

resolution. Compare this essay with Treuttner's contribution, where the imaginary curators debate the interpretation of three history paintings, which presents the dilemma of representation as a dilemma in scholarship, not in public opinion polls, petty politics or media frenzy.

Those of us interested in material culture, and the dilemmas to be faced when moving from object to information to ideas, should make special note of this book. The Hope Diamond story, or the curatorial issues surrounding the accessioning of The Woolworth Lunch Counter as an icon of the Civil Rights movement,

provide us with (no pun intended) food for thought. Reading these accounts of curatorial research at the Smithsonian Institution and enjoying the wealth of documentation brought to surround an artifact, a work of art or a collection is sumptuous feasting. Along with the praise we may give the curator/authors I suspect there will be envy. The privilege of the authority, the time and the resources to do the curator's job well is much too rare in our Canadian museum community. A few hours with *Exhibiting Dilemmas* should cause hunger cramps for most of the curators I know today.

Peter W. Williams, *Houses of God: Region, Religion and Architecture in the United States*

PAUL NATHANSON

Williams, Peter W. *Houses of God: Region, Religion and Architecture in the United States*. Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 1997. 321 pp., 105 illus. Cloth, US\$34.95, ISBN 0-252-01906-7.

In *Houses of God*, Peter Williams provides a regional and historical survey of American religious architecture. He divides the United States into seven regions, what he calls "cultural hearths." One chapter is devoted to each of the following: New England; the Mid-Atlantic states; the South; the Old Northwest; the Great Plains and Mountains; the Spanish Borderlands; and the Pacific Rim. Each, presumably, can be defined by at least one distinctive style (or a distinctive stylistic variant) originating in at least one distinctive religious or ethnic tradition.

The organization of this book has one major advantage: geographical comprehensiveness. Some authors would stop there. But Williams adds another kind of comprehensiveness. He is very careful to note the "diversity" and "pluralism" of American religious and art history. Unlike many other books of this kind, he gives Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and other non-Christians their due. (It could be argued that his title is not inclusive, though, because neither synagogues nor most Protestant churches can be described, at least technically, in connection with the *domus dei*.) But the organization of this book has one major disadvantage, too. That requires some explanation.

As Williams himself points out, some regions have been much less distinctive and influential than others. With a few exceptions (due to the historical presence of the Spanish in Arizona and New Mexico, the Russians in Alaska, the Mormons in Utah, and, more recently, the Buddhists in Hawaii and California) western religious architecture was simply brought there by eastern migrants and modified slightly according to local needs and resources. Although these migrants came from homogeneous communities, they settled in what became very heterogeneous ones. The religious architecture of these could be described, therefore, as "some of this and some of that." As a result, most sections of this book dealing with western regions are somewhat less satisfying than those dealing with eastern regions. (By far the best chapters are those on New England and the South.) The organizational principle simply makes less sense when applied to the west, in other words, than when applied to the east. Williams might have used some other organizing principle for his book. He might have used five or six types of religious architecture, for example, or five or six types of religion, for that matter.

Williams is at his best when dealing with specifics. Most fascinating of all is his discussion of the New England meetinghouse and its transformation, as an "iconic" building type, to suit the needs of people far removed in time, place, and even spirit from those who first built them.

There are a few errors. The editor should have found some of these. On page 210, for instance, we read about "climactic" circumstances (instead of climatic ones). On page 159 Williams discusses some churches that still exist. But then, in the very next line, he mentions that one of them was demolished in 1891. On page 176 we read that "Jewish residential patterns ... followed those of other cities, with a massive outflux into the northwestern suburbs [of Detroit] culminating with the urban riots of 1967." The (no doubt unintended) implication is that Jewish migration patterns led directly to or even caused the riots (in which Jews themselves did not participate). The author himself could have avoided other errors. On page 174 he writes that Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College was "the

first rabbinical seminary in the United States." Actually, it was the first *Reform* rabbinical seminary; the Orthodox had been training their own rabbis at smaller and more informal *yeshivot* for generations.

According to the blurb, this book is "beautifully illustrated." Would that it were so. Even though some illustrations are indeed by famous photographers (such as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange), they are not beautifully reproduced; some of them are too murky, in fact, to be of much use. But that can hardly be blamed on Williams. In any case, he has provided lengthy bibliographies for every chapter, an index of personal names, and — even more useful for art historians — an index of structures. I strongly recommend this book for college and public libraries.

Michael Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on Public Memory*

PHILIP V. SCARPINO

Wallace, Michael. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on Public Memory*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996. 336 pp., 16 illus. Paper, US\$22.95, ISBN 1-56639-445-7.

Michael Wallace has had a notable and productive career as an observer and critic of the role of history in American culture. Heretofore, most of his publications have appeared in article-length pieces scattered in a variety of journals and edited volumes. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on Public Memory* pulls together and presents a rich smorgasbord of Wallace's work, published and presented at conferences over a fifteen-year period. His examination of attitudes towards the past, of why people remember and why they forget, and of the relationship between past and present plays out in a language of struggle; his are stories of skirmishes, wars, combat, firefights, disputes, and attacks. Much of this conflict, he asserts, "has taken place outside academia, on the terrain now known as Public History" (p. xi). This volume, which is part of a series, *Critical Perspectives on the Past*, edited by Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig, deserves a wide readership among people interested in the interplay between public scholarship and material culture.

Most of the selections in *Mickey Mouse History* deal in a substantial way with the public interpretation of material culture. Thomas Schlereth often uses a definition of material culture coined by archaeologist James Dietz: "that segment of man's physical environment which is purposely shaped by him according to culturally dictated plans." Wallace engages the culturally dictated plans embedded in material culture and the cultural conflicts that characterize the public interpretation of material heritage in the present. He is an advocate and an activist; his examination of history in the public arena employs a model of analysis that blends hegemony theory with more traditional Marxism. Thus, Wallace is critical of the influence of capitalism and corporations and right-wing politicians, and he champions history that gives voice to the perspectives of working people, minorities, women, and other under represented groups. All of us make sense of the past through the prism of our own cultures and in the context of our personal experiences and ideological outlooks. Michael Wallace is a bit more transparent and honest about that than many professional historians, a fact that in the end adds depth and commitment to his narrative.

Following an Introduction titled "Battlefields of Memory," *Mickey Mouse History* is divided