

#1948784 in Books Zinguer Tamar 2015-12-04Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.30 x .80 x 8.10l, 1.98  
#File Name: 0813937728272 pagesArchitecture in Play Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys |

File size: 33.Mb



*Tamar Zinguer*

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# Architecture in Play

Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys



Tamar Zinguer

(Mobile ebook) Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys

## Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys

**Tamar Zinguer : Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Architecture in Play: Intimations of Modernism in Architectural Toys:

Created for children but designed by adults with considerable ingenuity, architectural toys have long offered a window on a much larger world. In *Architecture in Play*, Tamar Zinguer explores the nearly two-hundred-year period over which such playthings have reflected changing attitudes toward form, structure, and permanence, echoing modernist experiments and stylistic inclinations in fascinating ways while also incorporating technological advances in their systems of construction. Zinguer's history of these toys reveals broader social and economic trends from their respective periods. Focusing on four primary building materials (wood, stone, metal, and paper), Zinguer discusses a series of important architectural toys: Friedrich Froebels Gifts (1836), cubes, spheres, and cylinders that are gradually broken down to smaller geometrical parts; Anchor Stone Building Blocks (1877), comprising hundreds of miniature stone shapes that yield castles, forts, and churches; Meccano (1901) and Erector Set (1911), including small metal

girders to construct bridges and skyscrapers mimetic of contemporary steel structures; and *The Toy* (1950) and *House of Cards* (1952), designed by Charles and Ray Eames, which are lightweight cardboard "kits of parts" based on methods of prefabrication. Used in the intimacy of the domestic environment, a setting that encouraged the eradication of formal habits and a reconceiving of visual orders, architectural toys ultimately intimated notions of the modern.

Amply illustrated and engagingly written, this book sheds valuable light on this fascinating relation between household toys and the deeper trends and ideas from which they sprang.

Written in a clear, readable style, refreshingly free of jargon, *Architecture in Play* uses a number of prominent construction toys in Europe and the United States as examples of an interconnectedness between such toys and mainstream architectural thought. Tamar Zinguer's book broadens our understanding of the larger contextual field of architectural discourse. (Dietrich Neumann, Brown University, coeditor of *Cities of Light: Two Centuries of Urban Illumination*) Architecture often seems to lack the spirit of playfulness that other arts display at times. With this highly original and brilliant book Tamar Zinguer deconstructs this common perception by revealing the influence of children's building toys on many nineteenth- and twentieth-century architects. As Zinguer argues, the conception and use of these toys, some of which were actually invented by architects, are related to key design ideals from prefabrication to the quest for structural lightness. Well before the advent of the digital and the spread of strategic simulation, architecture already appeared as a 'serious game. (Antoine Picon, Harvard University, author of *Digital Culture in Architecture: An Introduction for the Design Professions*) Several architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Buckminster Fuller, and Charles and Ray Eames, have credited Friedrich Froebel and his Kindergarten Gifts with their professional pursuits. As such, what formative influences do toys possess? Responding to this query, Professor of Architecture at Cooper Union Tamar Zinguer seeks answers in her book *Architecture in Play*.... [Zinguer] succinctly displays the depth of her knowledge from commercial endeavors like the Levitt Brothers and Lustron Homes to projects by architects Konrad Wachsmann, Buckminster Fuller, and Walter Gropius.... In addition, readers fascinated with early flight experiments, like those of Alexander Graham Bell or the Lilienthal brothers, or bridge engineering, such as designs by Thomas Bouch or Sir John Fowler, will be pleasantly engrossed and enticed to discover more. Readers interested in building toys will also be pleased. In four generously illustrated chapters, Zinguer covers six of the most popular and long-produced construction toys from the late nineteenth century to the middle twentieth century in Europe and North America. (*American Journal of Play*) Tamar Zinguer's elegantly produced book on building toys and architecture is a long-awaited addition to a growing academic literature on playthings, their design histories, and social implications. Zinguer's book joins a series of exhibitions and catalogs produced by the Canadian Centre for Architecture (1990s); cultural and consumer histories,... While she stays within those established conventions, she also explores the tantalizing implications not only of the large-scale potential for miniaturized construction, but also of failure and destruction as a creative force. (*The Journal for the History of Childhood and Youth*)

About the Author Tamar Zinguer is Associate Professor at the Cooper Union's Irwin S. Chanin School of Architecture.