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Toward A Minor Architecture (MIT Press)



Synopsis

Architecture can no longer limit itself to the art of making buildings; it must also invent the politics of taking them apart. This is Jill Stoner's premise for a minor architecture. Her architect's eye tracks differently from most, drawn not to the lauded and iconic but to what she calls "the landscape of our constructed mistakes" -- metropolitan hinterlands rife with failed and foreclosed developments, undersubscribed office parks, chain hotels, and abandoned malls. These graveyards of capital, Stoner asserts, may be stripped of their excess and become sites of strategic spatial operations. But first we must dissect and dismantle prevalent architectural mythologies that brought them into being -- western obsessions with interiority, with the autonomy of the building-object, with the architect's mantle of celebrity, and with the idea of nature as that which is "other" than the built metropolis. These four myths form the warp of the book. Drawing on the literary theory of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Stoner suggests that minor architectures, like minor literatures, emerge from the bottoms of power structures and within the language of those structures. Yet they too are the result of powerful and instrumental forces. Provoked by collective desires, directed by the instability of time, and celebrating contingency, minor architectures may be mobilized within buildings that are oversaturated, underutilized, or perceived as obsolete. Stoner's provocative challenge to current discourse veers away from design, through a diverse landscape of cultural theory, contemporary fiction, and environmental ethics. Hers is an optimistic and inclusive approach to a more politicized practice of architecture.

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Customer Reviews

When first taking up "Toward a Minor Architecture," you hardly expect such a small book to be so deep and broad. Jill Stoner's apt intertwining of architectural, urban, literary, philosophical, cinematic, sociological and artistic references constructs a solid argument to then deconstruct premises often taken for granted, proving them questionable if not strikingly untrue. Into her dense yet fluid prose, she inserts images, parentheses, and footnotes (almost a book in their own right). These texts with, in, and within the text expand the questions and challenges posed by the book far beyond its one hundred pages; they do so through the strength of provocative teaching rather than reductive preaching. In Stoner's own words, "Architecture can no longer limit itself to the aesthetic pursuit of making buildings; it must now commit to a politics of selectively taking them apart." And so she does, by unveiling and analyzing the "political and economic powers [setting] forth conditions of complicity in which major architectures are made," to formulate minor architectures (plurals are not accidental) as "acts of clearing." Near the beginning of this inciting/inviting book, referring to Kafka's Castle, Stoner writes that "there is no interior, only multiple thresholds"; in the last paragraph, that "minor architectures will emerge through (and as) the substance of architecture." Both statements fittingly describe the book's dedication to inquire into--and ultimately to desire and demand--both possibilities and responsibilities. Big skills are needed to turn a small book, calling for the minor, into a major and enlightening journey. Stoner has achieved that transformation.

You shouldn't need to be an architect to appreciate architecture. You certainly do not need to be an architect to appreciate this book. Stoner interweaves literature, politics, history, film into her argument for a minor architecture. She opens the discussion from these many angles and increases both its accessibility and its relevance to a broad range of disciplines and interests. Towards a Minor Architecture demystifies the myths of (major) Architecture and explores multiple ways to re-appropriate and access (minor) architecture. It further suggests ways to apply this demystification to question and appreciate civilization, culture, and creativity on many scales. Not to be overlooked are the extensive, intriguing, and enriching notes. In keeping with the idea of continued dialogue and resistance to the illusion of the coherent and self-contained text/architecture, this book has no conclusion. In its place are notes that interrupt and build onto the main text and occupy almost the full last third of the book. They skillfully open holes for further investigation and contemplation and are truly worth at least glancing through as you read or on their own. Highly recommended read.

Understanding the subject propose by Jill ought to be central to anyone seeking to achieve perfection during his/hers architectural endeavours.

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