left to their own devices photographers and editors would have finished
the seventies much as they had begun them and gone into the eighties
fine tuning a language of photojournalism that had reached maturity in
the 1960s. But two influences made this impossible. One was the return
of artist-photographers to architecture as a subject and the sudden market for
their pictures in galleries and museums. The other, and in the long run more
significant, was a successful pressure on magazines by advertisers, their pres-
sure supported by improvements in reproduction technology, to use more color
pictures on editorial pages. Not only to advertisers but to architects and pho-
tographers as well, color was to prove seductive.

Black-and-white pictures were still the center of attention in the first half
of the seventies. In Britain the example of “Manplan” led to a more crowded
look (America by this time no longer had an eye cocked on England). In
pictures spaces looked smaller and more cluttered, and people, looking un-
opposed, often appeared in them. An interior space would be arranged to look
much as it would have appeared in use, like the photograph by Richard Einzig
(1932–1980) of the studio at Camden Town (1974) designed by Georgie Wol-
ton which suggests its occupant has just stepped away from his desk (178).
The display of objects in the foreground, especially the glasses, harks back to
Claude Gravoir’s view of the Villa Savoye, and the sunlight entering the room
is exploited (as Ezra Stoller had in photographing Philip Johnson’s house) to
bring the brightness of the room into balance with the exterior view of neigh-
boring London buildings. Despite its descent from “Manplan” pictures made
with hand-held cameras, this is anything but a casual shot, as the top of the
sliding window and the container for pencils tell us by the way they almost
touch the top, left, and bottom edges of the picture or as the space between
the raised window edge and the building across the street also tells us. Not that
Einzig always showed small and cluttered spaces. In the case of an exterior
view of Howell, Killick, Partridge & Amis’s College of Estate Management at
the University of Reading (1973) he attempted a different effect, using a
gnarled tree in the foreground to highlight the picturesque setting (without
using it as an excuse for a vertical picture) (179).

In America photographers adapted their perspectives to suit the needs of
changing architecture, each photographer doing so in his own manner. When
Morley Baer took Willis Polk’s Polk-Williams house (1892) for the book Bay
Area Houses (1976), one of his pictures was of the living room seen from the
gallery (180). Baer turned his camera down to make an untipped bird’s-eye
view that serves a clear descriptive purpose without in any way evoking the
heady excitement of a twenties or thirties picture. Ezra Stoller was presented
with a somewhat similar situation, an area of the living room open to view
from the upper floors, in Richard Meier’s Douglas house (1973). But Stoller
looked directly down two floors from just inside the entrance to produce a
head-on view of the floor below (181). Stoller’s tendency to turn to wholly
(rather than almost) head-on views is characteristic and one of the pleasures to
be had from his pictures, just as it is characteristic of Baer, and one of his
virtues, to bend only to the individual needs of a setting.

Those who photographed “for themselves” never entirely abandoned ar-
tecture as a subject (provided it seemed redeemingly ancient). Paul Strand
included it in a series of books that brought Time in New England’s idyllic view
to other parts of the world. Among the products of younger photographers is a
view, taken in 1967, of Paul Caponigro (b. 1932) that juxtaposes a vine-
covered tree trunk to one of the sarsens of the prehistoric Avebury Stone Circle
in Wiltshire, England (182). The impassivity of the stone, the contortions of
the ivy set close to the camera, and the pastoral element of cattle grazing in
the distance give the picture a special emotional tension. Like Norman Mc-
Grath’s picture of Penn Station where the subject is the untimely destruction of
a mammoth cornice of a bygone era (whether that era is of Imperial Rome or
of the more recent Empire State), the combination of a structure and its cir-
cumstances has lead the photographer to produce an elegiac picture.

Working in Germany since the late 1950s and later to some extent in
Britain, Bernd (b. 1931) and Hilla Becher (b. 1934), whose interest was in-
dustrial archaeology, had taken late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-
century water towers, colliery winding gear, and wooden cooling towers. A
selection of these appeared in the Architectural Review in 1967 and 1968. They
also photographed lime kilns, blast furnaces, gas holders, silos, warehouses,
and half-timbered houses. All of these they took under generally overcast skies
or in the hazy sunlight of midcontinental industrial zones and from as many as
eight viewpoints, each set including a head-on view of the facade and one view
toward each corner. Their stylistic approach remained so consistent that their
pictures of half-timbered houses taken in the late fifties are indistinguishable
from the ones taken in the midseventies, when a book of their pictures of
Framework Houses of the Silesian Industrial Region (1977) was in preparation.
A head-on picture taken in 1972 of a house from Büschergrund (built in 1800)
shows the characteristic look of the pictures (183). The Bechers’s concern with
Camden Town, studio, 1974.
Courtesy Richard Bryant.

