re:view

Elective Affinities: Philip Johnson and the Avant-garde

by Edward Eigen

On 1–3 February the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation at Columbia University and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, hosted *The Origins of the Avant-garde in America, 1923–1949: The Philip Johnson Colloquium*. The Canadian Center for Architecture was the principal organizer of the event; Phyllis Lambert, Bernard Tschumi, and Terence Riley delivered introductory remarks. The colloquium's ostensible purpose was to examine the continuously probated legacy of Philip Johnson to American architecture and to the tradition within it known as the avant-garde. Such a task would not seem as daunting if summations such as Johnson's own *Collected Writings* of 1979 did not already show his deft hand at auto-assessment and critique.[1] A diverse group of architects, critics, and historians comprised the ranks of four well-attended sessions, commencing with a conversation between Johnson and Jeffrey Kipnis, one in a series they have performed recently in public and in print. Johnson's principal interlocutor on the first evening, however, turned out to be Colin Rowe, who took the floor impromptu to claim, to much effect, that the generals of the modern movement

In the Wake of the Avant-garde

by Greg Lynn

The Museum of Modern Art's two most recent events — December's *Light Constructions* exhibition and February's *Origins of the Avant-garde* colloquium — seriously raise the question whether it is possible to launch another experimental architecture through the reevaluation of the historical avant-garde. MoMA in particular and contemporary architecture in general appear to have fallen into a negative feedback loop toward extinction based on the recycling of both the stylistic language of International Style modernism and the acquired posture of the avant-garde. This spiral of decline brings to mind two symptoms of inbreeding: first, the emergence of startlingly novel mutations and, second, the increasing lack of fitness of each successive generation. The events at MoMA revealed a troubling connection between the state of contemporary architectural theory and that of design — two realms that would have one believe each is somehow detach-

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were not within the ranks of the avant-garde. Rowe delivered the colloquium's keynote address the following evening, "Nostalgia and the Avant-garde," a far-ranging criticism of the concept of the *Zeitgeist*, making particular reference to what Christopher Wren once called the "gust of time." To come full circle, the final day's session at MoMA included a presentation by Peter Eisenman entitled "The Necessity of an American Avant-garde." The talk consisted of a series of responses, what he called *corsivi*, to Rowe's comments, in which Eisenman noted that the conflagrant wind of 1666 brought down one great city only to make way for the envisioning of another. The colloquium was characterized by the sense that the exchange between Rowe and Eisenman, and even more so that between Johnson and almost every one involved, appeared to be but one episode in a long-standing and well-publicized discussion that spanned several generations. Though Johnson made a pantomime of not understanding the main of Kipnis's comments, this was only the result of their exchange being ultimately reducible to "Hey Dad, can I borrow the car?"

The search for origins in architectural discourse is marked by a well-placed ambivalence relative to the status of archaeological or philological sources. Recent reconstructions of the prehistory of modernism show that discussions of canon and rule, ranging from Perrault's *Ordonnance* to Piranesi's *Cammini* to Quatremère's types, depart from the royal road of rational analysis, meeting instead at the trivial crossing of speculation, prescription, and reflection. The quarrel of the ancients and moderns was not even a deliberation over form as such, but the belief that each age was capable of its own particular genius. Sources, be they made or found, have less importance for themselves than for what they engender in our self-understanding. Once identified, origins, distant in time and place, are conserved only as regulative concepts, telling us where to look and what to look for in the future. In this sense, the question of the originality of America is particularly illustrative of the vaguities of the avant-garde; American history is strewn with the remains of false starts.

able and independent. What was shocking about both events was the extent to which they revealed not only their dependence on one another, but further, their mutual dependence on the legacy of the avant-garde.

Although the *Origins of the Avant-garde* colloquium brought together almost all of the preeminent architectural theorists in the United States, the only real public discussion that appears to have fallen out of the event has been of Philip Johnson's highly publicized flirtations with fascism. Rather than focus on such sensational tabloid aspects of the participants' political histories, it seems more critical to chart the internal *consistencies* of the assembled group and how these consistencies operate to prolong the ideology of a contemporary avant-garde project by revising the history of modernism as source material for the present.

