

BOOK REVIEW

Vincent B. Canizaro, editor

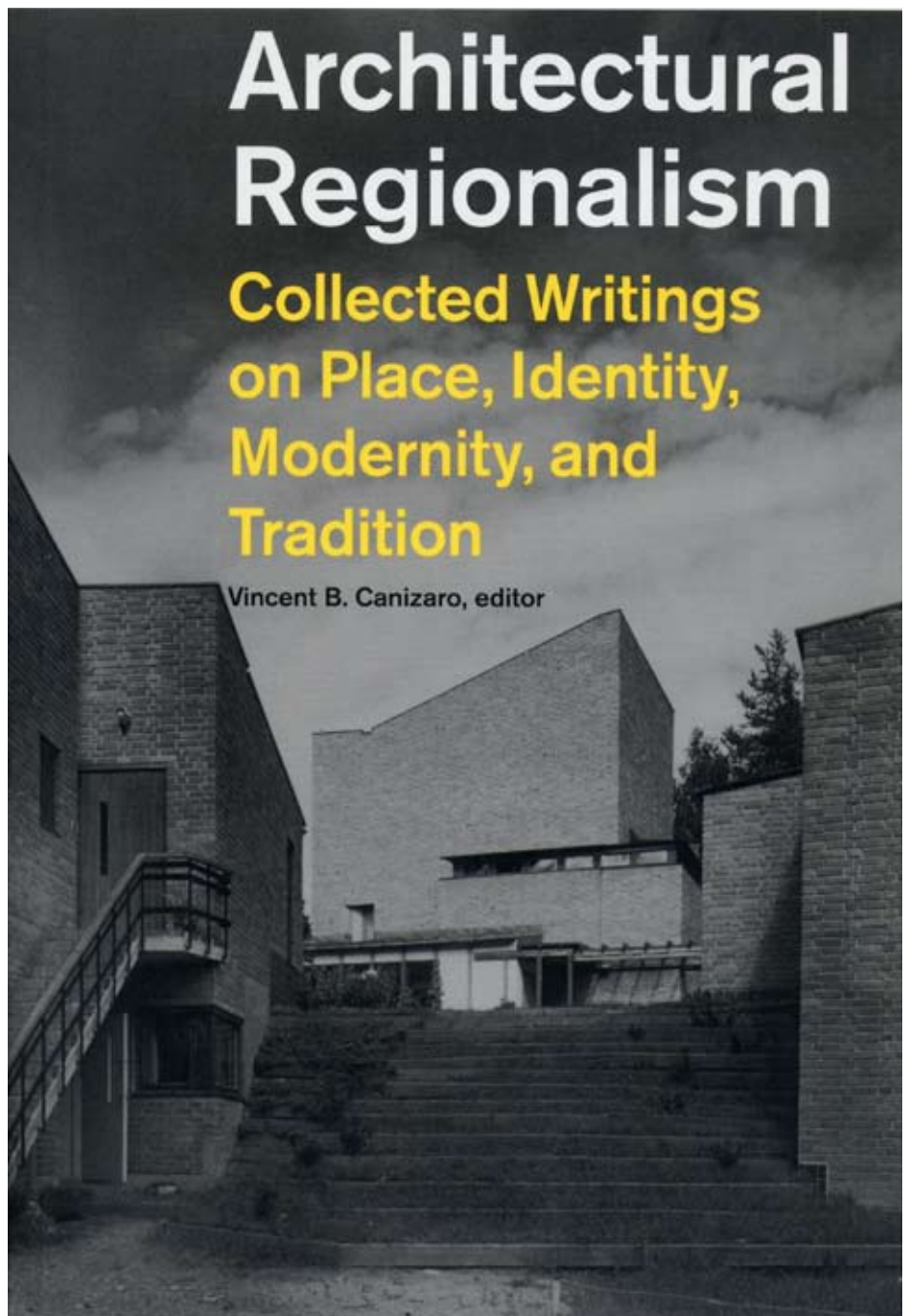
Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition

New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2007, 464 pp., 80 b/w illus., \$39.95

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After about 1900 architects all over Europe tried to overcome the outdated conventions of historicism and the arbitrariness of Art Nouveau by developing new regionalist styles that were organically rooted in the local environment. Vernacular architecture provided the inspiration for English cottages, neo-Normand villas, *Heimat* architecture, the *estilo montañés* and the Zakopane style. The resulting houses were to be up-to-date, comfortable and preferably built by applying local materials and artisanal traditions; at the same time they were to embody the *Zeitgeist* and the *Volksgeist*. Contrary to most avant-garde movements, however, regionalism with its stress on tradition, continuity and rootedness did not produce manifestos that loudly proclaimed a new beginning or a complete break with the past and existing practices. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the twentieth century, regionalism became a highly influential and innovative international architectural trend.

Architectural Regionalism in some ways is the belated manifesto of a style without manifestos, although the book almost completely ignores Europe. This book, hence, is in the first place an anthology of texts with which the editor Vincent B. Canizaro tries to place Kenneth Frampton's famous "critical regionalism" in a historical context. Frampton's fierce criticism of the homogenizing effects of technology and the emptiness of postmodern architecture and his subsequent plea for an architecture that takes regional differences into account without being nostalgic caused much commotion and debate in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the editor selected only one short text by Frampton, as he is more concerned with presenting architectural regionalism as a broad phenomenon of which critical regionalism is only one strand. The book, which also contains a short introduction in which the editor explains the importance of the topic, republishes forty-four articles or fragments of books of which only three deal with non-American (in fact: Third World) topics.



Various types of regionalist architecture are treated in the articles assembled in this volume, each of which is preceded by a one-page introduction by Canizaro. Several authors analyze the Mission style, the Pueblo Revival and other regionalist styles from the beginning of the twentieth century, whereas others, among whom Lewis Mumford, treat regional planning and regional modernism. Postwar currents, such as bioregionalism and critical regionalism also receive due attention. Some of the authors also clearly state what they mean by regionalism. Thus, the Kentucky farmer and writer Wendell Berry describes regionalism in general as “local life aware of itself,” whereas the professor of architecture Eleftherios Pavlides defines regionalism in architecture as “the architect’s response to ... the existing vernacular architecture of a region.” The editor has selected essays of both propagandists and opponents of regionalism, thus allowing the reader to study the general outline of the various debates on the topic, most of which until recently have sunk into oblivion. Although some authors mention Henry Hobson Richardson and the English Arts & Crafts movement as possible precursors they are not given specific attention in this volume. Moreover, the earliest text is from 1921 and only five articles date back to the 1930s. The impression thus could be that regionalism is essentially a recent phenomenon, and this is clearly not the case.

Although the sources of regionalism and the golden age of architectural regionalism do not receive due attention in this collection of essays, the book is a welcome contribution to current debates between both architects and architectural historians as it shows that regional or vernacular influences on architecture had an important impact on architectural developments during the entire twentieth century and stimulated much discussion. A further advantage is that it establishes regionalism as a clearly distinguishable architectural trend, and maybe even the most important challenge to modernism. Regionalist architecture is already an accepted label in both France and Spain, but in other European countries a wide variety of labels is still used to indicate the same neo-vernacular trend. Especially in

German-speaking countries many different terms are used to indicate essentially the same phenomenon, such as *Heimatschutzarchitektur*, *Heimatstil*, *Reformarchitektur* or National Romanticism. Hopefully, Canizaro's very useful American manifesto of twentieth-century architectural regionalism can establish regionalism as the best general term for neo-vernacular architecture all over the world.

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