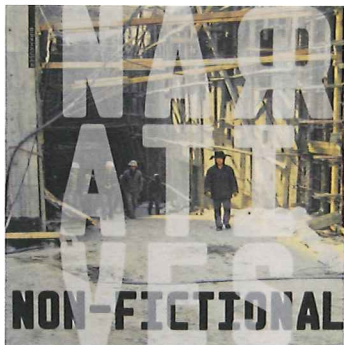


READING PLEASURES

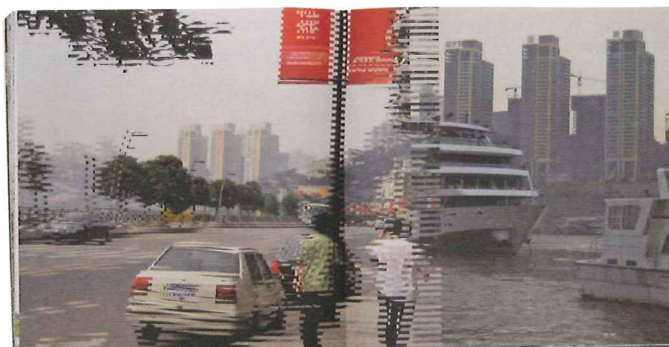


NON-FICTIONAL NARRATIVES: DENTON CORKER MARSHALL

Essays by Leon van Schaik, Jianfei Zhu, Nikos Papastergiadis and Deyan Sudjic. Birkhäuser, 2008. 293pp. \$135.

Non-fictional Narratives surveys Denton Corker Marshall's recent work in Melbourne, as well as describing several specific projects, treated photographically at some length, in the Yarra Valley, Manchester (the "twinning city" of Leon van Schaik's introductory essay), Brisbane, China and Jakarta. Van Schaik's often distracted introduction makes big claims on the firm's behalf, seating it awkwardly at an international table, but he studs the essay with paragraphs accounting intelligently and clearly for the architectural works selected for the book.

Non-fictional Narratives presents a number of discrete architectural works solely through a short series of representative plans and a folio of photographs: Brisbane Square, the Australian War Memorial (both documented by John Gollings) and Wilson House in the Yarra Valley (photographed by Shannon McGrath). Information is spare, and one relies heavily on van Schaik's prose to position the work. The book's structure strongly implies that the reader ought to already



know the work – most likely the case for its Australian audience, but not necessarily so further afield.

Two other projects enjoy extended commentary: Nikos Papastergiadis writes on Webb Bridge in Melbourne, although this short piece doesn't serve to fill in many blanks; Deyan Sudjic's piece, the smartest writing of the volume, matched to the best building, offers a sharp commentary on the Manchester Civil Justice Centre. In addition, Jianfei Zhu sets up the section Denton Corker Marshall in China, locating the work there historically and culturally.

The slicker dossiers of photographs by Gollings, McGrath, Tim Griffith and others are conventional enough, and appropriate to a coffee-table book, a genre to which this volume appears, in part, to aspire. Gollings' engaged survey of Denton Corker Marshall's recent Melbourne work offers a visual homage to the radical tone of *S, M, L, XL*, while intermittent text blocks convey something of

the firm's attitude to practice in Melbourne's architectural culture.

What seems a plausible documentary treatment for Melbourne comes unstuck in China, as the reality gets grittier and the work less interesting. Graphic designers emerystudio should have rethought the horizontal interference pattern muddying the images of Chinese projects, a device carried forward to documentation of Denton Corker Marshall's work in Jakarta. Stripy photographs signal Asia, it seems, although I don't get the connection.

Setting aside the tricks and ballast, *Non-fictional Narratives* is a curious object and a useful visual record of the recent work of one of Australia's most prominent international practices.

Andrew Leach