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The Re-examination of Modern Architecture: A Review of Modernism in America: 1937–1943

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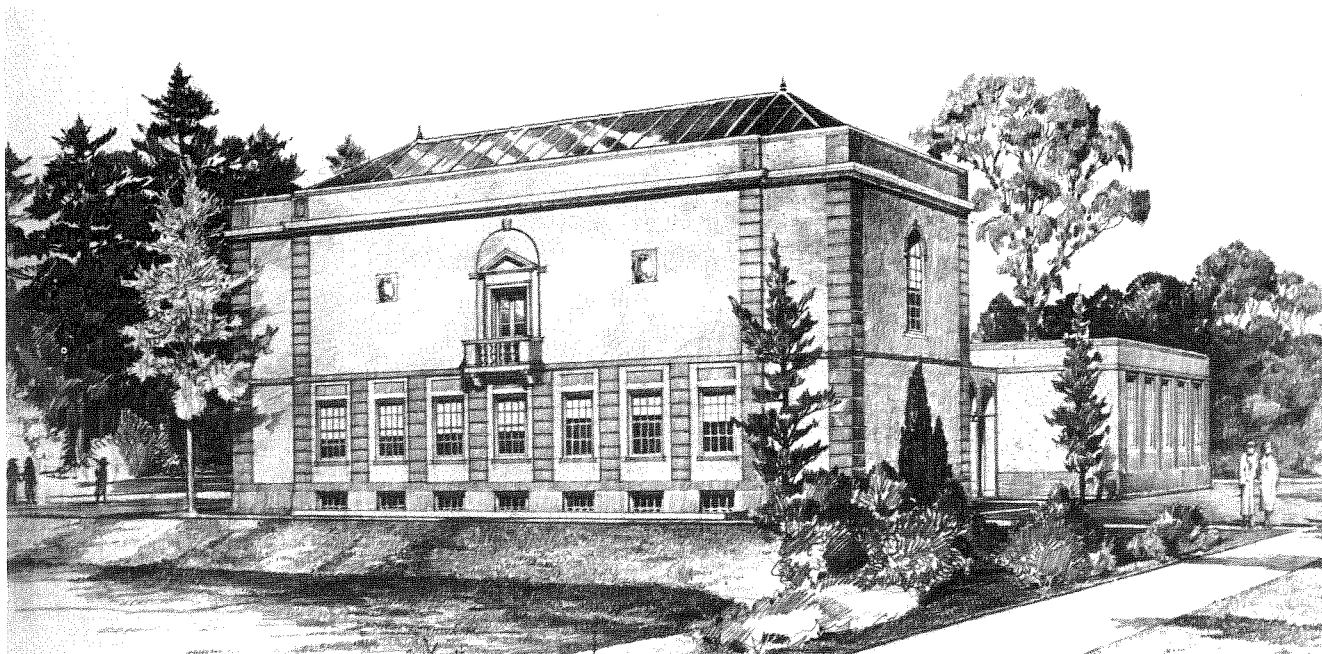
An unfortunate consequence of the intellectual dominance of the Modern movement since the Second World War has been the emergence of two broadly manifested perceptions of Modern architecture. One is quite familiar: the so-called post-Modern view perceives Modern architecture as the result of a monolithic and narrowly conceived theoretical position in whose rejection of historical precedent and representational devices the crisis of contemporary building supposedly resides. A second, less frequently identified view has evolved that is outwardly supportive of Modern architecture but limits our capacity for a balanced criticism of the architecture of the recent past with greater rigidity than post-Modernism. This is a perception of Modern architecture that embraces the tenets of the Modern movement and sees its development as progressive, constant, and unerring. It is a view that results from an ignorance of the initial debates of which the Modern movement was an outcome and is licensed by the surprising lack of historical information pertaining to the years during which the movement was formed before World War II. Whereas the first view is part of a negative and destructive reaction against the hegemony of the Modern movement, the second is a result of that hegemony: Years of acceptance of Modernist canons have permitted a myth of origins to be perpetuated that has disallowed critical engagement with the original assertions of the Modern movement. Thus, the Modern

movement is not properly understood, and those of its premises and achievements that remain valid cannot be introduced into the contemporary architectural discourse.

A recent work, *Modernism in America, 1937–1943* (edited by James D. Kornwolf and published by the Muscarelle Museum of Art, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1985), a book-length catalog for an exhibition at the Muscarelle Museum in Williamsburg, Virginia, and at Goucher College, Towson, Maryland, is a benchmark toward resolving this dilemma. Its authors present both a substantial body of work and correctly acknowledge the responsibility of the community of architectural historians to depict both the ideological structure of the Modern movement and its intellectual context. Having accepted these responsibilities, it is commendable that the authors have recalled truly extraordinary material long since eclipsed by subsequent canonical works of Modern architecture. It is unfortunate that while they have come close, they have not, in fact, managed to enter into the next difficult stage of criticism of Modern architecture, which permits this work to be seen afresh without the baggage of either its sympathetic or antagonistic propagandists.

