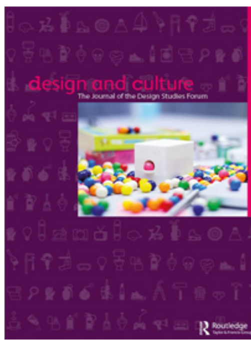

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Philip Johnson
Full Scale, False Scale

Jeffrey Lieber

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ABSTRACT In this essay, I propose a shift in emphasis in the interpretation of Philip Johnson's architecture of the 1950s and 1960s. Through a reexamination of his buildings and writings, I bring the notion of queer oppositionality to bear on the role of architects in promoting ideas of American democracy in the post-Second World War period. My argument is twofold: first, I argue that Johnson purposefully deployed his "queer eye" as a form of wicked cultural critique to ridicule the hypocrisies of democratic mythmaking and the mass-marketed social taboos and political fears of the age. Second, I argue that Johnson used history and the aristocratic traditions of European architecture to expose the fiction that the United States was the heir to and chief guardian of the whole body of Western civilization in the aftermath of the war. I further argue that Johnson's aristocratic posturing vis-à-vis culture and power was, like Camp, part of a vanguard queer sensibility that undermined mainstream views about the relationship between the two as popularized in architecture and visual culture.

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Since his death in 2005 at the age of 98, historians of modern architecture and design have begun to reassess the life and work of Philip Johnson. One might well ask: are there any new conclusions to be drawn from the life and work of a figure who so assiduously cultivated his own myths and about whom so much has already been written? Recent critical reappraisals have focused on parsing those myths and gauging Johnson's actual impact on the development of modern and contemporary architecture. I would argue that there is less a gap in the literature on Johnson than a problem in interpretation. The links between his homosexuality and his fascism continue to beleaguer historians approaching his architecture. Otherwise exciting analyses inevitably devolve into predictable stereotypes and clichés.

In the essays that came out of a symposium held at Yale University in 2006, for example, Johnson is accused of architectural, stylistic, and theoretical promiscuity: "architectural group sex," according to Charles Jencks (Jencks 2009: 139). Theatrical metaphors also abound, as when Joan Ockman describes Johnson's adoption of different styles as a "succession of ill-fitting costumes" (Ockman 2009: 83). In essay after essay, he is labeled effete, flippant, and narcissistic, and depicted as a high-strung nihilist and destructive cynic who exhibited "cavalier disdain" toward normative social and political values (Jencks 2009: 136, 139; Ockman 2009: 83; Petit 2009: 2; Scully 2009: 20). When Ockman posits that Johnson's political sympathies went "covert" in the 1950s, she expresses

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Figure 1
Philip Johnson, Moon-Viewing Pavilion, 1962, and Lincoln Kirstein Tower, 1985, New Canaan, Connecticut. Photograph by Jeanna Shepard Photography.

the view of many scholars who have not found much in the way of political content in his work of the 1950s and 1960s, although he seemingly embraced the dictates of corporate capitalism in his later postmodern projects (Ockman 2009: 88). Yet, the notion that Johnson harbored covert sympathies again raises the specters of his homosexuality and his politics in an amoral light, painting him as an ideologically tainted, Cold War era homosexual with a secret agenda, more Ellsworth Toohey than Howard Roark.

The literature on modern architecture has arguably not kept pace with fields such as art history, cultural studies, literary studies, and philosophy when it comes to issues of queer aesthetics. In his book *Queer Beauty* (2010), for example, Whitney Davis shows how art, beauty, desire, history, politics, power, and sexuality came together in the lives and works of gay figures from Winckelmann to Foucault as part of larger processes of aesthetic idealization and erotic projection; he further shows how their work ultimately came to inform mainstream cultural production and theoretical exploration through the dissemination of their ideas. If a similar investigation of the complex drives at the heart of Johnson's enterprise is to be carried out, it may have to be done outside the precincts of modern architecture in the interdisciplinary realm of design and culture.

In this article, I would like to propose a shift in emphasis by asking a more limited question: through a reexamination of Johnson's architecture and writings of the 1950s and 1960s, is it possible to bring the notion of queer oppositionality and/or subversion to bear on broader issues of American political ideology, specifically the role of modern architects in promoting ideals of American democracy? My argument is twofold: first, I argue that Johnson purposefully deployed his "queer eye" as a form of wicked cultural critique to ridicule the hypocrisies of democratic mythmaking and the mass-marketed social taboos and political fears of the age. I believe his antipathy toward democracy was right there on the surface for all to see. Contrary to recent accounts by Beatriz Colomina and Detlef Mertins, I argue that in the postwar period Johnson fought against the spread of cultural democracy by designing willfully anti-democratic and anti-utilitarian buildings, first on his estate in New Canaan, Connecticut, and then on the national stage (Colomina 2009; Mertins 2009). Simultaneously, in his essays and lectures he excoriated the architecture of his contemporaries while construing narratives for his own buildings that either confused their cultural and political meaning or divorced them from their mid-century American context. Second, I argue that Johnson used history and the aristocratic traditions of European architecture to expose the fiction that the United States was the heir to and guardian of Western civilization in the aftermath of the war. I further argue that Johnson's aristocratic posturing vis-à-vis culture and power was, like Camp, part of a vanguard queer sensibility that undermined mainstream views as popularized in architecture and visual culture.

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The article is organized in three sections. First, I revisit the cultural-political milieu of the postwar period and explore Johnson's response to it in his architecture and writings, including the role that Mies van der Rohe's work played as mediator for his politics. Second, I explore Johnson's self-avowed "passion for history" and the way he dramatized it in his work, in contrast to the use of historical forms in the work of his contemporaries. Third, I explore the queer currents in Johnson's work and discuss the relevance and irrelevance of concepts such as the "decorative" and Camp, while also pointing to other discursive modes of gay self-articulation. Was Johnson a "patrician esthete," as Peter Eisenman (2009: 223) has argued, or did his queer subjectivity as woven deeply into his work and his various "platform personas," as Robert Stern once called them, put him at a remove even from the class whose ideals he seemed to best express (Johnson 1979: 118)? In other words, although he seems to have been the ultimate insider, was he in fact the ultimate outsider, like comparable figures such as Andy Warhol and Anthony Blunt? One could argue that this complex psychological dynamic is, in fact, dramatized in his most famous project, his own Glass House.

