

Reviews

Mark Luccarelli, *The Eclipse of Urbanism and the Greening of Public Space: Image Making and the Search for a Commons in the United States, 1682–1885*. The Old Vicarage, Warwick: The White Horse Press, 2016. 245 pages. ISBN: 978-1-874267-94-2.

Mark Luccarelli charts the portrayal and image-making of nature in American cities from the colonial period up to the mid-19th century. Employing environmental literacy by rereading selected classical texts of Emerson, Thoreau and Olmstead, and by analyzing contemporary engravings and paintings, Luccarelli depicts the influence of the picturesque in portraying American cities with their hinterland. Using Philadelphia, Washington, the Hudson Valley, Maine, and New York as the main case studies, Luccarelli provides important insights into how various forms of anti-urban, agrarian political ideologies have affected the territorial ambitions of the new nation, leading to the exploration and exploitation of the “West” and to the mystification of wildness into “wilderness.”

Challenging the present environmental discussion, which has been dominated by single global problem – climate change – Luccarelli addresses a key question about when and why people became detached from their surroundings and how this (unfortunate) development could be re-addressed today, or can it? Luccarelli argues that current discussion about nature and the environment requires a better understanding of both the aesthetic, cultural, economic and social elements of the landscape as well as of society. In doing so, Luccarelli is clear from the start – a convincing analysis of any landscape “requires re-narration of spatial history” (2). In fact, Luccarelli pinpoints the ultimate problem of the environmental movement – the difficulty of linking economics and conservation – a problem already recognized by Thoreau, for instance. The task which Luccarelli sets for the book is demanding and the author has done a good job in charting out the evolution of ideas about the portrayal of nature

during the urbanization of a new nation, suggesting a new way of thinking about the urban environment.

One of the commendable elements of the book are its illustrations. In the first four chapters these work very well with the text, and for this the author can be congratulated. Given the number of illustrations of Central Park, however, there is an unfortunate imbalance between the chapter on New York and the rest. Moreover, as Luccarelli employs conceptual space as one of his key concepts, one is left wondering why there are only a few maps, not to mention very little discussion about the importance of mapping. The impact of maps in portraying a new nation and its territorial ambitions not to mention ideas about the American landscape ought to have been included in the scope of the book.

There are a few major shortcomings, however. First, and most importantly, Luccarelli does not spell out clearly what he means by green space. Given the amount of literature on green space there could have been more examples on ideas that have been influential in shaping green space not only in other American cities but elsewhere as well. In addition, for a book that aims to discuss the fate of public space as one element of conceptual space, there is surprisingly little discussion about people and the governance of the cities, towns and regions studied. In fact, while employing green space as one of the book's key concepts, one is left wondering if green space is such an all-encompassing urban-related idea as Luccarelli argues. If so, how do the forests and woods of Maine, common land and a new park in New York, and a river valley and a new capital share similar origins? Or were these interconnected through artistic portrayal by means of engravings, paintings and texts? Unfortunately, the book provides a broader insight into neither the greening of public space in cities nor urban regions beyond the American perspective.

Secondly, the book's structure could be better organized. Despite the fact that the book comprises five chapters, each dealing with a case study based on a single city or region, the reader is often left to follow Luccarelli's associative thinking without the help of firm conceptual signposting. Luccarelli is a lively writer who provides numerous thought-provoking points, but a series of straightforward questions at the opening of each chapter, for example, would help the reader understand the links between the chapters and the connections between the numerous arguments. Many key themes pop up almost out of nowhere. These include, for instance, an important discussion on nature (from 133 onwards). Similarly, the key final chapter

on Olmsted's Central Park has a paragraph (206) which summarizes the book's main points, arguing how Olmsted's thinking about the greening of public space that was threatened by commercialization was heavily influenced by previous works on American landscape. This point comes rather suddenly and should have been discussed in more detail earlier. Having said this, Luccarelli does succeed in pointing out crucial connections between commercial development and its impact on American thinking about nature, although some conclusive arguments about, for example, the fate of urbanism could have been discussed in more depth.

Thirdly, the book lacks a clear focus. The analysis would have benefited from a solid main argument spelled out in the Introduction. Instead, Luccarelli provides a multifaceted statement about environmental discourse and spatial analysis in regard to public space. The book is also demanding for a reader, because it is based on a reassessment of major American authors. Thus, it is not particularly accessible to those unfamiliar with the writings of Emerson, Thoreau and Olmsted, although Luccarelli does help the reader out with a clever use of captions throughout the text. Despite these shortcomings, Luccarelli's book makes an important contribution both to environmental and to urban studies.

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Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: Conservative Media and the Transformation of American Politics*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016. 320 pages. ISBN: 978-08-12248395.

Conservative media was widely hailed as the winner of the 2016 election. Steve Bannon, the former executive of *Breitbart News*, served on Donald Trump's campaign and was subsequently appointed chief strategist to the president. Bannon might represent the nationalist far-right media that gained legitimacy with the political success of Donald Trump, but the celebrity-turned-candidate was also buoyed by the more traditional, and influential, conservative media. These more mainstream conservative media powerbrokers, like Roger Ailes, Sean Hannity, and Rush Limbaugh, were vital to the success of Trump. Indeed, Trump not only drew his support but also cultivated his right-wing bona fides primarily through conservative media. In *Messengers of the Right*, Nicole Hemmer gives us a comprehen-