University of Reading, 1973.
Courtesy Richard Bryant.
180 Morley Baer
Courtesy the photographer.

181 Ezra Stoller
Courtesy the photographer.
perspective may well remind us of the techniques of the Königliche Preussische Messbildanstalt. Their interest in industrial forms also is in a German tradition for many of the same structures had appeared in Werner Lindner and Georg Steinmetz's *Die Ingenieurhäuser in ihrer guten Gestaltung* (1923). The pictures the Bechers show in this book are interesting both singly and in groups, where the effect of comparable facades of different houses can be mesmerizing. Such sets of pictures had an appeal in the seventies to both collectors of conceptual art and younger American photographers. The latter may have misinterpreted the Bechers's work as being quite as banal as that of Edward Ruscha (b. 1937) whose sets of pictures, such as his *Thirty-four Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967), also influenced young American photographers.

The subject of new buildings was not so wholeheartedly embraced by photographers of the seventies as that of older architecture. New buildings could be shown only if kept at arm's length. Lewis Baltz (b. 1945) took pictures in an industrial park at Santa Ana in 1974, in one of which scrawny trees are juxtaposed to a head-on view of a one-story office building (184). The trees have apparently been planted to close off access to a short path leading to a central door. Trees and building suggest parallels such as Walker Evans’s billboards and rowhouses. By carefully identifying his banal subjects by orientation, company and division names, and street address, Baltz underlines his own disinterested stance toward it.

Pictures by Lewis Baltz and Bernd and Hilla Becher were included in an exhibition at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House in 1975 called “New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape.” In the catalog to the show William Jenkins, quoting Frank Gohlke, another photographer in the show, summarized the philosophy of the photographers included as maintaining a sense of neutrality in the way the edges of the picture function—that is, they approached their subject matter with “an essentially passive frame.” Another participant quoted in the catalog, Joe Deal, offered some further insights:

By being at a greater distance from my subject matter it became difficult to significantly alter the angle of view or organization of the image by a step or two in any direction; ... the point of view and distance from the subject allowed an acceptance by the lens of a greater amount of contextual information without allowing too great a dominance of one object over another.
183 **Bernd and Hilla Becher**

Büchergrund, Bücherstrasse 9, 1972.  
Courtesy the photographers.

184 **Lewis Baltz**

Santa Ana, east wall, Business Systems Division, Permac, 1881 Langley, 1974.  
Courtesy Castelli Graphics, New York.
Four of the photographers who exhibited in New Topographics were among twenty-four hired by Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, Inc., to take pictures of American courthouses for the occasion of the U.S. Bicentennial. Some of these buildings were major works of architecture, many clearly deserved recording, a few were crushingly uninteresting, that is, desirably banal. Although courthouses were the subject of the undertaking, even—or perhaps especially—where buildings were of considerable interest, many of the photographers were shy of them, as though it could be dangerous to be interested in one’s subject or to present it as of direct interest. They characteristically introduced an intentionally uneasy and unbalanced relationship between building, environment, and light—an imbalance that often made exterior views seem cluttered (like contemporary British interiors but more distractingly so). This approach was, however, productive in a picture by Nicholas Nixon (b. 1947) taken from the high vantage point of one of the new skyscrapers that were transforming downtown Boston (185). It looks from above what used to be Scollay Square toward the Back Bay, though the nominal subject is George A. Clough’s mansarded courthouse (1854) at center. The picture includes far more. It shows old Boston cluttered with new buildings and relationships between parts of the city that usually remain reconciled in the minds of Bostonians—given Boston’s streetplan—and gives much the same sort of pleasure provided by nineteenth-century and earlier bird’s-eye views of towns and cities.

