

Periodicals

beautiful society pals.

In reading the early Capote, however, the grotesque that he later became is nowhere in evidence, says Allen, whose praise is occasioned by the publication of new editions of *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and *The Complete Stories of Truman Capote*. “It is a stunning experience to reread this fiction—mostly written when he was in his early twenties—and to realize

how very golden this golden boy was,” she effuses. “The image of the unhappy middle-aged clown dissolves. . . . Norman Mailer’s judgment that Capote was the most perfect writer of their generation—‘he writes the best sentences word for word, rhythm upon rhythm’—seems true and just.” Capote deserves enduring fame, says Allen, of the kind that will “outlive the mere notoriety of his final years.”

Designing Utopia

“Why Don’t the Rest of Us Like the Buildings the Architects Like?” by Robert Campbell, in *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, 136 Irving St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Architecture has become a troubled profession. For every Sydney Opera House or Museo Guggenheim Bilbao—buildings that become instant icons and transform a cityscape—there are hundreds of buildings such as Peabody Terrace. The latter, designed by Sert, Jackson & Associates to house Harvard University graduate students along Boston’s Charles River, consists of functional modernist towers “enlivened, at street level, by the bright color accents of the shops and cafés.” As Campbell, an architect and *Boston Globe* design critic, explains, the architects were trying to devise a strategy to make their project blend with the surrounding neighborhood. He admits to admiring the work but acknowledges that its “architectural language remains, for most people, unfamiliar and offensive.” Indeed, even though the design won the Gold Medal of the American Institute of Architects, “everybody else did, and does, hate it.”

In Campbell’s view, this conflict between architects’ visions and their buildings’ reception by the general public is an indication that “the connection between memory and invention has been severed in our culture.” Architects and laypeople who pay attention to design, Campbell says, mainly fall into two camps, “trads” and “rads.” The trads—traditionalists—want all buildings to “look like the buildings of the past they have learned and been conditioned to love.” The rads—radicals—want to “use computers to make groovy new shapes that will broadcast

our daring, our boldness, our march into the future.” Despite their seeming difference, both rads and trads “seek to substitute a utopia of another time for the time we actually live in. The trads find utopia in the past; the rads find it in the future.” Instead of grappling with “the complex reality of a present time and place,” both camps “inevitably create architecture that is thin, bloodless, weak, and boring.”

Campbell himself defines architecture as “the art of making places,” but argues that “you appreciate a work of architecture in only one way, by inhabiting it.” His definition would likely anger university professors of architecture, who “dream up totally unreadable theories” whose only purpose seems to be to “send smoke signals to [their] peers in other places.” Campbell likewise faults architecture critics like himself, who have encouraged the notion that a building can be appreciated as a separate thing, outside its own spatial context. This invites treating buildings as commodities, which then allows people to think of a “Frank Gehry” the way they do a Picasso or a Rembrandt. Campbell’s definition would probably not find favor even with most architects, who tend to “build for their peer group, and the hell with the rest of the world.” Rather than design with “an eye to the media world, not the physical world,” says Campbell, architects need to find a way to anchor their creations in the here and now, or risk having them become merely a succession of totems “in the worldwide stream of images.”