As with many similar movements, the Modern movement was initiated incrementally and advanced slowly

by the force of its ideological program as well as by the success of its proponents to express themselves publicly, attract patrons and, finally, to garner commissions. *Modernism in America* focuses on work generated through four major architectural competitions held in the late thirties and early forties. Although the projects demonstrate a wide range of aesthetic tastes, it is the Modern movement—and specifically the International Style—that is premiered. All four competitions—for an art center for the College of William and Mary, 1938; an art center for Wheaton College, 1938; a campus plan for Goucher College, 1938; and the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, D.C., 1939—were followed closely by a professional body just emerging (along with its clientele) from the worst years of the depression and entering into a period of political, economic, and, consequently, cultural transition. Together, these competitions were among the first since the famous Chicago *Tribune* competition of 1922 and therefore were regarded as significant indications of an evolving architectural aesthetic. This notion was strongly reinforced by the fact that the majority of schemes were the products of young designers who were, unlike the preceding generation of architects, trained at schools in the United States rather than in Europe at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Published widely, the Modernist schemes were integrated into the Modernist discourse and thus were posed as alternatives to the dominant bias for a traditional Eclecticism.



1 Proposed art building, Wheaton College. Norton, Massachusetts, 1932, Cram and Ferguson. Photograph courtesy of Wheaton College, Norton Massachusetts, Marion B. Gebbie Archives and Special Collections.

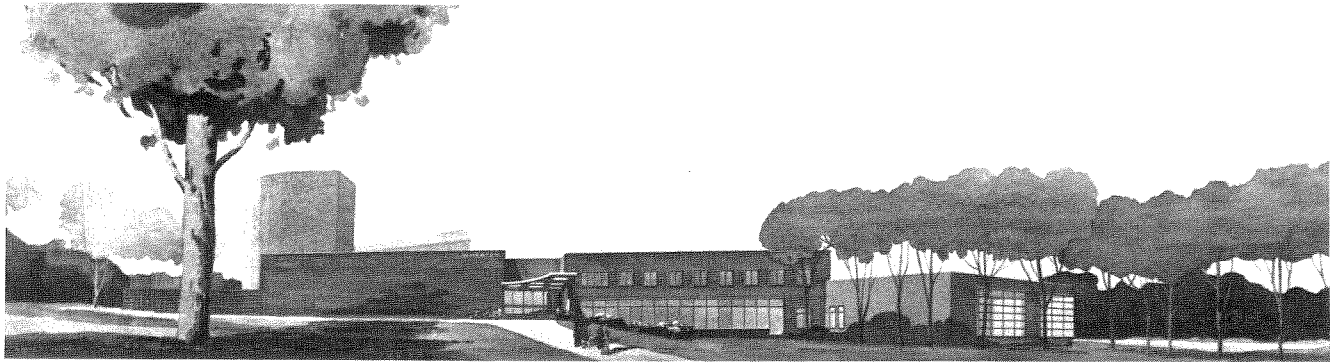
2 Design for an art center, Wheaton College. 1938, Richard M. Bennett and Caleb Hornbostel. Watercolor perspective. Photograph courtesy of Muscarelle Museum of Art.

The comparison of these two schemes for the same project, separated by only six years, makes the suddenness and novelty of the aesthetic program of the Modern movement more tangible.

The authors of *Modernism in America*, James Kornwolf, Travis McDonald, and Thomas McCormick, have designed a method of presentation for their work suited specifically to these early American examples of designs produced by architects consciously working within the Modern movement. The reviews of the competitions, authored separately and structured as independent research topics, share a similar format, which emphasizes, on the one hand, the events surrounding the competitions and, on the other hand, the schemes presented by the competitors. Thus, the authors tempt us to consider two primary foci for this and subsequent research pertaining to Modern architecture, one to be uncovered in the theoretical and political debates of early Modernism and the other the work itself, taken apart from these debates and considered on the basis of its own formal and aesthetic merits.

An important but subtle distinction presents itself as a condition of this historical method. The authors of *Modernism in America* recognize that, as an historical phenomenon,

the Modernist program proceeded along two related but not necessarily parallel lines. Throughout the two decades prior to World War II, a discourse existed between the principal protagonists of the Modern movement in the United States through which the central arguments for Modern architecture evolved, such as "Functionalism," the imperative to avoid ornament, and the liberation from the constraints of Formalism through the license of asymmetrical massing. These arguments, made increasingly vague and intangible through jingoistic overuse, derived from the fundamental convictions of practitioners as well as from the immediate and volatile confrontation between the new approaches of the Modern movement and established design practices. Moreover, the politicization of the Modernist discourse was severely at odds with the intellectual achievements of the Modern movement and constrained the theoretical underpinnings of Modernism. Given the Modernist agenda to achieve authority for the movement, a profitable affiliation or self-serving position may have had greater weight than compelling intellectual criticism. Simul-



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taneously, a substantial body of work was assembled, artifacts that one can now examine independently from the discourse and criticism of the Modern movement. A test of the success of *Modernism in America*—a test that is consistent with the stated goals of the authors—is the extent to which it allows us to isolate ourselves from those aspects of the Modernist debate that were merely the temporal and limited responses to the immediate dilemmas confronting the aspiring Modernist in 1938 while at the same time it facilitates a critical position that identifies those aspects of Modern architecture that continue to be relevant to contemporary architectural production.

