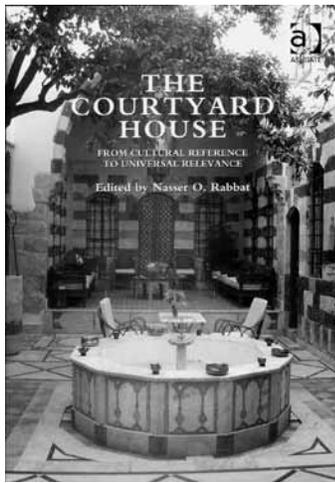


Book Reviews



The Courtyard House: From Cultural Reference to Universal Relevance. Edited by Nasser O. Rabat. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010. Published in association with the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture. 290 pp., 119 b&w illus.

This volume, edited by Nasser Rabat, is the most ambitious book on the subject of the courtyard house to date. This introverted yet Janus-faced building type has existed for thousands of years and is known in most parts of the world — in this book from Cuernavaca to Kabul. Its study is important both because of its manifestation in disparate cultural areas and its non-Western origins. This makes the form an ideal subject for moving beyond regionally limited analytic frameworks, and toward the transcultural stances required when employing architecture to question values previously accepted as universal.

The essays in the book are divided into three sections and use a variety of methodologies to explore the complexities of the typology. They show the courtyard house to be both universal, because of its wide distribution, and a potential forum for resistance to the universalizing tendencies of global modernity.

The first section comprises four essays that tackle historical and sociological paradigms of the form within one restricted cultural region. Jateen Lad provides a detailed socio-spatial analysis of the meanings of seclusion in the harem courts of the Topkapi palace. Marcus Schadl and Manu Sobti offer separate studies of the transformation and memory-based transmission of the Afghan courtyard house. The common denominator in their chapters is the investigation of response and reaction to the conditions of modernity. And, Asiya Chowdhury critiques a nineteenth-century English writer's understanding of Cairene houses to draw attention to the importance of carefully contextualizing the historical accounts of outsiders.

The second section contains six essays that explore the tensions between place-based identities and modernist ideals in a variety of cultural settings. Alfred B. Hwangbo examines the origins, transformation, decline, and subsequent revival of the traditional Korean courtyard house. In particular, he explores a distinctive but endangered hybrid transitional phase: an L-shaped adaptation found in the expanding extramural industrial suburbs of historic Korean cities during Japanese occupation. Monique Eleb describes her detailed, long-term research on French-planned low-cost housing for migrant workers in Casablanca between 1912 and 1956. Her chapter provides the locus for a deeper examination of conflicting histories of the modernization of Moroccan society. And Anoma Pieris probes the reasons for, and the outcomes of, the fascination with the typology by two renowned postindependence Sri Lankan architects, Geoffrey Bawa and Minette de Silva. The complex questions she raises about links between postcolonial place-based identities and modernization resonate in different ways throughout the book.

Vernacular courtyard houses can accommodate transformation, but their authentic development has been thwarted by imitation of modernist ideals. Looking at both social and environmental rationales, John Reynolds presents part of an extensive comparative study on the patio houses of Spain and Mexico, and their adaptation for modern lifestyles. Rafi Samizay questions the interface of the courtyard house with mass housing, and ways the change from extended to nuclear families have affected the logic of domestic space

in Herat and Kabul. And the section closes with Reinhard Goethert's exploration of the relationship of shared or multi-unit courtyard accommodation to in-migration in developing cities across multiple cultures.

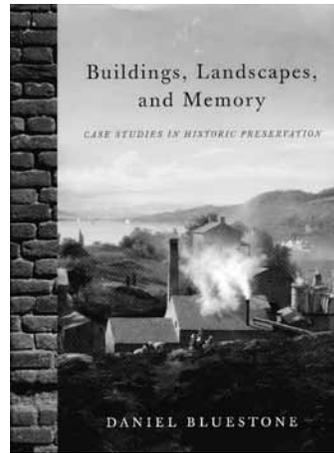
So how might traditional forms be given a legitimate continuity, in design as well as interpretation, without falling victim to the twin gunmen, pastiche and nostalgia? Moving beyond the oft-repeated trope that tradition and modernity are irreconcilable and that modernization has destroyed forever the human scale that defined the original typology, the final section contains three essays by practicing architects in the Arab world whose work reclaims the courtyard house from past miasmas and reincorporates it into functional contemporary living. For Hashim Sarkis, the threshold of meanings implicit in the attributes of the courtyard — its privacy and its qualities of enclosure, for example — signal nodes of place that address not the object but the absence of object. However, for Wael Al-Masri, nostalgia-driven appropriations of the type — for example, the house museum — fail to address the problem of an authentic continuation of tradition. His critique of its use as a historical and cultural symbol rather than a viable architectural type addresses the rupture between contemporary Arab societies and the heritage of coherence embodied in the extended family. Finally, for Kevin Mitchell, two new courtyard duplexes for faculty on the campus of the American University at Sharjah provide an opportunity to gracefully reintegrate form and function.

