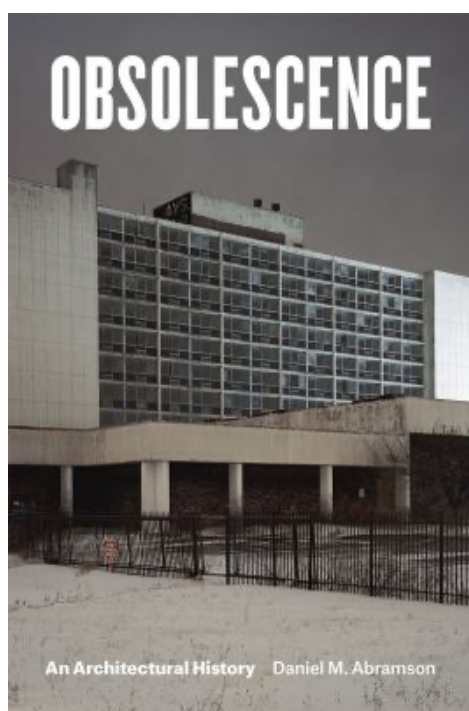


Obsolescence: An Architectural History

by Daniel M. Abramson. University of Chicago Press, March 2016. 192 p. ill. ISBN 9780226313450 (cl.), \$35.00.

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The construction industry of the early-twentieth century saw an unprecedented acceleration fueled not only by technological improvements but also by expectations of new levels of profitability in tune with capitalism. Just as consumerism encouraged acquiring more and newer goods, it also encouraged the relentless destruction and construction of buildings. In the quest for higher profits, the real estate industry deftly introduced the idea of obsolescence in architecture and successfully lobbied to revise the tax code to benefit their interests through rapid building depreciation. The obsolescence paradigm also reached the built environment at a macro scale within a few decades when the idea was adapted by urban planners and developers in order to declare whole neighborhoods and even cities obsolete.

The invention of obsolescence in real estate and its adoption into the urban realm occupy the first two chapters of *Obsolescence: An Architectural History*.

They serve as departure points for a century-long journey in which architectural historian Daniel Abramson takes us through the rise and fall not only of obsolescence but also of sustainability as they pertain to architecture.

Divided into six chapters, the two middle chapters expand their geographical scope outside of the US while focusing on architects' responses between the interwar years and into the 1960s. Abramson loosely groups these responses into two camps: those who saw the promise of obsolescence and embraced it and those who attempted to fix it. Representing a wide range of approaches, built and unbuilt projects are discussed including iconic works by Cedric Price, Piano + Rogers, Mies van der Rohe, and the Japanese Metabolists. The last two chapters

address, with a keenly critical eye, adaptive reuse, the preservation movement, sustainability, and what may come after it.

Abramson does an excellent job in structuring his work and making his arguments in such a way that directly connects architecture and its social, political, cultural, and economic circumstances. By starting outside of architecture, he provides context to the wide range of architectural movements that we have seen in the last 100 years while also successfully making evident that architecture is, in fact, a clear manifestation of its environment. His conclusion invites careful and critical examination of the past and present with full awareness of the unpredictability of the future.

Thoroughly researched, well indexed, and supported by copious notes and black and white illustrations, this brief 156 page volume offers compelling and thought-provoking arguments that make it well worth reading. Written for the architectural history community, Abramson's clear and straightforward language will also make *Obsolescence* a relevant and accessible read for those interested in the development of real estate, urban planning, and historic preservation.