

»BOOK

DILLER SCOFIDIO + RENFRO: ARCHITECTURE AFTER IMAGES

Edward Dimendberg

University of Chicago Press, £42

[Review by Shumi Bose](#)

The innovative office of Diller Scofidio + Renfro is in its mature summer, best known for its New York Highline project, which wrangles a gargantuan remnant of public infrastructure into a vibrant, much imitated and media-friendly, large-scale linear park (see *Blueprint March*).

It was not always so. DS+R is famed for transgressing architectural boundaries, towards loosely defined realms of media art, theatre, video and installation. Slightly more than 10 years ago, DS+R delighted thousands with its *Blur pavilion* for the Swiss EXPO, a diaphanous building whose 'fabric' was a fog of tiny lake-water droplets, sprayed from 31,400 micro-jets. When I was a student, we discussed D+S (as it was then) for its theory-driven edginess, its irreverent use of contemporary media and atmospheric performance-art scenography. That this contrary and challenging practice is currently – justifiably – famed for a large, green crowd-pleaser is like discovering that the edgy goth kid at school grew up to be a celebrated banjo player.

Edward Dimendberg's monograph maps its trajectory, through seminal and lesser-known but revelatory projects, revealing an even-handed

distribution between prosaic architectural works (less discussed here) and bolder experiments made for art biennales, galleries and theatres. The chronological order allows him to bypass a degree of criticality – as would have been implicated by chapters on typology, politics and method. Nonetheless, each of the projects described by Dimendberg is pursued with rigour and concentration – the texts are insightful and beautifully written.

One is hard pressed to learn much about the key actors of Diller, Scofidio and Renfro either as people or as architects. The former is forgivable; happily the practice has long avoided a cult of personality, although Diller's prominence as a teacher at Princeton University and as a successful woman in architecture does bring a certain limelight. But with regards to the architecture, one cannot help but miss that part of the story. Dimendberg takes care to disclose his status as a film scholar and critic but his narrative often omits the juncture where ideas and images become buildings – before they are transmogrified back into images, as on these glossy pages, or perhaps on DS+R's beloved screens.

According to Dimendberg – DS+R continues the project of modernity in its pervasive handling of media and screen-based technology. Consider its *Slow House* not only as a machine for living, but as a mechanism for approaching a view. This project is a great one for making an argument for Dimendberg's focus on 'the image'. The *Slow House* drawings, held at New

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York's MoMA, show the view or image in multiple forms: the real view that orients the plan; the same view-as-image, framed by a picture window; the view becomes virtual – a video image transmitted to a monitor that hangs outside the picture window, perversely obscuring the real view. Even the view from the drive to the House itself is represented by an image pasted from a magazine.

Though Dimendberg draws astute comparison with Haus Rucker Co & Coop Himmelblau, certain American architects of the later 20th century have allowed theoretical reflection to drive production to a greater degree than their European materialist

cousins. Scofidio and Diller studied under the angsty tutelage of John Hejduk at the Cooper Union, and shades of predecessors such as Peter Eisenman and Bernard Tschumi can be found in their architecture, which often asserts itself in an agonistic attitude of conflict. Easy parallels can be drawn, for example, between Tschumi's work on violence and bondage, and Diller + Scofidio's *Pleasure/Pain mirror*, its *Master/Slave* installation at the *Fondation Cartier*, and the giant lips of *Soft Sell* in Times Square.

The continuous thread is an obsession with visual media as a tool for affecting human interaction. Sociopolitical concerns are exchanged in favour of the spectator, and in this light one starts to understand Dimendberg's preoccupation, shared by DS+R, for the image. *Architecture After Images* is less about an architecture that leaves images behind, rather one that arises from a profound fascination with their potency. Cultural paradigms are used with deadpan humour, as mass-media consumption is metamorphosed and shown back to us, in projects like the airport-based *Travelogues* installation, or *Facsimile*, in which real and staged footage of an office was projected on to the outside of a building blurring expectations of truth and fiction.

DS+R reach its most eloquent heights when transgressing the limits of architectural practice. So a highly articulate discussion of its work in terms of affect, culture and media, rather than in traditional plan and section, does not seem out of place. I can't wait for the movie.

»EXHIBITION

CAMERA OBSCURA

Galerie Camera Obscura, Paris

Until 11 May

[Review by Herbert Wright](#)

Right: Work by Shoji Ueda's work shows a surrealist tendency

This small exhibition that samples black-and-white works from four mid-20th-century photographers is not only magical, it also reveals four extraordinary minds that profoundly enriched the medium.

Lucien Hervé worked for many of the world's top architects in the Fifties. Here, we see some Le Corbusier work in France and Chandigarh, India, as well as pictures of Mogul-era Indian buildings. His *Chapelle de Ronchamp* (c1954) illustrates both well – a spatial drama that reveals the concrete's stains and cracks and the dark massing of the great roof eaves to give a sense of deep, monumental time.

Willy Ronis had a very different vision in his life-long affair with Paris and Provence, which earned him prizes and honours. His work is romantic – a woman silhouetted



below an impressionist evening sun as she runs across a Paris boulevard, lovers on a Bastille balcony above rooftops that fade to the distant *Notre Dame*, and mischievous boys beneath stairs on a *Belleville* street.

Harry Callahan, who worked in Chicago until 1961, had a rare urban eye. A man in suit and hat walking into the shadow of new Miesian building is about encountering modernism, while a 1958 night photo

of men at the junction of Wabash and Monroe, starkly lit and hurrying, is film noir. Callahan also experimented with his wife Eleanor: an out-of-focus silhouette of her and daughter melts into a semi-abstract shape Henry Moore would have been proud of.

From Shoji Ueda we see works from after post the Second World War. They show not just that there could be joy in the recently defeated Japan, but also his strong surrealist sense. He often staged people in the sand dunes of Tottori, his home prefecture, but his *Self Portrait with Balloon* (1949) is serious as well as playful – an almost Chaplinesque figure alone with the sky, his balloon on a string slightly indistinct, wanting to float away but held, perhaps like Ueda's thoughts.

Photography approaches the truth, but there is more to it than just visual record. A photograph is also a personal memory, a record created by a mind. These photographers are significant because the mind's eye of each, in different ways, saw a deep poetry or drama in the world, and captured it. This show is more than beautiful images.

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