Johnson and Politics

> Where there are political passions, it is easier to have architectural passions.
>
> (Johnson, Informal Talk, Architectural Association, London, 1960)

While he addressed the subject obliquely over the course of his life, Johnson never spoke at length about the depth of his fascination with fascism or his attraction to Nazism. For decades, this "inglorious detour," as his biographer Franz Schulz termed it, was excised from studies of his work (Schulz 1994: 103). It was exhumed and explored by Schulz and, more recently, by Ockman. What is clear from the facts is that, having resigned his position at MoMA in 1934, and having formed a fraternity of like-minds with Lawrence Denis and Alan Blackburn, Johnson became a full-fledged activist. In 1938–9, the high point of his political activity, he glowingly reported on the fifth anniversary of Hitler's seizure of power and the German invasion of Poland for Father Charles E. Coughlin's magazine *Social Justice*, and was subsequently profiled, in October 1940, as one of "The American Fascists" in *Harper's* magazine. Yet, his political activism has long been dismissed as a combination of folly and naiveté: the line established by Schulz and followed by others is that Johnson "proved to be a trifler, the dilettante he earlier feared himself to be, a model of futility," and that the entire episode, born out of frustration and restlessness, resulted in "total failure" (Schulz 1994: 126, 144). In the Yale essays, Vincent Scully reinforced this

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view when he brushed off Johnson's "unsavory political alliances" of the 1930s as "essentially harmless" (Scully 2009: 19), while Ockman calls him "undoubtedly a political dilettante in the 1930s" (Ockman 2009: 87). Is the diminishment of Johnson's political activities mere apologia or more highly charged? It does point to a stereotype, pervasive in American culture of the mid- and late twentieth century, of the arrogant but ultimately "ineffectual, intellectual homosexual" representative of a perverted, unproductive form of masculinity, as detailed by Philippa Gates in her study of film noir (Gates 2006: 256). The level of Johnson's success or failure in politics not only seems immaterial, but less interesting than the question of what happened to his political passions after 1940, when he returned to Harvard to study architecture. Did they dissipate or manifest themselves in a new way?

The general consensus articulated by Schulz and reinforced at the Yale symposium is that in the post-Second World War period Johnson distilled his fascism into "an unconquerable esthetic impulse" (Schulz 1994: 146). After his failure in politics, Schulz argued, Johnson turned his attention to aesthetics and the representation of power as revealed in an impossibly high ideal of art. Ockman similarly argues that "Johnson's veneration of beauty and his belief in this *Lebensphilosophie* were the fundamental values by which he set his compass" (Ockman 2009: 87). My question here is: how can his aesthetics be separated from his politics? Isn't the quest for an ideal form of beauty at the core of most political ideologies? Along these lines, should Johnson's veneration of beauty and deployment of a specific kind of aesthetics in the postwar period be construed as political acts? Surely, it was his continuing belief in the Nietzschean will-to-power that makes it unlikely that he suddenly became an apolitical proponent of art for art's sake.

Following the war, politics gripped the imaginative life of the nation and almost all architects were working under its sway in one way or another. Very specific claims were being made on beauty in relation to architecture and politics. These were best expressed not by established theorists of the modern movement, such as Siegfried Gideon, or by the architects themselves, but by proponents of big business, such as the magazine impresario and political enthusiast Henry Luce. In his magazines, notably *Fortune* and *Architectural Forum*, Luce not only succeeded in selling modern architecture and design to an American business elite; he made them foundational building blocks of postwar American corporate liberalism. In May 1957, in recognition of the role he played in the advancement of modern architecture in America, Luce was invited to give the keynote address at the centennial celebration of the American Institute of Architects. In his speech entitled "The Architecture of a Democracy" he posed a question that succinctly encapsulated the mood of the era: "is real political freedom incompatible with pervasive beauty?" he asked (Luce 1957: 150). In September 1957, *Architectural Forum* provided an answer

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when it described the new headquarters of Connecticut General Life Insurance Company in Bloomfield, Connecticut, designed by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, as "pervasively complete" ("Insurance Sets a Pattern" 1957: 127). Connecticut General was the architectural embodiment of the postwar worldview propounded in the pages of Luce's magazines beginning in the early 1950s, which fused Protestant ethics with technological positivism, and principles of corporate management with democratic ideals of liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Luce made similar claims on history, expressing a widespread view of America's new role on the world stage. In 1941 he had concluded his "American Century" speech with the declaration that "we are the inheritors of all the great principles of Western civilization" (Luce 1941). From his standpoint, the war had validated this claim. In the fall of 1948, in a memo to his Time-Life editorial team, he outlined a "Western Culture project," explaining that "the drama of Western Culture culminates in the creation of the USA. And this interpretation invites all Americans to take stock of American civilization at the moment of history when the United States has become the heir and chief guardian of the whole body of Western Civilization against the forces of reactionary neo-barbarism" (Brinkley 2010: 329). In his AIA address, this project was reasserted in broader terms. In the modern Christian-corporate utopia Luce envisaged, time was essentially stopped in epic landscapes of "pervasive beauty." He charged American architects with the task of realizing this vision.

This symbiosis between modern architecture and postwar democratic ideals was a startling new phenomenon at the time. There were few architectural voices countering these claims. In June 1957, only a month after Luce gave his speech at the AIA, Scully similarly christened modern architecture "the architecture of democracy" in his speech at the annual meeting of the College Art Association (Scully 1957). In a beguiled and fascinated manner, and following Luce's lead more closely than he could have imagined, he rewrote the entire history of architecture from antiquity to the Enlightenment, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, up to the 1950s, and back and forth between Europe and America, in order to account for the role postwar American democracy was playing in the transformation of modern architecture. In specialized trade publications and mainstream magazines, new corporate and government projects by architects such as Bunshaft, Eero Saarinen, and Edward Durrell Stone were ecstatically described as rivaling or surpassing the monuments of ancient Greece and Rome. In *This Is America*, the official United States guidebook to the 1958 Brussels World's Fair, Stone's design for the US Pavilion was likened to the Rome Colosseum, while Skidmore, Owing, and Merrill's design for the new US Air Force Academy on the Rampart Range in Colorado Springs (1954–7) was described as "Olympian" and Acropolis-like (Stone 1962: 145; Naumen 2004: 59). There was no better expression

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of the United States as the heir to and chief guardian of Western civilization than this modern military citadel, which was modeled on ancient Egyptian tomb cities and Greek temple complexes, with a touch of Versailles in the landscape design, and with the central axis now representing the infinity of American military and technological supremacy.

