important connections with contemporary events and the reactions of individuals, journalists, scientists, and environmental groups. Such is the method of the good environmental historian.

Yet because the author chose such a broad geographic area and such a long sweep of history, he could not fill in the details that a narrower study might have offered. For example, if he had chosen to limit the study to the impact of the Keokuk Dam, he could have shown the relationship of the dam to specific industries that developed in the region, or even the role of the price of electricity, which until recently has been cheaper for large users than residential users (who have subsidized industrial development with their higher rates). Or he could have concentrated his treatment on the Twin Cities geographic area and included more depth on industrial waste along with his excellent section on the problems caused by the Corps of Engineers navigation channel in the disposal of domestic sewage. I also wondered whether or not typhoid and other infectious diseases forced municipal authorities of the large cities in the upper Mississippi to act on environmental problems, as happened in other sections of the country.

This difficulty of choosing to do a broad sweep of history and yet provide depth of interdisciplinary historical scholarship is one that every environmental historian has confronted. Professor Scarpino should be commended for making good choices, though he necessarily might have omitted material other scholars, for their own good reasons, would include. His work not only has enriched other histories of the midwest but has also raised excellent questions for further work.

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THE SECRET LIFE OF BUILDINGS: AN AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY FOR MODERN ARCHITECTURE, by Gavin Macrae-Gibson. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986. xvii + 215 pages, illustrations, diagrams, drawings, elevations and axonometric views, maps, photographs, plans, notes, bibliography, index, $25.00, clothbound.
ISBN 0-262-13203-6

Reviewed by John Whiteman

The introduction to *The Secret Life of Buildings* promises "a new method of criticism for modern architecture" (p. xii). The aim of the book is to reverse the scientism of modern architectural thinking, and to produce a poetic logic for architectural criticism in an age when it has become clear that modernist explanations of architectural form cannot account for our architectural achievements.

The book is structured as a close review of seven recent buildings, conjoining themes in architectural theory with real buildings. Macrae-Gibson reviews in turn: The Gehry House with a discussion of the representation of perception; Peter Eisenman's House El Even Odd as millenial anxiety; Cesar Pelli's Four Leaf Towers as a sensibility of silence; Michael Graves's Portland Building as a concern for the sublime; Robert Stern's Bozzi House with a discussion of scenography; Allan Greenburg's Court Building and the continuity of the classical; and Robert Venturi's Gordon Wu Hall as an irony of the difficult whole. These critical reviews are bracketed by an introduction that posits a new method of architectural criticism, and an epilogue that treats the problems of form and content, modern subjectivity, monumentality, and perfectibility in architecture.

The structure of the book is potentially delightful. It is similar in format to Stanley Cavell's essays on movie criticism, in which general philosophical themes are intertwined with particular movies, 1940s comedies of divorce and remarriage (*Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage*, Harvard University Press, 1981). As a technique the exploration of individual themes in single buildings has the great potential of making general and otherwise abstract discussions immediate and felt, and yet at the same time intimating something beyond the grasp of cold logic. The model may serve as an incisive tool of selection to make tractable sense of the vast areas of modern critical theory.

But *The Secret Life of Buildings* is a disappointing book, and its claims are vastly overblown. In no sense does it achieve its stated aim of reaching for a new poetic logic with which to criticize buildings. And it is all the more disappointing for the fact that it treats (misconstrues?) questions that are of central importance to contemporary architectural confusions. Three problems in the writing seem especially damaging. First, while Macrae-Gibson strenuously and rightly rejects scientism as a doctrine for the arts, it is clear that his sensibilities and preoccupations are created by it. Second, his claims for a new poetic method of criticism are not borne out in the way that he approaches buildings, which is little more than a juxtaposition of certain exhausted and millenial themes in modernism with a straightforward formalist description of the buildings. There is little that can be said to be a new poetry, such as one might say about the writing of William Gass, for example (See his "The Face of the City: Reading Consciousness in its Ties and Wrinkles," *Harpers*, March 1986, pp. 37–46). Finally, Macrae-Gibson makes no new theoretical inroads into the central problem of his subject matter, the problem of form and content.

