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Review of *Accommodating the Pedestrian* by Richard Untermann

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Hill, Michael R., "Review of *Accommodating the Pedestrian* by Richard Untermann" (1986). *Sociology Department, Faculty Publications*. 433.

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Hill, Michael R. 1986. Review of *Accommodating the Pedestrian* by Richard Undermann.
Environment & Behavior 18 (1): 147-151.

Accommodating the Pedestrian: Adapting Towns and Neighborhoods for Walking and Bicycling. By Richard K. Undermann. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984, xi and 232 pp., ill., index, \$34.50, 8¾ x 11 inches.

Undermann undertakes to provide design professionals and other decision makers with a down-to-earth, practical guide for converting existing automobile-dominated urban areas into bicycle and pedestrian-oriented neighborhoods and cities. Based primarily on his personal observation, experience, and professional predilections, Undermann lists the presumed "needs" of pedestrians/bicyclists and

presents a brief, uneven description of the "characteristics" of walking. A separate chapter, not well-integrated with the rest of the book, focuses specifically on bicyclists and bikeways. The second half of the book addresses specific improvements—primarily for pedestrians—suggested by the author for older neighborhoods, downtowns, and suburban communities respectively.

The visual quality of the double-column format of this book is dominated by myriad 2½ x 3½ inch black-and-white photographs and sketches illustrating problems and the author's recommended solutions. The prose is occasionally repetitive and sometimes rambles. Liberal, patriarchal, middle-class, planner-as-expert perspectives surface unreflexively in this work from place to place. The overall tone of the book is that of a personal, introductory survey of things that one "should do" as an environmental planner to enhance human-scale urban environments in the United States.

Untermann's primary goal—accommodating pedestrians within the framework of existing urban form—is an admirable task, but this book falls disappointingly short of its ambitions. Untermann energetically encourages the creation of revitalized, more humane urban settings. Design professionals moved to action by Untermann's enthusiasm will find, however, surprisingly little empirically grounded decision-making guidance despite the profusion of photographs and sketches. The author far too often equivocates on his proposed solutions with the too facile caveat that not all solutions will work in all situations. Although he advises planners to study and consider the needs and characteristics of given sites before identifying problems and choosing specific remedies, the rationale and how-to aspects of data collection, analysis, and interpretation are superficially approached (see pp. 50-55, for example).

Untermann's frequent turn to vague, undefined constructs (such as "uncomfortable" to refer to pedestrian traffic volumes, "boring" to describe pedestrian routes, and "attractive" to categorize pedestrian destinations) will make it difficult for practitioners to interpret any data they might collect in terms of Untermann's design suggestions. The book is also marked by an uncritical use of the concept "neighborhood" to designate an identifiable physical entity around which plans can be formulated. Planners who long ago assimilated Keller's (1968) thorough and perceptive critique of this approach to neighborhoods may experience a degree of 1950s' *déjà vu* when leafing through Untermann's book.

The numerous photographs and sketches are applauded in principle; but in practice the visuals in this book are not always instructive, and they are sometimes confusing. The author's interesting practice of stamping the word "UNACCEPTABLE" on photos of "bad" designs does not appear consistently executed in that a number of seemingly unacceptable situations have escaped unstamped. Information identifying site location and social/behavioral context would greatly enhance the utility of

several photos that appear without captions. The illustrations are not numbered, making it difficult in places to know which illustration is referenced by the text.

Although cost estimates and related matters are discussed for some proposals, such analyses are uneven. Readers expecting tried-and-true, nuts-and-bolts answers will often look without success for detailed guidance concerning case studies, construction costs, suppliers, durability, performance and evaluation criteria, maintenance scheduling, susceptibility to vandalism, and so forth.

Design professionals may well be sympathetic to many items in Untermann's catalog of bandages, ointments, and surgical procedures for treating our bruised and injured pedestrian landscapes. However, in this current (and likely protracted) era of budget slashing and economic retrenchment, responsible planners can use solid evidence that proposed remedies have verified probabilities of success. They look for assurance that proposed cures will not likely result in unpleasant, unforeseen complications from any significant quarter: be it physical, ecological, behavioral, aesthetic, cultural, social, economic, or political. Hence, the author's primary reliance on expensive physical design "solutions" in conjunction with a general lack of empirical evidence, systematic postconstruction evaluation, or documentation of detailed case studies supporting the viability and appropriateness of his many normative recommendations makes this volume far less useful to planners "in the trenches" than it otherwise could be. As it stands, *Accommodating the Pedestrian* leans more heavily on the author's personal beliefs, professional prejudices, and unsupported assertions than need be the case given the current state of pertinent environmental design research.

Readers familiar with the extensive theoretical and methodological progress accomplished in the fields of environmental design research and human-environment relations during the past 15 years will be struck by Untermann's failure to incorporate these readily accessible insights and techniques into his book. There is no bibliography and the woefully inadequate references in the text are frequently incomplete. An isolated nod to the ethological studies of "Hall, Sumner[sic] and others" (p. 54) is too little too late, a too cursory integration of the seminal work of Edward Hall and (one presumes) Robert Sommer.

Designers embarking on full-fledged commitments to pedestrian-oriented planning are well advised to delve thoughtfully and systematically into the available literature. For starters, the behavioral and perceptual foundations of pedestrian-oriented design are nowhere more intelligently and usefully drawn than by Amos Rapoport (1977). General surveys are found in Elkington, McGlynn, and Roberts (1976) and Hill (1984) with recent developments on the European scene detailed in Garbrecht (1981). Mountains of available data and studies on pedestrian

safety issues are quickly accessed by consulting Flynn (1977). For sound advice on many traffic-oriented aspects of pedestrian planning, Fruin (1971) still remains a standard reference (and is one of the few actually cited by Untermann). Detailed instruction on useful data collection techniques will be discovered in Pushkarev and Zupan (1975) and Mellor (1976) among others. These sources—and the additional citations found in their bulging bibliographies—lead readers to a healthy appreciation of the exceptional complexity of pedestrian behavior and experience, an appreciation virtually demanding that a designer's frequently biased, culture-bound "common sense" be quickly replaced by the tools and techniques of contemporary environmental design research.

A practical, down-to-earth guide to pedestrian design is a worthwhile project. I hope, however, that future efforts in this direction will rest more solidly on theoretical syntheses of current environmental design research. The pages of *Environment and Behavior*, *Man-Environment Systems*, and the annual proceedings of the Environmental Design Research Association, among others, provide a good foundation on which to launch a rational, user-centered reconstruction of our pedestrian environment.

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