

Designing Modern Childhoods: Landscapes, Buildings, and Material Culture, University of California, Berkeley, USA. May 2-3, 2002.
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Designing Modern Childhoods sought to offer insight into the ways in which the built environment, both buildings and landscaping, caters to the needs of the young. A conference addressing the needs, ideals, aspirations and troubles of youth was quite at home in an area so inextricably linked to youth protest. The key locations of Moe's and Cody's bookshops were adjacent on Telegraph Avenue and Haight-Ashbury remains a colourful neighbourhood across the water in San Francisco. Arriving into San Francisco airport with a bird's eye view of the Bay Area, the Golden Gate Bridge and parkland, and approaching Berkeley's beautifully landscaped 1868 campus with its 1914 tower modelled on St. Mark's Campanile, Venice, the visiting academic is wryly reminded of David Lodge's portrait of Euphoric State University in Essep in *Changing Places*. The Bay Area is endowed with extraordinary beauty of both nature and design such as the Californian Redwood trees (the largest living structures in the world), the Napa Valley wine region, the luridly painted Victorian domestic architecture and the breathtaking bridges - the Golden Gate (1932-7) and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (1936). Berkeley has many notable buildings dating from the 1900s onwards and recent architecture in San Francisco includes work by Mario Botta, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas and (in progress) Herzog & de Meuron. The architectural heritage of the Bay Area is the setting for the highly recommended William Stout Architectural Books <<http://www.stoutbooks.com/cgi-bin/stoutbooks.cgi>> near the infamous Transamerica Pyramid.

The conference itself took place at International House, built in the Spanish style by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1930 as a self-funding combination of halls of residence for international students, café, cultural centre and conference venue. The setting was appropriate to a conference that brought together an impressively international group of speakers and subjects ranging from Oakland to Auckland. The historical span of the conference was broad enough to encompass a survey by Anne-Marie Chatelet (Ecole d'architecture de Versailles) of school architecture in France over several centuries, as well as the many papers dealing with contemporary practice. Amid the diversity, a notably recurrent theme was the design of schools and playgrounds. One of the conference sponsors was the Danish Kompan Corporation, makers of playground equipment and an architect/designer from this organisation delivered a paper. The address to children by commercial interests was the subject of an interesting paper by Dr. Gary Cross of Pennsylvania State University in 'The Wondrous Child: American Ad Images and the Origins of Commercialized Childhood'. Other papers discussed Lego and the Donnay Motor Scooter. A stated aim of the conference to disseminate academic knowledge in a way that made it useful to practitioners. Delegates were encouraged to exchange papers and ideas outside of the conference through the circulation of an address list and a conference website <<http://www.hum.sdu.dk/projekter/ipfu/designing-childhoods/>> which goes some way to broader dissemination.

Modernist design provided a focus for a range of papers scattered across the conference strands. In an opening strand 'Children and Modernity' Dr. Susan R. Henderson of Syracuse University discussed 'The Pavilion Schools of Frankfurt am Main in the 1920s', which emphasised a location on the periphery of the city as a way of offering children outdoor benefits while Hong Kong University's Dr. David M. Pomfret offered a survey 'Natural Highs: Open Spaces for Children in European Cities, 1890-1940'. Michael Wakeford of the University of Chicago presented his study of Childhood and Modernism at MoMA's Children's Art Carnival at the 1958 Brussels Worlds Fair. In another strand Dr. Erwin V. Johannningmeier of the University of Florida discussed 'Catherine Beecher and Henry Barnard: Protoprogressive Architects of "Purpose-Built" Spaces' and elsewhere Bryan J. Kessler of the University of Virginia addressed 'Friedl Dicker Brandeis and the Children of the Bauhaus'.

An emphasis on public and institutional settings led to papers addressing the domestic being gathered in single strand. Paramita Atmodowirjo of the University of Sheffield presented her observational fieldwork into the flexible ways in which children use the home environment. She argued that naming such things as 'chair' 'wall', 'cupboard' etc. limits their use in a way that does not properly reflect the multiple 'affordances' they offer. Designers should recognise

these functions in their designs, she argued. Dr. D. Bradford Hunt of Evelyn T. Stone University College, Roosevelt University discussed youth density as a major contributing factor in the failure of mid-20th century high-rise public housing in Chicago or as he put it 'kids and elevators don't mix'. Dr. Diana Selig of Claremont McKenna College analysed a 1930s survey that sought to explain the link between homes and personality by detailing the wide variance of material provisions by socio-economic class with the aim of achieving equality. The actual outcome was the stigmatisation of the arrested development of the personalities of less well-off children, Selig proposed. My own paper "A corner he can call his own" on the representation of ideal models of teenage rooms in mid-century advice literature was in good company in this strand but might have sat just as comfortably with other papers such as Dr. Herb Childress (Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools) on 'The Social Geography of Loitering: teenagers, territory and the appropriation of space'; Dr. Sharra Vostral of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute 'From Girl to Young Woman: Media, Material Culture and Menstruation in the United States'; Dr. Deborah Freedman Lustig (Santa Clara University) on 'Baby Pictures: Teen Mothers Represent and Construct Family' and Anthony Bernier of UC Irvine 'Designing "a Geography of Yes": Making Spaces for Teens in Public Libraries, Oakland Public Library, USA'. The conference offered more than sixty papers on a related theme and there are many ways in which these papers might have been arranged. The fact that each paper made connections with a number of the others is a wholly positive feature. A regrettable emphasis on the institutional and public spaces at the expense of childhood in the domestic context is merely one missed opportunity thrown into relief by others that were successfully seized by Designing Modern Childhoods.