By extending the range of discourse and deepening the methodological frame, the essays in *The Courtyard House* move its subject squarely into the global arena. There it stands out as a building type significant for its role as an identity marker set apart from the so-called Western tradition. In using architecture to interpret history we still have a responsibility to history, and there is always more work to be done on that front. But the fluid parameters of this book pave the way for more cross-cultural comparisons. They also help open up current debates on the place of traditional architecture in the formation of modernist identities. In the eastern Mediterranean, in particular, this is a topic ripe for serious exploration.

Sylvia Shorto

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Buildings, Landscapes and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation. Daniel Bluestone. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011. 302 pp., b&w and color illus.



Daniel Bluestone's *Buildings, Landscapes and Memory* traces the preservation movement in the United States from the early nineteenth century to the present day through ten provocative case studies arranged in rough chronological order. These case studies include not only individual architectural works and historic sites but also a variety of manmade

and natural landscapes (from the Palisades along the Hudson River near New York City to the Fresno Sanitary Landfill in California), and they show how the places understood to merit preservation have changed drastically over time. At the center of this inquiry are the narratives harnessed by advocates for the preservation of places.

Bluestone argues that the preservation movement in America emerged from the desire to cultivate a shared memory, history and politics in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The triumphal tour made by the Marquis de Lafayette (in 1824–25), the subject of Chapter 1, provides evidence of citizens' interest at the time in preserving places associated with the Revolutionary War. But Bluestone is also careful to show how a parallel but sometimes competing interest in recognizing the nation's achievements since the war challenged some of these preservation efforts. While nationalism provided the larger context for Lafayette's tour, Bluestone's careful research, which makes use of a variety of primary and secondary sources as well as archival material, ultimately demonstrates the local character of preservation efforts, a theme that is carried throughout the book.

The text often acquires a personal tone, a reminder of Bluestone's role as an advocate for community preservation, cultural landscapes, and public history. This is especially palpable in the chapters that focus on Charlottesville, Virginia, where Bluestone lives and works. Chapter 3 explores the way the narrative surrounding Thomas Jefferson's celebrated design for the University of Virginia, where Bluestone directs the Historic Preservation Program at the School of Architecture, has both preserved an architectural masterpiece and limited architectural innovation. And in Chapter 9 Bluestone traces the history of Court Square in downtown Charlottesville to show that its current form represents an "invented tradition" in which a noble colonial past is created to cultivate heritage tourism. As Bluestone demonstrates,

the “colonial” lantern lights and brick streets and sidewalks installed there in 2004 obscure the square’s more authentic, but also more complicated, accretive history. The goal of “preservation” is thus shown to have less to do with historical variety than with economic benefit.

The destruction as well as preservation of places is central to Bluestone’s account, and several chapters pay attention to this theme. The Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis, the subject of Chapter 6, resulted in the clearing of a significant swath of that city’s riverfront district to establish a park honoring Jefferson, the Louisiana Purchase, and westward expansion. In this case, the project’s boosters argued that the act of remembering required the demolition of the buildings that comprised a decaying residential and industrial district. Bluestone’s analysis positions this project not only in relation to historic preservation but also the related disciplines of architectural history, urban planning, and landscape design — each of which shaped public perception and official attitudes toward the memorial. And although the book is thoughtfully illustrated throughout, the black-and-white period photos included in this chapter bring a particular richness to this case study. The success of the final project, which includes Eero Saarinen’s colossal sweeping stainless steel arch (1961–66) set within a park designed by Dan Kiley (1957), raises questions about whether new monuments can convey history more effectively than old buildings.

Although the narratives and understandings of history that contributed to the demolition of The Mecca apartment building in Chicago to make way for Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s celebrated Crown Hall (1950–56) at IIT have little to do with the St. Louis project, this example again points to the power of myths to shape the built environment. In both of these chapters, Bluestone draws attention to the importance of understanding the origins, motivations and legacy of the narratives used to argue for the preservation of some places and the destruction of others.

Bluestone devotes two chapters to places that less obviously fall under the purview of historic preservation, a discipline that has been concerned largely with sites valued for their historic or political associations or their architectural merits. In Chapter 10 the author’s analysis of Virginia’s historic highway marker program explores some of the ways the automobile and an ever expanding network of roads has changed the way Americans engage with historical sites. More provocatively, the author concludes the book by arguing that the alignment of historic preservation interests with efforts to transform environmentally toxic sites into public parks presents an enormous — and unfulfilled — opportunity to educate the public about the social, economic and political forces that created these industrial landscapes.

