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Author:

[Taylor, Rives T.](#)

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Beyond the Frontier II

Rives T. Taylor

Within the evolving American context there are, of course, a variety of specific visionary projects. The examples presented here briefly demonstrate the diversity of current approaches in future-oriented design in the United States. A dominant theme is a clear reference to the “machine for living in”—the future house in an increasingly urban, as opposed to suburban, environment. Each firm has focused on its definition of the future and on the necessary design parameters that any articulation of such a personal conception must entail. The projects respond to new technologies of construction, new images of the house, new family groups, and new conditions of siting and environment. Interestingly, few of the projects address, or see the need to address, the new communications technologies. The architects seem to state that, based on an informed design awareness, the house form can be made flexible enough to encompass an evolving communication technology.

There are also several projects for civic spaces and memorials that do make a greater statement about the future of “public communication” and the technology to support it. The notion of communication, inherent in any monument, is being examined in the new technological contexts.

These designers have chosen to explore the values and associations inherently attached to the built environment; they are using an increasingly complex architectural

and societal navigation chart to plot the interrelated changes within demographics, within public and private consciousness, and within building technologies and possibilities.

Geographically, the architects and their projects show a tricoastal diversity of approach. On the East Coast, Dennis Adams critically intervenes in street architecture with visual communication. Numerous exhibitions in New York have looked at the perceived future needs of living in the city or the country. What will the living and work spaces be like? In Texas, where the lines of urban and suburban development have been notoriously blurred, William F. Stern and Associates, Architects, has taken the reality of the urban neighborhood and its lots size and context as the basis for a reconfiguration of the suburban arrangement of living spaces. The West Coast, influenced by a long tradition of “case study houses,”¹ has taken a closer look at demographics, social change, and the technological forces of mechanization. Holt Hinshaw Pfau Jones Architecture has taken the distinct contemporary realities of language, image, and economics to develop a rationalized architectural approach to the city and modern consciousness. The designer Martin Mervel, in his monuments/memorials, reevaluates architectural notions of public communication.

Finally, architect and teacher Lars Larup reflects on the lessons of demographics and how he and

several of his contemporaries have designed structures to support living within a future, technology-dominated society.

Note

1 The Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles will explore the history and legacy of California’s Case Study Houses in a future exhibition. The Case Study Houses, designed and built in Los Angeles between 1945 and 1966, were a series of 36 experimental prototypes meant to acquaint the public with the modern architecture. Among others, Neutra, Eames, Rapson, Koenig, Ellwood, and Eero Saarinen contributed designs. This represented the most influential and innovative architectural research effort in postwar America.