Contrary to the long-held view that, beginning in the mid-1940s, Johnson self-consciously distanced himself from politics in order to rehabilitate his image, he was one of the few architects to actively oppose this business model of architecture and the propagation of these democratic myths. In his postwar curatorial work at MoMA, his essays and lectures, and his architecture, Johnson seems to have sought an escape from this context while simultaneously expounding a trenchant critique of democratic capitalism. When he returned to New York in 1944, it was through his connections at MoMA, where he resumed his former position as head of the Department of Architecture. The Rockefellers provided social absolution for his political sins. Unlike his contemporaries, Johnson did not seek out era-defining government commissions and was not yet an architect of corporate identities. Following the dictum of Voltaire, he cultivated his own garden, adding pavilions to his Connecticut estate, which served as models for the small-scale cultural and residential commissions he received throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, largely through the largess of the Rockefellers. What we confront in his work is a much more sophisticated synthesis of beauty, history, and politics than in the work of architects such as Saarinen, Stone, and SOM.

Johnson's first major postwar undertaking was a retrospective of the work of Mies van der Rohe, which took two years to complete and opened in September 1947. What was the significance of this project for Johnson? I would argue that it allowed him to eschew the triumphalism of the immediate postwar years and return, mentally at least, to prewar Germany, where he could indulge his obsession with Prussian classicism and its legacy in Mies's work. The main theme of the monograph accompanying the exhibition, which presented a comprehensive overview of Mies's career up to and including the IIT campus in Chicago, is the uninterrupted continuity of the German Romantic spirit in Mies's architecture. The buildings Johnson lavishes with praise are telling in that they are not Mies's canonical modernist works connected to the International Style, which informed American thinking. Quite the contrary, he lingers over Mies's earliest, Schinkelesque projects, such as the Kröller House (1912) and the Bismarck Monument (1912), which prefigured Nazi prestige planning in the severity of their massing, the proportioning of their colonnades, their attenuated fenestration, and their taut decorative detailing, and he accords seminal importance to Mies's proposal for the Nazi Reichsbank competition (1933), the project with which he had concluded his 1933 essay "Architecture in the Third Reich," and which at that time he believed would "clinch [Mies's] position" in the

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new regime (Johnson 1947: 16, 96; Johnson 1979: 54). Avoiding the postwar American context, he connects the structural, spatial, and decorative system on view in the new buildings Mies designed for IIT back to his earlier, Schinkelesque projects. My point is that the Mies on view in Johnson's monograph is not necessarily the recent émigré and Chicago transplant, who may have wished to move beyond the troubled decade of the 1930s, but rather the Mies who, as Sybil Moholy-Nagy later persuasively argued, had "an affinity of convictions" with National Socialism as documented in his writings and buildings of the late 1920s and 1930s (Moholy-Nagy 1965: 255–6). The Mies of the MoMA monograph, in other words, was a proxy for Johnson's unfulfilled foray into fascist cultural-politics.

The Glass House (1949), realized two years after the Mies retrospective, was an extension of that project. From its inception, it was more manifesto than dwelling, a veritable architectural declaration of independence from the dominant cultural-political drives of the postwar period. In contrast to the modern Christian-corporate utopia imagined by Luce, it was a utopia of "absolute form" and "absolute shapes" that had its basis in aristocratic European architecture of the Baroque period and the Enlightenment (Johnson 1979: 218). In "House at New Canaan, Connecticut," the essay he published in *Architectural Review* in 1950, Johnson avowed a theory of radical historical synthesis that mixed the modern and the Baroque with Mies as a starting point, not only the Mies of IIT and the Farnsworth House, which he cites as sources, but the Mies of the Nazi Reichsbank proposal, which he praised in the MoMA monograph as the most modern, but also the most monumental, of the early Nazi projects, "with a grand staircase worthy of a baroque palace" (Johnson 1947: 96). Among the twenty-two sources cited, he points twice to Schinkel's Casino at Glienicke (1826), the inspiration for Mies's Kröller House design. Calling his own house "Neo-Classic Romantic," he positions himself in a line of "intellectual revolutionaries from the Baroque" (Johnson 1979: 218), namely Schinkel and Ledoux.

This revolutionary fervor had a political charge in that both the house and the essay knowingly made a mockery of the postwar suburban domicile and the shelter magazine. Reading Johnson's essay, it is easy to forget that Mr. Blandings of Eric Hodgkin's *Mr. Blandings Buildings His Dream House* (1946), which began life as an article in *Fortune* magazine, was his fictional neighbor in New Canaan. In this new novel of manners, suburban Connecticut is depicted as a new Garden of Eden, where the Neo-Colonial house outfitted with modern technological conveniences serves as an allegory for the integration of American Revolutionary ideals into the postwar national security state. Ironically, the formerly revolutionary modernist émigrés often used the shelter magazines to transform themselves from ideologically suspect European designers into wholesome American architects. Marcel Breuer, Johnson's real-life neighbor in

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New Canaan, was a master of this means of assimilation. In profiles such as "Marcel Breuer Builds for Himself," from the October 1948 issue of *Architectural Record*, Breuer translated his Bauhaus ideals into cheerful and friendly tips for the middle-class executive and the wife of management, while presenting his own houses as new models of cosmopolitan town-and-country living. Johnson does the antithesis, transforming himself into a European libertine whose absolutist architectural forms not only defy assimilation but strike at the heart of democratic mythmaking.