The conference's discrete generational coherencies divided the event into four rather compact groups whose demographics provided a surprisingly tight fit with their content. The first presentations focused on Johnson and Phyllis Lambert, both of whom were involved with the introduction of the International Style to the United States. Jeffrey Kipnis engaged Johnson in a rather frank public discussion regarding the entrepreneurial motives behind the subsequent promotion of the International Style in an American context. It was during this exchange that Johnson acknowledged that the invention of an American avant-garde continues to be central to the maintenance of a kind of curatorial entrepreneurship.

An organic American avant-garde emerged thirty years prior to the colloquium's 1923–1949 time frame, around the period of Chicago's Columbian Fair of 1893. At the fair, America performed an ecstatic rite of initiation before it ever had a clear sense of what was to be new and what was to be left behind and excluded as a result. The contest between Burnham's White City, its planning following deracinated Beaux-Arts models, and the architecture of Wright and Sullivan, with its roots in transcendentalism, is but one well-known story of a missed opportunity. Wright himself claimed that it would take American architecture *thirty years* to recover from the fair. (Any discussion of Wright was absent from the colloquium; he whose work was a singular channel to and from the European masters throughout this period was relegated to the class of the individual talent.) The social and spatial intersection of the White City and the heterogeneous Midway, the epochal articulation of Turner's "Frontier Thesis," Adams's set piece on the "Virgin and the Dynamo," to say nothing of the paternalistic utopia of Pullman City, the fulcrum the following year of a millennial labor struggle, offered a heady mix of ideals, incidents, and practices in formation. Yet Francesco Dal Co's paper, "Victors and Victory: Lewis Mumford in the Brown Decades," was the only one to touch on this period's logic of self-presentation and its critical aftermath.[2] Another opportunity missed.

The majority of the papers understood the fluoridated wellspring of the American avant-garde to be connected to a distant European source, uncontaminated by American capitalism and lore. This interpretive bias impeded a historic understanding of the American scene, which could have shed light on the tangency of advertising, fashion, and consumerism with the innovatory strategies of the avant-garde that was hinted at in some of the papers. Even in 1923, the putative initiation date of the American avant-garde, D. H. Lawrence saw the need to vindicate native sources of critical intelligence. In his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, he described the artful dodge by which America, still beholden to its European masters, denied its own "spirit of the place" as it fashioned a culture of its own: "Oh American. No good chasing him over all

Representative of a second generation, Peter Eisenman and Rem Koolhaas have convincingly redefined and revitalized the notion of an American avant-garde throughout their careers. For both, the historical avant-garde constitutes a strong force that must be negotiated and then channeled into the present. Their careers have derived their strength from redefining the possibility for a contemporary avant-garde, and in so doing, they have reconfigured various modern precedents such as Guiseppe Terragni and Wallace Harrison. Eisenman and Koolhaas did not merely inherit the legacy of the avant-garde, they invented a contemporary context for their own practices through the revision and redeployment of architectural history.

At the colloquium, Eisenman's confrontation with the avant-garde took the form of a debate with Colin Rowe over the possibility for a contemporary avant-garde, in which he contended that the condition of the avant-garde is one of conflict and contradiction with any dominant cultural form. In opposition to received cultural modes, Eisenman has invoked Terragni's formal experiments from the 1920s and 1930s as a radical precedent and his use of Terragni as the germ of Chomskian structuralism in architecture established a foundation for his early house experiments. Eisenman's position raises the question of whether there can ever be an avant-garde project when the dominant form of architectural innovation and practice is entrenched in the strategies of the avant-garde. Complexity and contradiction have been the primary tenets of architecture for the last several decades. One wonders whether some critical and theoretical alterna-

the old continents, of course. But equally no good *asserting* him merely. Where *is* this new bird called the true American? Show us the homunculus of the new era. Go on, show us him. Because all that is visible to the naked European eye, in America, is a sort of recreant European. We want to see this missing link of the next era."[3]