A great strength of Bluestone’s account is its ability to position the particulars of individual case studies within the larger discourse of historic preservation, and to make this relevant for a broad audience. This audience, for example,

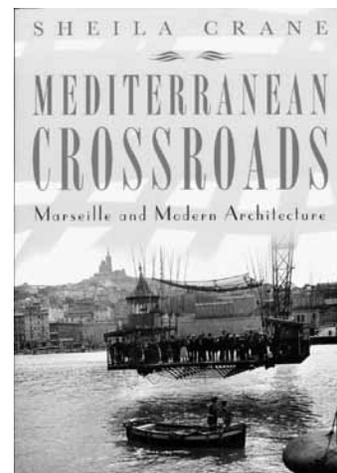
might include those interested in history, urban planning, architectural history, and landscape urbanism. One is left with a greater appreciation of the way in which historic preservation, in all of its complexities, has contributed to the shaping of modern America and how the field might engage with the challenges facing the nation’s postindustrial landscape. ■

Lucy M. Maulsby

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Mediterranean Crossroads: Marseille and Modern Architecture.

Sheila Crane. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 352 pp., 104 b&w photos, 13 color plates.



Marseille is a city that people either love or hate. (It is also a city that provokes more than its fair share of clichés, but that is another story.) Those who hate Marseille lament its seediness, dilapidated housing projects, and lack of stereotypical “French” culture. For those who love Marseille, these very same shortcomings are transformed into advantages: it is exciting, cosmopolitan,

and decidedly less prissy than other French cities. Marseille may not always be charming, but it is undeniably authentic. Whichever camp one falls into, *Mediterranean Crossroads: Marseille and Modern Architecture* provides a detailed etiology of our reactions.

This book traces the architectural and spatial evolution of Marseille from the 1920s through the post-World War II building boom. Its six chapters divide this time span roughly in half, with the war itself marking the midpoint. Chapters One and Two focus on ideas of and plans for Marseille as a modern metropolis in the interwar period. Here the work of the Bauhaus photographer/filmmaker László Moholy-Nagy, the urban planner Jacques Gréber, and the art and architecture critic Siegfried Giedion are usefully brought together for a discussion of Marseille’s distinctive transporter bridge (a mobile platform ferry) as, simultaneously, an “iconic exemplar of modern spatial transparency” and a harbinger of the future ruins of modern architecture in Marseille. Crane is always careful to measure the gap between the mythic identity of Marseille, how that identity was understood and articulated by planners, and the intersection (and occasional clash) of their ideas with lived realities on the ground. As these first chapters quickly make clear, this is urban history of the most

ambitious, and ultimately most satisfying, sort. It is deeply informed by cultural theory (Walter Benjamin figures prominently) and politics (particularly the politics of colonialism and immigration), and it is built on a broad foundation of primary sources, including films, photographs, postcards, paintings, historical maps, drawings, and sketches. Appropriately, Le Corbusier serves as a sort of touchstone throughout the work, beginning with his initial visit to Marseille in 1915, an encounter that was brief but which would lead to a much fuller engagement with the city through his Unité d'Habitation (completed in 1952).

The second half of the book focuses on the destruction and reconstruction of downtown Marseille, large areas of which were dynamited during World War II by German military engineers. As the titles of Chapters Three and Four ("Urban Gynecology and Engineered Destruction" and "Spectacles of Ruin") suggest, the local ramifications of war and occupation were considerable. However, the reader never loses sight of Marseille's unique role as an imperial link between the *métropole* and the colonies. This was a designation that existed for more than a century before the war, and would persist for many decades after. By framing Marseille as a "city in the world," Crane is able to draw not only other European cities into her discussion, but also make important connections to sites in North Africa, including Casablanca, Bizerte, and especially Algiers, which was a *département* of France at the time. (Oran, with its European majority, would have perhaps provided an even better example of Marseille's southern face in this Mediterranean crossroads.) More information on the economic underpinnings of the colonial project, including the impact of specific types of colonial trade on urban planning, would have rounded out the discussion on colonialism. However, the author should be commended for maintaining a consistently broad scope that stretches well into West Africa.

Long ignored by scholars of modern architecture, Marseille constitutes a sort of "absent presence" in our understanding of how European and Mediterranean cities evolved in the twentieth century. This book should effectively bring Marseille out of the historiographic shadows. While not an introductory volume (and far from jargon-free), it more than proves the argument that "Marseille was a significant terrain for architectural experimentation from the late 1920s through the end of the post-war rebuilding." If anything, this claim doesn't go far enough. Marseille was not simply a "significant terrain," judging from the evidence presented; it was a veritable breeding ground for modern architecture from the earliest stages, attracting the attention of some of the most important urban theorists, artists, and architects of the period.

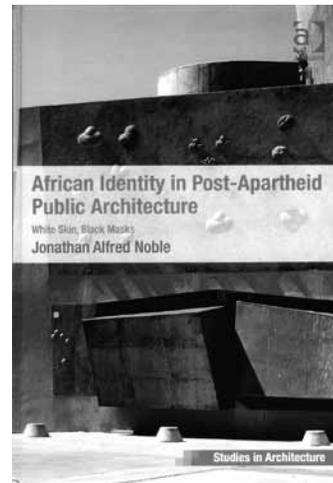
Although it would have been beyond the scope of her study, I couldn't help but wish that the author had brought her analysis up to the present. The challenges facing Marseille today — immigration, a degraded downtown, increasingly isolated *banlieus* — are traceable in part to the choices made by the urban planners and architects of the last century.

