education had been turning out well-built, reasonably handsome buildings. But they were designed and built by engineers, not architects: “France’s most thoroughly trained architects were engineers, and had been for a century” (436). Saint’s discussions of Léonce Reynaud’s role at first the Polytechnique and then the École des Ponts et Chaussées provides an historical counterpoint for assessing the reforms Viollet was trying to implement (444). What is this really about? Cultural capital? Class? Localized knowledge systems? Further analysis needs to be done. For Saint it would seem that the teaching of the ETH Zurich (originally the Eidgenössische Polytechnikum) provides a compelling ideal model for an education that supports the inextricable connection between architecture and engineering that he so admires. And on top of it, there was and is at the ETH a commitment to assigning an important role to brilliant humanists, beginning with Gottfried Semper and Jakob Burckhardt (447). What the Swiss got right is worth pondering as Saint launches into the gloomy section on the “Triumph of the Art School” and the sad state of architectural education today, when “words, as much as buildings or designs, have become the output of schools of architecture” (475). The final chapter of The Architect and Engineer, on the goals of an architecture education, should be required reading for every educator in a studio-based school.

This book provides a broad sociological history of the building professions and of the role and goals of education for those professions that is especially timely today. With the current economic crisis, architecture programs everywhere are being forced to rethink what their educational product is delivering, and why. This is a time of opportunity and change, given a drastic reduction in resources. There is a renewed rhetoric about interdisciplinarity (especially as it pertains to sustainability) and a further blurring of the boundaries that have separated not only architect and engineer, but also industrial designer, mechanical engineer, landscape architect, and various trade-based experts in “smart” or ecological materials and new technologies. This book is a historically informed place to start the discussion of where to go next.

Andrew Saint’s Architect and Engineer is highly recommended, despite or perhaps even because it is filled with such a personal voice, sometimes as insistently as that of Henry Adams in Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres. Where else will you find an architectural historian scolding you for “a preference for the mollycoddling fellowship of the academy” (444)? Or being sure to remind you to give credit to each of Le Corbusier’s technical collaborators, and the famous man’s failings as a team member—didn’t Corbu see the problems that come with trying to build in distant countries where “the gap between design and construction is bound to widen” (277–79)? Likewise, Saint observes that the engineer Ove Arup, one of the author’s heroes, thought of the relationship between architect and engineer as marital, “with all the potential for harmony, conflict, perpetuity, and fruitfulness which marriage implies” (493), only to find him back away from assigning a gender to either profession. The field is lucky to have this large and idiosyncratic book, which sprang from Saint’s simple observations long ago about the relative locations of the departments of architecture and engineering at Cambridge, where he was teaching. What did it mean? How did we get here? A consummate empiricist, Andrew Saint is still engaged in surveying the trees, giving us glimpses of the forest as he found it. It is a landscape we would all do well to survey.  

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Despina Stratigakos  
A Women’s Berlin: Building the Modern City  
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 264 pp., 77 b&w illus. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 9780816653232

Against the profile of the Trümmerfrauen, the heroic rubble-women who reassembled Berlin after its wartime air attacks, Despina Stratigakos’s A Women’s Berlin: Building the Modern City reconstructs an earlier, forgotten generation of women’s roles in shaping the German Imperial capital’s identity circa 1871–1914. Whereas existing histories of Berlin mention the Trümmerfrauen’s passive role as “an accidental builder,” the progressive, dynamic vision of a “women’s Berlin”
deliberately constructed by female architects and designers, housing cooperatives, charitable organizations, and lady-patrons has been obscured from the historical landscape of the rapidly expanding Wilhelmine capital. To Stratigakos, the pre-1914 women’s Berlin was both real and imaginary, “expressing a vision of the German capital that embraced their feminine modernity . . . [F]rom residences to restaurants,” she continues, “a visible network of women’s spaces arose to accommodate changing patterns of life and work” (ix–x). Berlin’s network of women’s spaces, consisting of residences, clubs, exhibition halls, and welfare institutions, developed in response to the architectural needs of the New Woman: independent career women requiring places to conduct business, socialize, take meals, and retire and call their own. Penned in an ebullient, eminently readable prose, the slim volume comprises five chapters. These focus on the alternative urban geography and narrative strategy conveyed by a woman’s guidebook to the city; nation, class and the politics of women’s clubs; domestic architectural solutions for single women; exhibitions featuring new female professions; and the architecture of social work. Each well-constructed chapter helps vividly map out the terrain of this vanished Women’s Berlin.