In his essays and lectures, Johnson the curator, the disciple, the *philosophe*, and the wit created a context for Johnson the architect. He summed up his age by opposing it. At an informal talk to students at Harvard in December 1954, which was published as "The Seven Crutches of Modern Architecture" in the 1955 issue of Yale's *Perspecta*, he railed against everything Luce advocated: "cheapness," meaning architecture driven by an "economic motive," the crutch of serving the client, and "the crutch of utility, of Usefulness" (Johnson 1979: 137, 138, 139). In contrast, he championed the architect's "act of creation" and, quoting Nietzsche, argued that architecture is "man's will to power assuming visible form … Architecture is a veritable oratory of power made by form" (Johnson 1979: 140). This was a truly shocking statement for an American architect to make in the mid-1950s. When *Architectural Forum* profiled Connecticut General in 1957, for example, it explicitly highlighted the fact that "the architect renders himself almost invisible," and, barely mentioning him by name, praised Bunshaft for sacrificing himself to the greater demands of the corporate client and the greater good of American democracy ("Insurance Sets a Pattern" 1957: 127).

Johnson's views on these matters only intensified over the course of the 1950s into the early 1960s. In the speech he gave at the annual AIA conference in 1962, the "seven crutches" became "The Seven Shibboleths of Our Profession." With increased amplitude, he declared "the shibboleth of *Democratic Capitalism* can be a danger," and attacked "*the idea that our buildings be democratically acceptable*" (Johnson 1979: 146, original emphasis). He took aim at both the organizational model of architecture espoused by firms such as SOM ("we have organization charts, all the paraphernalia of big business … The head of the firm can no longer design or practice architecture in any sense. Instead he flies around the country 'selling' jobs") as well as the magazine culture fostered by Luce ("At its worst this virtue leads to a vanity about magazine and book popularity which can be disgusting") (Johnson 1979: 147, 146). Simultaneously, he made a case for 'prima donna' architecture and what I would term the useless monument (Johnson 1979: 144, 147, 148). If Johnson "liked praise," it was as a prima donna architect. Architecture for Johnson was by its nature authoritarian and therefore had no philanthropic social imperative. He completely rejected the emerging field of "Environmental Studies" and along with it the

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notion that architecture should serve the forces of "*Social Progress*" (Johnson 1979: 145, original emphasis). In doing so, he rejected the modernist notion both of the architect's responsibility toward society and of the design process as one determined by many hands. Architecture's purpose was to elevate the soul, not to educate the masses or make life more agreeable and attractive.

The useless monument was Johnson's greatest contribution to modern architecture in the postwar era. The Moon Viewing Pavilion, which he added to his estate in 1962, was such a monument (see Figure 1). Like the Glass House, it was a manifesto project, the architectural counterpart to his shibboleth lecture. In the essay he published on the pavilion in *Show* magazine, also in 1962, he described it as a folly in the tradition of aristocratic European garden architecture, which was connected to eighteenth-century philosophies of character and grandeur in design and sensation and sexuality in the feelings buildings aroused. "My pavilion is full scale false scale, big enough to sit in, to have tea in, but really 'right' only for four-foot-high people. Change of scale like this is a harmless and pleasant joke on serious architecture. And yet it is serious architecture," he explained (Johnson 1979: 251). The queer implications of this "full scale false scale" philosophy and the idea that the pavilion was really only "right" for people who looked at the world from a skewed perspective are things I explore in greater detail below.

My point here is that the useless monument was not, technically, useless. It served a political purpose, just like propagandistic showpiece projects such as Connecticut General, but to opposite effect. It was deployed in both quixotic commissions, such as The Roofless Church in New Harmony, Indiana (1960; see Figure 2), as well as significant international commissions, such as the Nuclear Reactor in Rehovot, Israel (1960), as a means of poking holes in hegemonic narratives and ridiculing the era's mass-marketed political fears. Johnson cheekily described these two projects as among his most important religious works, even though they had little to do with religion. I see them as a kind of commentary on the rise of democracy as a new religion with atomic weapons as its new talismans. The roofless church, which he nicknamed "the Shrine of the Rose," since "the symbol of the town is the rose," and described as "a shrine out in Indiana for a Texas lady," is a giant sigh of wood shingles rising sixty feet high and fifty feet wide and set on ten-foot high limestone megaliths (Johnson 1979: 237, 238). Restraint and release, tension and suspension are orchestrated to perfect effect to create a form that uncannily recalls the mushroom cloud of nuclear mythology. At Rehovot, his massive, jagged Nuclear Reactor rises ominously above a classical courtyard with a peristyle colonnade of reverse-tapered piers (bringing to mind Mies's Kröller House design and Bismarck Monument). The perimeter walls, mammoth at the Macedonian-style entrance gate, disappear diminutively into the desert hills in the distance. I see this project as Johnson's architectural retort to SOM's

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Figure 2
Philip Johnson, Roofless Church, 1960, New Harmony, Indiana.
Photograph by Ted Engler.

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new Air Force Academy on the Rampart Range. There was no better architectural metaphor for postwar Western civilization's precarious position "under the volcano."

Johnson and History

> My passion is history … history is the answer to everything.
>
> (Johnson, Informal Talk, Architectural Association, London, 1960)

In the spirit of the Western Culture project outlined by Luce, architects such as Saarinen and Stone cast themselves as the modern-day counterparts to figures like Bernini and Louis Le Vau. Louis Kahn, who spent a year in Rome in 1950–1 as a fellow at the American Academy, rediscovered the architecture of antiquity via the prints of Piranesi. Paul Rudolph, in his Sarasota houses and projects such as the Jewett Arts Center, found inspiration in Renaissance Venice. Breuer, in his late phase, developed a bizarre fanaticism for Pharaonic architecture. Johnson's feeling for history differed from that of his contemporaries, and his use of historical forms was often more complicated and fraught. On the one hand, he participated in a large-scale state-sanctioned symbolic project such as Lincoln Center (1964), which celebrated the performing arts as an embodiment of American Civilization and positioned New York as the capital of culture for the postwar world, while, on the other hand, in smaller-scale projects such as the Proctor Institute in Utica, New York (1960), and the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery in Lincoln,

Nebraska (1963), variations on the useless monument, he seems to have deployed historical forms to combat the democratization of culture. Throughout the 1950s and early to mid-1960s, his passion for history found an outlet in museum projects, which taken together provide a kind of disquisition on the subject of art, culture, history, and society.