And once again, remedies for social ills are often taking the form of spatial transformations from the top down: the commercial development of the Rue de la République to offset the seemingly irredeemable Canebière, a new tramway to link St. Pierre with la Joliette. But that discussion will have to wait for a similarly erudite treatment of the evolution over the *longue durée* of France's oldest city (to finish with another cliché). ■

Emily Gottreich

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African Identity in Post-Apartheid Public Architecture: White Skin, Black Masks. Jonathan Noble. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. 314 pp., 135 b&w illus.



Since 1994, post-apartheid South Africa has been a much-looked-to example of a society that has somehow succeeded without traumatic social turmoil to make the transition from a racist, authoritarian *ancien régime* to a constitutional multi-racial democracy. As one commentator recently noted, the country has come to be seen as a valuable cultural laboratory in which to observe the ways

"the Manichean opposition of colonizer and colonized" might evolve once historically oppressive power structures disappear. This book explores the role that architecture in general, and public buildings in particular, might have played in this process, by comparing five major projects consciously designed to express this new socio-political order. All these designs were the subject of high-profile public architectural competitions (something that in itself was unusual in the old South Africa). They range from government buildings created to administer the nine newly created provinces to iconic, centrally located "national" sites, such as the Constitutional Court in Johannesburg, and Freedom Park outside Pretoria. While interested in the architectural qualities of each project, Noble is equally focused on the cultural values and political processes that gave rise to them in order to determine how successful visionary architectural design might be at mediating significant socio-political change. He takes architectural projects that have been evaluated elsewhere as discreet objects and considers them as part of the post-apartheid state's larger project of fashioning a new national-cultural identity.

Noble's investigation is framed by a cultural-critical framework derived from Frantz Fanon's famous essay "Black

Skin, White Masks,” notably Fanon’s argument that colonial societies founded on confrontations of culture, power and modernity tend to nurture artificially static, overdetermined subjectivities and identities. Noble juxtaposes Fanon’s well-known dialectic of the “natural” skin/“less-than-natural” mask with architectural discourse’s preoccupation with the building skin (whether decorated or minimal) as a primary site of meaning, in order to launch an inquiry into how architecture actually mediates “authenticity” and “identity.” This is of primary importance because, as we read, almost every artist, architect, administrator, politician, and cultural commentator involved in these projects believed that the buildings they were creating needed to explicitly break with the past and project a new kind of identity that was not just “post-apartheid” but also “post-colonial” (and for most of these actors this meant, in some sense, “African”). While it is debatable whether the white Republic of South Africa really was a “colonial” society, Noble elides this question by suggesting that Fanon’s arguments (which date from the 1960s) can be used to recuperate a productive, optimistic attitude towards contemporary understandings of subjectivity. As he clarifies in his elegant conclusion, he is less interested in the skin/mask coupling as an architectural metaphor than in using it heuristically to explore how architecture can, through hybrid forms of representation, authenticate a new kind of socio-political identity that is multifarious, contingent, and open ended. At stake here is how — or indeed whether — architecture, per se, can promote “positive plurality.”

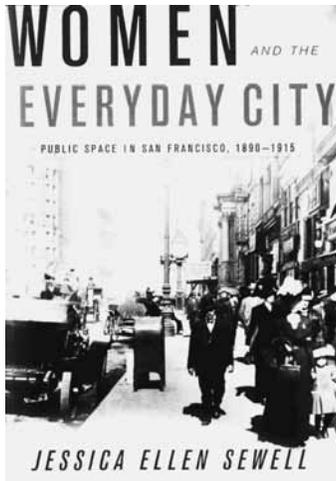
Presenting his case studies — the first designed in 1995, the last only recently completed — more or less chronologically, Noble offers them as milestones in a rapidly evolving arc of discourse and practice. This arc reveals how much easier it is to talk about such utopian (and today increasingly rare) architectural aspirations than it is to physically realize them. First, there is the fundamental tension between notions of subjectivity (and by extension, identity), which resist and subvert dominant narratives and the project of nation-building, which privileges notions of origins, continuity, social cohesion, and the linear passage of time. Equally critical are the realities of architectural culture and production. Repeatedly, competition briefs were framed in ways that left questions of architectural expression and meaning undefined in the hope that entrants would somehow provide this. Often this vacuum was filled by the taken-for-granted value systems and discipline-based assumptions of those charged with developing these projects. Most of these actors belonged to the intelligentsia-in-waiting that had developed by 1994, whose notions of culture and identity remained subtly tethered to the previous system, either because they trained under, or were reacting to, its supposedly oppressive technocratic modernity. Although some of the projects discussed are fine pieces of architectural (and landscape) design, this reader was struck as much by the continuities as by the discontinuities between them and pre-1994 projects of

similar scale and ambition — not only in terms of design and construction, but also of the imagery and rhetoric latent in their production. Particularly striking is the recurrent resort to a Lefebvrian “realistic illusion” that regional landscape and preindustrial craft practices were phenomena that, without explanation, could provide the key to architectural identity and authenticity — something that Herbert Baker first proposed one hundred years ago, albeit from a more Eurocentric perspective. Over the period discussed, however, such intellectual maneuvers evolve into a more critical, informed and inventive engagement with various non-Western material practices, cultural narratives, and symbolic frameworks to fabricate an alternatively modern architecture of “appropriation and inclusion.”

