

Stieber, Nancy. *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam: Reconfiguring Urban Order and Identity, 1900–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Pp. viii, 386. Maps, black and white illustrations, and index

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Volume 27, Number 2, March 1999

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016591ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016591ar>

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Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Schoenauer, N. (1999). Review of [Stieber, Nancy. *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam: Reconfiguring Urban Order and Identity, 1900–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Pp. viii, 386. Maps, black and white illustrations, and index]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 27(2), 71–72. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016591ar>

The creation of museums of contemporary art in the nineteenth century came about in the wake of profound social, political, and economic movements. Monarchist and republican strategies for the restoration of former palaces as propaganda "palaces of the people" competed with bourgeois ambitions and self-interested philanthropy in the creation of purpose-built galleries. Private sponsors acted as catalysts in the transformation of public art-collecting as it shifted from the leisurely privilege of the ruling class and the reluctant responsibility of the state to the idealist designs of city planners and, most recently, to the ardent self-determination of the artists themselves. Drawing on his considerable knowledge of the primary sources and documents that is evident throughout the book, Lorente tells his stories of all these differences with grace and erudition.

Issues of time and space are recurrent themes in this study. Chronology and geography determine the book's shape, focusing the discussion on decisive moments of conceptualization in specific locations, those large centres such as Paris and Vienna where competing ideologies were contested. Nations, cities, and neighbourhoods each competed with each other in the political race to commodify the modern. The suburban park vied with the urban centre, the utopian "white cube" challenged the prestige of the classical monuments as the site for the display and rhetoric of modernity in art. The tension between building a permanent collection and exhibiting new work became a struggle between individual curators and among government factions as academics and selection committees exerted their control over the anointing of new (but preferably dead) "masters." How and by whom these collections would be viewed was also contested by directors and benefactors. In one example, the author reveals the hypocrisy of the supposedly populist intentions of the South Kensington museum complex in London where the days of free admission were not so much instituted to serve the poor as to reserve the days of paid admission for the wealthy in order that they might enjoy the galleries in peace and quiet.

The debates over the naming of these new institutions is telling: political choices had to be made between celebrating either the national (or civic) identity of a new museum or its internationalist modernity. The term "modern" itself begged the question of what constituted the collection that would be housed and which works would be acquired. A museum of "living art" is, after all, an oxymoron. Fascism and the conservative taste of some curators would mean the exclusion of certain radical stylistic movements within "modernist" tendencies, such as the suppression of Expressionism in Nazi Germany. ("Modernism" is a moment in the history of art, modernity is an attitude to the past.) Just where the past ends and the present begins is a question of interpretation; the periodization of art production that coincided with the concerted drive to establish museums of new and recent art in the nineteenth century not only involved the erection and renovation of buildings, but the construction and revision of the history of art itself. The adoption of terms, such as "contemporary" rather than "modern" and "institute" instead of

"museum", mark the American transformation of European struggles over nomenclature and self-representation.

All contemporary art eventually becomes the art of the past. The "universal survey museum" is just as much an illusion as any projected "museum of living art." Lorente cites Gertrude Stein, who once said of New York's MoMA that it could either be a museum or modern but not both. Eventually the "museums of modern art" turned into fossilized museums of nineteenth century art, just as the more recently established institutes of contemporary art have become permanent collections of early twentieth century art. Museums such as MoMA have become iconic institutions in themselves, trapped in their own histories.

In presenting a chronological narrative of the establishment of museums of modernity, Lorente risks falling back on the methods of traditional art history, itself a positivist discipline with a vision of progressive evolution. Consequently the book could have mirrored the very modernist illusion he attempts to explain. Writing about the museum, Donald Preziosi has described the "intractability of the institution to critical inquiry or sociohistorical analysis ... the modern discourse on the subject remains complicit with the museum's most fundamental programmatic mission — the fabrication and maintenance of modernity."¹ But Lorente has taken on Preziosi's challenge and written an interesting study. He has avoided making simple causal relationships, rejected the mechanistic and organic models once preferred, and refused the value judgements that could have characterized his narrative, allowing instead for contradiction, mixed motives and the overlapping of agendas in this cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary analysis of the establishment of the first museums of contemporary art.

Note

1. Donald Preziosi. "Modernity Again: The Museum as Trompe-l'oeil." Peter Brunette and David Wills, eds. *Deconstruction and the Visual Arts: Art, Media, Architecture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 145.

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Stieber, Nancy. *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam: Reconfiguring Urban Order and Identity, 1900–1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Pp. viii, 386. Maps, black and white illustrations, and index.

