis of the erotic. In this case, the erotic might be defined as jouissance transcribed to the level of the signifier: it is one of the only modes of communicating “bliss” that can be granted to an artifact. And architecture, of course, operates within the realm of artifacts. Without a concept of an erotics of architecture, it is quite possible that the works of Michelangelo, Giulio Romano, Francesco Borromini, Guarino Guarini, Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Giuseppe Jappelli, Le Corbusier, Carlo Mollino, Carlo Scarpa, Alvaro Siza, and many others would be inarticulate.

For all of these reasons and despite its intentions, Origins of Architectural Pleasure cannot be read as a prologue to a scripture on the universality of pleasure, but, ironically, as a testament to pleasure’s individuality.

It is the epistle of a fan.

Notes
1. The concept “biophilia” was introduced by biologist and ant specialist E.O. Wilson in his 1984 _Biophilia_. It proposes that our species’ modes of discourse, thought, socialization, and perception were developed through historic relationships with other animals and our environment.
2. This was exemplified by several books by astronomer Carl Sagan, especially _Dragons of Eden_, and his and Anne Druyan’s _Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors._
3. Jones’s encyclopedic work from 1856 helped initiate the Arts and Crafts movement and later inspired Art Nouveau enthusiasts and influenced Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. The latter’s early teacher, L’Eplattenier, used the book as something of a textbook.
4. Although I’m not as certain that the “odd arch with the blind oculus” (110) on the south façade of the Loggetta is part of Sansovino’s grand plan, given its oddness, and the fact that the current configuration of the ends of the Loggetta seem to have occurred long after Sansovino’s death.
5. Hildebrand is the author of _The Wright Space: Pattern and Meaning in Frank Lloyd Wright._
6. I doubt such symmetry: some of us will never enjoy squirrel sculptures made of acorns, regardless of the happiness of the craftspeople.
8. Books about Frank Lloyd Wright tend to conflate the genre of the docudrama with that of conspiracy theory. There are always claims that the “architecture community” insufficiently recognizes the architect. One thinks of Neil Levine’s _The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright_, giddy with conspiracy theories, like the GSD’s Gund Hall being an unacknowledged copy of the studio wing at Taliesin West, in support of which is featured a photograph as “evidence of a repressed relation in which Wright’s influence appears only in subliminal form” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 430. (Why not a plagiarism of Terragni’s 1940 study for terraced housing on a flat site in Como?) This seems to support Roland Barthes’s observation that a “Society of the Friends of the Text . . . would have nothing in common . . . but their enemies” (_The Pleasure of the Text_, trans. Richard Miller, New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 14.
9. Other criteria used here include the evaluation of responses of subject groups to slides (evaluated how? from which pool were the subjects drawn? who took the slides, and what exactly did they depict? how were they scored?); sample “paintings and literature that record settings appealing to the painter or writer” (which paintings? which literature? found where? what are settings [see below]? how is “appeal” judged? which painters and writers? why exclude all nonrepresentational art?); buildings that have been satisfying (or unsatisfying) to current occupants (using what evaluation system? why only current [versus historical] occupants? who constitutes an occupant? why only buildings with occupants?); buildings and places, independent of a sense of entertainment or historical value, that people spend “considerable time and money to experience,” including some of those mentioned in guidebooks (why exclude entertainment or historical buildings? what is the limit of “considerable”? why only those who spend money? what kind of guidebooks?). You get the idea.
10. One might even argue that Wright’s Cheney House, with its symmetrical music/dining spaces, depends more on its relation to exterior nature as an elaboration of interior difference than does the Villa Savoye. (While aware of its pivotal importance in the Wright oeuvre, I consider the Cheney House one of the more claustrophobic of the early houses and thus rather unpleasant. Hildebrand adroitly rechristens such claustropho-
nia in Wright “peerless coziness” (39). Now that it is a bed-and-breakfast, the phrase might be useful in a brochure.)