Overall, Noble’s narrative suggests that both “the stubborn loop of professional autonomy” and excessive faith in participatory design processes limit the architectural exemplification of “positive plurality.” Instead, he suggests that the buildings most successful in fulfilling such ambitions are those in which the penetrating design intelligence of individual architects and artists was matched by rigorous, enlightened and inclusive imagination on the part of those administering the projects. (To this one might add that these buildings also tend to be those whose site and program lend themselves to such “exemplification.”) Still, such definitions of architectural quality — with which I basically agree — remain rooted in a reflexive-educated way of thinking that invests architectural *form* with an overdetermined symbolic-representational value, something that the author himself questions. Unfortunately, Noble’s preoccupation with Fanon’s arguments and his exhaustive documentation of how the different competition entries were parsed to generate the final built projects leave little room for sustained discussion of anthropological, cultural-geographical, or indeed architectural theories about how built environments develop and convey meanings. Also regrettable is the lack of engagement with the wealth of critical writing about the built environment and social transformation in South Africa over the last couple of decades. (This would have revealed, among other things, that the equation of “roundness” in architecture with African-ness has been around for decades.) These reservations aside, the book’s careful unpacking of the formal undecidability that results when political ideology becomes entangled with architectural production gives it a relevance and value that transcend its South African setting. Noble offers a well-illustrated, thoughtful account of how cultural “authenticity,” whether manifested through political subjectivity or built environments, is always *under construction*, fashioned through the interplay of a heterogeneous array of actors, narratives and mechanisms. ■

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Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890–1915. Jessica Ellen Sewell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 272 pp., 74 b&w photos.



“The women question,” cultural historian Kathy Peiss wrote in a 1991 article for *American Literary History*, “encapsulated for nineteenth-century Americans deep uncertainties about women’s social roles and gender identity. Whatever one’s position on this question, she continues, “the debate rested on the perception of transgression, the sense that boundaries had been crossed: women

had entered the public sphere.”

In the past twenty years, such debates and transformations have been the subject of a number of publications in women’s history, and scholars of nineteenth-century cultural life have written widely on the roles, experiences and perceptions of women in what Peiss called “extradomestic” urban space. Jessica Sewell’s *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890–1915*, re-examines the relationship between women and the public sphere, but does so by framing it through questions about the built environment. If space is, as Sewell contends, “expressive as well as constitutive of . . . culture and society,” can a “spatially focused mode of social inquiry” better illustrate the changing roles and perceptions of women at the turn of the twentieth century? Can attention paid to the ways women used and experienced various public spaces in San Francisco add to the scholarly conversation about the transformation of nineteenth-century gender ideologies by positing space as central to their maintenance?

To explore these questions, Sewell parses turn-of-the-century San Francisco into four overlapping landscapes. Focusing on how women of various classes used, experienced, and were imagined within these spaces, Sewell devotes separate chapters to the circulatory spaces of the street and the streetcar, the landscape of shopping, the landscape of dining, and spaces of amusement and entertainment. Then, in her final and strongest chapter, Sewell argues that the transformations she documents in each of these landscapes paved the way for women’s use of these spaces as they fought for suffrage in the campaign of 1911. As women utilized streets, street cars, restaurants, tearooms, vaudeville houses, and shop windows as arenas for political discourse, they “engaged familiar spaces of consumption but radically shifted their roles within these spaces” (165). Only because these spaces were part of the everyday lives of women were suffragists able to reshape them

to communicate a vision in which women could participate more inclusively in the American public sphere.

There is much to be commended in Sewell’s book. While her reliance on only three diaries (each of which is assumed to be representative of more collective experiences of women from various classes) leads to some precarious generalizations about the “experienced landscape” of downtown San Francisco, her attempts to illustrate the social world from the perspectives of multiple classes adds depth to her work and complicates the construct of gender as a unified category. Her class-inflected analysis is particularly illuminating when it comes to the landscape of public dining. Here she argues that elite women’s money not only made more of the city accessible to them, but also allowed them to drink more freely in public without compromising their morality, thus enabling them to conflate the experience of dining with that of tourism and thrill. Furthermore, Sewell’s commitment to documenting how the downtown landscape was built, represented and experienced provides a comprehensive picture of the social world of turn-of-the-century San Francisco, populated with a variety of actors whose experiences often conflicted with how the public spaces of the city were imagined in manuals, novels, advertisements, and the like.

