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Lewis Arnold. *An Early Encounter with Tomorrow: Europeans, Chicago's Loop and the World's Columbian Exposition.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997. xv + 353 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02305-7.

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Arnold Lewis' purpose is to analyse the shock Europeans felt when visiting Chicago towards the end of the last century. His interest is motivated by the painfulness of the encounter between what the future, as embodied in Chicago, was and what these travellers thought the future was going to be. Despite focusing his attention most specifically on architects, Lewis makes use of accounts of all kinds of visitors, from mere tourists to engineers, journalists and writers.

In the first part ("Chicago: Laboratory of the Future"), A. Lewis describes altogether the reality of Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century and the reactions of foreign visitors to American life, to Chicago, and especially to its business district, the Loop, which was considered as the quintessence of American modernity.

He begins (Chapter One, "Prophetic Encounter with Modernity") by describing how the vision of Chicago evolved. In mid-nineteenth century Chicago was described as a frontier town. By 1865 it was considered as a major regional center. Towards 1870, Europeans mainly noticed the quickness with which projects were completed in Chicago and the readiness of its inhabitants to undertake seemingly impossible tasks. By 1890, Europeans began to consider America as a world of economic competition and barbarism, and to point out its lack of cultural life. After noticing foreign observers were conscious of the failures of Chicago, A. Lewis describes those failures (Chapter Two, "Disquieting manifestation of urbanism"), as the pollution of the River and the smoke. Visitors explained these nuisances by the fact that Chicago's growth was guided by the greed for money, and followed no definite plan.

In the third chapter ("The urban transformation of time and tempo"), Lewis focuses on the specificity of urban rhythm in Chicago and on the foreigners' perception and understanding of it. The open concern of Chicagoans for business struck visitors, who saw the close link between earning money and saving time. Foreigners were also impressed by the time-saving proceedings in indus-

try and in construction. European architects were both fascinated and worried by the time-saving organisation in big architectural offices, praising its efficiency, but also fearing that architecture would be turned from an art into a mere trade. Visitors noticed that the concentration of activities in the Loop brought efficiency, but they considered that as a city center the Loop was a failure. They branded its lack of elegance and its dangers, caused by tall buildings, its great number of building sites and large concentration of people and cars. Europeans were also struck by Chicagoans' indifference to accidents and some understood that high profits were linked with a devaluation of life.

In the fourth chapter ("Historicism and Innovation"), Lewis makes a comparison between American and European attitudes towards the past. Chicagoans were proud of the suddenness of their city's development and felt no need to study the past, while Europeans complained about a lack of curiosity of Chicago inhabitants and officials, as the latter did not express any need for the lessons of Old World cities. The strongest criticisms came from non-specialists who shared the old European conception of the past as a segment of time separated from the present, offering knowledge that was useful to cope with present needs (while the Americans perceived time as a flux).

American anti-historicism also had its enthusiastic admirers: businessmen, engineers, social scientists, and, to a lesser extent, architects, who praised U.S. technology but were less convinced by the artistic quality of its achievements. The reluctance diminished from the 1870s to the 1890s, as European architects celebrated their colleagues' independence from obsolete rules. European architects' evaluation, however, remained conflicted. In the Loop, architects working under the pressure of fast changing conditions produced an architecture that Europeans had not been taught to respect. Americans were also prone to adopt whatever innovation brought comfort or efficiency, while Europeans lamented the loss of

human contacts, the subjugation of man to machine and the threat to good manners implied by changes. The belief that, in a period of quick changes, the effectiveness of a new solution would be of a short duration also induced American architects to build light buildings, the soundness of which Europeans questioned.

The beginning of the 1890s is the period when Chicago was most famous in Europe, being perceived as a laboratory where what European future would be tested. In the second part, "Chicago: Modernity Materialized," Lewis focuses more precisely on architecture: how did Europeans react to the Loop, to the residential suburbs, and eventually to the International Exposition in 1893?

In the fifth chapter ("Discovering Chicago's Architecture"), Lewis explains that the interest European architects began to pay to America in the mid 1880s resulted from the crises of European architecture. European architects considered that American professionals' strength lay in its efficiency when dealing with practical issues, while they lacked artistic sense. However, the anti-historicism of American functional architecture was more and more approved in Europe as time went by. "Chicago Construction" caught European architects off-guard. They felt that a major change in architecture was in store, but their information was slender. This explains the inaccuracies and tendency to exaggeration of a lot of accounts before 1893. Europeans were more prone to ask for a change and to be laudatory about American architecture than to accept skyscrapers in their own cities.

In the following chapters (Chapter Six, "The Uniqueness of the Loop" and Chapter Seven, "The Domain of Women"), A. Lewis analyses the perception of what was considered most typical of Chicago (the Loop and the suburban residential areas) by the foreigners who visited Chicago on the occasion of the 1893 International Exposition. What impressed observers most was that everything in the Loop was designed to serve capitalism. Europeans were struck by the number and density of people in the streets, moving orderly according to the "rhythm of the metropolis." They felt uneasy in this crowd, in which each member followed his or her own purpose without paying any attention to others. Observers also noticed the responsibilities Chicagoans assumed: they were responsible for their own security in dangerous streets and it was considered normal for anybody to step into buildings without being checked at the entrance. This freedom astonished foreigners. In buildings, Europeans felt as awkward as in the streets: what the public did there would have been performed by clerks in Europe. However, the main discovery made by Europeans concerned

the buildings in the Loop: they realised that electricity, central heating, elevators and such devices as telephones or writing-machines tended to create offices where the atmosphere was not hectic but rational, people and machines working together. The architecture of office buildings was perceived as an expression of American genius, entirely devoted to business.

