

Strange Details (Writing Architecture)

By Michael Cadwell

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Confronted with the intricate construction details of Italian architect Carlo Scarpa's Querini Stampalia Gallery--steel joined at odd intervals, concrete spilled out of concatenated forms, stone cut in labyrinthine patterns--Michael Cadwell abandoned his attempts to categorize them theoretically and resolved instead to appreciate their idiosyncrasies and evoke their all-embracing affects. What he had dismissed as a collection of fetishes he came to understand as a coherently constructed world that was nonetheless persistently strange. In Strange Details, Cadwell looks at the work of four canonical architects who "made strange" with the most resistant aspect of architecture--construction. In buildings that were pivotal in their careers, Scarpa, Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, and Louis Kahn all created details that undercut our critical and analytical terra firma.Cadwell explores the strangeness in the material menagerie of Scarpa's Querini Stampalia, the wood light frame construction of Wright's Jacobs House, the welded steel frame of Mies's Farnsworth House, and the reinforced concrete of Kahn's Yale Center for British Art. Each of these architects, he finds, reconfigures the rudimentary facts of construction, creating a subtle but undeniable shift in a building's physicality. And for each of them, nature is strange, and its strangeness infects; nature unmoors exhausted cultural ideas, constricted analytical procedures, and outmoded production techniques. An awakening to nature's strangeness forces a new sense of the world, one that we can detect in these architects' configurations of the world's materials--their strange details.

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Editorial Review

Review

" *Strange Details* follows none of [the] well-worn paths, and is thus the most astonishing example of innovative writing about modern architecture I have read in years." *The Architect"s Newspaper*

"In our spectacularly enervated age, this brilliant interpretive excursus reminds one that, as with music (to which it used to be compared), one cannot enter a work of architecture without a cultivated sensibility, compounded in equal measure out of knowledge and imagination. These four critical essays on the theme of tectonic estrangement, together with the author's meticulously annotated bibliography, should be required reading and re-reading in every school of architecture." **Kenneth Frampton** , Ware Professor of Architecture, Columbia University

"In the course of his brief book, Mr. Cadwell provides admirably focused, legible, and sympathetic readings of the similar accomplishment of four very different structures, each in its way a milestone of mid-century modernist architecture." James Gardner The New York Sun

"With a forthright and sweeping historical consciousness untainted by ideological proselytizing, Cadwell has invented a new form of architectural writing fusing the personal essay, the journalistic critique, and the academic treatise." Norman Weinstein The Architect's Newspaper

About the Author

Michael Cadwell is a practicing architect and Associate Professor in the Austin E. Knowlton School of Architecture at The Ohio State University. A former Fellow of the American Academy in Rome and the MacDowell Colony, he is the author of Small Buildings.

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