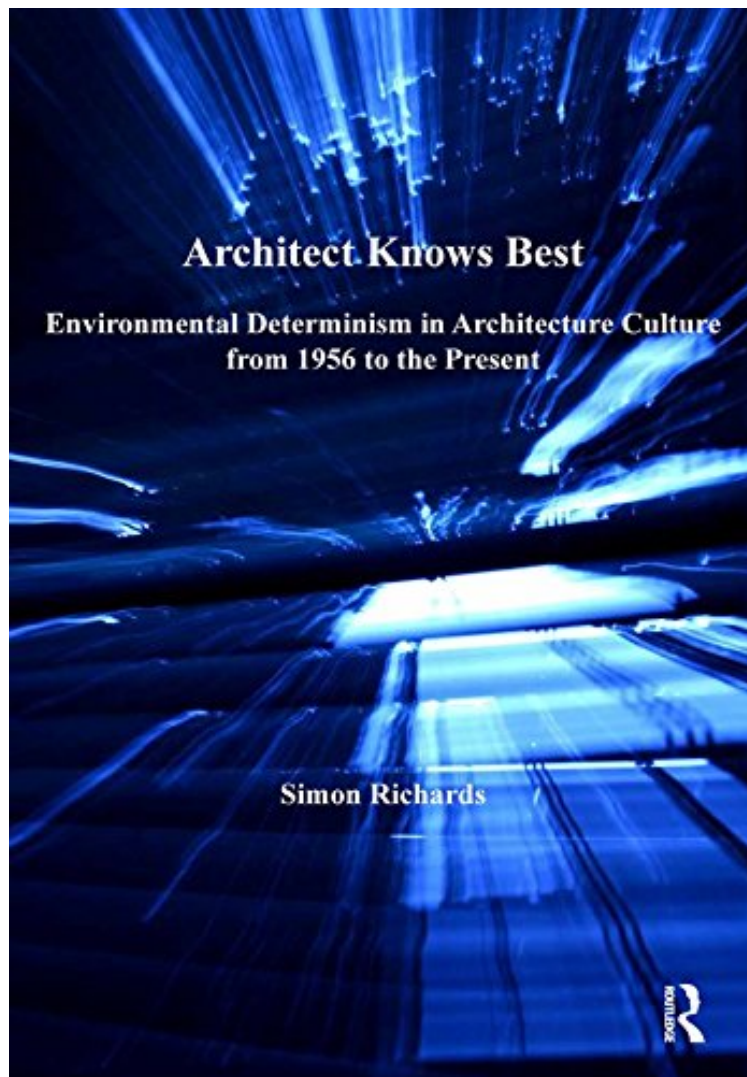


(Ebook pdf) Architect Knows Best: Environmental Determinism in Architecture Culture from 1956 to the Present (Ashgate Studies in Architecture)

## Architect Knows Best: Environmental Determinism in Architecture Culture from 1956 to the Present (Ashgate Studies in Architecture)

*Simon Richards*

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**Simon Richards : Architect Knows Best: Environmental Determinism in Architecture Culture from 1956 to the Present (Ashgate Studies in Architecture)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Architect Knows Best: Environmental Determinism in Architecture Culture from 1956 to the Present (Ashgate Studies in Architecture):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A good overviewBy A. FinemanFor an academic book, this book was surprisingly unborng and not too dense. I enjoyed it a lot. It gives a nuanced view of the different strains of

architectural thought during the postmodern period.

The idea that buildings could be used to reform human behaviour and improve society was fundamental to the 'modernist' architecture and planning of people like Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier and Joseacute; Luis Sert in the first half of the 20th century. Their proposals for functional zoning, multi-level transport, high-rise living, and machine-inspired aesthetics came under attack from the 1950s onwards, and many alternative approaches to architecture and planning emerged. It was thought that the environmental determinist strand of the discourse was killed off at this time as well. This book argues that it was not, but on the contrary, that it has deepened and diversified. Many of the most prominent architect-planners continue to design with a view to improving the behaviour of individual people and of society at large. By looking at - and interviewing - major figures and movements of recent years in Britain, Europe and America, including Leacute;on Krier, Peter Eisenman, Andreacute;s Duany, Jane Jacobs, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, it demonstrates the myriad ways that architect-planners seek to shape human behaviour through buildings. In doing so, the book raises awareness of this strand within the discourse and examines its different purposes and manifestations. It questions whether it is an ineradicable and beneficial part of architecture and planning, or a regrettable throwback to a more authoritarian phase, discusses why it is seldom acknowledged directly and whether it could be handled more responsibly and with greater understanding. Richards does not provide any simple solutions but in conclusion, is critical of architect-planners who abuse the rhetoric of social reform simply to leverage their attempts to secure building commissions, while being more sympathetic towards those who appear to have a sincere desire to improve society through their buildings.

'Architect Knows Best', Simon Richards observes wryly, as he describes how we architect-planners stride onto the urban scene asking 'where's the Big Idea?' The words 'urban vision' bring Le Corbusier to mind. But social change in the 1950s altered the terrain of architects' visions, diversifying them, making this trail harder to follow. With love and fascination, Richards teases out the last sixty years of such ideas. Noting that we feel our expertise entitles us to prescribe for cities, he shows how much of our prescription consists of navel gazing as we delve into our own psyches and value systems. We ask ourselves, 'What did Corbu - or Frank, Rem or Zaha - do?' Or we adopt the values we find in a particular book - one book - which makes our world. In the 1950s, social scientists and activists began attacking us over the unintended consequences of our proposals, wondering why we pontificated so naively about cities and why our 'do gooding' had been allowed to cause such harm. Yet because we are among the rare urban professionals whose training is holistic, we end up leading the planning team. Few sociologists can or care to assume this role. But we architect-planners do, and therefore the gaps in our awareness are harmful. Richards has taken an early step towards defining the problem: we need a wider view on the world. You can't just read a book. Which book? Might not Von Thunen help more than Derrida? Who decides? And how best use the knowledge? The problem clearly calls for another type of architectural education. But we must add it without losing our architectural strengths - our immediacy, our out-of-the-box thinking, our ability to get things done, and especially our passion. Denise Scott Brown, Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, USA A sure-footed and highly informative guide to the battle of ideas about architecture and the city of the past half century. With pithy, and sometimes deadly, precision Simon Richards analyses the ideas of Jane Jacobs, Leon Krier, Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown, Aldo Rossi, Charles Jencks and many other writers. Jules Lubbock, University of Essex, UK 'Architect Knows Best is a thoughtful and highly recommended book, especially at a time when environmental determinism enjoys new popularity in its latest incarnation of sustainable architecture and planning - two disciplines which often promise to solve all of our alleged ecological problems if only we would let them reshape our environment.' Volker M. Welter, Department of the History of Art and Architecture, University of California, USA About the Author Dr Simon Richards, Lecturer, Department of History of Art and Film, University of Leicester, UK