This scholarly work tells the story of housing design in Amsterdam during the time when H.P. Berlage, J.M. van der Mey, Michel de Klerk, P.L. Kramer, M. Brinkman, H.J.M. Wallenkamp, Jan Gratama, and other Dutch architects emerged as leaders in the search for innovative design solutions to social housing problems. This search led to the development of an avant-

garde housing policy in The Netherlands, a policy that subsequently was to serve as a model for other countries in Europe.

As in other industrialized countries, the chief problems of the urban housing of underprivileged in the nineteenth century were inadequate air, light, and sunshine in the home, as well as overcrowding and lack of privacy. Poor housekeeping, the taking in of boarders to help pay the rent, the keeping of small animals in the home, and the use of the dwelling as a workplace were all undesirable practices that further aggravated living conditions for many families.

The author describes living conditions in substandard workers' dwellings in the first four chapters of her book, entitled: (1) The Politics of Daily Life, (2) Social Hygiene and Aesthetics, (3) Setting Housing Standards, and (4) Civilizing the Working Class. The contents of the remaining chapters relates to housing design, namely (5) The Standard Plan, (6) Controlling Urban Aesthetics, (7) Reforming Workers' Taste, and (8) Normalization of the Facade.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, social reformers sincerely believed that a good healthy house was not only promoting wholesomeness, but was also conducive to good domesticity and cleanliness. Thus, reformers set about to improve workers' housing conditions through the introduction of new dwelling types where daily household functions were separated from each other, e.g., washing and cooking in the kitchen, socializing in the living room, and sleeping in the bedroom, in fact, mirroring values that were the hallmark of bourgeoisie housing.

As a Montrealer, the reviewer was fascinated by two factual observations by Ms. Stieber, namely that a Catholic housing society "preferred a floor plan in which the kitchen was enlarged to a size permitting the family to dine in it, while a second, separate living room was used as a sitting room or parlor," and that "various attempts were made to achieve the goal of maximizing the number of families with their own street entrance, reducing the number of families sharing halls or stairs." It is interesting to note that although "a large multi-purpose kitchen" and "dwellings with individual entrances," are also characteristics of Montreal's indigenous workers' housing, especially in the French residential neighborhoods of the city, Montreal's so-called "multiplexes" have shared external stairs leading to upper floor dwellings.

Dutch workers, however, had apparently a deep-rooted dislike for both central entrances and internal communal stairways; they found these to be a nuisance for dwellers and non-dwellers alike. Residential buildings with such features were dubbed mere "barracks." While reluctant to share interior spaces with their neighbors, Dutch workers had no objection to sharing outdoor spaces. In fact, families preferred the so-called *hofje* (court) housing pattern, because in this type of perimeter block development children could play safely in a protected spacious outdoor public area shared by the entire community.

A remarkable housing development in the Spaarndammer district was *Zaanhof*, based on a design concept that entailed two annular parallel closed block developments with a well-defined public urban space in the center. While reflecting urban design principles advocated by Camille Sitte — an Austrian architect and planner in vogue at the time — the planning concept of *Zaanhof* is also attributed to Arie Keppler, a supervisor at the Building and Housing Inspection office, and to the architect J.M. van der Mey. However, it was H.J.M. Wallenkamp who was commissioned to design the entire interior perimeter of this housing estate. Reminiscent of a medieval town, each house has its own gable facing the public square. Vehicular access to the interior square is through two breaks in the building mass, while pedestrians had four additional portal entrances through the attached housing blocks.

There is no doubt that this scholarly book has been meticulously researched, with its findings substantiated by copious references spread over 85 pages. Unfortunately, such thorough scholarly works — especially when written in an academic style — come with a price: the general public may find the text, as detailed as it is with so many references, too daunting to read.

Municipal administrators, social workers, town planners, architects, and others who are interested in the evolution of a successful social housing policy, will find Nancy Stieber's *Housing Design and Society in Amsterdam* a good and informative read. Moreover, this handsome book should be available at every public library, as well as a welcome addition to private libraries whose owners are interested in housing design.

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Winter, Jay, and Jean-Louis Robert, eds. *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Pp. xvii, 622. US\$90.00 (cloth).

War and social change are prominent subjects for historians interested in the cultural and social aspects of conflict, with most conceding that the First World War was the watershed of change in the twentieth century. One of these historians, Arthur Marwick, has developed a paradigm of total war's effects on society — as destructive, as a test, as demanding participation, as a vast psychological experience — applied to the national experience in several countries, especially to Great Britain. *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919*, edited by Jay Winter of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and Jean-Louis Robert of the University of Orléans, self-consciously departs from this national framework to present an ambitious study of the capital cities of France, Britain and Germany during the First World War. Their departure from Marwick's approach is so complete that this innovator in the field of war and social change is