AFTER THE MANIFESTO
WRITING, ARCHITECTURE, AND MEDIA IN A NEW CENTURY

EDITED BY CRAIG BUCKLEY

GSAPP BOOKS T6) EDICIONES
AFTER THE MANIFESTO
CRAIG BUCKLEY

FROM MANIFESTO TO DISCOURSE
ANTHONY VIDLER

MANIFESTO ARCHITECTURE
BEATRIZ COLOMINA

ANONYMOUS MANIFESTOS
RUBÉN A. ALCOLEA & HÉCTOR GARCÍA-DIEGO

THE ALHAMBRA PALACE, THE KATSURA OF THE WEST
JOSÉ MANUEL POZO & JOSÉ ÁNGEL MEDINA

THE LAST MANIFESTO
CARLOS LABARTA & JORGE TÁRRAGO

CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE AND THE MANIFESTO GENRE
JUAN M. OTXOTORENA

TOURNAMENTS
FELICITY SCOTT

RETROACTIVE MANIFESTOS
ENRIQUE WALKER

MANIFESTO FEVER
MARK WIGLEY

ARCHITECTURAL MANIFESTOS
BERNARD TSCHUMI
TOURNAMENTS

FELICITY D. SCOTT

AS A TITLE FOR THIS FORUM, the question—"What happened to the architectural manifesto?"—is seductively ambiguous: Are we being called upon to reflect on the recent history of this genre, to examine or even clarify what happened to it and why? Or, to doubt, question, or problematize the continuing efficacy of manifestos by tracing the terms of their unfortunate demise? Or is it rather a call to action, even implicitly a request to launch a new manifesto, perhaps a manifesto about architectural manifestos in an attempt to resist any such narrative of loss, an attempt to reinvigorate contemporary debates by mobilizing the polemical rhetoric of urgency so familiar from the modernist manifesto? This ambiguity calls upon the speaker to identify from which discursive position she or he speaks, a task that is less than straightforward given the convoluted topology or interpenetrating matrix that has characterized both historical and theoretical discourse in architecture as well as architectural manifestos in the twentieth century. In other words, we might say, the ambiguity inherent to the symposium's interrogative title reflects or reiterates the productive slippage between modalities that has informed the field of architectural discourse in the past and invested it with a certain sense of critical (and at times political) urgency. For, on the one hand, we often find a manifesto-like proclamation of contemporary stakes within historical writing, even if not overtly taking the form of a declaration, and, on the other, a level of historical self-consciousness informing architectural manifestos. This is not, of course, to suggest that the writing of history and that of manifestos have been (or should be) collapsed, or that they are without distinctiveness. Rather, it is to posit the importance of the ongoing encounter and mutual displacement that arises through their productively conflictual dialogue.

The question—"What happened to the architectural manifesto?"—appears, additionally, haunted by the sense that something about the discursive and historical context from which manifestos are launched has indeed changed, that the heroic voice proper to the manifesto genre as it drove modernist and avant-garde polemics, refutations, and counterclaims, no longer resonates only, or simply, as heroic. Looming is the sense that our perception or reception of such performances—whether played out in oral proclamations, print-based media, exhibitions, or other forms of actualization and dissemination—has thus been irrevocably altered. One might, in the first instance, speculate upon whether or not this doubt has arisen on account of the association of manifestos not only with progressive tendencies but also with reactionary ideologies and forces of exclusion and violence during the twentieth century. Moreover, in the United States, at least since the early 1970s, there is the specter of the "tournament"
model of discourse favored by the neoconservatives and the polarizing, declarative polemics of right-wing pundits and demagogues to contend with, if not simply to avoid partaking in. But it is not simply the association with less progressive tendencies that has rendered the bombast of the manifesto troubling: if this were the case, Marinetti’s “Futurist Manifesto” of 1909 would have been cast rather differently as a founding moment of art and architectural manifestos, or at least the championing of such heroism would in retrospect be more profoundly disturbing. We are, however, left with the question of whether (today) the heroic rhetoric and chest-pounding over heartfelt ideals now simply or irreversibly resonates with the dramatic prose of right-wing demagogues or, in the wake of feministic and gender struggles, with the machismo they identified at work within a largely heteronormative, male-dominated field.

