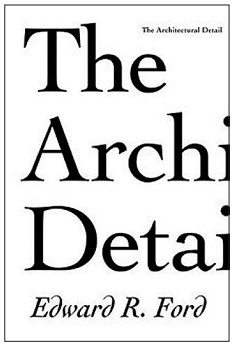
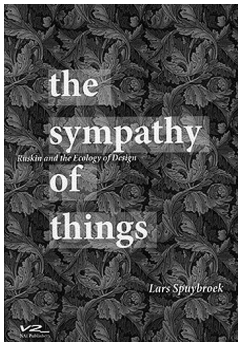
Detailing architecture

Sympathy for a ruined dream



The Architectural Detail
Edward R. Ford
Princeton Architectural Press
New York, 2011
328 pp.
ISBN: 978-1568989785
£25.55 (pb)

Edward R. Ford's two volumes on *The Details of Modern Architecture* are design studio staples. Because of contemporary regulations – particularly those concerning thermal separation, which frequently serve to detach the interior face of a wall from the exterior face – we can no longer detail in the same way as the modern heroes whose work Ford catalogued. In this new book, which can be imagined as a theoretical 'prequel' to his previous books, Ford explores how detailing can be conceptualised at a time when the possibilities seem ever more constrained. Five definitions of 'the detail' presented in the introduction establish the ground for what follows: 'There Are No Details in Modernism', 'A Detail is a Fragment in Which the Whole Building Is Represented', 'Details Are the Articulation of Structure', 'Details Are the Articulation of Construction' and 'The Detail as Autonomous Design'. For architects keen to think through the implications and possibilities of their daily life with working drawings, this book is a must.
AS



The Sympathy of Things: Ruskin and the Ecology of Design
Lars Spuybroek
V2_Publishing
Rotterdam, 2011
399 pp.
ISBN: 978-90-5662-827-7
£28.95 (pb)

The capitalist crisis urges renewal of Ruskin's legacy, as in Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman* (2008). Lars Spuybroek is yet bolder in writing history backwards to retrieve Ruskin's world of beauty and feeling. He knows the dangers of this, of the shock to the reader, for example, of thrusting Ruskin into bed with Charles Babbage (inventor of the Difference Engine – 'no less than the first computer'). But his faith in the gains that can be achieved, his subtle argument, and firm cultural grounding, largely avoid the pitfalls of similar projects. 'Brilliant' is misused in reviews, but the opening chapter on 'the digital nature of gothic' is truly scintillating in its exposition of the nature of gothic (using Worringer as well as Ruskin). Here the rib is defined as the essential gothic figure; unlike an 'element' such as the Greek column which is fixed in its role and proportions, ribs in their flexible rigidity can transmute and flex into arches or vaults, and span the divides between structure and ornament, for in the gothic *'ornament acts like structure and structure acts like ornament'*.
SK



A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britian
Owen Hatherley
Verso
London, 2010
400 pp.
ISBN: 978-1844676514
£9.99 (pb)

Owen Hatherley's journey around the ruins of post-Blairite Britain makes for a comically depressing, yet occasionally joyful, paean to the lost radical country of post-war modernity. *A Guide to the New Ruins of Britain* must be read through the lens of nostalgia for a Britain, and an architecture, that existed as a dream of social equality and working-class activism. But what a dream, compared with the nightmare of plastic clad sheds and glass-clad tower blocks that Hatherley presents as the current face of mainstream, contemporary British architecture. Our cities, he argues, once the adventurous trailblazers of industrial urbanism, with all their charms and sins, are now mealy-mouthed dystopias of primary colours and ruthless commercial imperatives. On train and by car, from Southampton to Glasgow, via the industrial cities of the North, Wales's mini-metropolitan capital, Cardiff, the Midlands' sprawling urban regions and London's docklands, Hatherley's grand-tour of the UK is an engaging account of how millennial visions have turned out rather less visionary in their realisation than in the futurism of their ideals.
EW

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