Traditionalist vs. Progressive: The Modernist Debate

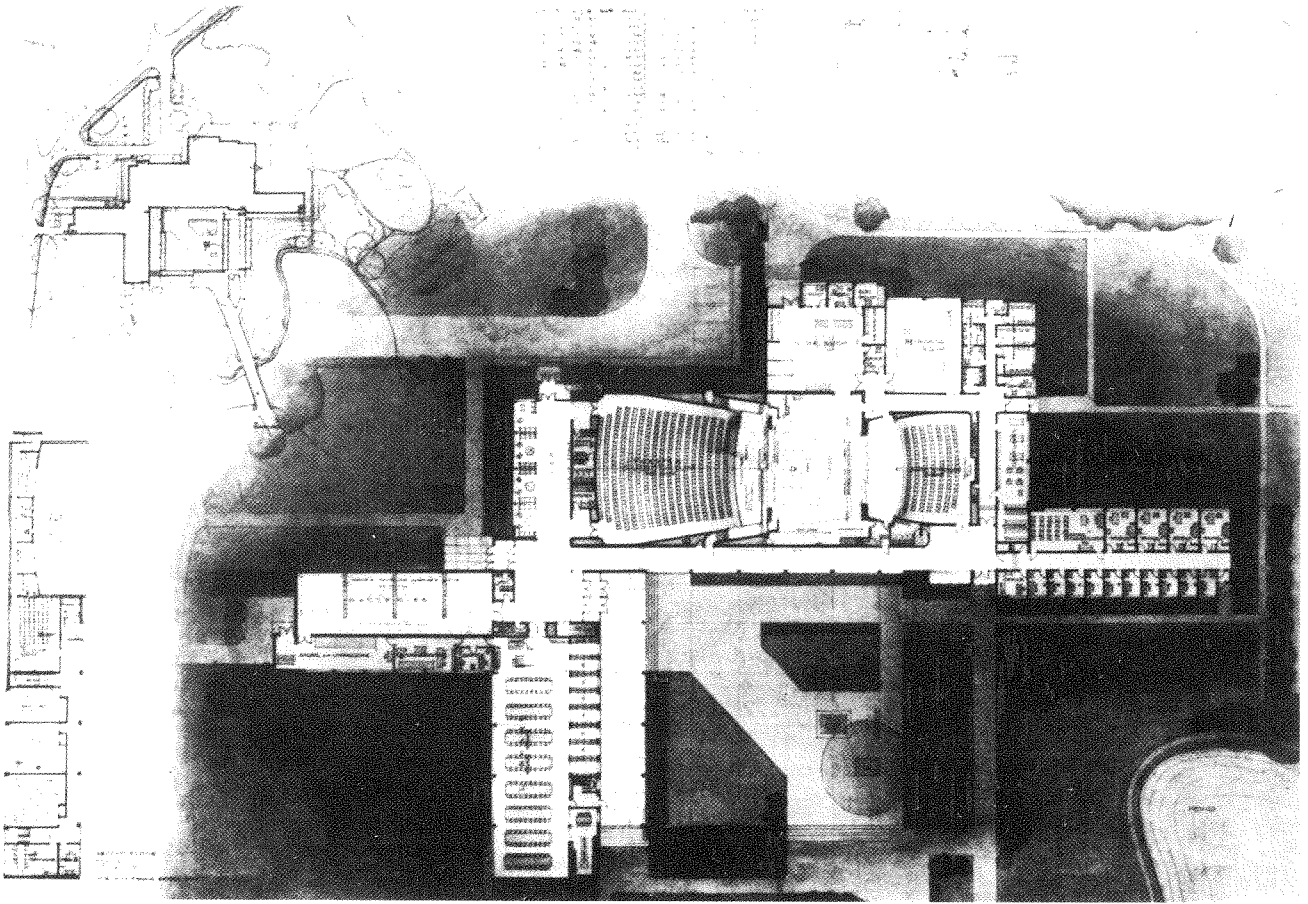
Until recently, the dominant interpretation of the intellectual development of the Modern movement was that of historians and critics partisan to Modern architecture itself. The popular but unfortunately polemical work of Siegfried Giedion or Nikolaus Pevsner invited oversimplification. Their work was used to support

the view that an unconscious honesty to program, structure, and materials evidenced in large-scale American engineering projects formed the basis of the Modern movement, a movement that sponsored a sudden revolutionary breach with older patterns of architectural practice no longer capable of satisfying the problems of contemporary building.¹ In the face of declining partisanship to the intellectual tenets of the Modern movement, this view has appeared increasingly inaccurate. The charges by Modernists that the Traditionalist architectural program of the thirties, which emphasized historical and stylistic continuity, were indulgent and inadequate were—apart from the question of their validity—intentionally divisive in the sphere of professional practice. The problems of the Modernist historical perspective, which invented a determinism validating the Modern movement (variously called the “will of the Epoch,” “Zeitgeist,” or “spirit of the times”), is widely appreciated today.

Giedion’s and Pevsner’s most influential books, *Space, Time and*

Architecture and *The Pioneers of Modern Design*, appeared in 1941 and 1936, respectively. The subsequent influence of these works and others similarly supportive of the Modern movement obscured the arguments of other, earlier works that had attempted to deal with the phenomenon of Modern culture and a related mode of architectural production in a less proscriptive manner. A more balanced historical view—and one to which the authors of *Modernism in America* return—dominated in the 1920s and early 1930s. Many architectural historians, critics, and theorists of the time held that the phenomena constituting Modern culture—industrial economy, international politics, the growth of bureaucracy—were unprecedented. Furthermore, both the so-called Traditionalists and Progressives held that cultural activities such as architecture must reflect these new conditions.²

A remarkable historical work of the first decades of the twentieth century in which this view is clearly expressed is that of Fiske Kimball and George Edgell, *A History of Architecture* (New York, 1918).



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They described the conditions of the modern era.

