

BOOK NOTES

Back to Bauhaus: Design, Art and Behavior

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Spaces for People: Human Factors in Design. By Corwin Bennett. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977. Pp. 195; \$3.95 (paper).

Too Close for Comfort: The Psychology of Crowding. By Paul M. Insel and Henry Clay Lindgren. Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978. Pp. 180; \$3.95 (paper).

Low Rise Housing for Older People: Behavioral Criteria for Design. By Zeisel Research (Cambridge, Mass.). Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, 1977. U. S. Government Printing Office/HUD-PDR-282, January 1978. Pp. 141. No price indicated.

The essence of Walter Gropius' Bauhaus idea was: a variety of design and art specialties seen as integral parts of one theoretically unified "total architecture." This idea seeks to link, in education and practice, these disciplines that otherwise tend toward excessive compartmentalization and a consequent drift into specialized trivia. The

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books reviewed here indicate and declare, in varying degrees, relationships of these fields to each other. More important, the Zeisel report provides a basis for illustrating (as I intend to do) how several design and art fields might contribute to — and cooperate in — the fashioning of a single type of environmental design intended for human habitation. This touches on the collaboration concept of the Bauhaus school, as it flourished in Europe in the 20's and 30's. According to Gropius himself, in his *Scope of Total Architecture* (1966), the ideal was that of a whole faculty (educators) and staff (practitioners) of " . . . collaborators . . . who would work . . . independently, although in close cooperation to further a common cause." The clarion note was ". . . the common citizenship of all forms of creative work, and their logical interdependence . . .," reflected somewhat today by the little Cranbrook school in Michigan.

To achieve this interconnectedness back in the Bauhaus days took strong individuals, leadership and charisma. Today this linking function between design and art disciplines may be in the making by way of the burgeoning study of behavior-and-design. Landmark works by Canter (1969), the Darks (1975), and Rapaport (1976) are indicative of the potential.

The three books under review here represent that same linking potential. They all deal with psychology of the built environment, space, and

scales of space. Moreover, all three include some form of **individual** space: Insel and Lindgren (personal space), Bennett (anthropometry), and Zeisel (private space). They all deal with human use of space and response to design (i.e., post-occupancy analysis) and by inference in Zeisel, response to art. Each book is either research-oriented or research-based. Behavioral research is common to all three. Finally, neither volume seeks to be a design manual or blueprint. Rather, each book is quickly identified as providing guidelines concerned with principles and criteria, based on behavioral and design research.

The least important, competent or relevant of the three works is the one by Insel and Lindgren, *Too Close for Comfort: The Psychology of Crowding*, although in their informed discussion of interpersonal distance preferences, one sees shades of Hall's *Hidden Dimension* and Sommer's *Personal Space*. The main argument is that crowding is harmful to human beings, and this is documented by experimental studies in the social psychological literature. Various definitions of crowding are culled from the literature, but they are handled rather discursively in relation to the evidence from research. The three chapters that more or less treat the different "scales" of space dealt with are: "The Social Cost of Crowded Homes," "Lines or Queues . . ." and "Urban Stress." Perhaps the most pertinent part of the book, though not novel, is the discussion of the relationship between crowding and aggression: pathological behavior occurs in humans as well as in rats when there is no "appropriate architectural design" to allow for personal space (p. 127). And the authors make a clear implication for architects and interior designers: **the ratio of space to number of people is critical even when cultural differences are held constant.**

In *Spaces for People: Human Factors in Design*, the design concept is broad, though not as comprehensive or as articulate as Gropius' idea of design. Although "concerned with design of the built environment . . ." Bennett's clear emphasis is on interior spaces (p. ix). The justification for

this emphasis, he argues, stems from the fact that most of us do the bulk of our living and working **indoors**. Boiled down, this book is on engineering design, focusing on the relatively new field of **ergonomics** (human factors) in interior space design. The author regards this still-nascent field as being capable of developing "a body of knowledge and expertise beyond that of the generalized architect" (p. 5). In fact, he criticizes so-called "design teams" because they usually do not include anyone specifically responsible for the "design of interiors." He believes that architects' focus on the appearances of building exteriors violates Sullivan's dictum: "form must follow function" (p. 4).

