

Obsolescence: An Architectural History

Daniel M. Abramson

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Daniel M. Abramson : Obsolescence: An Architectural History before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Obsolescence: An Architectural History*:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Great overview of the concept of ObsolescenceBy E.B.This is a small book - about 140 pages - that gives a concise overview of the concept of "obsolescence" in architecture; it touches upon its rise, fall, and complicated present. The book is easy to read without being over theoretical. I particularly enjoyed the author's coverage of the demolition of Boston's East End. However, the compactness of the book sometimes falls prey to simply being a laundry list of moments when obsolescence enters the public dialogue. The book could benefit from a few deeper descriptions of particular buildings or writings on the topic. That said, there

are many points made that other scholars may find worthwhile to explore further. The bibliography at the end of the book is broad and provides good source material for further scholarly work. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. but the content was fantastic. My husband loved it. By M. V. Mauger. I was expecting more of a coffee table book, but the content was fantastic. My husband loved it. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. very fast, receive it next day. By Lance. Nicely weighted and sharp. Very well-made. fast and in time. fine. i think it is very good , will buy next time.

In our architectural pursuits, we often seem to be in search of something newer, grander, or more efficient—and this phenomenon is not novel. In the spring of 1910 hundreds of workers labored day and night to demolish the Gillender Building in New York, once the loftiest office tower in the world, in order to make way for a taller skyscraper. The New York Times puzzled over those who would sacrifice the thirteen-year-old structure, “as ruthlessly as though it were some ancient shack.” In New York alone, the Gillender joined the original Grand Central Terminal, the Plaza Hotel, the Western Union Building, and the Tower Building on the list of just one generation’s razed metropolitan monuments. In the innovative and wide-ranging *Obsolescence*, Daniel M. Abramson investigates this notion of architectural expendability and the logic by which buildings lose their value and utility. The idea that the new necessarily outperforms and makes superfluous the old, Abramson argues, helps people come to terms with modernity and capitalism’s fast-paced change. *Obsolescence*, then, gives an unsettling experience purpose and meaning. Belief in obsolescence, as Abramson shows, also profoundly affects architectural design. In the 1960s, many architects worldwide accepted the inevitability of obsolescence, experimenting with flexible, modular designs, from open-plan schools, offices, labs, and museums to vast megastructural frames and indeterminate building complexes. Some architects went so far as to embrace obsolescence’s liberating promise to cast aside convention and habit, envisioning expendable short-life buildings that embodied human choice and freedom. Others, we learn, were horrified by the implications of this ephemerality and waste, and their resistance eventually set the stage for our turn to sustainability—the conservation rather than disposal of resources. Abramson’s fascinating tour of our idea of obsolescence culminates in an assessment of recent manifestations of sustainability, from adaptive reuse and historic preservation to postmodernism and green design, which all struggle to comprehend and manage the changes that challenge us on all sides.

“Abramson uses design as evidence to read society’s responses to the notion of obsolescence, rather than as mere illustration. And the resulting narrative is one of the most coherent and powerful explanations I’ve ever read of the seemingly disparate architectural movements of the past century: interwar conservatism, Brutalism, historic preservation and Post-Modernism. . . . The conclusion of *Obsolescence* is brilliant. Now superseded by sustainability, obsolescence is now itself obsolete. . . . The ideas of obsolescence and sustainability, in the end, are just ways to justify change. They are belief systems that preoccupy an era, and then they disappear.”