I would not, of course, want to cede the potential of launching polemical challenges to the discipline of architecture to reactionary tendencies, let alone to suggest that any such strategy was doomed to rhetorical cooptation by the right. Far from it. (The conceptual and theoretical register within which manifestos operate upon present conditions with some precision is one of the key weapons in the arsenal of critical practice.) In the second instance, however, as a historian, I want to ask whether we can identify aspects of the manifesto, or certain types of manifesto that might have lent the genre too easily to the foreclosure of critical potentialities and their recuperation as demagoguery.

Here I want to turn, briefly, to Charles Jencks’s highly symptomatic endeavor to define the architectural manifesto as a violent, incantatory, sectarian call to order in “The Volcano and the Tablet,” his introduction to Theories and Manifestoes of Contemporary Architecture of 1997 (a volume receiving little attention before this conference, in stark contrast to Ulrich Conrad’s Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture, with which it was in explicit dialogue). In his typically bombastic, ad hoc manner, Jencks characterized the genre (or, as he put it, the “art form”) in terms of an emotionally charged, even biblical crusade bent at once on destruction of an enemy or outsider, the exclusion of difference, and the establishment of new orthodoxies. Manifestos “inspire fear in order to create unity and orthodoxy” he posited, additionally clarifying that it was the “irresistible display of violence and strength which makes the manifesto memorable and psychologically impressive.” Of their formal characteristics he noted that manifestos were repetitive and hypnotic, that they were magic words written on the run and exhibiting “an hysterical, telegraphic quality.” For Jencks, it was the collusion between fearmongering—the “volcano” in his title, which referenced “the explosion of emotion”—and the institutionalization of new norms—its counterpart, the “tablet,” which referenced the establishment of “laws and theories”—that characterized a manifesto. Concluding, Jencks tied this opportunistic logic of promoting fear to the once-utopian figure of changing the world. As he explained, “Crisis, or the feeling of imminent catastrophe is one more reason why the ‘volcano’ is as deep a metaphor as the ‘tablet’—pure theory—for without the motive to change the world the manifesto would not be written.” What, then, we might ask, did Jencks imagine such fearmongering to be in the service of? What was at stake in such attempts to change the world, to establish new laws?

To be clear, I am not implying that there is something constitutive about the genre on account of Jencks’s definition, but want to ask if there are manifestos that operate otherwise, to different ends—those that undermine or differently articulate themselves with respect to historical forces and political discourses as well as to established forms of institutional power. Are there not other types of manifesto, wayward versions or ironic appropriations of the genre? Or can we identify borderline examples that might have us asking: How on earth did the architectural manifesto come to look like that? Can we find examples of manifestos that destabilize the genre from within, even allow us to significantly redefine it? While not discounting the distinct possibility that it might even be Jencks’s astounding ability to turn all polemic into pure platitudes, to subsume distinct discourses into his monstrous categories, which has killed the efficacy and specificity of the manifesto in architectural discourse, I still want to speculate upon other possible lives.