This wary approach to major architecture could also produce pictures whose subjects had been badly and unhappily lit or whose subjects were almost completely obscured. Frank Gohike’s (b. 1942) picture of the City-County Municipal Building (1906), Hennepin County, Minneapolis, shows it from side to side and from bottom to top (almost) without either explaining the building’s overall form or its detailed substance (186). The light on the building at the moment he chose to take it does evoke a time of day and year but fails to light the building articulately. Again the nominal subject of a picture by William Clift (b. 1944) is Henry Singleton, Robert S. Mitchell, and William Rumbold’s Old St. Louis County Courthouse (1845, 1863) which we see obscurely reflected in the glass curtain wall of Helmut, Obata & Kurzbaum’s Equitable Building (1973) (187). The balance between subject and ambiance in this photograph has tipped to the point where the subject is allowed only barely to appear, and the environment is there not to tell us the photographer was moved by his subject (not to say critical of it or a partisan of it) but for its own banal sake. In many of the Seagram pictures we sense a laudable intention (whether achievable or not) of showing buildings as they look in the litter of their contexts, but here Clift demonstrates inadvertently that a picture that aims to be disinterested can seem self-absorbed instead.

Another photographer involved in the Seagram project was Stephen Shore (b. 1947). Shore also photographed for Venturi & Rauch, Steven Izenour, and Denise Scott-Brown’s exhibition “Signs of Life: Symbols of the American City” at the Renwick Gallery of the National Collection of Fine Arts (1976). A picture of a bungalow juxtaposed to Cesar Pelli’s Pacific Design Center (1975), reproduced in the catalog, shows imbalance used to elegant effect. Shore gave a banal, vernacular building pride of place over a big new building that one would have expected to be the primary object of interest. Neither is given short shrift, and because the camera lens was a normal one (rather than a telephoto lens that could juxtapose two things that were in actuality far apart) the apposition, like one of Atget’s, is clearly valid.

These younger photographers were also interested in ways that sets of pictures might be tied together structurally. In 1980 in an exhibition and book, St. Louis and the Arch, Joel Meyerowitz (b. 1938) demonstrated that it was possible to organize a topographic book at least in part on distant views of one dominating structure, the pictures forming something very loosely like a panoramic series with camera pointing toward the axis of rotation. (He had already demonstrated two years before in photographing for the exhibition “American Images: New York by Twenty Contemporary Photographers,” sponsored by the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, that such an organization used exclusively could seem largely conceived.) In 1982 to 1983 Jim Dow (b. 1942), another photographer who had taken part in the Seagram county courthouse project, took American and National League baseball fields in the form of rudimentary but precise panoramic sets, three pictures to a field, on eight-by-ten color negative film.

Many of the photographers who worked on these exhibitions used precisely the sort of large camera that earlier architectural photographers had stopped using after the 1950s because there no longer seemed an advantage to its size. The younger photographers used these big cameras—and announced that they used them—partly to be able to say they used nothing new and special, partly to be seen to use something very special indeed, the sort of camera that Walker Evans and Eugène Atget (not to say virtually every other architectural or commercial photographer up into the 1950s) had used. Many—Shore, Dow, and
185 **Nicholas Nixon**

Boston, Suffolk County Courthouse, 1975.
Seagram County Court House Archives, Library of Congress.

186 **Frank Gohlke**

Minneapolis, City-County Municipal Building, Hennepin County, 1975.
Seagram County Court House Archives, Library of Congress.
William Clift
Seagram County Court House Archives, Library of Congress.
Meyerowitz among them—used modern color negative film with these cameras, and they paid a high price in practicality in the process. Meyerowitz has written that his exposures might often be between four and ten minutes long (partly to increase depth of field with his large camera, partly to make up for the limitations of his older lens).

Technical development is clearly present in photography, but technical progress is harder to argue for. A director of the Eastman Kodak Research Laboratories, L. Jack Thomas, has been quoted as saying that “film speeds have been doubling every ten years,” yet photographers in the first decade of this century were able to freeze the motion of pedestrians that a modern architectural photographer would not expect to be able to stop. And most productive photographers have always seemed wisely content to stick to equipment and techniques that were current when they began their careers.

At the beginning of the 1970s, thanks to the use of smaller cameras and faster black-and-white films, magazine photographers were able to include unposed people in virtually any architectural photograph; at the end of the seventies they were using color film that had a fraction of the speed of black-and-white film, and they were “bracketing” exposures. If they repeated a picture on four sheets of film at four different lens openings to make sure they ended up with one correct exposure, the chance that the picture with the best arrangement of pedestrians and vehicles in it would also be the best exposed was only one out of four.

For each picture they took they might typically expose a set of films that would allow them to provide a transparency to a journal and black-and-white and color prints and color slides to the architect. Add delays caused by the passing of clouds across the sun and by the surges of pedestrian and vehicular traffic caused by stoplights, and at that point a picture was likely to take longer to make than a daguerreotype or calotype had taken in the first days of photography. Thus color formed a trap.

