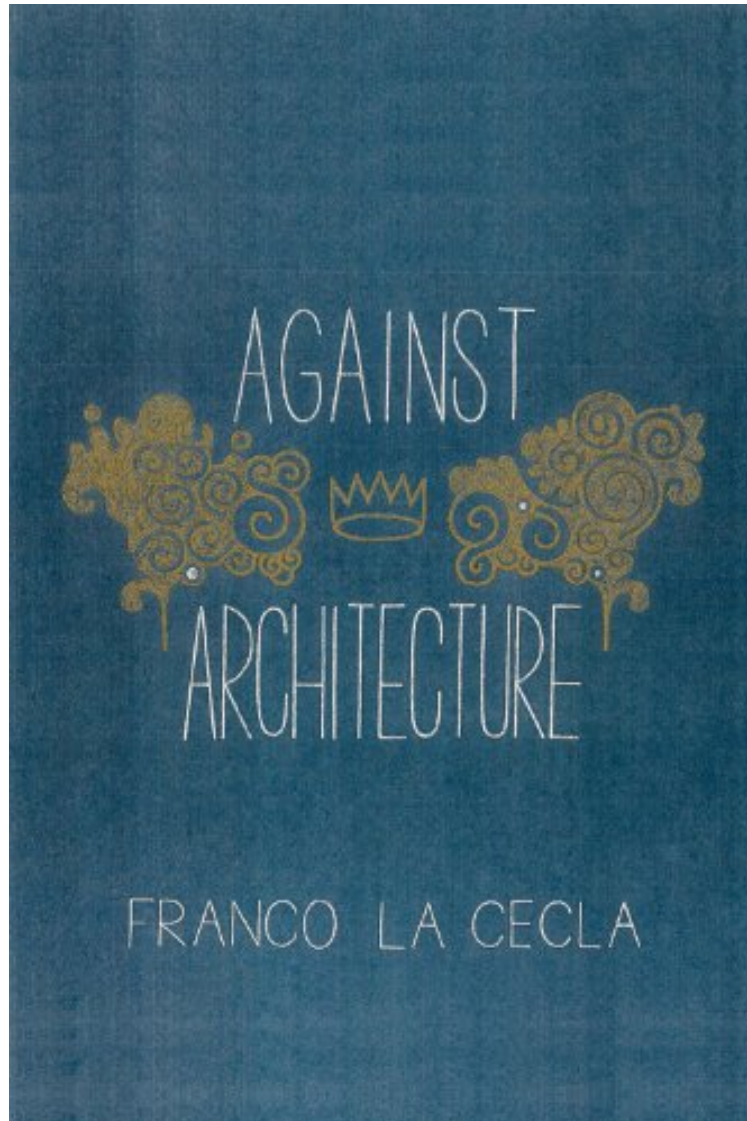


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Against Architecture (Green Arcade)

Franco La Cecla

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Franco La Cecla : Against Architecture (Green Arcade) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Against Architecture (Green Arcade):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. very good book!By charles boydwhat a good book! talks about the very real problems facing successful architects and the s***ty current paradigms of the profession. the author worked closely with renzo piano on a couple projects where he really tried to engage the community and be sensitive to local culture, only to get insurmountable pressure from clients and outside forces to be more exclusionary and elitist. good effort, renzo! very good read.10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. A much needed, if occasionally garbled polemic.By E. S. VoytkoFranco La Cecla has stature. He is a close friend and colleague of Renzo Piano; he

has consulted for Barcelona's regional planning body; and he helped to choose the design firm to head up a dramatic planning overhaul of Tirana, Albania. He is curiously prominent as a non-architect within the architecture profession, which positions him very well for a polemic against a field that at times displays an alarming disinterest in the immense social power it wields. Which is why I opened his book *Against Architecture* with such high hopes. Thankfully, for the most part La Cecla delivers. This short work draws on both La Cecla's firsthand experience in the field and on writers and theorists he admires (he particularly reveres Rebecca Solnit) to indict the current paradigm in architecture: reverence for each new "genius" work from the architectural superstars regardless of its social impact. The only real defect in La Cecla's delivery is his regular flirtation with the garbled postmodern obscurantism that plagues today's academic writing. Here is a paragraph from a randomly selected page: "Living is the direct communication between the subconscious of the city and the subconscious of the inhabitants. This brings us again to "local frame of mind." But because "local frame of mind" is an expression that still implies a certain state of consciousness, whereas what is working here is not a thought but, as Richard Sennett would say, "flesh and stone." The dream flesh of which we are made is the same dream stone into which the cities will sooner or later crumble." You'll have to trust me that context does not render the above paragraph any less opaque. As for the structure of the book: it is not a linear, coherent, thesis-driven text. Each chapter is rather a separate essay, many of which have been previously published in periodicals. This doesn't detract from the book's impact, though, because La Cecla's writing throughout is informed by a sensitivity to social issues and a suspicious, frustrated, and sometimes mournful stance towards the architectural profession. In separate chapters, La Cecla describes his experiences consulting for Barcelona and Tirana and laments the slow decay of his native Palermo, but the best essay of the bunch is a ten page affair detailing the ongoing expansion of Columbia University into Harlem. La Cecla recounts his awe and admiration for Renzo Piano's designs, which sought to delicately balance the needs of Harlem residents and Columbia students. He then describes with increasing horror the process by which Columbia bought out existing residents and shopkeepers, relegated Piano to an insignificant role in the project, and pushed forward with its bald-faced plan to wreck a historic Manhattan neighborhood as part of a real estate move. This essay, along with the rest of La Cecla's book, throws in sharp relief the promising role architects could play in stitching together urban fabrics given a little sensitivity. Sadly, it is much more common to see architectural talent reduced to a branding role in the real estate deals that have become the ugly urban hallmarks of "casino capitalism."

With insight into the human side of architecture, this critical assessment displays the shortcomings of modern urban planning as an acclaimed architect issues a passionate charge against the celebrities of the current architectural world: the "archistars." He argues that architecture has lost its way and its true function, as the archistars mold cityscapes to build their brand with no regard for the public good. More than a diatribe against the trade, La Cecla makes a call to rethink urban space and take the cities back from "casino capitalism" that has left a string of failed urban projects, such as the Sagrera of Barcelona and the expansion of Columbia University in New York City. Recounting his travels across the globe, La Cecla provides insights to aid in resisting the planners and to find the spirit of a place. These commentaries on the works of past and present masters of urban and landscape will take an important place in continued public discourse for years to come.

"To tell the truth, Franco La Cecla is not wrong. There is too much building, sometimes only to put a signature, a stamp on a spot, without any worry about the people who are going to live there. In other situations it is easy to be used by the institutions that support speculation. It is the reason why I refused many projects, because, I am lucky—and I can choose." —Renzo Piano, *La Repubblica*