The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America (MIT Press)

By Hyungmin Pai

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The Portfolio and the Diagram is about the changing ways architects see, read, and use the words and images of architectural publications. Architects today do not use the glossy photographs of magazines in the same way that nineteenth-century architects mobilized the drawings in the grand folios. The images have changed, and so have the ways in which they are used.

The book begins with an outline of the academic discipline and the mimetic practice of the portfolio, established in America during the late nineteenth century. World War I triggered a historical process that resulted in the demise of the portfolio and the emergence of the discourse of the diagram. The Beaux Arts-trained architects had fashioned their discipline through the meticulous object-centered images of the portfolio. The discourse of the diagram provided a new range of possibility in the architect's relation to words, images, and buildings. More than the diagram itself, more than the province of narrow-minded functionalists, the discourse of the diagram is a complex formation of texts, concepts, and modes of representation.

Concerned less with constructing a new kind of modernism than with understanding the boundaries and structures of modernity, the book is a history of modern architecture as a discursive practice and its striving to become a viable discipline.

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Editorial Review

Review

"With the resurgence of interest in diagrams for design, *The Portfolio and the Diagram* is a timely and valuable reminder that reflecting on the historical uses of diagrams enables more-informed future practices and, hopefully, avoids the separation of fact and appearance that continues in too many architectural practices today." -- Journal of Architectural Education

"This book alters our view of American architecture during the 1920s and 1930s. It reaches far beyond the narratives indebted to the European avant-garde or technological modernization to elucidate the rich intellectual history behind the emergence of American modernism as a socially-oriented practice."--**Gail Fenske**, School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation, Roger Williams University

"This insightful history of the 1920s and '30s entices us with multiple implications. The Portfolio of drawings and the abstract Diagram, two 'practical systems' of architectural production, have also generated distinct languages for understanding and debating the very nature of architecture itself."--**Gwendolyn Wright**, Professor of Architecture, Columbia University

"Because architects do not make buildings but representations of them, the media of architectural thought and discourse will always merit attention and reconsideration, especially in a time such as ours when the techniques of producing this 'discourse' are rapidly changing. *The Portfolio and the Diagram* illuminates the historical and theoretical conditions of the shift in representational intentions and techniques that defines the modern period -- a shift that has both destabilized and invigorated contemporary architecture."--**David Leatherbarrow**, University of Pennsylvania

About the Author

Hyungmin Pai is Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Seoul.

Sherry Blankenship has taught graphic design in theUS, New Zealand and Lebanon and offered courses andworkshops in Jordan, India, Turkey and Zimbabwewhich has only stimulated her interest in design andculture. Before entering design education, she designedbooks and magazines. She currently writes and codesignsComma, a publication dedicated to graphic designin the Middle East.

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