However, it is in Sewell’s attempts to get at the relationships and contradictions between how the public landscape of San Francisco was lived and represented that her analysis falters. Drawing upon the Lefebvrian concepts of perceived, lived and conceived space, Sewell’s introduction outlines a three-pronged approach to understanding the “multifaceted interaction among [gender] ideology, experience and the built environment.” She thus divides the city into “the imagined landscape,” “the experienced landscape,” and the “built landscape” (xiv). However, this model, which Sewell promises will illuminate interactions, is primarily useful as a structure through which she organizes each chapter into separate “imagined,” “experienced” and “built” components. Sewell’s attempt to synthesize these three landscapes to support her original contention — that a study of built environment (and how it was used and imagined) can add to scholarly discussions about changing gender roles at the turn-of-the-century — is not entirely convincing. As a result, the first four chapters of *Women and the Everyday City*, while illustrative of the physical and social world of women’s consumption, read as analytically flat.

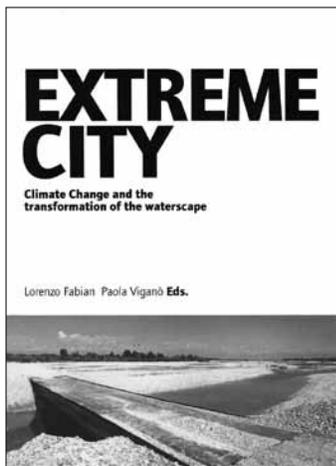
Rewardingly, Sewell’s final chapter, in which she abandons the three-landscape model, allows her own analytical voice to come through. Here, her discussion of public “spaces of suffrage” leaves the reader wishing she had devoted more space to exploring the relationships between women as consumers and women as political actors — between the physical public and the social and political public sphere. In the early chapters of the book, as Sewell guides the reader through the imagined, experienced and built landscapes of circulation, shopping, dining and amusement, the reader

may wonder why the rich picture she paints matters. Unfortunately, the payoff comes only at the book's close; and here, it appears as an afterthought, when it might have served as an useful analytical question throughout.

While Sewell provides us with a wealth of important information about the gendered landscape of turn-of-the-century San Francisco, her uneasy use of the three-landscape model hinders her ability to do much with this information until the book's final chapter. *Women and the Everyday City* might have been a stronger book had its author taken a freer and more creative approach to the rich material she set out to explore. ■

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Extreme City: Climate Change and the Transformation of the Waterscape. Edited by Lorenzo Fabian and Paola Viganò. Venice: Università Iuav di Venezia, 2010. 289 pp., ill. Available for download at <http://issuu.com/extremecities/docs/extremecity>.



This book gathers the main contributions to an intensive international learning program held in April 2010 at the IUAV University of Venice-Italy. In response to climate change, and through the lens of extreme water spaces worldwide, forty architecture graduate students from institutes across Europe worked together to develop sustainable design strategies for the drainage basin of

Venice lagoon. They sought to answer the question: How will it be possible to plan a future city in this most vulnerable of territories?

To explain its underlying hypothesis, the volume begins with an introductory essay by one of its editors, Paola Viganò. According to Viganò, the environmental emergency of climate change and subsequent sea-level rise offers an opportunity to renew the structure of the Venice region. Toward this end, the program concentrated on its most fragile lands: its “extreme” waterscapes — a network of water bodies and the urban areas in immediate contact with them, which will continue to be affected by climate changes. However, Viganò writes that the study of the contemporary urban condition in this area requires understanding all the elements that constitute its hydrological system, with the goal of identifying

key areas of transition. The hope underlying the program, therefore, was that this focus would also enable a reading of phenomena in other parts of the territory with greater clarity.

According to Viganò, the “conditio sine qua non” for restructuring this territory is acceptance of an interdisciplinary approach, involving urbanism, landscape architecture, water management, and environmental and hydraulic engineering. Only such a joint effort will allow the design of integrated spatial devices capable of resisting or adapting to environmental change.

To face this complexity, Viganò's essay explains that the program adopted a method of “research by design.” A deeper explanation of this method would have been useful. Despite her claim that this represented the most pertinent way to engage both theory and design in an interdisciplinary context, this reader could only guess that “research by design” is an empirical inductive process. Its goal seemed to be to take advantage of considerations developed through the projects of the program participants and the contributions of the lecturers from the schools partnering in it (IUAV University of Venice, UPC Barcelona, TU Delft, and KU Leuven).

Following Viganò's essay the book contains a section of theoretical material, bringing together two different subjects. The first set of material concerns contemporary water conflicts. It is introduced by a brief essay from Bernardo Secchi, and includes insightful and well-written pieces on Palestinian waterways and the shrinking of Lake Aral. The second subject is climate change itself. Here the book provides a brief review of the literature and an explanation of the possible responses: mitigation, adaptation, resistance, resilience. This discussion is useful, well structured, and would have been worth developing at greater length.