To do so I want to bring in three examples that do not appear in Jencks and Kropf’s otherwise quite extensive selection: Open Land: A Manifesto, Leslie Kanes Weisman’s “Women’s Environmental Rights: A Manifesto,” and Luc Deleu’s “Manifesto on Urban Planning.” All have an air of urgency and in this sense resonate with Jencks’s definition. But in addressing pressing questions of their respective historical moments in the 1970s and early ‘80s, particularly environmental concerns as they related to the discipline of architecture, each departs from the critic’s formulation in an instructive manner. To be clear, I am not putting these examples on the table as instances of more important manifestos than those included in Jencks’s anthology, or as examples that answer my questions as such. Rather, they are introduced here because each one speaks, in a different manner, to the pressure of historical forces upon the discipline, as manifest in the manifesto.
Open Land: A Manifesto was not written by architects but by the
communards of Morningstar Commune and Wheeler’s Ranch in Northern
California (1). It was, however, a manifesto about architecture, one
concerned, specifically and avowedly, with the impact of architecture upon
one’s body and psyche. While pervaded by the mysticism and problematic
identifications often accompanying hippie culture, it stands as an example
of a manifesto that staged a departure from extant institutions, as do most
instances of the genre, but without indicating a means of return or of the
establishment of a new orthodoxy. The Open Land movement emerged
in the mid-to-late 1960s in reaction to what its earliest proponents—Lou
Gottlieb and Ramon Sender (both musicians working with electronic
technologies)—called “cybernation.” Responding at once to the imminent
possibility that human labor would be rendered unnecessary on account
of automation and that those same technologies harbored the threat of
atomic and nuclear warfare and hence a forced return to a pre-industrial
condition, these communes adopted an ethos of “voluntary primitivism,”
a performance of survival strategies or anticipatory experimental testing
of an alternative form of life (2, 3). Central to this testing were attempts
to cede private property rights to the public domain in order to facilitate
communal stewardship of the land. They hoped to make land available rent
free for anyone to use, to open a space without governmental regulation.
Offering her impressions of Wheeler’s Ranch, journalist Sara Davidson
recalled that there was a sign near the community garden reading “Permit
not required to settle here.” Many had taken up the call to occupy land free
of charge, building makeshift structures or setting up temporary dwellings
from tents and teepees to customized school buses and vans within this
ambiguous territorial zone. The dwellings, Davidson wrote of the scene she
encountered, “are straight out of Dogpatch—old boards nailed unevenly
together, odd pieces of plastic strung across poles to make wobbly igloos, with round stovepipes poking out the side. Most have dirt floors, though the better ones have wood." The occupants themselves had a similarly poverty-ridden, even pre-industrial if theatrical appearance, wearing, as she put, "hillbilly clothes, with funny hats and sashes," outfits also described as "pioneer clothes."

Exodus from official systems of managing land and the built environment—from property rights and trespass laws to building codes as well as health and safety regulations—was not as easy as declaring, "Permit not required to settle here." Indeed, the sign served less as a performative or speech act in the sense theorized by J.L. Austin (actually freeing the land of the need for permits) than it did as a polemical and political gesture.7 And the local authorities soon fought back, giving rise to what came to be known as "code wars" and with them an escalating set of tactical and counter-tactical maneuvers between the commune, on the one hand, and local police and state governing institutions, on the other (4, 5). After initially trying to charge the communards with harboring dangerous persons, then repeatedly rounding them up and arresting them for health and safety violations, local government agencies eventually bulldozed the ad hoc settlements at both sites.

It was in this embattled context that Open Land: A Manifesto appeared in 1970, a text recounting how these structures had been a principal means for articulating and testing alternative modes of life. The "architecture," in other words, served as a strategic vehicle in the communards' attempts to withdraw from the state's regulation of the environment, as materiel in the battle over opening land. As more people arrived in the commune, we learn in the manifesto, "Sonoma County started a broad-based policy of repressions, including a punitive and discriminatory enforcement of the health and building codes.8 "Even tepees and tents were disallowed," the manifesto reported, going on to note the county's acts of rezoning the properties, revoking right-of-way access, instituting new laws against the formation of non-normative households, and other tactics to break up the communes. The vehemence of the government's response itself indicates that at stake was far more than ensuring the health and safety of those adopting a lifestyle of voluntary primitivism.

A section of the manifesto entitled "Our Beleaguered Homes" further outlined their ethos of self-build, no-code homes. "How about building yourself a house? No, no, you don't need money, architect, plans, permits. Why not use what's there?" "[R]estrictive codes on home-building," the manifesto insisted in a related context, "make it just about impossible to build a code
do-it-yourself ethos certainly informed the non-normative character of the
ad hoc constructions, the manifesto reveals that the teepees, lean-tos, tents,
open-sided A-frames, simple tarpaulins, treehouses, geodesic structures,
vans, school buses, and brushwood hogans were not simply the product of a
lack of building expertise (although this did of course often factor in).

Rejecting normative and scientifically justified approaches not only
to housing but also to health, hygiene, education, sanitation, birthing, and
labour, Open Land communards were not to stress, fighting for access to or
equitable inclusion within the system. Rather, they were actively withdraw-
ning from the institutions, practices, and sites through which micropolitical
techniques of power had developed under a modern form of governmental
rationality; they were withdrawing from the points at which that logic
systematically met the body and psyche of the contemporary subject in
their everyday lives. Open Land thus implicitly questioned the relation
between the state's more benevolent role in ensuring the health and welfare
of its citizens and the forms of control it exerted over them in the name of
maintaining productivity, or more precisely, maintaining profitability for the
capitalist machinery. Architecture, in turn, served as a tactical vehicle for
testing the occupation of a counter-environment, tactical weapons in a war
against the state's administration of dwelling (and hence of bodies) through
regulatory codes.

