

Climatic Effects: Architecture, Media, and the Globalization of the International Style

Daniel A. Barber

Architects have long had an interest in the relationship between their design interventions and surrounding climatic conditions. Concerns over site, orientation to the sun, and the relationship of materials with heat and humidity are all embedded in vernacular design traditions, and have been essential to the provision of human shelter for centuries. With the emergence of modern architectural techniques beginning in the nineteenth century, the relationship of a building with its climate, and the figuration of this relationship, underwent significant transformation.

The Nature of the Image documents and analyzes the robust and dynamic discourse around climate that developed as part of architecture's modernization and became the focus of many practices and pedagogies by the 1940s and 1950s. The postwar years saw extensive experimentation in how architectural practices could project buildings with a more precise relationship with their surrounding ecological conditions—in the efficiency of production, in the use of solar power, and, the primary subject of this book, in the alignment of the form, orientation, and materials of a building to its climate. As part of these new methods, forms of representation were developed that sought to clarify the possible social, material, and economic relationships that could result. It was through these images, as much as through the buildings that were constructed, that design methods sought to conceptualize new relationships and encourage new ideas about how to live. The drawings, diagrams, and photographs produced in this methodological discourse, quasi-technical in nature, led to new parameters for how architecture could operate in the social milieu, and also encouraged design professionals to consider new criteria for their designs.

The Nature of the Image establishes that visual and technical strategies to consider relationships of architecture with climate not only had an impact on the profession, they were also essential to a broader understanding of how economies and ecologies interact. The way in which we conceive of, imagine, and represent the relationship between humans and the environment was seen as central to the social patterns, material conditions, and professional processes that allow us to live comfortably within it. Architecture became a primary discursive site through which discussions about the environment could take place. The images, concepts, and buildings developed from these methodological discussions simultaneously allowed for productive engagement between architecture and adjacent fields, and also emphasized the importance of research to architectural innovation.

The architecture profession is currently undergoing a very interesting transformation. Many assumptions that have guided innovation in the field—in particular, the use of digital platforms for the production of novel form—are beginning to be questioned by practitioners, students, and scholars. An important goal of *The Nature of the Image* is to substantiate an alternative history for the field, one that is focused on careful attention to environmental patterns, and on architecture as a means to interrogate and adjust the place of the human within these patterns. This book thereby intends to contribute to emergent scholarship, in architecture and other fields, that reframes the past in order to reconsider parameters for action in the present.