The new Americans, the booster selling visions of the metropolis and the bunco steerer preying on its ever-new immigrants, had and have a story to tell. In what Henry James called America's "hotel civilization," mobility and change are the stuff of tradition; myths of origin and a resourceful nature are its cultural currency. Rem Koolhaas, who gave a paper entitled "Le Corbusier, Harrison, and the United States," is exemplary of those Europeans who have refamiliarized students with the neglected products of American genius. Only when their discoveries are reimported do these phenomena seem promising and new. Johnson managed the reverse scenario, showing in his 1930 trip to Europe how the by-then familiar work of Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, and J. J. P. Oud could profit from the heated effects of American-style promotion and advertising.

The colloquium's panels were arranged under the rubrics "Procedures: Form and Pragmatics," "Genealogies: Intimate and Collective Influences," and "Ideologies," which brought into focus both the objects and methods of analysis. Conceptual approaches to the avant-garde styled after the writings of Baudelaire, Tafuri, Bürger, Greenberg, and Krauss were deployed in diverse though related historic contexts, returning frequently to the problems and issues of art's autonomy, the future world (utopian or otherwise), bourgeois sociology, the sublation of art and life, and kitsch. Nineteen twenty-three, according to Lambert, marked the year in which a remarkable group of young men at Harvard, including Johnson, Everett (Chick) Austin, Lincoln Kirstein, and Alfred Barr, all of them deeply sensitive to artistic developments in both Europe and American, came together as editors of the "little magazine" *Hound and Horn*. Johnson was a surprisingly frequent presence in all that followed. The case for 1949 — the year of Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in* tive might be found to these now well-established strategies of opposition.

Koolhaas, for his part, affiliated himself with the historic transfer of European experiments to the laboratory of the postwar United States. He presented a triad of collaborator precedents — Johnson/Mies, Emery Roth/Gropius, and Harrison/Le Corbusier — all of whom formed a partnership across the Atlantic for such projects as the Seagram building, the Pan-Am building, and the United Nations building, respectively. It was clear from his presentation that Koolhaas intends to occupy both roles simultaneously, with Johnson's collaboration on the Seagram building providing a precedent for half a team that Koolhaas could monopolize individually. Unlike the radical experiments of Europe that were transferred to the United States, Koolhaas's production indicates that the flow across the Atlantic has been reversed. He is at once the European practitioner too practical to theorize and the American intellectual in need of a testing ground for his ideas. Koolhaas and Eisenman work as architectural designers and theorists simultaneously. One would have to assume that, largely due to Manfredo Tafuri's dismissal of operative criticism, this kind of joint activity is virtually extinct. Embodied in Koolhaas's double identity as theorist of Manhattanism and builder of European global capitalism is a new economy between theory and practice, where the United States supplies theory to European practitioners. This inversion of the original export of the avant-garde to America from Europe was raised by Robert E. Somol in his introduction to the colloquium, but it is unfortunately too vast a topic for elaborate discussion here.

the Age of Humanism, following upon Rowe's own *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa* — as a termination of these developments, or even as a point of inflection, is less clear. In her paper "1949" Beatriz Colomina discussed Ray and Charles Eames's Case Study House # 8 as critically responding to the promise of postwar prosperity delivered by wartime industries. But this historical moment and its concomitant system of advertising, like that of the Chicago fair, seems still to be very much with us. Looking back, the work of the New York Five only served to secure the prospect of a domestic avant-garde; the question that remains open to contention is, to whom does the America avant-garde rightly belong?