6 Leslie Janes Weisman, "Architecture as Icon," New York. The built environment as "a living archaeology
through which we can extract the priorities and beliefs of the decision-makers in our society."

My second example, Weisman's "Women's Environmental Rights: A
Manifesto," emerges from within a more specifically architectural context,
but similarly recognizes, we might say, a matrix of biopolitical forces at work
within architecture and the forms of life it sustains, reading them as "envi-
ronmental oppression." Appearing in Heresies 11, a 1981 special issue of
this feminist journal called "Making Room: Women and Architecture," the
manifesto begins, "Be it acknowledged: the man-made environments which
surround us reinforce conventional patriarchal definitions of women's role
in society and spatially imprint those sexist messages on our daughters
and sons (6)." Under the subtitle "Architecture as Icon," Weisman referred
in turn to the built environment as "a living archaeology through which we
can extract the priorities and beliefs of the decision-makers in our society."

What emerges in the remaining parts of the manifesto is a fascinating split
between calls for reform to take place within the system through mobilizing
architectural expertise—for instance, "We must demand the right to archi-
tectural settings which will support the essential needs of all women,"—and
something closer to the exodus of the Open Land communes. In the
context of calling for the appropriation, alternative use, and even radical
transformation of architectural spaces to counter social inequality and
disempowerment, Weisman included a statement issued a decade earlier
in the wake of attempting to occupy an abandoned building in New York's
East Village on New Year's Eve, 1971 (7). It reads in part: "Because we
want to develop our own culture... Because we refuse to have 'equal rights'
in a corrupt system... We took over a building to put into action with
women those things essential to women—health care, child care, food
conspiracy, clothing and book exchange... a lesbian rights center, interarts

7 Protest in the wake of the attempted occupation of an abandoned building
in the East Village on New Year's Eve (1971).
school, feminist school... For this reason we were busted... because we are women acting independently of men, independently of the system." At stake in both responses—the reformist and the revolutionary—however, and to reiterate, was a critique of the manner in which architecture served as a technique of power informing or sustaining particular forms of life. But there was also the hope that it could operate otherwise, and even serve to facilitate a type of disinvestment from such environmental forces (hence the need for the manifesto).

Third, I want to introduce Deleu’s 1980 “Orban Planning Manifesto,” a retroactive manifesto of sorts since it was launched not as a new polemic or to announce a change but to consolidate the architect’s ideas from the previous decade. In this regard it belied the contemporaneity of the manifesto form. Deleu’s manifesto returned to themes dating back to his earliest polemics under the rubric of T.O.P. office, in particular the limited land on planet Earth, the pressures of population growth and urbanization on food production, and the foreclosure of any remaining commons. In 1970, when he formed T.O.P. office, questions of environmental catastrophe and population growth were at the forefront of public debate, fueled by the survivalist rhetoric of R. Buckminster Fuller, whose Utopia or Oblivion: The Prospects for Humanity had appeared a year earlier, following Stanford biology professor Paul Ehrlich’s best-selling 1968 book, The Population Bomb (8, 9). Also in 1969, Stewart Brand—a former student of Ehrlich and avowed disciple of Fuller—launched the Whole Earth Catalog, with a cover featuring an iconic photograph from NASA’s Apollo missions, an image of earth from outer space (10).

