
Sarah Robinson takes a somewhat unusual approach in her book, which proceeds from the argument that much of the built environment does not appeal to the heart and body. Throughout it, she liberally employs metaphors. The first few chapters in particular, she uses nesting as a metaphor to underscore her point, and frequently cites sources from architectural criticism, philosophy, medicine, literature, and anthropology. Rich within the discourse of visual culture, this strategy gives the book a meditative style in her intent to implore architects and architectural students to take into consideration in their designs the emotions and senses in addition to sight, which she also argues is not mechanical and one-dimensional. She makes such frequent use of quotes, especially from those of philosopher Gaston Bachelard and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, that her own voice is lost within these arrays of other writers’ thoughts. Her sharing of critical opinions and thoughts, however somewhat undeveloped, is reminiscent of the type of book one would expect to see from a well-known architect who comments on the history of his or her career and imparts his or her ideas on architecture and its precepts. Yet, Robinson - who is a practicing architect in the San Francisco Bay area with training from Taliesin, the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture - has also studied in philosophy. It is on these subjects that her writing is most solid. When she cites research from phenomenological science or medicine, her assertions tend to be loose and weak. She concludes from what she asserts is a paradigmatic shift in astronomy the findings of a scientific breakthrough, “When astronomers ceased searching the heavens for light and turned their attention to empirical matters, they discovered dark matter and dark energy” (p. 85). Her assertion, as are so many on science in this book, is sweeping and unsupported.

In her chapter, “Adieu, Descartes,” she faults Cartesian thought for limiting perception to the mind with an absence of other senses. This chapter is at the center of her philosophical thrust, and in the following chapters, she suggests methods for generating creativity in architecture, whether through use of metaphor, elements of light and dark, time as an influence on architecture, or playing at problem solving. She does not offer examples of architecture that use the concepts she discusses, which might be a benefit to her readers. She addresses this book to architects, and the lyrical, yet academic style is fitting as are the images, which are equally minimal and poetic. She leaves notes at the end of the book so as not to interrupt the flow of her discussion. This book would be a good supplemental addition to an architectural library.

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