In addressing the subject of history, Johnson had to do battle with a monster of his own making: the International Style. When Johnson returned to the subject of the International Style in the 1950s, it was to clarify what it was and what it wasn't, or, more frequently, to distance himself from it entirely. As he recognized, it had become a crutch, or worse, a crutch-encompassing category, a straitjacket for architectural thought. In "Style and the International Style," a speech he gave at Barnard College in 1955, Johnson instructed: "A style is not a set of rules or shackles, as some of my colleagues seem to think. A style is a climate in which to operate, a springboard to leap further into the air" (Johnson 1979: 76). Singling out Bunshaft's Lever House (1952), he lamented the misapplication of the Style, pointing specifically to the irregularity of the spacing of the aluminum-clad columns in the plaza and the ugly fire stair (Johnson 1979: 77). In contrast, he shared a rendering of the Seagram Building (1958), which he compared to "the buildings of other Golden Ages – Egypt, Rome, Byzantium" (Johnson 1979: 79). The Seagram Building, he clarified, was not an example of the International Style, but rather of "an accepted style," by which he meant a skeletal steel structure, the use of glass, and a colonnade of "noble piers" (Johnson 1979: 78). Style was to be found in the exactness and richness of the detailing (i.e., the "stiff bronze edging" of the corners), which signaled the ineffable: the architect's imagination and engagement with history (Johnson 1979: 78).

When Johnson invoked history in "Style and the International Style" and declared that "our Golden Age of Architecture is only beginning," he did so in a radically different vein than Luce in "The Architecture of a Democracy" (Johnson 1979: 79). The distinction is essential to understanding his architectural and intellectual enterprise in the postwar era. There is no indication in Johnson's writings that the return to monumentality and fascination with "the buildings of other Golden Ages" was in any way intended to serve "Democratic Capitalism." For Johnson, history served other masters: it was a means by which the architect could transform himself into a world-historical figure, but, much more pointedly, history could be deployed to expose the fiction that American democracy was the heir to and guardian of Western civilization. I would argue that this is precisely the point of the comparison he makes between Lever House and the Seagram Building in "Style and the International Syle:" in the Seagram Building, history comes forward with a vengeance to expose Lever House and everything it represents as a fraud. Johnson hints as much in a lecture he gave at Yale in 1959,

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"Whither Away – Non-Miesian Directions," in which he proposes substituting history "for the debacle of the International Style, which is now in ruins around us" (Johnson 1979: 230).

In Johnson's view, the Seagram Building was inviolate. As acolyte and interpreter, I would argue, he created an image of Mies and his architecture that made him seem far more remote from mainstream American culture than was the case. There was no real ideological conflict between American discourses on democratic capitalism and the ideals of the German émigrés, who anxiously rewrote their biographies and reframed their earlier principles. Despite the cause célèbre that erupted over the Farnsworth House, the flames of which were fanned by Elizabeth Gordon, the editor of *House Beautiful*, Mies's architecture was as easily and readily absorbed into postwar American culture as Lever House and Saarinen's new headquarters for GM and TWA. The Seagram Building plays the starring role in Jean Negulesco's film *The Best of Everything* (1958), for instance, where it serves as the headquarters for the fictional romance publishing company in which the story unfolds. At climactic moments, the three young career girls at the center of the narrative look up at the building yearningly from the corner of Park Avenue and 52nd street as the embodiment of their aspirations of corporate romance and upward mobility. It plays a similar role in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961), in which a kittenish Audrey Hepburn seduces George Peppard while sitting on the green marble balustrade framing the Seagram Building Plaza. This iconic image will forever mitigate the view of the plaza as a radical "void" later offered by Manfredo Tafuri (Tafuri 1979: 366). If the building exhibits an air of refusal, it is more in the fashionable vein of "elegance is refusal," the *bon mot* which Diana Vreeland borrowed from Coco Chanel. In fact, Louis Kahn critiqued the building exactly along these lines in his talk at CIAM in 1959, when he described it as a coy, sophisticated lady: "I can worry about the Seagram Tower," he said. "She is a beautiful bronze lady but she is all corseted inside … She is a beautiful bronze lady but she is not true" (Kahn 2003: 51). If anything, it was Johnson's main contribution as junior partner on the project, his design for the Four Seasons Restaurant (1959), with its Schinkelesque reimagining of the imperial Roman triclinium, which resisted easy assimilation into the mainstream commercial imagination.

As his conduit to Schinkel and the tradition of Prussian classicism, Mies was at the core of Johnson's worship of history. He was obsessed with the clipped quality of the Prussian box and the cool majesty of Prussian decoration. In "Schinkel and Mies," a lecture he gave in the Congress Hall in West Berlin in 1961, he aligned himself with these two masters as the third of a trinity of Romantic Classicists. In this lecture, momentarily disengaged from an American context that inspired only his cynicism, he was at his most technical and reverent. In Berlin, Johnson was on hallowed ground. In a dramatic and somber tone he explained that "all my architectural designing

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has been influenced by the work and example of two men, two men who both had years of their best work in this city," affirming, in a way, that his desire to become an architect was the outcome of his own experiences in that city (Johnson 1979: 165). Focusing his intellect on the two things he loved most, architecture and history, the twin figures of Schinkel and Mies emerged "unaccented" from "the whole continuum of architecture," except for the sense of divinity he accorded them in his role as artistic and spiritual heir (Johnson 1979: 165). Johnson presents Schinkel and Mies as academic architects, although, he argues, they both grappled with the revolutionary work of their contemporaries, in Schinkel's case Boullée, Gilly, and Ledoux, in Mies's case Lissitsky, Mondrian, and Picasso. In championing their academicism, he made a case for his own eclecticism and historicism, and further distinguished himself from his own truly visionary contemporaries, notably Kahn and Rudolph.