... A multitude of individual tendencies combined to initiate the age of archeological discovery and historical research, of revolution and democracy, of natural science and invention, of capitalism and colonial empire. These were destined to affect not only the stylistic aspect of architecture, but equally the nature of the prevailing types of buildings and methods of construction, as well as the extent to which these were diffused over the world.³

These conditions, Edgell and Kimball inform us, reinforce "... the idea that they constitute the beginning of a new era, specifically modern." Edgell and Kimball define "Modern Architecture," that is, architecture in the "modern era," as

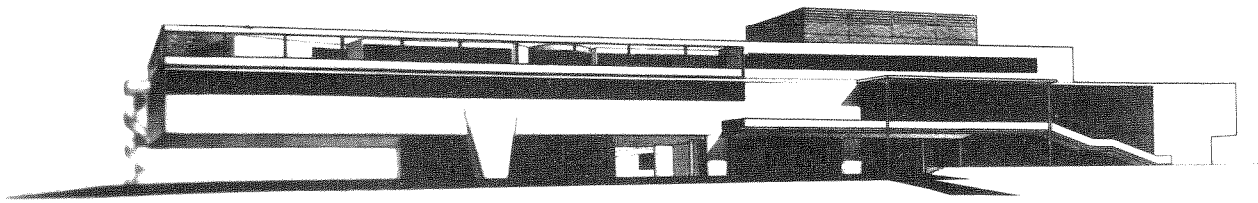
being composed of two types of architectural production:

Although the kaleidoscopic interplay of forces makes it difficult to generalize regarding the architectural characteristics of the period, they may be conceived broadly as the result of a synthesis of retrospective and progressive tendencies. ...⁴

Kimball and Edgell describe these tendencies at greater length:

After as before the cessation of architectural activity in Europe due to the great war, two contrary tendencies are struggling for mastery in matters of style. One emphasizes the elements of novelty in modern civilization. In the Germanic countries it is the radical emphasis on novel elements which has secured the advantage, in France and England

it is the conservative emphasis on continuity which on the whole retains the supremacy. In view of the currently intensified nationalism, it is natural to expect that these national differences will be cultivated and perpetuated at least for a time. The underlying elements of internationalism existing in the community of practical problems, materials and structural systems and the essentially international character of both the conservative and the radical movement, however, may seem to indicate that this particularism will be relatively temporary. Whether the present conservative or the present radical tendency may ultimately be victorious, we may be sure that change in architectural style is bound to be constant and that architecture will remain a living art, not less expressive of the



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complicated texture of modern life than it has been of the life of earlier and simpler periods.⁵

The position advanced by Edgell and Kimball in *A History of Architecture* closely parallels the views expressed almost seventy years later by the authors of *Modernism in America* and suggests a valuable, moderate critical view of the Modern movement. Although the authors of the more recent work do not cite the works of Edgell and Kimball, James Kornwolf offers an historical perspective in his introduction that similarly begins with an affirmation of the phenomenon of Modern culture. In a footnote, Kornwolf makes a necessary distinction between “Modern” and “Modernism”:

... The author interprets “modern” to refer to all developments in the arts since the cultural, political and industrial revolutions of the later eighteenth century; “Modernism”, as a term, is restricted to those major developments in architecture crystallizing in Europe after World War I and principally associated with the International Style. Obviously, there were a number of important proto-Modernist developments prior to World War I, just as Modernism exerts a strong impact today.⁶

Kornwolf’s description of a political and economic context that contributes to the formation of Modern culture echoes that of Edgell and Kimball. More important, his

3 Design for an art center, Wheaton College, 1938, Maynard Lyndon and Eberle M. Smith. Plan and site plan. From *Pencil Points* (Sept. 1938).

The massing and relationship of this scheme to its site typifies the sophistication of the planning abilities of American Modernists before 1940 as demonstrated by many of the projects illustrated in *Modernism in America*.

4 Design for an art center, Wheaton College, Design I, 1938, George Fred Keck and William Keck, architects, and Robert Bruce Tague, associate architect. Perspective. Photograph courtesy of Hedrich-Blessing Studio, Chicago and William Keck.

The expressiveness of the Keck brothers’ project for the Wheaton College Art Center is one of the remarkable early achievements toward the development of an American Modern monumentality.

recognition of a separate artistic response to those conditions distances him from Giedion and Pevsner, who strongly implied in their work that artistic production was obliged to follow a specific course determined by what Giedion was fond of calling the “constituent facts” of an era.

Kornwolf’s suppositions stem from his high regard for the intellectual confrontation between the Progressives and Traditionalists similar to that which Edgell and Kimball document in their book. These debates persisted into the 1930s and became an important component of a later Modernist discourse. Following World War I and up to 1929, American architectural practice was dominated by a professional body trained at the Ecole des Beaux Arts (or at American schools with educational programs based on that of the Ecole), which practiced a conservative Eclecticism. A rigorous conventional system determined the appropriate relationship between style, such as vertical Gothic, Corinthian, or Georgian, and building program. A decorum was recognized that respected the assumed roles and relationships of institutions within the existing social structure. Planning methods for the large urban scale of American cities, such as those espoused by Werner Hegemann and Elbert Peets in their book, *Civic Art* (New York, 1922), reflected a similar conventional association between formal properties of planning types and the expectations and sensibilities of the public. As well as satisfying programmatic require-

ments, architects attempted to convey an important message to their audience by symbolic or representational devices; this message was translated through conventional systems of architectural vocabulary. Through the order, conventionality, and legibility of this architecture, the anxiety of change, resulting from the disruption of traditional cultural formations by unprecedented Modern economic and political conditions, was diminished.