Bennett, with others, is convinced that research in interiors has transformed the discipline from "art" to "design." In chapters of the synthesis section of the book ("Putting It All Together"), he gives more or less equal stress to research, including space evaluation, (esp. pp. 139-142) and to creativity and problem-solving as an integrated operation of two processes (esp. 162-164). The latter coupling is intriguing: while community planners regard developing alternative solutions as part of problem-solving, Bennett sees such formulations as the **creative** aspect of design, while **the problem-solving** aspect is finding a viable solution among the several constraints which represent a design problem.

Compared to the other two books here, Zeisel's report, **Low Rise Housing for older People: Behavioral Criteria for Design**, hints most clearly, (with some interpretation) at the overlap of various fields of design and art, as well as distinct contributions by individual fields. In this way, it relates to the spirit and philosophy of the Bauhaus. Further, it indicates how behavior-design research and theory seem to provide the **means** for connecting a number of design and art fields, as Gropius intended.

The performance guidelines of this HUD-funded study are based on analysis of forty-seven final design entries (out of 149 submissions) in a state-sponsored housing competition in Dracut,

Massachusetts. A panel of eight behavioral scientists and designers with expertise in gerontology were used. In addition, the research included two focused group interviews with residents of housing for older people, and a review of published and unpublished environmental design research.

Some of the results and impressions of this work can be shown by covering the general contents of the monograph and by indicating the professional collaboration that is implicit, though not stated. I will list the subject and elements of each of the six design guidelines and, by my interpretation, mention in abbreviation, the following disciplines that logically might be associated with each appropriate area: architecture, interior design, industrial design, fine arts, graphic design, and planning.

By subject and elements, the guidelines cover: 1. Inside the Unit — furnishing, eating, "backstage," storage and display (inter., arch., i. d., graph., and f. a.); 2. Unit Edge — entrance, outdoor territory and window view (inter. and arch.); 3. Places for Neighboring — indoor shared spaces, outdoor shared spaces and clustering (inter., arch. and plng.; latter re site design); 4. Community Activity Spaces — community space location, indoor community spaces, and outdoor community spaces (inter., arch., f. a. and plng.); 5. On the Site — pathways as activity areas, pathfinding, retreats, cars (arch. and plng.); 6. Links to the Town — getting on and off the site, facilities for children, and facilities for non-residents (plng., i. d., graph., and arch.).

The book's format, which includes ample non-jargon text along with numerous illustrative sketches, site plans and page-size photographs, makes it abundantly clear that the subject of this book, like Bennett's, is **people-oriented** design.

These three books of the late 1970's at least suggest that behavior-and-design research may be the "new" fulcrum for coordinating design and art specializations. But the behavior-design **genre** is **not** new. Gropius wrote back in 1947: "The designer must know the effect of optical illusions, the psychological influence of shapes, colors and

textures, the effects of contrast, direction, tension and repose . . ." That could be straight out of EDRA (Environmental Design Research Association) the hegemony of present day behavior-and-design. So maybe it's back to Bauhaus.

References

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- Sessions, K. W. *The Homeowner's Handbook of Plumbing and Repair*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1978. Pp. 421; \$15.95 (cloth).

This book is designed for the homeowner as a guide for plumbing installation and repair, but would serve as an excellent resource for anyone who is bombarded with questions ranging

from "How do I install a dishwasher?" to, "What do I use to soften water with a high content of iron?" or "Can I replace galvanized pipe with PVC?"

Of great use to any housing educator is a section devoted to hints for home buyers. Many warnings to home buyers are expressed in news columns and publications stating that one should check the plumbing before purchasing a home but with no explanation of how. This book gives step-by-step instructions for the home buyer on how to check water pressure, fixture drains, fixtures and pipe stability and many more items that can become a new homeowners nightmare. Explanations and drawings furnished in the appendix offer a reference for plumbing tools, plans, and symbols, and a brief description of their use. Of course,

no "do it yourself" book is a panacea for all problems and this book does not answer every plumbing problem for every community. But it is to be commended for noting when a procedure can be questioned and encouraging the reader to consult local codes. U.S. Government recommendations and standards are followed throughout.

The *Homeowners Handbook of Plumbing and Repair* offers an easy to read reference for the housing educator as well as a do it yourself guide for the homeowner.

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