

Lorente, J. Pedro. *Cathedrals of Urban Modernity: The First Museums of Contemporary Art, 1800–1930*. Historical Urban Studies. Aldershot, Hampshire, UK/Brookfield, Vermont, USA: Ashgate, 1998. Pp. xiii, 322. Black and white plates, bibliography, index

Claudine Majzels

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ique where French operas were interspersed with considerable spoken dialogue, a new and uniquely French operatic tradition was evolving.

Although called, *grand opéra*, that term meant more than "grand opera" in the popular sense. It referred to a work that was sung throughout, with no spoken dialogue, and unlike most Italian and German operas it was usually five acts long rather than the traditional three. In addition the chorus was expected to play a large role, often as a way of advancing the dramatic plot. Most importantly, a full-length ballet, often lasting longer than forty minutes, was to take place either during the third or the fourth act. Finally, the opera was to include a noteworthy and cataclysmic spectacle, such as the slaughter of several hundred Protestants by militant Catholics at the end of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. When Wagner challenged several of these conventions in his reworked Paris version of *Tannhäuser*, set to a French libretto, but in three acts and with the ballet coming early in the first act, public indignation ended the performance before it was half over.

Anselm Gerhard is professor of musicology at the University of Bern in Switzerland. Although he is fascinated by the development and evolution of the French *Grand Opéra* tradition his study places that tradition within a larger and more compelling canvas. Along the way he raises several intriguing and important questions, one in particular. Given the fact that Paris was one of the few truly cosmopolitan cities in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, perhaps the most sophisticated city in Europe, did urbanization play a role in the evolution of the *grand opéra* tradition? This question, and his attempt to answer it, raises an important area for exploration in European thought and culture, one seldom researched.

There were hundreds of opera houses in Europe, but the Garnier Theatre in Paris was the home of French *grand opéra*. Internationally recognized composers like Meyerbeer, Rossini, Verdi and Spontini were invited to contribute to the advancement of this genre. Mr. Gerhard investigates not only the relationship between urbanization and grand opera, but he asks and tries to answer another significant question. Why did opera characters and plots take the forms they did, reeking with psychological overtones and fraught with numerous examples of neuroses? Why did librettists write multifaceted and complicated works? He then relates this question to his primary focus: what role did urbanization and the complications of city life play in the evolution of *grand opéra*?

Professor Gerhard concentrates on eight major works composed by Rossini (*Le Siège de Corinthe* and *Guillaume Tell*), Auber (*Le Muette de Portici*), Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots* and *Le Prophète*), Verdi (*Les Vêpres siciliennes* and *Un ballo in maschera*) — although why this opera got into the story rather than *Don Carlos* is only partially explained — and finally, the virtually unknown Louise Bertin (*La Esmeralda*). The fact that a female wrote an opera would be newsworthy enough, but Bertin

was the only composer to collaborate directly with Victor Hugo and this fact alone makes her unique.

Although *The Urbanization of Opera* runs in excess of five hundred pages, Gerhard provides an effective introductory time line from 1826 to 1859, the years of his study, thereby clarifying and focusing on the principal issues of the day. Each of the major works is treated with an effective plot summary so those unfamiliar with the operas need have little fear. Mary Whittall has had a long and distinguished career as a translator and this monograph is graceful to read.

For anyone interested in questions and problems associated with mid-nineteenth-century urbanization, with all its associated miseries and complications, this complex but important study adds a new dimension to European thought and culture, and Gerhard's monograph is highly recommended.

Alan David Aberbach  
Opera Studies Program  
Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre

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Lorente, J. Pedro. *Cathedrals of Urban Modernity: The First Museums of Contemporary Art, 1800–1930*. Historical Urban Studies. Aldershot, Hampshire, UK/Brookfield, Vermont, USA: Ashgate, 1998. Pp. xiii, 322. Black and white plates, bibliography, index.

Although the title of J. Pedro Lorente's book alludes to the well-known metaphor of the museum as a temple of art, it is not as a site for religiosity that this book deals with its subject, but as a site for the social discourse of culture. Lorente's history of the early establishment of museums of contemporary art is a history of ideas about art, of taste and of the politics of art patronage in the period 1900–1930 and, in fact, beyond. The author acknowledges his debt to the historical tradition of art and its methods, but this study is more of a post-structuralist attempt to describe the dynamics of power in the institutionalisation of the modern during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although references are made to Haskell's studies of the history of taste and art collecting, Lorente probably owes more to Foucault's concept of "human archeology." He presents us with a convincing deconstruction of the first museums of modernity in Europe and North America, and of the cultural construction of the history of art itself through the selective preservation of certain works. The political issues, historical tensions, economic conditions and personalities are all dealt with even-handedly and sometimes with humour as well. Unfortunately, this otherwise well-organized and clearly conceived study is plagued by occasional lapses in English language usage. Nonetheless, the intellectual value of the analysis presented here is not diminished by its weak prepositions. Lorente's book offers insights into the ideologies that produced, and were themselves produced, by the establishment of the first museums of modern art.

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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.

Claudine Majzels  
Department of History  
University of Winnipeg

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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-