However, severe complications existed in the practice of Eclecticism. Even the most sophisticated theories of style were greatly confused by the introduction of building programs that did not fit neatly into the image of society for which the architect trained at the Ecole had been taught to design. The skyscraper, for example, pressed itself relentlessly into the urban context and had no easy formal or programmatic precedent. A number of alternatives presented themselves in the last decades of the nineteenth century, but no aesthetic solution clearly dominated by its logic or familiarity. The variety of solutions proposed in the Chicago *Tribune* competition of 1922 demonstrates this point. Architects such as Louis Sullivan, an advocate for the resolution of the issues of style and ornament through a highly rationalized interpretation of the building program, the structural system, and the materials of the building’s construction, were the most vocal critics of the traditional and academic Eclecticism fostered

at the Ecole and practiced by its graduates. Sullivan held that the architect/artist could determine an order and reason for an ornamental system out of conditions specific to the building being designed rather than on the basis of a distant precedent.

Kornwolf defines these contrasting positions as the Traditionalist and Modernist. Whereas the Traditionalist was concerned with historical styles, precedents, and what Kornwolf calls “associationism,” the Modernist designed with no explicit reference to style. Whereas the Traditionalist was concerned with legibility and appropriateness, the Modernist was principally intent on using industrially produced materials and designing a building from the “inside out.”⁷ Kornwolf proceeds to more questionable judgments, such as his claim that Traditionalist architecture was religious and aristocratic whereas Modernist architecture was communal and public. But, in general, his distinction between Traditionalist and Modernist is based on well-established historical interpretations. Furthermore, the outcome of Kornwolf’s terminological and historical definitions has important consequences for our appreciation of the entire book. Traditionalist or Modernist, Kornwolf asserts, architects practicing in the “Modern” epoch were bound by common concerns for the same troubling determinism in the conditions surrounding Modern culture: dehumanizing industrial production, the materialism of

economic valuation, and a profound discontinuity with the past. Theories associated with either Traditionalism or Modernism regarded architecture as a device of culture capable of easing the tensions between the individual and the Modern world. Contrary to the frequent Modernist claim that the Modern movement broke fundamentally with traditional practice, Kornwolf finds that the contrast between Traditionalist and Modernist was one of method but not of ends.⁸ Both represent “rich aesthetic and ethical” positions and form part of our “pluralistic inheritance.” Thus, the motivation for a re-examination of this period, 1937–1943, is to restore to the historical account of Modernism the richness and diversity of its ordination. Moreover, in describing the value of the historical research compiled in *Modernism in America*, Kornwolf, perhaps unwittingly, endorses a position that had been central to historical and theoretical arguments prior to 1930 and voiced in the work by Kimball and Edgell: “. . . a synthesis of retrospective and progressive tendencies.”

The Politicization of the Modernist Discourse

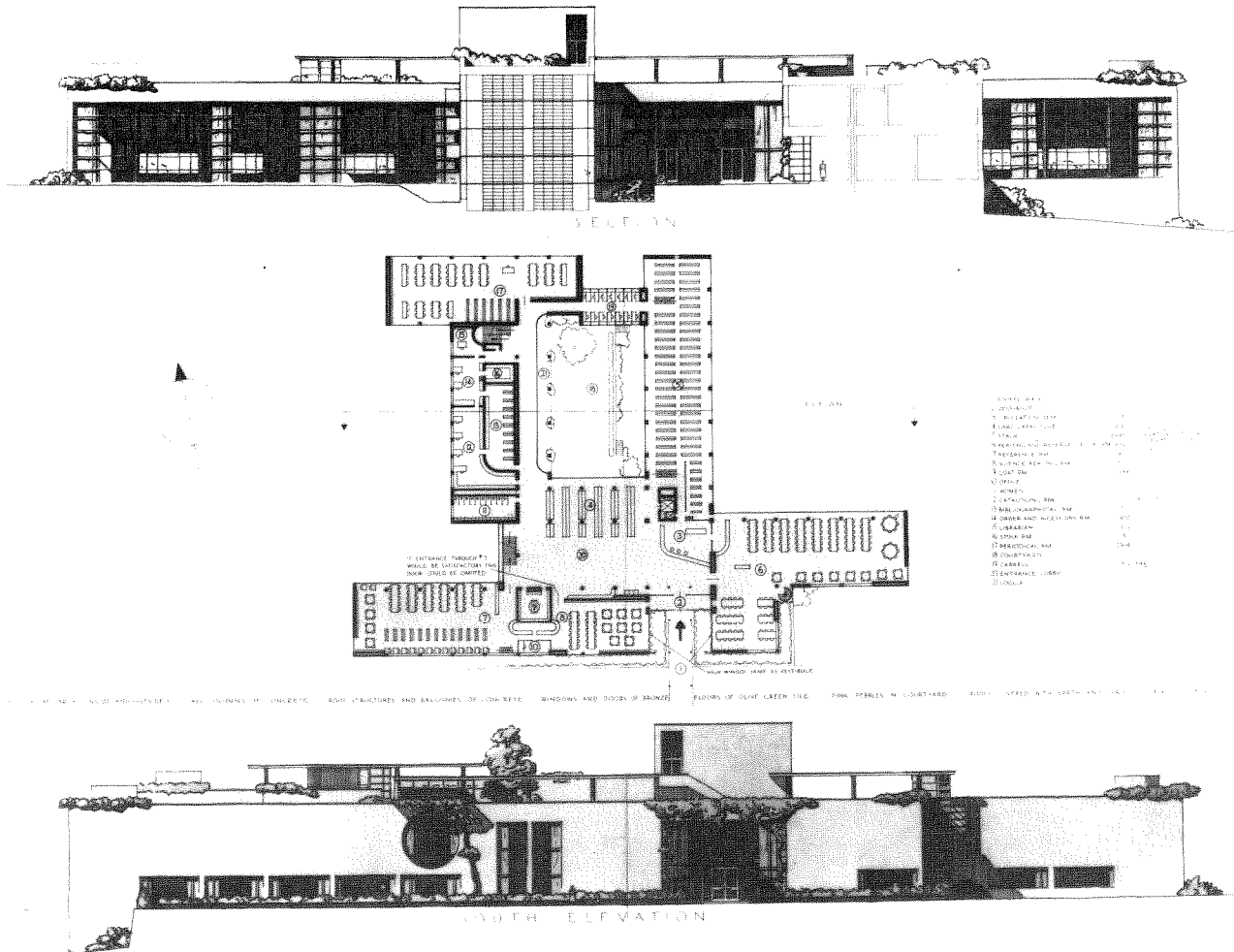
Curiously, the observation that the architectural programs of the Modernist and Traditionalist were more closely allied than their respective propagandists would admit encourages closer consideration of those differences that specifically cast the Traditionalist and Modernist as apparent adver-

