

communicating forms are transparently generated by function yields buildings that only confirm that architectural language is culturally, not naturally constructed.

How are we to account for these transgressions against modernist principles? For Frey, one senses these are exceptional incidents in a generally dry, straightforward body of work. They perhaps represent Frey, the emigré outsider, struggling to come to terms with America's alien culture and landscape. He writes to Le Corbusier, "As I have settled in America I had to understand and accept the psychology of life here so not to be in constant conflict, and also in order to earn a living."

In the case of Nelson, the question of intentionality is more ambiguous. In his essay, Frampton includes a lengthy quotation in which Nelson enthusiastically describes Charreau's *Maison de Verre*: "purely aesthetic research has not been the aim, but curiously enough solely through technical research this house approaches Surrealist sculpture." In this quote, Nelson seems to suggest that reason in the end produces unreason. New programs and technology yield not the objective Euclidean forms of Le Corbusier, but unique forms that respond to the particular and the personal—to subjective, not only objective experience.

Despite their intentions, both Frey and Nelson help us to see modernism in a new light; not a simple monolithic tradition, but one whose premises were susceptible to multiple interpretations. More important, these monographs enable us to see the critique of modernist doctrine not as a postmodern phenomenon but rather as internal to the tradition of modernism itself.

ALBERT FREY, ARCHITECT, Joseph Rosa, Rizzoli, 1990, 160 pp., illus., \$29.95.

THE FILTER OF REASON: WORK OF PAUL NELSON, Terence Riley and Joseph Abram, editors, Rizzoli, 1990, 152 pp., illus., \$29.95.

Annmarie Adams

Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal

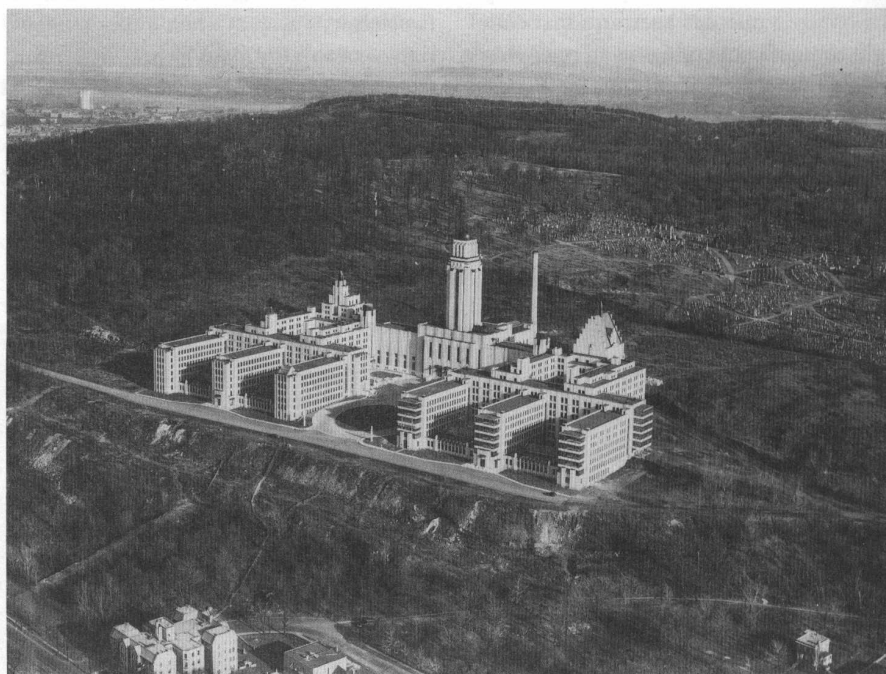
ISABELLE GOURNAY, EDITOR

By most accounts, "Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal" was a superb exhibition. Exploring the prolific career of one of Canada's most important 20th-century architects, the show occupied the main galleries of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montréal from May to October, 1990. Much more than a record of his major buildings—the best known are the University of Montréal (1924–43), the Supreme Court of Canada in Ottawa (1937–44), and his own house in Montréal (1930–31)—the exhibition lent real insight into Cormier the man; the requisite architectural sketches, presentation drawings, watercolors, and models were augmented by the architect's drawing and book-binding equipment, the sign hanging outside his Montréal office, volumes from his personal library, and photographs of the architect's friends and

colleagues, exploring far beyond Cormier's public life as "Architecte et Ingénieur."