In proudly placing himself in a genealogy of Romantic Classicists, Johnson was staking out an ideologically charged position in a larger historical debate with significant meaning in the postwar context. Siegfried Gideon had coined this term in his first book, *Late Baroque and Romantic Classicism* (1922), to describe the birth of modern architecture in the period of the late Enlightenment. Emil Kaufmann had further elaborated on the relationships between the architectural fantasies of the Enlightenment revolutionaries and the early twentieth century avant-gardes in *Von Ledoux bis Corbusier, Ursprung und Entwicklung der autonomen Architektur* (1933). Published the same year the Nazis seized power, Kaufmann's book was prescient in terms of the kind of modern, yet monumental, vastly volumetric, and highly ordered architecture the Nazis would realize. As critics later recognized, Ledoux's fantasies found an end point not in Corbusier's villas but in Speer's endless colonnades (Scully 1974: 136). Horrified by Hitler's 'perversion' of history and of the modernist tradition, Gideon repudiated his own earlier thesis, first in the Charles Eliot Norton lectures he gave at Harvard in 1938 and then in his influential book *Space, Time, and Architecture* (1941). Johnson, according to Schulz, was obsessed with Kaufmann's book: he invited Kaufmann to speak to a group of students and faculty in the house he built for himself on Ash Street in Cambridge while a graduate student at Harvard, and the book was still atop his reading pile in 1947–8 at the time of the Mies retrospective at MoMA and the design of the Glass House (Schulz 1994: 193–4). In "Schinkel and Mies," Johnson shifts the emphasis from Ledoux and Corbusier to these chosen two, but the central argument is still the same. His self-conscious revival of Romantic Classicism with its well-known and highly fraught connection to Nazi architecture may have been another means of attacking the political narratives driving postwar American architectural discourses.

In his museums of the 1950s and early 1960s Johnson substituted his own Romantic Classicism and *revanche* idea of history

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for American democratic ideals. The Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas (1960), was an homage to Schinkel's Altes Museum in Berlin, while the Proctor Institute was an homage to Ledoux's Maison des Gardes Agricoles at Maupertuis, which he cited as a source for the Glass House. The Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery had a multiplicity of referents: Hellenic in the shape of the building, Byzantine and Islamic in the ceiling systems, Gothic in the flattened curves of the arches, and late Baroque and Romantic Classical in the anodized gold scissor stair (bringing to mind his admiration for the "stair worthy of a Baroque palace" in Mies's Nazi Reichsbank proposal). Describing the gallery, Johnson said "the challenge was severe," a sentiment that, as he explained, also purposefully applied to the experience of the visitor (Johnson 1964). There was no humanist impulse in these buildings, as there was in Kahn's Yale Art Gallery (1953) and Richards Medical Center (1957–62). These buildings did not glorify the powers of technological materialism, as did contemporaneous works by Saarinen, or cultural materialism, as in works by Rudolph. There was no populist impulse, as there was in the architecture of Morris Lapidus and Stone, which appealed to mass fantasies of glamour and world travel. By pointing back in his work to the Romantic Classical architecture of Schinkel and Ledoux, Johnson reignited the polemical Enlightenment discourse between the ancients and the moderns for the postwar world, positing an ultimately irreconcilable grappling between the past and the present. Behind his work lay the same spectacular, annihilatory encounter with history that informed Winckelmann's mid-eighteenth-century descriptions of the art of antiquity and the fantasies of Ledoux's compatriot Etienne-Louis Boullée. This was no mere decorative subversion of the International Style, but rather totalizing late modernist abstraction. As such, it became the subject of critiques far more acidic in tone than the reception accorded the work of his contemporaries.

Johnson and Falsity

> It is pleasant to be in a false scale.
>
> (Johnson, "Full Scale False Scale", 1962)

Unlike the rather jovial critical dismissal of outré projects by Saarinen and Stone, Johnson's architecture, treated as a corollary to his homosexuality and his politics, has long been met with feelings of fright and revulsion. Charges of perversity, stylistic confusion, formal "Chaoticism," destructive disregard of morality, and singleness as a form of selfishness are the standard critical stock-in-trade. In his 1973 book *Movements in Modern Architecture*, for example, Jencks characterized Johnson's architecture as sheer sexual-historical provocation: "a demonstration of his impeccably perverse taste and

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motivated by historicist allusions" (Jencks 1973: 207). For Jencks, Johnson's architecture was not only amoral but also "fatalistic … destructive of the public domain which depends on both personal sacrifice and morality" (Jencks 1973: 212). More than two decades later, in a 1995 review of Schulz's biography, Hilton Kramer characterized Johnson's career as "a series of brilliantly performed charades in which other people's ideas, other people's taste, and other people's styles have been appropriated, exploited, deconstructed and repackaged to advance the prosperity of his own reputation and influence;" Kramer dismissed all his major works as "failed buildings" (Kramer 1995: 44). The essays from the Yale symposium generally followed these themes.

Failure is, in fact, an interesting lens through which to view the queer subtext of Johnson's architecture. Queer theorists such as Judith Halberstam (2011) and Lee Edelman (2004) have recently argued for the significance of failure as it relates to the social and political positioning of homosexuality. They interpret the failure to participate in the normative structures of marriage, child rearing, and domestic family consumption in contemporary capitalist society as a productive political stance of negation signaling the possibility of alternate regimes. Seen through this lens, all of the qualities that Jencks and Kramer identify in Johnson's architecture, which continue to get under the skin of modern architectural historians, could be interpreted as purposeful queer acts of negation. To this point, Johnson's "full scale false scale" philosophy deliberately flaunted failure as a primary feature of the work of architecture: the useless monument was by definition a failed building.