saries. There is no question that the Modern movement introduced a novel aesthetic program. In his article on the competition for the Wheaton Art Center, Thomas McCormick offers a comparison of an earlier project for the center by Ralph Adams Cram of 1932 with the winning competition entry by Arthur Brown and Caleb Hornbostel done in 1938 that makes this fact more tangible. However, the profound antagonism between the Modernist and the Traditionalist in the 1930s cannot be adequately explained by dissimilar aesthetic values. Taken at face value, Kornwolf’s claim that the Modernist and Traditionalist positions were equally valid aesthetic and ethical positions suggests that the eventual dominance of the Modern movement was the result of a more complex set of conditions than simply the greater appropriateness of Modern architecture to the conditions of Modern culture.

A significant portion of the historical documentation in *Modernism in America* demonstrates the effectiveness of Modernists in their appeals to special interests, their influence in architectural publications, as well as their ability to portray Modern architecture favorably in a period of unprecedented economic crisis. In his preface for *Modernism in America*, Walter Creese calls greater attention to the efforts of Modernists to position themselves and the growing movement. Creese recommends that five “rallying points” for the “Modernist Doctrine” in particular are made evident in the reviews of the four

competitions assembled in the Kornwolf, McCormick, and McDonald book. They are the influence of Harvard, the influence of the Museum of Modern Art, “the constructive optimism gained from the construction of the Tennessee Valley Authority projects,” Lewis Mumford’s criticism and, finally, “the most decisive though least discussed . . . the growing conviction that Modernist buildings could be more cheaply executed than the eclectic styles.” These “rallying points” are component parts of the historical context for the Modernist debates, a context that shaped the Modernist discourse as profoundly as did more generic considerations of free plan space forming or the aesthetic abstraction endorsed by the faculty of the Bauhaus and characterized by the “International Style.”

The value of Creese’s observations becomes apparent as one reads more deeply into the narrative accounts of the individual competitions. Each begins with a short précis, followed by a brief history of the events leading to the competition, a review of the work, and finally a discussion of the “Aftermath.” Thus, only about one-quarter of the written material deals with the architectural designs themselves. The authors’ work clarifies the influence on the Modern movement of institutions and individuals whose importance has, until now, been regarded as peripheral. The significance of Harvard to the history of the Modern movement, for example, has been attributed to the influence



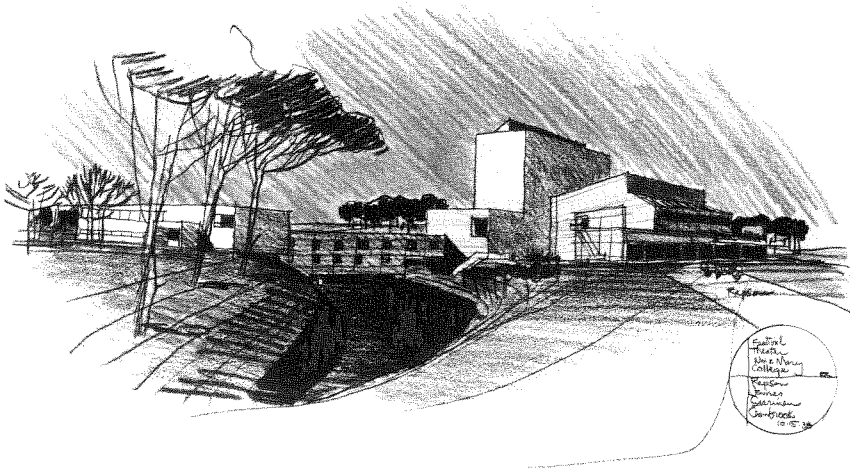
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of its dean, Joseph Hudnut, and the appointment of Walter Gropius to the faculty in 1937. However, in the context of these competitions, all of which were for academic institutions, it is apparent that the perhaps unwitting institutional endorsement by Harvard of Modern architecture had greater intrinsic significance given the extent to which the university served as a role model for other, less well-known schools. The support by the Museum of Modern Art for the Modern movement was no doubt the result of an honest intellectual consensus between individuals such as Philip Johnson, Henry Russell Hitchcock, John McAndrew, and Alfred Barr. The museum's sponsorship of the movement was effective, however, because of the financial sponsorship of MOMA by the