The vertiginous relationships of patronage and obligation that obtain among Johnson, Lambert, MoMA, Eisenman, and so on, were constitutive of the colloquium's structure. An anonymously produced "rap sheet," discretely distributed along with the official colloquium materials, detailed Johnson's past dalliances, political and otherwise, which at this point in his career have more the effect of titillating than of shocking the bourgeoisie. The crucial question of the institutionalization of the avant-garde, discussed in the well-placed paper by Joan Ockman, "The Road Not Taken: Alexander Dorner's Way Beyond Art," was nowhere directed at the organization of the colloquium itself, with the possible exception of Sanford Kwinter, who assailed Johnson's staging of the *International Exhibition of Modern Architecture* in 1932. In fact, Johnson's provocations of the first evening — "I was never an avant-gardist, I was always a member of the upper class" — along with his claim that he, Barr, and company were only acting in the Calvinist belief that "virtue was on our side," require critical tools beyond those of avant-garde theory itself. Only with a deep understanding of New England Protestantism, with its visions of a city upon the hill, jeremiads, and pursuit of earthly well-being as a sign of present and future grace amidst a corrupt world, can one begin to understand the rich bounty that has accrued to the American avant-garde and its institutions. Rowe's talk was not without a discussion of the tents pitched by itinerant healers and evangelicals, an indication that the southern

The complicated, perhaps coincidental, confluence of revisions of modernism by both academics and designers points to a persistent tendency to revisit the avant-garde as if it were a reservoir of perpetual novelty. But before describing this situation, it is important to exempt an entire group of colloquium participants from this critique. These often younger speakers made little or no reference to familiar modernist figures or to the familiar strategies of the avant-garde, focusing instead on forgotten or extraneous figures and on those practices that were overlooked during the modern movement and passed over by the International Style. Among the most memorable papers were Detlef Merten's presentation of Giedion, Joan Ockman's research on Alexander Dorner, Sylvia Lavin's analysis of Richard Neutra, Sanford Kwinter's valorization of Alfred North Whitehead, and Mark Linder's evaluation of Frederick Keisler's experiments. In his paper, Somol called for "secondary" or "minor" reading of the avant-garde. Unfortunately, in the present climate of recycled radicality, such a summons falls, for the most part, on deaf ears. The presentations for which Somol set the tone probably did not belong in a conference highlighting the origins of the avant-garde. And many participants remarked both publicly and privately that these speakers contributed nothing to the discussion of the avant-garde today. On the whole, this less established generation has little interest in revising or reinvesting either the posture of the avant-garde or the stylistic languages of International Style modernism. More than this, however, the entire group gravitated toward the experimental traditions of practices exemplified by archi-

tradition of charismatic faith and snake oil might also have its place in these discussions.

For all the colloquium's meticulous planning, Rowe's seemingly spontaneous remark during Johnson's opening presentation shaped the reception of the subsequent panels. His statement was not ultimately a question of there being an avant-garde as such, but rather of there being generals who command ranks. Who were these generals, and if not properly within its ranks, what was their relationship to the avant-garde? In what cause was a war waged? Detlef Mertins, in his compelling paper on Sigfried Giedion and Emil Kaufmann, was among a number of panelists to refer to the derivation of the term avant-garde in the military lexicon. The avant-garde, in this context, is a small group of scouts who march in front of a greater army corps to insure its liberty of action. Vanguards function either as tactical preludes, directly confronting an enemy before the advance of the column, or as a strategic curtain, conveying information back to the generals so they can rearrange their maneuvers and forces.[4] In either case, the avant-garde is defined by two characteristics: first, it is sensitized to the field of action through which it moves; second, it is detached from a greater corps to which it is responsible for conveying information and ascertaining resources for survival.

To understand generals may be the best way ultimately to understand the avant-garde that is formed and dispatched by them. Though the mechanisms of war have changed, Karl von Clausewitz's treatise of 1826, *On War*, remains a seminal text on the formation of generals and it might suggest an answer to Rowe's provocation. Military genius, Clausewitz argued, stemmed from the general's *coup d'oeil*, the synthetic glance over all the factors that could come to bear on the outcome of the battle.[5] The cultivation of military genius, if such were possible, derived not from the study of formal strategy, but from the direct study of war by means of history, criticism, and theory. Clausewitz recognized that the chain of command leading from general to front line was complex and frequently interrupted. All too often the particular nature of these interruptions were the decisive elements in the outcome of the battle. Indeed, the tects like Keisler who always managed to evade the classicizing and canonizing impulses invited by Mies and Corbusier, among others. This should not be confused with a rejection of history in favor of experimentalism, as all of the aforementioned papers focused on histories that did not lend themselves to canonization. Because of this position, these presentations clearly did not fit comfortably within the institutional form of the event — a discomfort that, in turn, provoked the derision directed toward them. Precisely because this group has little claim to, and perhaps less interest in, the project of the received avant-garde it is difficult to locate their work within its legacy.

