

A history of that which hides itself (camouflage effect of history)

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Upon a shallow first reading, one might understand Giedion as addressing key aspects of contemporary architecture that are often left unconsidered both historically and theoretically. For instance from the development of the lock into an industrially produced mechanism integral to the protection of the fortunes involved in large-scale banking and finance in the 19th century to the role of the hotel bathroom, and in particular the development of the industrially manufactured tub, in the standardization of the dimensions of the American home bathroom in the twentieth-century, Giedion is writing a history of objects that have tended to play largely tacit roles in the theorization of architecture.

Both mechanical operations as well as the unassuming everyday mechanically produced objects had been in Giedion's thought process long before the publication of *Mechanization Takes Command*, and indeed before *Space, Time and Architecture*, which focused largely on extraordinary works of architecture. To this effect, along with several colleagues, Giedion had organized an exhibition on the history of the bath at the Zurich Kunstgewerbe museum in 1935 which was entitled "The Bath of Today and Yesterday".

A written predecessor to *Mechanization Takes Command* can also be found in an unfinished manuscript that Giedion worked on in the mid-1930s entitled, "The Emergence of the Modern Human". The aforementioned manuscript was in essence a cultural history of industrialization with many thematic similarities to *Mechanization Takes Command*, while drawing mostly on European rather than American historical material. In this sense,

Giedion's approach was not out of place with other architectural scholars and historians.

With that said, Giedion's goal in *Mechanization Takes Command* was not only to write a history of things that weren't yet written, but more importantly, he sought to further make us aware of the camouflaging function of mechanization; the way in which it masquerades itself going unnoticed or at times unconsidered. This is not a history that serves to fill gaps but rather one of a process that has become so intertwined with our life that we have a tendency to naturalize it.

A case in point; Giedion figuratively describes how in the "murder machinery" of an abattoir, "the mechanization of death" blurs the line between the workings of the machine and the end of biological life of the animals being slaughtered as "death cries from the animals and mechanical noises of machines are almost impossible to disentangle".

His goal is not to regard this condition sentimentally nor to see mechanization merely in terms of the production of commodities, but to try to expose an essential condition that the mechanization of death brings out. What is truly startling in this mass transition from life to death is the complete neutrality of the act. One does not experience, one does not feel; one merely observes this progression.