

Inside

Leader 8

Letters 8

Concrete Boots 9

Culture 18

Ian Martin 28



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BUILDING DESIGN

Picture perfect:
Should the RIBA
Drawings
Collection be more
selective?

10

Making a splash:
Acanthus
Ferguson Mann's
minimalist flats on
Plymouth harbour

16

Founded on notions of site specificity and permanence, conventional architectural practice finds great difficulty adapting its thinking and ways of working to the fast-moving changes that continue to overtake society in these first years of the 21st century.

But is this a new phenomenon or simply part of the historical continuum? Reading *ROAM: Reader on the Aesthetics of Mobility* should shatter any wavering doubts on the subject. Rapid expansion in the means of communication and mobility has far-reaching implications for architects. The profession will have to become seriously involved in the debate if it is to have any significant role in the way workplaces, homes and cities are planned in the future.

As in the early part of the 20th century, a great deal of recent international architectural investigation (as shown at this year's Rotterdam Architecture Biennale) has focused on issues of mobility and our apparent ability to exist in more than one place at a time.

Almost 100 years ago, Cubists such as Braque, Gris and Picasso developed their art around the possibility of simultaneous perception of objects and spaces, while the architectural fraternity led by Le Corbusier more literally used images from the then newer forms of transportation – steamships, aeroplanes and automobiles – to inform their designs.

The similarities in process between then and now are fascinating given the vastly different scale of the challenge today and, in selecting from the work of architects, artists, photographers, cultural theorists and philosophers to provide the contents of *ROAM*, the editor, Anthony Hoete, presents a wide-ranging survey of current thinking.

Scattered like seeds through the book's 336 pages are an astonishing amount of thought-provoking statistics and nuggets of information: 60 million vehicles in 1950, 350 million by 2000, or one vehicle per person for 9 per cent of the

Moving targets

ROAM successfully introduces the complicated dynamic between mobility and architecture, says Peter Wilson



Leidsche Rijn project for Utrecht by Monolab creates a vehicle-free city centre.

world's population; from 1960-2000 the use of mobile handsets grew from zero to 722 million worldwide (it is now 1.03 billion and rising); more than 1.5 billion people have flown a cumulative distance of 240 billion km since the first powered flight by the Wright

Brothers in 1903; modern aviation appeared in the same year as cinematography, a medium that has transformed human perceptions of space and time.

Comprehension of the implications of ever-increasing levels of mobility and communication is

very much a moving target and there is undoubtedly a massive intellectual challenge to be grasped before valid large-scale design solutions can emerge. *ROAM* makes considerable efforts to help in this respect, offering definitions of many unusual terms (eg "non-place", "linescapes") and, in its overall review of the transition from mechanised to digital technologies, provides some stimulating preliminary investigation into the impact this has on our daily lives and the ways in which we perceive and conceive buildings and cities.

There is no doubt that this is an important – albeit deceptive and sometimes frustrating – anthology for architects to read. Deceptive because its claims to unconventionality lie in a graphic design style intended to communicate, but one that in the end merely irritates. Frustrating because more frequently than not its visual content adds little to the fascinating connections made in the text. And crucial because the profession needs to recognise and address the questions presented by the rapidity of every aspect of modern life.

New and genuinely visionary responses are required to the 21st century's most dynamic architectural challenge, and dipping into *ROAM* should stimulate some creative thinking about the subject.

ROAM: Reader on the Aesthetics of Mobility, ed Anthony Hoete. Black Dog Publishing, 336pp. £19.95.