Following Eisenman and Koolhaas demographically, but slightly ahead of the participants described above, is another group that, rather than construct a contemporary avant-garde, has been working to revise the historic one. This middle generation was best represented at the colloquium by Beatriz Colomina and K. Michael Hays. Because Colomina's presentation focused on the transfer of wartime technologies into postwar consumer culture in the experiments of Charles and Ray Eames, among others, and because Hays has earlier rigorously theorized the practices of Ludwig Hilberseimer and Hannes Meyer, it is perhaps not entirely fair to say that they tend to gravitate toward canonical modern heroes. Yet, as seen in their presentations at the colloquium and elsewhere, both have a tendency to recover radical and critical cultural practices out of the failed strategies of modernism. Although these critical strategies are always bracketed within the con-

primary impediment to our understanding of battles, which history, criticism, and theory seek to overcome, is the belief that they follow prescribed plans.

In Clausewitz's formulation, history consisted of the analysis of what happened in battle. An inventory of the contributing factors to any campaign is never complete and frequently indeterminate. In his opening comments, Johnson declared: "I happened to have been there, and you weren't." The "happened to" as opposed to "was" raises the question of whether generals watch what takes place or make it happen. Or, to paraphrase the great mass mediator William Randolph Hearst's instructions to Frederic Remington, "you provide me the pictures and I'll provide you the war." Historians, by contrast, can construct what was there, even if they weren't, expanding our knowledge of the field of battle and the inventory of its combatants. Historical accounts such as Sylvia Lavin's "Repressed Memories: Richard Neutra and the Birth Trauma of Modern Architecture" told of specific encounters and tactics. The subsequent resonance of these encounters in our understanding of the modern movement leads to the strategic redeployment of signs currently available to architecture.

The second mode of inquiry, criticism, is responsible for assessing the accounts of historians, which often derive from limited, incomplete, or inconsequent sources. According to Clausewitz, the critic, like the soldier, is in the midst of a battle. Both have direct access to what is going on, but can quickly become a casualty of it. In contrast to the general, the critic/soldier is governed not by a belief in the war, but in the outcome of its campaigns. "The function of criticism," Clausewitz wrote, "would be missed entirely if criticism were to degenerate into mechanical application of theory. . . . A critic should never use the results of theory as laws or standards, but only — as the soldier does — as aids to judgment."[6] Giedion's critical output has become emblematic of the use of history to promote some causes and to frustrate others. The results of his brand of elective criticism of some of modernism's less sound ideals was portrayed in Mitchell Schwarzer's paper, "CIAM and the City of Mechanical God." Yet, for its apparent advocacy of an avant-garde positines of historical experiments, they serve to prolong both the possibility for an avant-garde project, in theory, and the formal language of modernism, in practice.

In the discussion after her presentation, Colomina acknowledged that in Europe very few architects are currently interested in or qualified to practice architectural history or theory because they are too busy building. The flip side of this scenario, she noted, is to be found here in American and Canadian universities where few of the architects teaching are interested in or qualified to build because they are concerned with theory alone. Colomina neither implied that one scenario was more valuable than the other, nor did she indicate that they might be intertwined. Of course, such a cynical and divisive position regarding the ability to design without theory and vice versa risks either retreating into historical work or apologizing for a fundamentally reactionary design agenda. Both Colomina and Hays are architectural theorists who are reticent to admit that their work might be attached to any specific design agenda, and yet their work can be understood as underwriting what is rapidly becoming the dominant design practice of recycled modernism, much of which was exhibited at the *Light Constructions* exhibition. In this way, the activities of theorists in the United States working to revise the historic avant-garde, intentionally or unintentionally, serve as apologies for the belated introduction of the International Style to Europe.