Visitors wondered if the Loop's employees could recover their individuality at the end of the day. Information about suburban family homes helped them to understand how businessmen could cope with their work in the Loop. The visitors' perception of suburban Chicago focused on several themes: the dual life of business people, the importance of home ownership, the suburb as an expression of middle- and upper-class social confidence and the rising influence of women. Visitors were pleased with the residential areas of Chicago. Opening new streets miles away from the center was considered wise. The detached house was praised. However, Europeans were unpleasantly surprised by the confidence everybody seemed to place in their neighbors, a confidence visible in the absence of separation between gardens. Europeans had long noticed the respect paid to women in America and their influence within their homes. At the beginning of the 1890s, they also began to notice the influence of middle- and upper-class women in cultural life.

In the eighth chapter ("The World's Columbian Exposition"), Lewis analyses the reactions toward the Exposition. Europeans expected Chicagoans to design audacious Exposition halls, typical of the designers of the Loop. When the projects were made known, European architects felt betrayed: the buildings did not reflect Chicagoan genius, because their designers looked back on history for inspiration. Some critics approved architects for having become wiser while others lamented the loss of their independence. The former thought Americans had evolved: no longer a rough people submitted to bare necessity, they could now appreciate refinement. The latter considered Americans were not self-confident enough to avoid European models when they wanted to be artists. However, visitors, architects as well as laymen, were stunned by the optical splendor of the Exposition grounds, known as the "White City." Nevertheless, on second thought, architects reflected that the White City acted more as a scenery than as a set of convenient buildings for a show of industrial activities. They became more and more severe as time passed, because the dazzling visual impression caused by the White City faded. European architects were interested in American architecture mainly because it could be used to fight their own

national architectures' historicism, which explains their disappointment. In a way, the Exposition destroyed the myth of an isolated U.S. functional architectural art.

In the last chapter ("International Implications of the Loop's Architecture), A. Lewis analyses the uses of the Loop in architectural debates in Europe. By 1890, the responsible Chicago architect, answering his profit-orientated clients' demands, was praised by Europeans, who pointed out Chicagoan architecture's openness to scientific progress and purposefulness, basic principles which Old World- architects had forgotten. Europeans, who argued that new conditions required a new architecture, used the Loop as an example. The Loop led to a questioning about the role of architects: had they to surrender their moral authority? What did teamwork with engineers imply? Visiting the Loop rendered European critics less pessimistic about the new architect's role, but they failed to see this role was changing without being reduced; architects having to coordinate more and more complex projects. Accepting purposefulness, European architects did not abandon the cause of art. A minority wanted street fronts to be left bare, in order to emphasize the major characteristic of skyscrapers (their size), but the majority thought designers should compose the street fronts in order to reduce the impression of height. The Loop helped European architects to renew their debates. Even those who resisted the definition of architecture as the adaptation of means to purpose, without any direct reference to artistic or moral aspirations had to take into account its existence.

Arnold Lewis' book is attractive, documented and richly illustrated, but the author tends to limit himself to an analysis of discourses. For example, only sometimes does Lewis relate the commentaries about Chicago that he mentions with the national or professional background of their authors (there is a copious and useful biographical appendix), but he does not do it systematically. However, some of A. Lewis' analyses are very con-

vincing: for instance, when he studies the commentaries of European architects on "Chicago construction", he explains how a legend-attributing the birth of the skeleton system to a single individual, the Minneapolis architect Buffington,-developed, based upon untruths which were repeated, by means of quotations and cross-quotations, from article to article.

The reports about the opinions of nineteenth-century visitors are often blended with reports about facts concerning Chicago at the time, but observed from another point of view: that of the present day historian. The equivocation between facts and what Europeans observers perceived could not be avoided: it is impossible to analyse perceptions without reporting what is perceived. It would not create any problem if the author did not refer to a theory about the city developed by American social scientists in the beginning of twentieth century, to interpret urban phenomena as they developed in big American cities and especially in Chicago.

According to Lewis, what made life in Chicago specific was the vast number of disordered stimuli to which people were subjected (Chapter Three, "the Urban Transformation of Time and Tempo"). We can trace this assertion back to Louis Wirth's "urban culture" (Louis Wirth, "Urbanism as a way of Life", *The American Journal of Sociology*, July 1938). This notion has long been considered critically: for instance, according to Ulf Hannerz (*Exploring the City*, Columbia University Press, 1980), Louis Wirth's conception of urban/industrial societies, as opposed to rural/traditional ones, resorts more to a common sense about societies (which includes Durkheim's opposition of mechanical solidarity and the organic !) than to scientific concepts based on observation. But, after all, this is a basic problem of urban studies.

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