Rockefeller family and other wealthy patrons. Therefore the museum could offer extensive coverage through its publications, as it did in the case of the Wheaton competition.⁹ Even an aesthetically conservative governing board of a small school such as Wheaton might be convinced of the virtues of Modern architecture given this valuable sponsorship. Appealing more directly to the financial support of the Rockefellers, A. Conger Goodyear proposed that his pet project, a national theater and performing art center, which later became the proposed theater and art center for the College of William and Mary, be close to the Rockefeller project for Colonial Williamsburg with the hope of attracting the family's funding.¹⁰ Similarly, the federal government

was seriously courted as a potential sponsor. The invitation of Roland Wank, chief architect of the TVA projects, to sit on the jury of two of these competitions can be taken, as Creese points out, as an indication that there was hope of sponsorship through the Roosevelt administration. Thus, within Creese's observation there is the insinuation that the Modern movement was purposefully and fortuitously associated with powerful economic and political entities, which, though they did not reveal any aesthetic commitments, nevertheless indirectly gave momentum to the movement.

Creese suggests that it was the depression that magnified the importance of these affiliations between architect and potential



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patron. The depression had a far more direct impact on the conception of Modern architecture and the practical role it was thought to serve. The economic downfalls following 1929 transformed the issue of cost and expense into a central feature of architectural debates to a magnitude unprecedented in American architecture. Throughout *Modernism in America* it is apparent that one of the principal (if not foremost) justifications of Modern architecture by Modernist architects was its direct resolution of program through expeditious planning, a design tactic that, coincidentally, held down costs. “Functionalism,” an abstract idea relating program, material, and structure through some rationalized system, took on a tangibility and urgency after 1929.¹¹ Through the shared experience of the economic crisis of the depression, the collective understanding of the built environment was based not on abstract theories of style but on economics and efficient patterns of use. Thus, J. Edgar Park, president of Wheaton College, could conclude with conviction that the competition for an art building on the Wheaton campus had been a success because it had proved

That such a building is of more value per cubic foot than any other similar building at Wheaton.

Every room, every inch of space is fulfilling the purpose for which it was separated from the rest of the cosmos.;

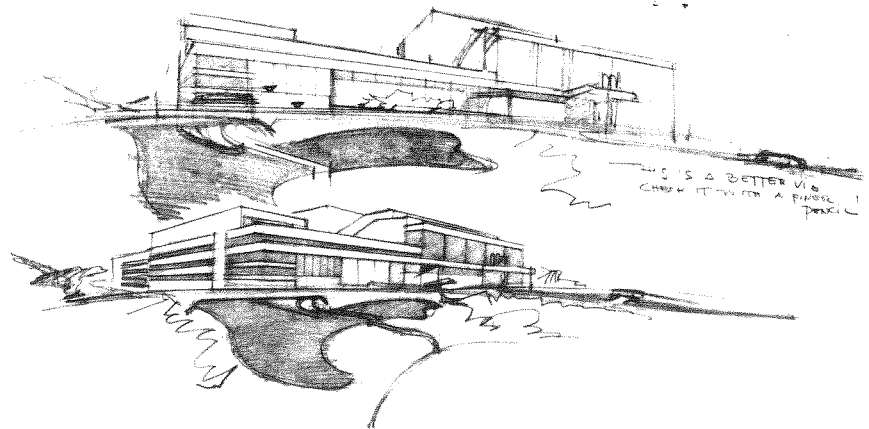
That the cost of the building amounting to about \$170,000, is not in excess of what would have been expended in the erection of an architect’s mail order type building.¹²

These “rallying points”—the importance of which the bulk of the historical material in *Modernism in America* confirms—offer a critical perspective into the discourse out of which the intellectual tenets of the Modern movement were formed. For instance, special interests, such as those that existed between MOMA and the Rockefellers, can be more articulately elaborated and traced. Furthermore, the origins of compromising aspects of the canons of Modern architecture, such as “Functionalism,” can be observed. Finally, perhaps as a result of this type of historical research, which seeks to examine the formation of ideas within a specific historical context, simplistic slogans, such as that which equated function and cheapness, can be identified and excluded from serious discussion of the Modernist program. Such is the value of the historical account offered in *Modernism in America*. Moreover, the isolation of architectural work from a parallel

5 Campus development plan and library, Goucher College, 1938, Walter Mellor and Arthur Meigs. Design I, library plan, and elevations. Photograph courtesy of Muscarelle Museum.

In the Mellor and Meigs scheme, circulation and structure are made simultaneously expressive in the plan.

6 Design for a festival theatre and fine arts center, College of William and Mary, 1938–1939, Ralph Rapson. Preliminary sketches. Project by Ralph Rapson F.A.I.A., Frederic James, Eero Saarinen. Photograph courtesy of Muscarelle Museum.



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discourse—the separation of what was said from what was done—permits us to return and re-evaluate the buildings and drawings themselves. Unfortunately, on this score, the authors are less successful.

Though the catalog records a rich body of work—most of which was assembled with extraordinary difficulty given the inattention the period has received thus far—not enough consideration was given to a critical evaluation of the work itself. Reviewing the illustrations in *Modernism in America* briefly, one can quickly apprehend the sophistication in almost all cases of the massing of these buildings and their relationships to their sites, as in the projects for Wheaton College by Maynard Lyndon and Eberle Smith and by John Rodgers, William Priestley, and Carl Brauer. The expressiveness of the Keck brothers' projects for both Wheaton and the William and Mary competitions are remarkable early achievements in a Modern monumentality. Projects such as that by Mellor and Meigs for the Goucher College library or that of Edward Stone for the William and Mary competition are evocative and compelling schemes that simultaneously express cir-

culatation and structure as a fabric for the building program. The draftsmanship of Ralph Rapson and Richard Neutra demonstrate a unique and not frequently appreciated dimension of the American Modern movement, namely, a masterful control of the austere volumes of the International Style unparalleled even in the work of European Modernists. These drawings suggest that within the aesthetic limitations of the “Functionalist” style, there was room for a richness equal to the competing Eclectic architectural program.

