

Sullivan-esque: Urban Architecture and Ornamentation. By Ronald E. Schmitt (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. Pp. x, 350, 156 photographs (some in color), 16 line drawings, appendix, index. Cloth, \$60.00).

The Chicago Auditorium Building: Adler and Sullivan's Architecture and the City. By Joseph M. Siry (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Pp. xviii, 550, 200 halftones, 16 color plates, appendix, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$55.00).

On the surface, these two impressive works of architectural history have a great deal in common. Both were published in 2002 by university presses in Illinois; both are attractive, oversize, copiously illustrated books that would look nice on a coffee table; and both address (among other things) the work of the famed Chicago architect Louis H. Sullivan (1856-1924). Given these books' significant similarities, it comes as something of a jolt to discover how very different from one another they really are. In scope and approach, these books are diametric opposites—so much so that it is a wonder that they can both be as useful and enjoyable as they are.

Ronald E. Schmitt's object of study in *Sullivan-esque* is not buildings per se, but rather an early twentieth-century architectural style that he defines as being "based on an aesthetic derived from the designs of Louis H. Sullivan (1856-1924) and adapted to mass production." (1) The overarching argument of the book is more accurately an aesthetic judgment than a historical assessment. Schmitt's primary contention is that the architects and builders of Sullivan-esque "decorated sheds," by "successfully integrat[ing] 'high art' with functional construction," and ultimately gave "focus and distinction to inexpensive, utilitarian buildings in Chicago's commercial strips and throughout the Midwest." (1, 260). A secondary claim, which Schmitt suggests in the fairly standard introductory chapters on Sullivan's life and works and summarizes at the end of the book, is that "the Sullivan-esque paralleled the fortunes of Louis Sullivan," in that it shifted from an initial, "optimistic" phase to a phase of "decline" and eventual obscurity. (260)

Given the "vernacular" nature of Schmitt's objects of inquiry (most of the Sullivan-esque buildings Schmitt illustrates are modest commercial buildings from the upper Midwest), his traditional "Great Architecture" approach to his subject—that is, his emphasis on biography and stylistic development—comes as something of a surprise. As opposed to most other typological studies of large numbers of vernacular buildings—for example, Henry Glassie's classic *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* and others of its

kind—Schmitt does not deal with floor plans (he illustrates not a one) nor with patrons/users (other than in the most cursory fashion). Schmitt's selective approach to the material is certainly understandable, given the prodigious number of buildings he discusses. But there is much more that could be said about these buildings and about the Sullivanesque style. Though Schmitt has laid an admirable foundation for further study by both cataloguing the buildings that are instances of this style and by providing information about the designers and terra cotta suppliers who were crucial to its development and popularity, supplementing his style-and-architect-centered approach with a more plan-and-program-centered, social-and-cultural-historical "vernacular architecture" approach would be one way of making this already-interesting work even more useful to scholars of other forms of early twentieth-century architecture.

Whereas Schmitt's book defines, catalogues, and "defends" an oft-overlooked vernacular style, Siry's book, in contrast, dramatically repositions a single well-known monument of "Great Architecture"—usually discussed in terms of its ornamental style and precursordom to modernism—by implicating it instead in discourses about class, ethnicity, civic identity, power, labor conflict, Italian and German operatic culture, and European and American theater, music hall, and luxury hotel architecture. From Siry's initial deployment of the fighting word "capitalist" in the first paragraph of the introduction, it is clear that this is primarily a work about social and political conflict rather than architectural style and influence. Siry ultimately sees the Auditorium Building as a symbol of the triumph of capital over labor, arguing that it is the fruit of a deliberate ploy by elite patron Ferdinand Peck (1848-1924) to create a civic institution that would both placate and reeducate Chicago's working classes into greater docility. In rousing Marxist rhetoric, Siry concludes that "The building fit ideologically within an urban environment ordered by capital; its cultural functions were inextricable from the local economic order." (323)

In opposition to Schmitt, who implies that Sullivan's genius or "influence" is the reason that the Sullivanesque style is of interest, Siry claims that "It was the impulse and support of clients like Ferdinand Peck that provided the situational framework within which Adler and Sullivan could excel." (387) Siry not only credits patrons with more importance than Schmitt does, but also seems very deliberately to decline to discuss the lives of the architects of the Auditorium Building. No doubt this is a reaction to the plethora of biographical narratives already available on Adler and Sullivan, but it is nonetheless a puzzling absence in a book that otherwise so exhaustively addresses so many aspects of the building's sociopolitical and architectural contexts.

Although very different from one another, both of these books make important contributions to the literature on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century American architecture (and more particularly, to the literature on Louis Sullivan). Schmitt's book, though less "deep" than Siry's, is in some ways the more useful of the two on a day-to-day basis. It attends to a genre of architecture that, to many Midwesterners, probably seems barely worthy of note, precisely because it is ubiquitous. *Sullivan-esque* is thus a good book to toss in the back seat of the car before a regional road trip; although Schmitt acknowledges that "omissions are inevitable," (267) it is certainly the most complete guide to this style that is available, and is obviously the result of years of Schmitt's work both on the road and in the archives. Schmitt not only provides town-by-town listings of Sullivan-esque buildings, but also rates the buildings' architectural interest on a scale from 1 to 5 (a move that, although perhaps theoretically suspect, does make it easier to decide whether a given building is worth driving a few miles out of the way to see). In short, this book would make a great gift for any architecture buff who lives or travels in the Midwest.

Siry's book, in contrast, is not light reading, and is not a book I would care to carry with me anywhere, since it weighs more than my laptop computer and makes only limited reference to other extant buildings. But as a model of how to write architectural history—or any other sort of history, for that matter—Siry's book is a masterpiece. The issues to which Siry chooses to attend, he addresses extraordinarily thoroughly and well. Although social class and power are clearly Siry's primary interests, his attention to ethnicity, gender, engineering, architectural program, urban history, and music history, makes this book an instructive read and a compelling model for anyone who wishes to discover how studying one building (or, by extension, one person or one object) can be a means of "getting at" and understanding larger cultural issues.

Read separately, these books are each useful. But they are even better read as a pair, not only because each provides information the other omits, but also because in concert they clearly demonstrate the different kinds of readings that "traditional" and "vernacular" approaches to architectural history yield, regardless of whether the object of inquiry is an architect-designed Great Monument or a group of unassuming vernacular storefronts. In these books the authors both use the "wrong" approach to their subject; Schmitt examines vernacular buildings using a traditional "Great Architecture" approach, and Siry examines Great Architecture using a "vernacular architecture" approach. The rich and unexpected results in each case ultimately demonstrate the usefulness of both approaches—as well as the desirability of combining them.

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