

The Iconic Building / Charles Jencks.--New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., October 2005.--224 p.: ill.--ISBN 0-8478-2756-9: \$35.00.



With *The Iconic Building*, Charles Jencks presents an overview of the current trend of building as municipal icon, and questions whether this is in fact just a trend. In doing so, he provides a background and definition of the building type and presents a thorough account of some of the more recent iconic buildings. The book focuses on the metaphor in order to construct a vocabulary necessary to evaluate these designs.

Jencks suggests that we are uncomfortable discussing unfamiliar building forms and, as a result, it becomes difficult to reach any consensus regarding their good design. Lack of sufficient discourse has led to uncertainty regarding the icon's validity. Jencks provides the framework in which to analyze them, taking us beyond terms such as "blob architecture." He contends that we can only comfortably discuss new and sometimes strange building types in terms of metaphor. The metaphor is featured heavily in the book, not only in the text but also in diagrams provided by Madelon Vriesendorp. While Jencks uses the metaphor to discuss the icon, he also uses this book to convince us of its validity in general. Jencks succeeds in justifying the need for metaphors in architectural discourse; however, it is the buildings' stories and the politics and media that shaped them that truly makes this book significant.

Establishing Le Corbusier's Ronchamp and Gehry's Bilbao as "the standards of this emergent genre," the book continues with coverage of more recent landmarks including Libeskind's Freedom Tower, Koolhaas' CCTV building, Miralles' Scottish Parliament and Foster's Swiss Re headquarters. Through a survey of press coverage, architect interviews and economics, Jencks compiles an in-depth overview of each building. Including the media coverage of these works is especially necessary given the influence that it has had upon the buildings themselves and the architects. Media attention, whether positive or negative, is necessary to establish a building as iconic. The third chapter, entitled "Iconic Media Wars," most clearly illustrates the current impact of both politics and media by focusing on the Ground Zero competition and Libeskind's Freedom Tower. This chapter provides an excellent summary of the media coverage of both and succeeds in placing the competition design and its subsequent modifications in context with historical and political events. Its coverage is more complete than any other building discussed and includes more citations than any other chapter. However, a quick review of the six other competition entries would have been useful as frequent reference to them demands quick recall.

Jencks is an experienced critic, lecturer, and author, and this book demonstrates his confidence with the subject matter. His clever phrasing and yet familiar tone make this an accessible read for undergraduate students without alienating a more educated audience. The images are excellent, and the metaphorical diagrams, although superfluous at times, do help convey Jencks's argument for their use. The book certainly benefits from Jencks's relationship with and access to the featured architects. The concern for libraries, however, will be connecting readers with the content contained within. While the index is complete, the chapter titles do not necessarily indicate the significant buildings that they include. The table of contents includes subheadings for each rather enigmatic title, although these too are a bit inscrutable. These subheadings should perhaps be considered when cataloging the book. The building overviews as well as the images make this a good resource for students compiling case studies. It is recommended for both academic and public libraries.

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