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition, edited by Isabelle Gournay, has a much narrower view of Cormier. Six brief essays explore the aesthetic, social, cultural, and political contexts of a single commission: the University of Montréal. The catalogue is lavishly illustrated with material drawn from the Fonds Cormier, the extensive archive that also supplied most of the material for the exhibition. It was acquired by the CCA from Cormier's widow following his death in 1980. The series of contemporary color photographs of the University of Montréal by Gabor Szilasi, commissioned by the CCA to complement the historical material and the focus of a smaller, simultaneous exhibition, is also included in the catalogue.

The interpretation of Cormier's career by focusing on a single project is not unreasonable. The commission for the new University of Montréal was enormous, occupying Cormier for nearly two decades. A vast ensemble of Ohio-brick pavilions arranged symmetrically about a



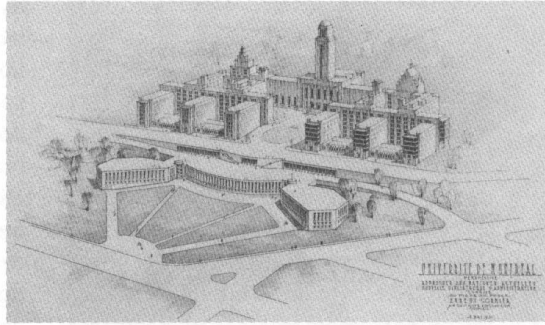
Aerial view of the principal pavilion, Université de Montréal; Ernest Cormier, architect and engineer, 1927–1943. (Courtesy of the Canadian Center for Architecture, Montréal.)

grand axis, it is located on a conspicuous and prestigious site in Montréal on the north slope of Mount Royal, for which the city is named. Its construction in 1928 marked years of reform in French Catholic higher education in Québec. Its “modernity” and carefully-orchestrated attitude to the tradition of American campus planning and to the city of Montréal was intended to express the independence and conviction of French intellectual interests in what was then Canada’s largest city.

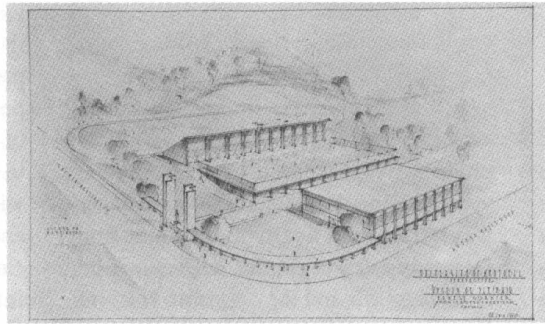
The essays in *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* explore this fascinating project from several perspectives, charting the complex relationship of a Montréal architect, recently returned from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and a powerful Québec institution, eager to utilize monumental architecture to ensure its unique place in Montréal and North America. Cormier’s education and early career, as well as an architectural analysis of Cormier’s design for the campus, are covered in sections by Gournay. The Cormier archive, the history of the University of Montréal, architectural practice in the 1920s, and Cormier’s combined backgrounds as engineer and architect are the subjects of the other essays in the book.

From this perspective, *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* follows a fairly traditional approach to an architect’s career by focusing on a single “masterwork” and extrapolating from it, in increasingly broad strokes, to include the architect’s immediate working environment, his other commissions, and finally the international architectural context in which he worked. Pierson and Jordy’s multivolume series, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, is perhaps the finest example of this genre, in which the authors construct a survey of the American built environment from a selected list of well-known buildings.

Using a similar methodology, the au-



Aerial perspective of the campus with proposed new library and administrative offices; Ernest Cormier, 1961. (From *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*.)



Aerial perspective of the sports facilities; Ernest Cormier, 1960. (From *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*.)

thors of *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal* position the Canadian architect with confidence in a “Montréal-Paris-New York architectural triangle.” Indeed, architectural “style” is used throughout the book as a measure of architectural influence. A combination of French academic traditions and North American modernism, claims Gournay, “marks the entry of Québec and Canadian architecture, too often categorized as ‘colonial,’ into a new era.” Phyllis Lambert, Director of the CCA, asserts in her essay on the archive that the university “transcends questions of style” in its synthesis of North American scale, Beaux-Arts planning, and a French taste for engineering. Not surprisingly, given this rather orthodox view of architectural style, the book is replete with precedents for the building, ranging from John Galen Howard’s plan for UC Berkeley to Eliel Saarinen’s Helsinki railway station.

The three essays focusing on the social

context of Cormier’s career enrich the architectural analyses tremendously. Particularly insightful is Yves Deschamps’s essay on the relationship between the architectural and engineering professions in Québec. He argues that Cormier’s dual qualifications allowed him “entry to two cultures,” rather than representing a conflict or overlap in the two professions, and shows how the architect marketed his background to attract clients.

Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal is an outstanding addition to the history of Canadian architecture. The quality of the reproductions is superb and the format of the book—thematic, rather than chronological or biographical—is refreshing. In a field comprised almost exclusively of monographs, however, it could only have improved with comparative social and historical perspectives. The authors’ emphasis on Cormier’s “unique” training and background is misleading; many American architects com-

bined precisely the same interests as Cormier. Julia Morgan, for example, was also educated as an engineer and studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Like Cormier, she insisted on working alone and also kept a small office. Gournay seems unaware of the diversity of working methods employed by American architects. “Cormier organized his office more along French lines,” she says, “unlike North American architects’ offices churning out plans, his never had more than ten employees.” Perhaps there is a connection between architects’ backgrounds and the subsequent pattern of their careers. These missed opportunities for instructive comparisons serve only to illuminate the dangers of the “monograph” drawn from a single—albeit extensive—archive; such comparisons would not only have enriched our understanding of Cormier’s career, but also dispelled the pervasive myth that the eclectic mode employed by architects like

Morgan, Bernard Maybeck, and many others who attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts represented a particularly "American" way of working.

The book's dependence on a single archive and its seeming independence from many relevant secondary sources have also left several fundamental questions unanswered. It was rare for Canadians to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, as several authors point out, while it was fashionable for American architects to attend the famous French school. Obviously French Canadians had fewer language barriers than Americans as students in Paris. What does this say about the architectural profession in Montréal or in Canada? Again, secondary sources concerning the history of architectural education may have shed new light on Cormier in this regard. Gournay claims in the introduction that the book is the first "scientific" work on Cormier. Comprehensive and rigorous, it is; unlike the work of scientists, however, it appears to have been conceived in relative isolation, failing as it does to build on the work of other scholars.

Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal is as much a reflection of its time as Cormier was himself. The architecture of the campus has been recently "rediscovered," like inter-war architecture everywhere, but infused with new political fervor. As Québec ponders separation from the rest of Canada in 1992, the University of Montréal has become, once again, an important symbol of the strength and independence of Québec. Its construction was a major achievement in the history of education in Québec; its architecture marked its special relationship to North America and France. *Ernest Cormier and the Université de Montréal*, available in French and English, is a potent reminder of the power of the present to direct the ways we interpret the past.

ERNEST CORMIER AND THE UNIVERSITE DE MONTREAL, Isabelle Gournay, editor, Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1990, 179 pp., illus. \$29.95. [The French edition is titled *Ernest Cormier et l'Université de Montréal*.]

Gregory Herman

Architects of Fortune

ELAINE S. HOCHMAN

Among the revisionist analyses, reviews, and monographs that have appeared since the 1986 centennial of Mies's birth, Elaine S. Hochman's biographical account, *Architects of Fortune: Mies van der Rohe and the Third Reich*, contains the only extended exploration of the circumstances surrounding Mies's final years in Germany, and his response to, and co-operation with, the demands of the Third Reich. Unfolding a well-researched drama, Hochman traces the development of Mies's character from neophyte artist-architect, into his striving years guiding the Bauhaus through uncertain terrain, and finally to his flight from Germany, after a protracted face-off between himself and the opposing Nazi politico-tastemakers.

Yet Hochman has no difficulty finding direct and irrefutable contact between Mies and Reich groups. Allegations are neatly proven through surprisingly obvious sources; a letter appearing in the pro-Hitler newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* encouraging support for Hitler is clearly signed by Mies and several other sympathetic cultural contemporaries. But given Mies's acknowledged and time-justified status in architectural history, and the fact that his relationship with the Third Reich was insubstantial relative to the roles played by committed Nazi architects such as Albert Speer or Paul Troost, why is it now important to explore his relationship with the Third Reich, and why has this never been considered before? Historically, seldom has the moral-

ity or provenance of Mies's work (or the work of any other architect), been questioned; the influence and look of Mies has become a de facto element of the 20th-century urban environment. For architecture in general, time and transformation allow a separation of form from intended meaning and politics. Hochman, however, reminds us that Mies's work and his openness to moral compromise in the name of continued practise and high art must not be separated or de-politicised, despite the documented diversions of Mies or his apologists. The reader is left with a sense of the irony resulting from the simplicity and purity of Mies's idiom, paired with the complexity of his own personal morality. The crucial importance of Hochman's work may lie in its mission to instate a consciousness of Mies's unwillingness to protest National Socialism, and to give all of us pause to at least consider inherent meanings in architectural form. Hochman's effect, intended or not, may aid the enrichment of current architectural form through a negative process,



Newspaper article concerning the police search and closing of the Berlin Bauhaus on April 11, 1933, appearing in the *Lokal-Anzeiger* (Berlin) on April 11, 1933. (From *Architects of Fortune*.)