On Scientism. Macrae-Gibson rightly objects to scientism as a method for the arts, but his own sensibilities and preoccupations are clearly informed by it. For example, his discussion of the representation of perception in the Gehry House is a concern that reflects the extreme subjectivity of a population hell-bent on the atomism of science. Why is the representation of perception interesting for itself alone? Surely the mechanics of perception without content is no content at all, or at most a

reflection of the narcissism of an individualist culture. Why represent it? Macrae-Gibson touches on this, the most tantalizing of issues, in describing the detachment of the moment of perception from the act of memory, but does not push the case far enough. A change in the mode of our perception would also be a change in the world in which we live. It would signify a change in the structure of our sensibility, and this would be worth representing. (Think of the false perspectives of the Renaissance and the destabilizing axonometrics of Le Corbusier, each of which heralds a change in sensibility — the way the world is felt.) But Macrae-Gibson discusses perception with the same abstraction and universality as the scientism that he rejects. And he does not notice that the desire to detach perception from memory, something he regards as the cutting edge of theory and sensibility, is itself an aesthetic created by machine logic and the unselfconscious penchant for cultural disassociation. (Much of the problem has to do with Macrae-Gibson's exorcism of social theory from his concerns. The focus on abstraction and universal validity that characterizes both his discussion of perception and the scientism that he rejects is historically associated with the bourgeois class. The disassociation of memory and perception was a concern of Baudelaire's in his theory of instants in the city, as long ago as 1840. It is also a common theme in the poetry of T. S. Eliot.)

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On Formalism. In his essays on individual buildings Macrae-Gibson generally proceeds from a simple description of the building in familiar formalist terms to a concern for meaning and metaphor. But in each of the essays the basis of association of ideas seems very unclear. (Why does he show us this with that?) For example, his formalist predilictions lead him to bring in the most irrelevant associations on the slight basis of morphological similarity. Witness his conjunction of Ledoux's prison at Aix-En-Provence with Cesar Pelli's Four Leaf Towers (p. 61). The two buildings simply have very little to do with one another, and the comparison is fatuous. Or again, on a less literal level, it is not clear why a discussion of Bruno Taut's expressionism is brought to bear on a Pelli building in which the financial logic of the building reads more strongly than any attempt at poetry.

On Form & Content. These faults betray a much more serious problem with the book. The confusions that Macrae-Gibson exhibits over scientism and over the link between formal description and the relevant themes of the works that he discusses are themselves symptoms. They belie a bankruptcy with the most serious concern of the contemporary debate in architecture, the relation of form and content. Macrae-Gibson simply has no theoretical account of the relation between the two. His concern with the extremes of *the* literal and *the* mythological is highly suggestive of a mind divided by the dualities of scientism. What makes sense is clear or else it is mystical, says science taken crudely. Gone is a concern for more subtle and intermediate modes of meaning that our scientism has eclipsed, and that recent research in philosophy is slowly bringing back. Surprisingly, the category of metaphor plays no central role in the development of a new poetic criticism, despite its acknowledged role in easing the grip of the literal while avoiding the nonsense of mysticism. (See, for example, the collection of essays in Sheldon Sacks, *On Metaphor*, University of Chicago Press, 1978). It is this criticism of the book that is most damaging. For the ambition of a new poetic criticism must surely include a treatment of the contemporary problems of form and content. How does this issue appear to us now? For example, how does the very articulation of the problem of form and content hover over our discussions, presenting itself both as a dream and a menace? But Macrae-Gibson does not deliver anything close to an answer or a position.

Instead, the book presents rather familiar and tired arguments in a very uneven body of material. Even the selection of buildings is strange, since they are of such uneven quality. The result is that we are taken on a trail of associations that often borders on a random walk. In Graves's Portland Building we go on a bewildering trail from scale manipulation, to a (forced and sadly literal) metaphor of building as mountain-scape, through monumental anthropomorphism, to the sublime and the colossal, to fragmentation, to human force, to a discussion of the new sublime and primitive huts (pp. 74–97). There is no serious argument made here, nor a demonstration of a new poetic. Merely a pretentious parade of references, analogies, and fashionable architectural concerns.

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THE NATURAL ALIEN: HUMANKIND AND ENVIRONMENT, by Neil Evernden. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985. x + 160 pages, notes, index, $19.95, clothbound.

ISBN 0-8020-2552-8

Reviewed by David Seamon

In the last fifteen years, there has been a slow but growing academic interest in reexamining and redefining the human relationship with nature, environment, and landscape. The starting point for this work is perhaps best marked by Theodore Roszak's seminal *Where the Wasteland Ends* (1972). Presently, the major academic hope for important philosophical break-throughs in understanding and describing the person-environment relationship arises from two independent research traditions: first, the work of "deep ecologists" such as Arne Naess, William Devall, and Warwick Fox; second, phenomenological research grounded on the ontological insights of Martin Heidegger and represented by such scholars as Edward Relph, Joseph Grange, and Michael Zimmerman. Both of these literatures argue that a false ontological picture of how people relate to the world—in terms of a subject-object dichotomy and separation—has led to a false way of acting in and on the world, including the natural environment. Because our modern Western world view inter-