In *Movements in Modern Architecture*, Jencks dismissed the body of Johnson's postwar work as "entirely Camp" (Jencks 1973: 207). He had read Susan Sontag's then still recent essay "Notes on Camp" (1965), yet, in my view, he entirely missed the point. Camp is a useful category for exploring Johnson's queer sensibility because of its complex engagement with culture, history, politics, sexuality, style, and taste at a specific moment in the early and mid-1960s. As Sontag describes it, the Camp sensibility is concerned foremost with failure and performance/performativity. Camp enthusiasts transformed the debased processes of mass production and consumption in postwar America into a new form of ecstatic experience by taking "unique objects" associated with failed ideologies, dead styles of the past, and putting them back into circulation as beautiful and bizarre fetish objects. She repeatedly stresses that the Camp sensibility is one that "converts one thing into something else": "the Camp eye has the power to transform experience," it "converts the serious into the frivolous," it is always "alive to a double sense," "susceptible of a double interpretation" (Sontag 1966: 277, 279, 281). The relation of homosexuality to Camp ultimately rests on this process of transformation, since it parallels the homosexual experience itself. In Sontag's telling, it is homosexuals, a marginalized and "improvised

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self-elected class … who constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste" in an age in which "aristocrats in the old sense" have ceased to exist (Sontag 1966: 290).

Johnson's admission in "Full Scale False Scale" that his pavilions were a joke on serious architecture, and yet serious architecture, aligns him with Sontag as a philosopher of Camp, as does his appropriation of architectural typologies and stylistic motifs of a discredited and vanquished German Romantic past. Camp objects, as Sontag describes them, are analogous to the useless monuments Johnson designed. Johnson transformed his failed political aspirations into a libertine aesthetic philosophy, which, like Camp, cast a "queer eye" (or "Camp eye," as Sontag calls it) on the dominant political and social regime, illuminating its anxieties particularly around issues such as durability and productivity. Like Sontag, who argued against moral interpretations of art, Johnson argued against a moral imperative in architecture. "In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art," Sontag wrote at the end of "Against Interpretation" (1964), a prelude to her essay on Camp (Sontag 1966: 14). The Camp sensibility provided such an erotics, since it could take in everything either through sincere love of the beautiful or a wicked form of cynicism. Johnson not only possessed both, but he brought them together in his architecture.

The transformative aspects of the Camp sensibility are also at the core of drag performance, which Kramer, like Jencks, grossly misrepresents. In "Full Scale False Scale," Johnson hints that he conceived of his pavilions as a form of drag, tableaux vivant type performances in which he could adopt different poses and try on different styles. Floating on a lake, the Moon Viewing Pavilion was a make-believe Cythera where he could slip into a girlish persona and play at being a coquette: "My pavilion I should wish to be compared to high-style, high-heel evening slippers, preferably satin – a pleasure-giving object, designed for beauty and the enhancement of human, preferably blond beauty" (Johnson 1979: 252) (see Figure 3). He describes one of the four open-air rooms in the pavilion as a Boudoir, like something out of Jean-Francois de Bastide's libertine novella of architectural seduction *Le Petite Maison* (1758) or Le Camus de Mézières's treatise *Le génie de l'architecture, ou L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (1780). It was a site of political, sexual, and social inversion, purporting an idea of beauty at odds with the ideology of "pervasive beauty" advocated by Luce. The pavilion was an allegory for falsity as a state of being in the world: "it is pleasant to be in a false scale," Johnson says (Johnson 1979: 251). The point of the arches was that they were demonstrably false: "it is obvious these arches are not truly structural – not honest" (Johnson 1979: 252). This was more than a mid-1950s expression of the "epistemology of the closet" or a Tennessee Williams like concealment of the true nature of gay subjectivity; Johnson sought to cast into sharp relief the artifice of the construction of architectural norms, just as

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(a) (b)

Figure 3
Philip Johnson, Moon-Viewing Pavilion, 1962, New Canaan, Connecticut. Photographs by Jeanna Shepard Photography.

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the drag queen, through illusive performance, revealed the artifice of the construction of gender and sexual norms. As he makes clear, “I wanted to deliberately fly in the face of the ‘modern’ tradition of functionalist architecture” (Johnson 1979: 251).

Johnson’s digressive, meandering, witty performance style in his public lectures displayed a distinctive discursive mode. In describing the backstage world of the performing arts in mid-century New York, headed at its apex by Johnson’s friend Lincoln Kirsten, the poet and literary critic Wayne Kosentenbaum has described the character on view in Johnson’s lectures: he is the “gay virtuoso gabber – creature of lists, parentheses, digressions, apostrophes, opinions, contradictions,” all of which were a part of the syntax of “pre-stonewall gay argot” (McCourt 2002: v). In a similar vein, in describing “the writing of modern homoerotics,” the literary critic Kevin Kopelson, drawing on the work of Foucault, has stressed the significance of “reverse discourse” in “gay self-articulation,” defined as “subaltern speech that transfigures dominant ideology,” in other words the purposeful misappropration of dominant discourses in such a way that they are turned back on themselves as a means of attack (Kopelson 1994: 18). I would argue that Johnson performs precisely this kind of subversive reverse discourse in projects such as the Moon Viewing Pavilion, where “the form of the design – the grammar – is frankly ‘modern’,” but where “the idea of the arch is, of course, contrary to ‘modern’ design” (Johnson 1979: 252).

In his earlier essay on the Glass House, he also wrote about “the grammar of architecture” and stressed the peculiar importance in his work of syntax (Johnson 1979: 220). His foundational architectural vocabulary and his decorative and spatial system may have been coming from Mies, but his sharpened syntax had a pointed inflection, which resulted, as he himself recognized, in a “totally different compositional effect” (Johnson 1979: 221). Johnson’s syntax was

not "fussy," a charge leveled at Rudolph's initial designs for the Jewett Arts Center at Wellesley College (1955), which looked back to the Doge's Palace in Venice; even a project as decked out as the Four Seasons Restaurant, with its metallic drapes hanging like dripping jewelry, is characterized by the rigidity of its forms and rich but spare decorative detailing (Rohan 2000: 207–11). The queerness of Johnson's architecture was not registered in decorative motifs and their connections to fears of effeminacy, but rather in his oppositional approach to the practice of architecture and the way he put his buildings together.

