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# Book review

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## Book Reviews

### **Back from Utopia: The Challenge of the Modern Movement**

Hubert-Jan Henket & Hilde Heynen (Eds)

*Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 2002, 412 pp., €37.50 pb, ISBN 90 6450 483 0*

This book has now been published for some two years and it is surprising that, given its subject, contributors and wealth of detail, it is not better known. It was conceived after Hubert-Jan Henket, as founding Chairman, departed from DOCOMOMO (DOcumentation and CONservation of buildings, sites and neighbourhoods of the MODern MOVement). The book reflects this organization's interests in the Modernist built environment and so will appeal to architects and students of architecture. However, as the authors critically discuss the values and flaws of the Modern Movement, some of its multiple manifestations, the promises it did and did

not keep and its inherent paradoxes, it will have a wider appeal. It is not just an illustrated retrospective, although it does contain close to 100 photographs, drawings and illustrations. It also is not merely an academic tome, even if many of the essays are written in a referenced academic style.

Henket was assisted as editor by the Belgian art historian Hilde Heynen and they were able to obtain contributions from 43 international authors. Many are academics, but others include practising architects, urban designers, planners and historians. Some of the names will be familiar to a wider audience, notably Norman Foster, Oscar Niemeyer and Tadao Ando. However, the less well known are clearly respected in their own fields. All of the authors were asked to focus on the same three questions: does the Modern Movement have meaning today and can we learn anything from it for the future, then, should we conserve anything from the movement and, if so, what and how? Their contributions were then arranged into five sections: values of the movement today, its multiple manifestations, questions of colonialism, critical voices and paradoxes of history and conservation. Although most of the contributions are academic or personal essays, there is a variety of other approaches, including cartoon, poetry and images.

There is a general consensus among the authors that the Modern Movement belongs to the past. Those few, such as Norman Foster, Harry Seidler, Tadao Ando and Herman Hertzberger, who in the first section defend the values of the Modern Movement for the future, do realize that its approach is not widely supported today. John Allan argues that we at least can learn from Modernism by facing the future in a search for rationality and progress. Kenneth Frampton suggests that the tradition of modern architecture as a critical culture would help resist both superficial populism and indulgence in the spectacular.

The Modern Movement aimed at internationalism, but its inception and reception varied depending on political context, social condition and cultural needs. These

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