All left a profound mark on Deleu’s thinking. For Deleu this new planetary consciousness meant that architecture and urbanism could no longer operate at the scale of housing or even the town, as he believed had characterized modernism. Rather, as he put it, “architecture would now have to be treated on a global scale.” As he explained in another manifesto, entitled “A Task for Contemporary Architecture,”

The consumer society requires a different approach than the production society of the beginning of this century. The mid-sixties and early seventies was a period full of changes—social and technical as well as artistic. Le Corbusier and Mies died. The first communication satellites were launched, enabling us to see events from all over the world in “real time” on our home TV screen. Concepts such as “Global Village” and “Spaceship Earth” were in use. The concept “ecology” (thinking about the earth) was in general use by the time of the Club of Rome report, which emphasized the limits of the earth and its mineral resources.11
Deleu invoked the popular duo of "World Thinking"—McLuhan's Global Village and Fuller's Spaceship Earth—on a number of occasions, making clear that what he called "world planning" or "orbanism" was indebted to both and hence inextricably connected to the so-called communication revolution (1.1). He also repeatedly clarified, however, that orbanism was not directed toward designing or managing the Earth at a global scale (as in Fuller's "World Game") but rather toward conceiving a model of design that was attentive to the scale of Earth and its interconnectedness. It is in this sense that we can understand the ironic commentary on global ecological interdependence appearing in two of his proposals. As Deleu wryly explained, "The proposal for an international compost heap in the Sahara is, for instance, an ecological project on a planetary scale. By shipping all vegetable waste to the Sahara, where it dehydrates quickly and becomes dust, the winds from the Sahara will carry particles that will automatically fertilize our farmland in Europe. I wrote a proposal to shoot nuclear waste to the sun. Obviously the sun is the best location to dump our nuclear waste." (1.3)

Suggesting that human settlement might shift from land to oceans, Deleu's 1980 manifesto alluded to his very first project, a 1972 competition entry entitled Mobile Medium University (12). The competition was launched in the wake of a decision to decentralize the Belgian university system, a move Deleu read as yet another threat posed to agricultural land by development. He responded via a proposal to situate the Union Internationale des Architectes (U.I.A.) at sea, to produce an institution literally traveling the globe upon three recycled aircraft carriers supplemented by no less than 33 helicopters and "communication media." (1.3) "A progressive policy," he explained, would attempt "to burden the earth with as little ballast as possible." In addition to such environmental claims were

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11 Lac Deleu, references for his thinking on Orbanism (including Stewart Brand's Whole Earth Catalog).

12 Lac Deleu, competition entry entitled "Mobile Medium University." (1972). This project—Deleu’s first—was alluded to in his 1980 manifesto.

13 Lac Deleu, proposal for the Union Internationale des Architectes (U.I.A.) on an aircraft carrier.
pedagogical ambitions articulated as geopolitical ones. "It seems to me," he remarked, "that a university that sails around the world with its pupils, connected via electronic media, diplomatizes real world citizens, with an expanded view of the world." In another drawing for the project, one ironically referencing posters associated with the occupation of the Parisian Ecole des Beaux-Arts in May 1968, we find the exclamation: "During my studies at the U.I.A. I was all over the world... I am a real international, not a consumers diploma!"

Deleu's choice of aircraft carriers could not have failed to resonate with their use in the Vietnam War at this moment as it spread into Cambodia. From aircraft carriers were launched fighter-bomber planes whose packages included not only incendiary bombs but also the defoliants and other chemical weapons responsible for the "ecocide" in Indochina. Such warships, if certainly abundant, were not exactly surplus at this moment.

The U.I.A. project formed part of a larger endeavor Mobile Medium Architecture, the manifesto for which appeared not in public circulation but in a private notebook in which the connections between American militarism, expanding communication technologies and transportation infrastructures, and environmental concerns, become far more explicit (14). After cover images of protestors, video cameras, and an IBM 956 column punchcard tucked into the dust jacket, we find a manifesto about mobility. It reads,

On the next spread we find Mobile Medium University in the company of two enigmatic comments regarding the communication matrix within which the new mobility, and the new "medium-man," operates. The first reads,

Our friend has no address
Always changing coordinates
To find your friend
You will have to communicate more intensely
Address book --> CoordinatoPhone, CoordinatoVideo.