When Rudolph, also a mid-century gay architect, left the chairmanship of Yale's School of Architecture in 1965, which he had taken up in 1957, he said: "I suppose the Yale chairmanship made me a member of the Establishment, being accepted or something. I now understand that I can never belong to these things and that I'll always be attacked as an outsider" (Moholy-Nagy 1970: 16). Although completely different in style, his Art & Architecture building on the Yale campus (1963) was attacked along the same lines as Johnson's architecture. In *Movements in Modern Architecture*, Jencks labels it "Middle Camp" and points out "the grand gesture, the defiance of convention, the honest arrogance … unequivocal exhibition of the personality cult … unalloyed pursuit of fame combined with exotic taste (candelabra, orange, pulsating carpets, etc)" (Jencks 1973: 190–1). Such analysis not only becomes dully repetitive, but it also willfully refuses to see or understand the strange beauty of Rudolph's and Johnson's buildings by focusing instead on their perceived failure to conform to some notion of the architect's responsibility toward society. Yet, it is this outsider mentality, an indelible part of gay subjectivity, which powered their iconoclastic attitude toward modernist doctrine and enabled them to break through to a new and idiosyncratic architectural vocabulary.

In many ways, Johnson and Rudolph upend mid-century critiques that equated overly decorative architecture and interiors with social pathology. Such critiques were usually connected to fears about the dangerous effects of consumer culture and the role that women played in postwar society as arbiters of the domestic and social realms. Unlike an architect such as Morris Lapidus, neither Johnson nor Rudolph worked in the realm of commercial architecture or designed buildings that gave shape to mass cultural fantasies. Interestingly, the criticism of mainstream architects such as Lapidus, Saarinen, and Stone often came from critics and magazine editors, including Douglas Haskell and William Jordy, who weirdly lagged behind both the public and the architects themselves in understanding shifts in culture and politics. As Alice Friedman has shown, Lapidus's flashy hotels were understood by most "to fit squarely within postwar modernist trends toward an expanded palette of forms and emotional possibilities – it is clearly modern architecture that was shaped by the desires and aspirations of American glamour" (Friedman

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2010: 182). Johnson and Rudolph both worked on the periphery of mainstream consumer and popular culture and were, in their respective ways, actively subverting modernism from within.

In Johnson's case, I would conclude, this subversion was motivated by a sense of radical difference that was manifested in both his political aesthetics and his sexuality. His break with orthodox modernism occurred not in the late 1950s or early 1960s but back in 1933, before he even became an architect, when he welcomed the move toward monumentality and dynamic historical synthesis that he saw in the earliest Nazi prestige projects. His cynicism, like his architectural libertinism, was a result of this ruinous early adventure in politics as much as a response to the ecstasies and degradations of mass culture in postwar America. His cynicism was itself a kind of social gesture. With the rise of postmodernism, he knew enough to turn it into celebrity, which is also to say that he saw celebrity as a form of cynicism. In this he was a trailblazer and a true contemporary of Warhol, with whom he collaborated on the facade of the Theater of the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair in New York. When postmodernism exploded in the late 1970s, he came to be regarded as a prophet and rejuvenated his career. His grinning visage on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1979, soon after the unveiling of his controversial AT&T Building, was the apotheosis of his cynicism and historicism; pointing back to the ideology of history he developed in his lectures of the 1950s, it was history's ultimate revenge. By then, he was no longer decrying "the shibboleth of democratic capitalism" because it had finally come around to his way of thinking: big business no longer desired "democratically acceptable" buildings; rather, it aimed to express totalitarian fantasy.

The intersection of gay subjectivity and modern architecture remains a frontier in modern architectural studies. Yet, recent developments point to a dim prospect. Soon after Johnson's Glass House opened to the public in 2006, around the same time as the Yale symposium, it appeared in *Vogue* magazine in a series of fashion advertisements for 7 Jeans (see Figure 4). While supporting "the National Trust for Historic Preservation's efforts to save modernism's legacy," the ads effectively stripped the Glass House of any historical, political, or social meaning, transforming it into a cultural backdrop for stylish consumption. In one image a straight young couple leans on the rock wall in front of the Glass House, while in another the tight jeans-clad body of the young woman is seen in relief against the Glass House facade. In death, and in the context of "preserving the modern," Johnson and his house have thus been subsumed into a paradigm of normative, middle-class, heterosexual consumption that he not only openly disdained, but ridiculed in his architecture and his writings of the 1950s and 1960s, and especially in his Glass House. Yet, as with his turn to postmodernism in the 1970s, one wonders if he wouldn't offer a wry smile at this bizarre turn of events.

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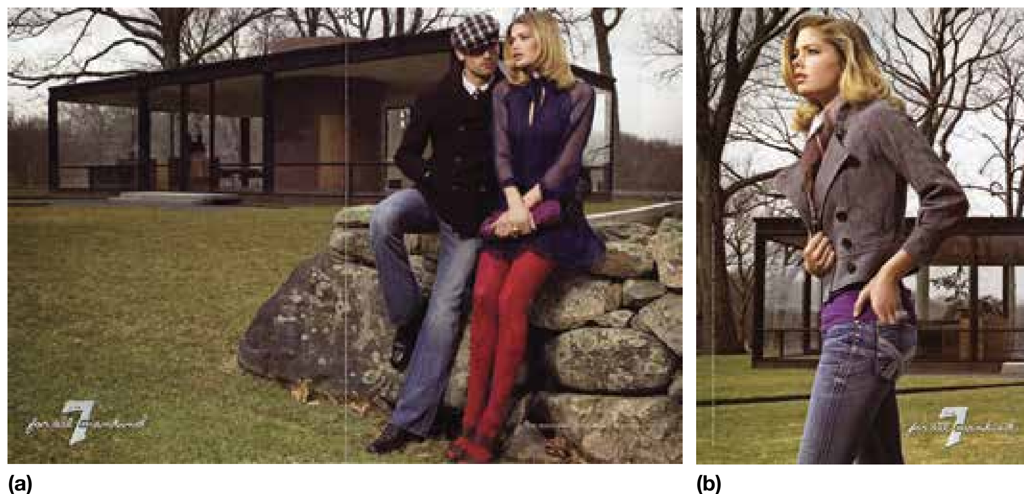

(a) (b)

Figure 4
7forallMankind, 2008 advertisement. Photographs courtesy of 7forallMankind.

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