Photographers fell into still another trap, for part of their new skill with color film lay in the reconciling, by the use of multiple exposures, of different kinds of light (fluorescent, incandescent, and daylight), that were less compatible on their films than they were to the eye. Their energies applied to this complex procedure could at best only result in pictures that looked unremarkable.

The use of color pictures became virtually universal, in part because the technology of color reproduction improved while printers lowered the quality of their black-and-white reproductions and in part because color was a seductive medium that advertisers encouraged journals to use on their editorial pages. In the late seventies and early eighties its use seems to have been most successful, not where the materials of a building were either brightly or subely colored but where color film could distinguish between special qualities of light.

In a picture by Balthazar Korab (b. 1926) of Caudill Rowlett Scott’s Indiana Bell Telephone Company Switching Center (1978) at Columbus, Indiana, the special quality of the color original, here seen in black-and-white, is the difference between the light coming directly from the blue sky behind the building and that reflected in the glass curtain wall (188). The careful placement of the reflected church works effectively in both the color version and the black-and-white. In a head-on picture of Cesar Pelli’s Winter Garden (1977) at the Rainbow Center at Niagara Falls Norman McGrath accepted (perforce) in the color version very errant rendering of the pavement and bollard illumination in the foreground as compared to that in the building itself (189). It is a bright greenshine blue, and this makes the picture a more informative statement than if the light were more accurately shown.

In the same year, partly because of hard times, architects turned increasingly to designing interiors, and taking pictures of them became an attractive specialty to photographers. One of the more skillful of these specialists was Jaime Ardiles-Arce (b. 1939) who, with his lights shining up through plant leaves and with lens characteristically thrust next to chairs (or pillows) and plants, could leave his own mark on even an interior as modest as that of the Michael Schallie apartment (190). With his lights, plants, and pillows he was able to create spaces that one was convinced may never have existed.

But the most effective role for color pictures seems to have been in showing ephemeral light. A black-and-white picture of the John Hancock Building in Boston by Harry Cobb of I. M. Pei’s & Partners was among a set that Steve Rosenthal (b. 1940) made for the AIA Journal, most of them in color, on days when a late sun shone past clouds (191). It shows the building from the vicinity of the Massachusetts Turnpike at an instant when the afternoon sun, shining under heavy overcast, has just started to reflect off the building’s south facade.

But the evocative sense of ephemeral light that color photographs can give does not survive translation into black and white. As reproduced in this book, pictures can only illustrate other qualities that in their transience are compar-
188 Balthazar Korab
Columbus, Indiana Bell Telephone Company Switching Center, ca. 1979.
Courtesy the photographer.

189 Norman McGrath
Niagara Falls, Rainbow Center Winter Garden, ca. 1978.
Courtesy the photographer.

190 Jaime Ardale-Arce
Courtesy the photographer.
191 **STEVE ROSENTHAL**
Boston, John Hancock Building, 1980.
Courtesy the photographer.

192 **RICHARD BRYANT**
Camden Town, television studio, 1983.
Courtesy the photographer.
ble to that of light in color pictures. Though the ephemeral dusk (or dawn) light in Richard Bryant’s (b. 1947) color picture of Terry Farrell’s TV-am Building (1983) in Camden Town, London, is not apparent in the reproduction here, the trace of what seems to be a bouncing bicycle light on the sidewalk of Hawley Crescent gives something of the same feeling in black and white (192). And in a picture by Timothy Hursley (b. 1955) the placement of the tree trunks with respect to the windows of Philip Johnson’s studio (1980) are as precise as that of the tree in Paul Strand’s photograph with respect to the Palladian window (193). But the ephemeral instant of the exposure is evoked by the passage of a bus behind the building.

Thus a medium that had seemed through the sixties to provide an increasingly articulate language for describing the built world appears in the eighties to have gone back to its point of departure—to describing qualities of light more than architecture. A historian can predict with confidence that before long there will arrive a time when this new way of using color photography will come to be a cliché. Though he cannot predict what will follow, he can point out that at least twice before in almost a century and a half of photography a generation has placed a primary emphasis on qualities of light. It happened not only in the decades before the First World War, it happened in the earliest days of photography, at the time of the early calotypes. Just as the later of these two periods was followed by a “new objectivity,” the earlier was followed by one of the great ages of visual discovery. It is certainly likely that before long photographs will again take a fresh, hard, objective look at architecture.
TIMOTHY HURSLEY


Courtesy the photographer.