One essential similarity underlies Colomina's and Hays's independent strategies: the reconfiguration of canonical mod-

tion, the colloquium lacked a clear critical component. The opinions of those who circulated the "rap sheet," reminding the audience of what really happened, were not heard on the panels, allowing theory, as it turned its attention to the task of the historians, to take criticism's place.

Theory offers an explanation of cause and effect that moves beyond *what* happened to *why* it happened (only the critic can ask *ought* it happen). Constructing theory is a problem of moving between what is planned and what ensues. Clausewitz was a critic of formalistic planning and advocated instead the careful scrutiny of strategy as it adapted itself to the shifting conditions of battle. Papers such as K. Michael Hays's "Mies van der Rohe and the Production of Abstraction" showed the capitalist city to be the field on (over?) which these battle were contested. Miscounted resources, troop defection, improper bearings, all these were among what Clausewitz counted as "friction," which distinguished "real war from war on paper." As Eisenman pointed out, the economic and social realties of architecture's production means that ideal tactics can be worked out only on paper, where friction is internal to design deliberation. The number of obstacles that have intervened in his own struggle to realize built work has resulted in his waging a Thirty Years' (Paper) War. In another instance, Koolhaas's fiction of the Pan-Am building serving as a monument to metropolitanism is erased by the inadvertent irony of its new name Met Life, referring to the bureaucracy of an actuarial concern.[7] Capital's ideal of efficiently managing chance once again overcomes attempts to conserve meaning, however tentative and disruptive its initial impetus.

It would be one thing to show that Johnson's career as an impresario of the new was merely a strategy for assimilating it into the more considerable corpus of tradition to which he is sentimentally beholden. The colloquium, more importantly, gave strong evidence of how generals become apprised of what is going on in the field, and how each war finds its own generals and its own soldiers. The conversations among Johnson, Eisenman, Rowe, and the others can be seen as the transmission of orders back and forth along an elaborate chain of command. The avant-garde can be ernist figures such as Le Corbusier and Mies as the predecessors and innovators of such critical poststructuralist practices as mass marketing, advertising, mass production, representation and the construction of consumer subjectivities. Any one of these practices, according to Colomina and Hays, can be considered to be indicative of global late capitalism. Like that of Eisenman and Koolhaas, Colomina's and Hays's project is not the revision of historical figures, but rather the opportunistic use of the canon to establish a foundation for the theorization of new forms of speculation. Both Colomina and Hays have consistently outlined an intellectual program that, with a historical sleight of hand, situates contemporary subjectivity and cultural production within the emergence of high modernism. Despite the attraction to such opportunistic uses of hallowed modernists, one must acknowledge the complicity with the global design culture that it is quietly underwriting. Colomina's and Hays's backhanded reinvigorization of dated modernist strategies ultimately bestows new theoretical currency on the bankrupted International Style. In fact, Colomina's casting of Le Corbusier as a predecessor of poststructuralism, in other contexts, resembles nothing less than Eisenman's use of Terragni as a Chomskian structuralist. The most haunting unspoken endorsement of architects such as Jacques Herzog and Jean Nouvel was the analogy that Hays, in his presentation, made between the façade of the Seagram building and a television screen. From the contemporary perspective, poststructuralists have consistently, perhaps by definition, shown a proclivity for dead canonical architectural figures who can be resuscitated as exemplars of

identified alternatively with the content of these transmission or the structure of the chain. In the hands of architects, critics, historians, and even students, linkages such as journals, exhibits, manifestos, competition entries, and the occasional built work transmit ideas with a determinate end: to overcome opposition (including that within the ranks) and to shape future events. Sensitized to the moment and place, the avant-garde can direct the action of a greater corps, not by supplying impetus but by offering guidance. Yet control, in the end, resides in the hands of the generals. The avant-garde is for them a process of translation that brings events and objects into view. Like the search for origins, forming an avant-garde is not itself the object, but a means by which to assess one's position by looking elsewhere and beyond. It is only recently that theorists, either in the service of architects or as freelances, are in the forefront of telling how things are. But still cut off from the command of the main body of practitioners, they have few means of changing how and what those things will be.