The next section examines three extreme territories in Europe: the Delta region of Holland, the Barcelona metropolitan area, and the Venice area. Each case is presented through a theoretical frame with one or more design visions. Sybrand Tjallingii and Viviana Ferrario deserve credit for presenting insightful rereadings of the problems affecting the Delta and Venice areas, respectively. The lowest common denominator of analysis between the two cases appears to be a new synergy between spatial structure and natural water elements.

This sequence of theoretical contributions is followed by an essay by the volume's other editor, Lorenzo Fabian, describing the particular situation of the drainage basin of the Venice lagoon. This essay also serves as an introduction to the students' proposals for restructuring this territory. These are grouped by area: the dry plain, the low wet plain, the coastline, and the lagoon. Besides prompting the production of engaging graphics, these contributions reveal the value of Viganò's initial paradigm: thinking in the long term, representing time, and imagining an alternative future.

The final section of the book enlarges the perspective, describing two further case studies — one in Baltimore in the U.S. and the other in Bangkok, Thailand. And its last

chapter, by the so-called “concept group” of the workshop, jumps to an overall theoretical conclusion, which in some ways repeats previously introduced concepts about the value of an integrated approach. But what really emerges here is a vision for the future role of the architect: as a negotiator between adaptation and mitigation, he or she may take a stand and show possible ways forward.

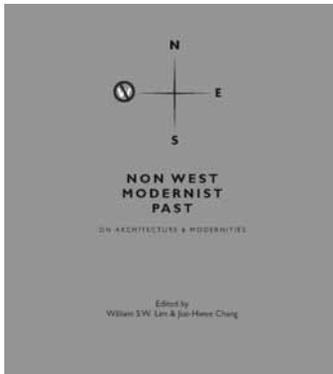
To sum up, this book could have benefitted from a better explanation of its structure. A few of its essays are also weakly argued. Nevertheless, it makes a substantial contribution to the development of a joint approach among the different disciplines involved in urban design. In addition, its overriding premise that climate change, normally considered a threat, may also be an activator for sustainable new development, is explored both in theory and in practice.

The book is enjoyable to read, with an astonishing visual richness. Maps and diagrams have been wisely elaborated by the authors based on well-documented sources, and have great communicative power. In only a few cases could this material have benefited from further work. Despite the changing nature of the profession and the need for new design approaches, this book provides confirmation that the architect’s imagination and drawing skills remain a valuable resource. ■

Elisa Brusegan

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Non West Modernist Past: On Architecture and Modernities. Edited by William S.W. Lim and Jiat-Hwee Chang. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2012. 224 pp., ill.



Although research on architectural modernism outside the “West” has been rapidly expanding in the past two decades, *Non West Modernist Past* is the first book that offers a critical overview and assessment of this emerging scholarship. The product of a conference organized by the

Architectural Association Asia and the Singapore Institute of Architects in early 2011, this edited volume includes contributions by leading scholars from the fields of architecture, sociology, art history, and cultural studies. It raises many potent questions not only about the writing of architectural historiographies and construction of the canon, but also more generally about the relationship between architectural modernism and modernity as well as their varied entanglements with colonialism, nationalism and globalization.

The title of the book provocatively conjoins three geographical and historical terms: “Non West,” which refers to all territories outside Europe and North America; “Modernist,” which refers to a general attitude oriented towards the future predicated on continuous human progress; and “Past,” which distinguishes modernist architecture of the earlier periods from that of the present. While as a concept, “Non Western Modernist Past” may invite contested interpretations, it is precisely the editors’ aim to use the title to foreground an existing condition in the discipline of architectural history. They argue that modernism outside the “West” has long been “doubly marginalized” by architectural historians and scholars in area studies. The coupling of “Non West” and “Modernist,” then, is an adroit heuristic move to invite projections of an “alternative disciplinary reality” in which the heterogeneous nature of modernism and its uneven career in “Non Western” contexts are emphasized.

The book is organized into three parts. The first, “Interrogating Modernism and Modernities,” includes five theoretical essays: by Anthony King, Mark Crinson, Leon van Schaik, Duanfang Lu, and Fernando Luiz Lara. Each author provides a critical reassessment of the use of key terms, categories, and underlying concepts in the historiographies of modernism. These include, for example, the ideas of internationalism, critical regionalism, and the structural couplets of “center” and “peripheries,” metropolises and colonies, and “First” and “Third” Worlds, etc. The second part, “(Dis)locating Modernism in the World,” consists of eight case studies of “Non West” modernism that encompass India, Turkey, China, Singapore, Indonesia, Brazil and North Africa. The third part, “Reflecting/Refracting Modernism,” includes three commentary pieces by Randolph S. David, C.J. Wan-Ling Wee, and Chua Beng Huat, who reflect on the key concerns in the previous chapters, particularly those centering on the ideas of multiplicity, heterogeneity and mobility in architectural modernism.