Modernism in America rejuvenates the aesthetic richness and intellectual activity of the early Modern movement in the United States. Coincidentally, it sets an important precedent in the historiography of the Modern movement by recognizing the highly polemical nature of the discourse out of which the canons of Modernism were formed. *Modernism in America* is timely as an historical document, as the Modern movement slips into our immediate past to become—finally—a part of a less deterministic historical view. At the same

7 Design for a festival theatre and fine arts center, College of William and Mary, 1938–1939, Richard J. Neutra. Sketch of theatre interior. Richard Neutra Collection, Département of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA. Photograph courtesy of Muscarelle Museum. The drawing abilities of Ralph Rapson and Richard Neutra reveal a remarkable and frequently underestimated control of the volumetric International Style.

time, *Modernism in America* serves contemporary architecture by promoting a more balanced view of the strengths and weaknesses of the Modern movement. This view should reduce the harmful contemporary oversimplification of Modern architecture encouraged by the so-called post-Modern criticism and will instead sponsor an appropriate and valuable consideration of work whose merits have been overlooked for far too long.

NOTES

- 1 Though their historical models differed, both Giedion and Pevsner endeavored to show that the exigencies of modern construction, the phenomenon of contemporary building programs, and the condition of the modern city demanded a fundamentally new concept of design. They maintained that the essence of this new concept was already plainly visible in the developments of modern technology—mass production, which had facilitated the invention of the steel frame, the automobile, and the airplane. These inventions were the products of an intuitive and collective intellect, possessed of a common “spirit,” which bound all men. See Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design* (London, 1936); and Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1941).
- 2 An architect practicing at the time might have witnessed such encompassing and specifically “Modern” arguments in the writings of both Louis Sullivan, a “pioneer” of the Modern movement, as well as in the writings of Ralph Adams Cram, an avowed Traditionalist. Though Cram and Sullivan were poised at opposite extremes on the issue of “style”—the appropriate representation of contemporary culture exists as a phenomenon of unique and unprecedented social, political, and economic conditions. For instance, see R. A. Cram,

“Lincoln Memorial,” *Architectural Record*, vol. 53 (1923), pp. 478–508; and Louis Sullivan, “Concerning the Imperial Hotel, Tokyo Japan,” *Architectural Record*, vol. 53 (1923), pp. 333–352.

- 3 Fiske Kimball and George Edgell, *A History of Architecture* (New York, 1918), pp. .
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 461.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 516–517.
- 6 James Kornwolf, “Introduction,” *Modernism in America: 1937–1943*, p. 20, fn. 15.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 8: “. . . the fundamental premise of Modernism is the unrelenting rejection of all reliance upon and reference to earlier historical styles and their theories which underwrite them.”
- 8 To further demonstrate, Kornwolf cites an article written by Albert Bush-Brown in 1952 entitled “Cram and Gropius: Traditionalism and Progressivism.” Cram, fighting mechanization, wrote, “The liberal arts of age-old human culture have nothing to do with the current seventy-five year old technological civilization (except as a corrective which has thus far failed to work) and consequently the artistic expression of the latter phenomenon can have no part in the manifestation of the older eternal unity.” On the other hand, Gropius, “. . . wanted to create a clear organic architecture whose inner logic will be radical and naked, unencumbered by lying facades and trickery. . . . We want an architecture adapted to our world of machines, radios and fast motor cars.” Kornwolf argues that the Traditionalist and Modernist positions represent extremes in architectural thinking, extremes perpetrated by architects working in the period following the depression, which was prone to extremes. Moreover, these positions, although different, are not necessarily antithetical. Indeed, by virtue of a common basis of concern as demonstrated by the comparison of the writings of Cram and Gropius, the positions are closely allied. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 9 At the competition’s conclusion, Esther

Seaver reported on its success in her terms to the faculty:

In summary I should like to point out several reasons why I believe the competition has justified itself: first, the winning architects are unknown except for being brilliant younger men in other firms and thus are given an opportunity; second, none of the four established firms invited fully lived up to what either the Museum of Modern Art or Wheaton’s Art Department had hoped; third, Wheaton has taken a significant step in having sponsored the first bona fide combination of the open and closed competition in the United States; *fourth, this competition has done much toward making Wheaton better known among professional people* [Bentel’s emphasis].

Cited in Thomas McCormick, “Wheaton College Competition for an Art Center, February 1938–June 1938,” *Modernism in America*, p. 30.

- 10 Thus, the odd juxtaposition of a Modern building in the vicinity of the restored colonial Williamsburg project can be more easily understood.
- 11 Creese notes that “. . . Perhaps the most decisive though least discussed factor was the growing conviction that Modernist buildings could be more cheaply executed than the eclectic styles. This aligned with the functionalist arguments Esther Seaver and Eleanor Spencer presented to their administrators.” “Preface,” *Modernism in America: 1937–1943*, p. xi.
- 12 McCormick, “Wheaton College Competition for an Art Center. . . ,” *Modernism in America: 1937–1943*, p. 36.