The colloquium was the proving ground for new generals. Trained in avant-garde academies past and present, whose founders are quickly becoming the objects of historical analysis, there was a palpable desire on the part of the panelists to take command of the moment. The talks sought to repair particular links in a chain of command while severing others, all the while redirecting the nature of the struggle. Kwinter's comment that "the courage to be avant-garde is to be anachronistic, to be out of step with one's time" requires a subtle reformulation. To be in the avant-garde is, by definition, to be precisely attuned to time and place. The problem, however, is that the generals are out of step with the ranks they purportedly command. In one sense, it is a generational struggle: the Youngers want to be elevated in rank. They also have their own battle to fight. In his foreword to Terence Riley's sixtieth-anniversary restaging of the *Modern Architecture* exhibition, Johnson mused, "'history is written by the victors,' they say. In this case, the new history is written by the 'victors' of the next generation." It only remains to put this comment in the context of Clausewitz's most important requirement for the general: the unshakable conviction in the propriety of the war, or a new form of radical practice. In this way, both Colomina and Hays are undoubtedly as heavily invested in the project of a reconstructed avant-garde as are Koolhaas, Eisenman, and Johnson.

It is the complicated dedication to the tried and tired strategy of reinventing and postponing the avant-garde that was the most disturbing aspect of the conference. Weary with fifteen years of critical dismantling of canonical architects, one grows suspicious on seeing Mies and Le Corbusier, among others, once again propped up as the sponsors of a theoretical and design vanguard. Whether intentionally or not, the notion of an architectural avant-garde is being kept on theoretical life support to maintain the International Style project as it makes its belated return to Europe. The historical and theoretical project of revising the avant-garde has recently bestowed limited intellectual cachet to the "new banality," "new simplicity," and "unprecedented realism" that one associates with the reactionary modern currents of much contemporary Swiss, German, and Spanish architecture. One need only visit Berlin to witness the latest generation of banal corporate international modern skin jobs the likes of which have not been seen since the uncontrolled proliferation of spandrel glass in the 1970s preceding the switch to postmodernism. Likewise, as the latest effete Miesian box is exhibited under the auspices of *Light Construction*, one begins to wonder about the desirability for yet another generation to originate their experiments with a reuse of the avant-garde. More likely, the revisionary modernist designers who make claims to being the "true avant-garde" through stylistic association

what Johnson would have, in his misplaced Calvinism, as "virtue on [our] side."

Notes

1. The volume has a foreword by Vincent Scully, Jr., an introduction by Peter Eisenman, and a commentary by Robert A. M. Stern.

2. Dal Co was not present at the conference; his paper was read by Paolo Costantini.

3. D. H. Lawrence, preface to *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York: T. Seltzer, 1923), n.p.

4. *Dictionnaire militaire: Encyclopédie des sciences militaires* (Paris: Librairie Militaire Berger-Levrault, 1898), s.v. "avant-garde."

5. Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

6. Ibid., 157.

7. Thanks to Mabel O. Wilson for sharing this observation with me.

and institutional paternity merely provide us with a more palatable form of reactionary classicism than that previously espoused by postmodernism. "Lightweight modernism" serves as a more stylistically refined and more tasteful corporate substitute for what was understood as postmodern classicism a decade ago. Despite the recent call by MoMA for a lightweight modernism, mainstream modernism's corpse hung with an unbearable heaviness over the events of the avant-garde colloquium.

Edward Eigen is a Ph.D candidate in the History, Theory, and Criticism of Art, Architecture, and Urban Form at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Greg Lynn is an adjunct assistant professor at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, Columbia University, and principal of FORM in Hoboken, New Jersey.