Like many edited volumes, the central challenge here is to unite a multitude of case studies across diverse geographies under a cogent conceptual frame that also avoids generalization. This balance is especially crucial given the book’s emphasis on attending to the historicity and specificity of local contexts while retaining the use of the meta-geographical categories of the “West” and “Non West.” The editors, William Lim and Jiat-Hwee Chang, have done an excellent job in elucidating these inherent problematics in an introductory essay. Lim and Chang carefully decipher three approaches adopted by the contributors in their effort to challenge the conventional Euro-American-centered architectural historiography. These include the expansion of the spatial and temporal frame for the study of modernism in both the “West” and the “Non West,” the examination of the socio-political conditions behind the production of architecture, and attention to the role of agency, professional practice, and other nuanced processes that shape the making of the built environment.

Notwithstanding their different theoretical positions, the essays in the book collectively illustrate what Lim and Chang call “hetero-modernisms” — a term that describes “the diverse modernisms in complex relationships with the uneven process of modernization and varied modernities around the world beyond the West.”

Non West Modernist Past offers a number of innovative entry points to reconceptualize the histories of modernism. First, the juxtaposition of selective “Non West” modernist projects enables a diachronic investigation into how modernism has entered different geopolitical spaces at particular historical junctures. In doing so, this arrangement highlights both modernism’s “universal” character as well as its susceptibility to appropriation in particular ways. Second, the attention to the circulation of architectural ideas and the indigenous agents involved in modernist schemes provides a basis for remapping the production of knowledge that departs from the long-established “diffusionist” model. Finally, by revealing certain contradictory ascriptions to modernism and modernity, some of the essays open up questions about the intellectual positions of the contributors themselves. The most notable contradiction is between a widely shared goal to unsettle the “universalizing” master narrative in Euro-American-centric historiographies and a polemic call to support “global values” for the advent of a more just society in the modern present. Within *Non West Modernist Past*, such “global values” allude to the promotion of democratic aspirations and the elimination of social inequalities and uneven development — all elements belonging to what Anthony King refers to as “social modernity” or “the global society in which we all live.”

These contradictory ascriptions to modernism and its associated “universal values” point back to the tricky conception of “Non West modernism” itself. It seems these contested ascriptions, many of which have in one way or another become synonymous with the “West,” could have been deciphered more carefully in some of the chapters. As Crinson has noted, modernism is itself full of paradoxes and cannot be easily subsumed under the “derogative impulses of nation-states or of capitalism.” When it first emerged in architecture in the early twentieth century, modernism operated as a form of critical discourse and was endowed with an ethical aspiration toward social betterment. These multiple associations have not been lost in recent writings on the subject. Hilde Heynen, for example, has pointed out that the historical reality and complexity of modernism can only be grasped by examining the cultural, political and social dimensions that together constitute the foundation of the Modern Movement. What is potentially problematic with the conception of “Non West modernism” is the tendency to fixate the meanings of the “Modern” and its association with a generic “West” in order to qualify its Other, thus combining many of modernism’s own contradictions into a dominant, hegemonic “Western ideology.” Given the rich material of the contributions,

it might have been interesting to explicitly frame the varied conceptions of the “West” as a key point of discussion within the volume.

On the whole, most of the chapters here avoid this kind of generalization, and instead allow the case studies to speak to the adaptability of modernism as discourse and practice. Notable examples include Abidin Kusno’s excellent study of the contested ideals associated with different phases of modernization in postcolonial Indonesia and Zeynep Mennon’s insightful analysis of the Turkish state’s attempt to promote modernist architecture to advance a particular political agenda. Indeed, examining the competing values of the “modern” and reflecting on what scholars have chosen to critique, embrace and omit also brings up the question of ethics and the purpose of critique itself. As Chua contends in his commentary, while it is important to recognize multiplicity and pluralism, tolerance of “difference” can also become a ploy for not addressing concrete injustice and inequalities. This is also to suggest that without an appeal to some common interests and commitments — or “universal values,” so to speak — any intellectual dialogue about “difference” can only go so far.

Lim and Chang’s notion of “hetero-modernism” is certainly an intriguing frame for rethinking the histories of modernism. However, the editors could have engaged more directly with the question of what this reevaluation can actually do. For example, in what possible directions can a “more socially and politically situated understanding of modernism” advance the debate and inform current practice? As Lim himself expresses in a polemical prologue to the book, the reexamination of “Non West modernism” should lead to the building of a more “humane, just and ecologically sustainable modernity.” And yet, there remains much work to be done to link the critical historical perspectives raised by this volume and the ongoing processes of advancing a desired “social modernity” in the present.

While these are not easy questions to answer, *Non West Modernist Past* is without a doubt a major contribution to the field and represents a significant milestone in advancing scholarship in the study of architectural modernism. I applaud the efforts of the editors and recommend this volume not only to those interested in the histories of the built environment, but to all who are concerned with the ongoing construction of knowledge across geographical and disciplinary boundaries. ■

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