Stressing that such apparent liberty to move about is suspended within a regulatory system geared toward increasing control, the second comment, inscribed immediately below, reads, "If the administration keeps track of your coordinates the system is ever again worn out." 15

I have written extensively about this work elsewhere, and here just want to call attention to two elements: first, Deleu's recasting of the name of his office (which stood for Turn on Planning) as "Turn on Promotion," and the launching in turn of a realized work, Mobile Medium Architecture Promotion, a customized Opel Blitz that appears in various guises in the scrapbook (15, 16). It appears, for instance, in association with mobile homes, alternative technologies, and even a drawing that seems to invert Hans Hollein's Rolls Royce Grille on Wall Street of 1966. Finally, making connections to protests against the war in Vietnam, it appears opposite a photograph of John Lennon and Yoko Ono's legendary March 1969 weekend "bed-in" in Amsterdam. If we take seriously the implied reference to Timothy Leary's catchy phrase—"Turn on, tune in, drop out"—we might speculate that Deleu was proposing that once a practice (like architecture) had been turned on to a new consciousness which, whether aided by psychedelic drugs or not, aimed to achieve a departure from conventional

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14 Luc Deleu, Mobile Medium Architecture, the manifesto for which appeared in a private notebook.
modes of perception, it could in turn tune in to the world around it and even drop out, hence relinquishing connections to the capitalist system and refusing to participate within its institutions and normative modes of life.

To some degree I think this is what is going on, but there are further complications when Leary’s mantra encounters architecture. Can an architectural or planning office drop out? Is this not a contradiction in terms or even a categorical mistake? That is, if architecture succeeded in withdrawing from longstanding roles of environmental control in the service of capital and the state, would it remain architecture? Deleu was certainly struggling with such questions. In a text entitled “Spaceship Earth,” he argued, “Urban planning and architecture are always a structural and three-dimensional packaging of socially dominant attitudes, and in this way the contemporary urbanization of the world (urbanization) emanates from the hegemony of capitalism, with its high consumption and low use of space.” And it is here that I want to return to his “Orban Planning Manifesto,” which ends by stressing that in an age characterized by massive environmental pressures, the critical task of the town planner-architect—what he called the orban planner—had radically transformed (he likened this change to the profound impact of photography on the pictorial function of Western painting). The architect’s role, he argued, had translated into the dissemination of “information”: “he is a medium, a trendsetter and/or town fool, etc… He designs, publishes, performs, shows, realizes or plays, etc.” The orban planner, he added in conclusion, “has become primarily a theoretician, who in rare cases realize his visionary views on spaces of the planet earth.”

As Deleu insisted elsewhere, he was not proposing that architects drop out but rather that they work in a conceptual or experimental register to launch images or ideas of a counter-logic, or counter-conduct, seeking to facilitate a critical self-consciousness regarding the discipline’s relationship to contemporary forces, and that they do so in a manner promoting structural transformations from within the system, even as he noted, at the level of policy.

To conclude: in response to the question “what happened to the architectural manifesto?” I have not attempted to find an answer in a definitive sense but rather to use the process of questioning as a vehicle through which to articulate or recover the possibility of manifestos operating otherwise, refusing the normative impetus stressed by Jencks, and their role of “enforcing purity and orthodoxy.” These admittedly rather marginal examples (and we might have taken examples instead from Jenoks to make a similar point) suggest, for instance, the possibility that manifestos might
not only assume a strictly oppositional stance but could also launch critical contradictions that are not so easily resolved, particularly with respect to the process of gaining institutional power, or that even stage a tactical exodus from that milieu, if only momentarily. Could a manifesto involve the insertion of risk or aim simply to trouble, rather than staging opposition or taking the form of attention-seeking polemics? Can manifestos stress the articulation of aporias rather than claims of truth (something we find in the history of architectural manifestos but absent in Jencks’s definition)? More particularly, I think such a process might serve to stress the need for new definitions, definitions that intentionally depart from Jencks’s ethos of alarmist violence and the establishment of new norms. For the manifesto does seem, on the one hand, to be an archaism from an earlier period of modernity. But, on the other hand, like print media itself, it is an archaism that might retain a contemporary function, prompting us also ask what might happen to the architectural manifesto and how might it be defined otherwise, differently.18


2 Ibid., 7.

3 Ibid., 12.

4 This research on Open Land communes forms part of a larger book project entitled Outlaw Territories: Environments of Insecurity/Architectures of Counter-Insurgency, forthcoming on Zone Books.


6 Davidson, "Open Land," 92 and 96, respectively.


14 Project text for Mobile Medium University, 1972. I want to thank Stefano Vervoort for translating this from the original Dutch for me.

15 I want to thank Wouter Davids for his kind translation from Dutch.


18 The notion of an archaism with a contemporary function is taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).