11. If one were positively disposed to Hildebrand’s points, an analysis of Savoye could argue that, whereas the counterclockwise spiral that begins with the driveway and ends on the roof connects various natures through a vertical series of ever-increasing prospects, the horizontal, clockwise spiral of the main floor begins on the exterior terrace, connecting a series of increasingly determinate spaces, ending in the ultimate refuge: the boudoir, a window, a table.

12. This is the case both in the page proofs I read first and in the final published text.

13. Hildebrand’s concept of refuge and prospect goes far beyond the simple utilitarian notions posed by Oscar Newman in Defensible Space. In a sense, Hildebrand penetrates the reasons for Newman’s theses.

14. Well, perhaps the golf part does.

15. At least, according to my inquiries among faculty and researchers at Cornell’s Veterinarian School and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Hildebrand himself even cites research into the “waggle dance” of honey bees, in which variation in motion assists in communicating distance to a source.

16. One thinks of Kakuzo Okakura’s canonical The Book of Tea, from 1906: “In the tea-room the fear of repetition is a constant presence. The various objects for the decoration of a room should be selected [so] that no colour or design shall be repeated.” (New York: Kodansha International, 1989), 90.

17. To an extent, Hildebrand describes fashion, but leaves it nameless: “[Some] responses are common among compatriots in place and time: shared customs, forms, beliefs, associations and values, ways of reasoning, ways of prioritizing, and ways of building constitute the material that makes a culture cohere. These characteristics too evolve through time, distinguishing a culture at one time from the ‘same’ culture at another time” (6). Even taste emerges on occasion, only to be suppressed. Regarding music: “Tastes differ; your complexity ordered sound may not be mine; but all Homo sapiens seem determined to experience complexity ordered sound in one form or another” (100).

18. Hildebrand relates the movement from refuge into peril to the “hero’s journey,” using Kahn’s Exeter Library and the Salk Institute as spaces of “heroic implication” (86-87). The concept of the hero is central to many early cultural constructions, and this is a concept worth further investigation. However, in this text, “hero” is based on Joseph Campbell’s observations from the 1940s. More evolved (but still problematic) are those of Northrop Frye in Anatomy of Criticism, who demonstrates that only mythic and romantic heroes are greater than their environments, and that tragic, epic, comic, and realistic heroes are all reduced by their environments.

19. For example, Morse Peckham, author of the Variorum Darwin, contends, in Man’s Rase for Chaos: Biology, Behavior, and the Arts (New York: Schocken, 1967) that the drive to produce art is already the opposite of a drive to create order; and that this is a necessary deviation, because without a drive to create art as a dis- or re-orientation, repeated orientations would be ineffective precisely because they suppress inconsistent data, leading humans to an eventual inability to deal with a world that is constantly altering its visage. It is notable that the only art to which Hildebrand refers is highly mimetic.

20. Hildebrand hopes that, “Because of their generality and ubiquity these [six] characteristics alone help in analyzing many settings” (100-101). But ubiquity rarely helps in analysis; it merely re-asserts truisms. In the conclusion Hildebrand states, with poignant hesitation: “We can use these terms for these purposes whether or not their theoretical basis in survival advantage is substantiated or modified in the future. They are useful terms for evaluating individual preferences without regard to any universality they may or may not claim” (145).

21. Contrast this with Michel Foucault’s thought (in The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley [New York: Pantheon Books, 1978], 63) that there is a special pleasure that comes from the knowledge of pleasure, and the anticipation that comes from that knowledge.


24. The cover photograph, a view of the Seattle offices of George Suyama Architects, can be appreciated for its conformity to Hildebrand’s criteria of refuge/prospect. These traits could as easily have been transferred from a study of the nearly identical entry spaces in Ledoux’s Director’s House at Arc-et-Senans.


26. And it is an alternative to the rather unsettling prescriptions Hildebrand finds himself making: one should have deeply shadowed voids with large areas of glass; large terraces, ideally elevated, usable or not; varying room plan dimensions, some with between two and three hundred degrees of perimeter arc incorporating miscellaneous opaque niches, etc.; multiple-height ceilings, but with the ceilings of “refuge” spaces being within reach; and so on (47-48; 139-140).

Val K. Warke is associate professor of architecture at Cornell University.