Synthesizing histories of women’s architecture with vernacular methodological approaches, Stratigakos’s resurrection of this forgotten women’s metropolis subtly challenges the established canon of Wilhelmine architecture while contributing to the body of comparative literature on gendered appropriations of urban spaces. Reading buildings and interiors as “carefully coded texts,” the author claims to balance transnational with partial or full kitchen facilities in addition to Einkochkasten-style communal food-service. Stylistically, the feminine aesthetics of such buildings expressed a stripped-down modern functionalism grounded in neoclassicism and Biedermeier simplicity.

The author’s fascinating chapter on the politics of clubhouse architecture brings controversies over the proper aesthetic vernacular for German women’s clubland into high relief. A satellite of London’s Lyceum Club extending membership to women with proven achievements in art, literature, or commerce, the Berlin Lyceum Club’s ostentatious clubhouse on the Potsdamerstrasse became the locus of a heated debate involving tensions of gender, consumption, and national identity. Whereas male clubs, modeled on English aristocratic country-houses, represented private refuges of leisure away from women’s domestic sphere, women’s clubs emphasized public over private spaces in a manner that underscored women’s professional and self-advancement. Tensions developing between the German ladies and their male London managers, particularly over the style of furnishings, amenities, and meals to be offered by the club, came to a head in 1908 when the International Lyceum Club’s Berlin satellite severed ties with its English overseers and vacated its onion-domed Potsdamerstrasse premises, at which point Berliners’ plans to remodel an existing structure on the gentile Lützowplatz took firmer shape. Designed by Berlin-based architect Emilie Winkelmann, who stripped the neoclassical façade of all traces of ornament, the Lützowplatz clubhouse embodied what Stratigakos celebrates as a sächlich functional feminine aesthetic, “harmoniously fusing past and present” (47).

Yet the limits of the author’s transnational comparisons to the Anglo-American axis obscure the relevance of concurrent developments in Central European architecture—particularly the possibility that such works expressed a genderless modern aesthetic. A brief survey of architectural responses to changing gender roles in Central European urban centers would likely have substantiated the author’s arguments on the Prussian metropole’s uniqueness. Differing gender ideals affected the development of similar housing cooperatives across Central Europe. For instance, while female schoolteachers in Germany and Austria were subject to enforced celibacy, Hungarian female schoolteachers were allowed to marry, lessening the need for such housing. The author’s conclusions that the late-Imperial era of gender-segregated institutionalism gave way to postwar integration may well have held true for Berlin, but not uniformly across the German lands, as notions of “separate but equal” continued to flourish in First Republic Austria.

Stratigakos’s contention that the monumentality expressed by female building projects challenges narratives of the moderation and “docility” of the German middle-class women’s movement vis-à-vis their radical Anglo-American counterparts stands on
shakier ground because the book has not been adequately contextualized in terms of the German women’s movement. While the author correctly highlights the particularist “spiritual motherhood” discourse wielded by German bourgeois feminists, her arguments against notions of German’s women’s movement as conciliatory in comparison to the militant tactics of the British suffragettes lack the proper scaffolding to connect architectural developments to ideology. That a discussion of German liberalism, particularly given the liberal character of the German women’s movement and the principles of self-help embodied by the book’s buildings projects, remains absent from her arguments detracts from her ability to draw such sweeping claims.

Nevertheless, Stratigakos is to be applauded for excavating these forgotten sites of women’s building in this exemplary study drawing upon a rich arsenal of discursive, periodical, and archival materials. The field can hope that her work inspires further studies of women artists and architects in other urban centers. A groundbreaking piece of scholarship building bridges among gender studies, cultural history, and architecture, A Women’s Berlin is an essential addition to any institutional library or specialized bibliography.

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Richard Wittman
Architecture, Print Culture and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France

One of the pleasures of studying eighteenth-century French architecture is encountering the range of publications that sought to engage a popular audience in architectural criticism. Among the books that had such aspirations in the 1750s are two available today in English translation: Marc-Antoine Laugier’s Essai sur l’architecture (1753, rev. ed. 1755), with its iconic frontispiece of the primitive hut engraved by Charles Eisen, and Jean-François Bastide’s tale of architecture and seduction, La Petite Maison, which first appeared in 1758 in the journal Le Nouveau Spectateur, one of the more than 115 French periodicals available at midcentury.1

Generations of historians have mined this literature in the course of their studies of architects, buildings, and urban design, but Richard Wittman is among the first to describe and contextualize its history. Architecture, Print Culture and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century France is the culmination of research undertaken for his doctoral dissertation, completed in 2001 at Columbia University. As the title suggests, Wittman frames his study with Jürgen Habermas’s concept of the bourgeois public sphere, wherein new information networks, such as the popular press, constituted an arena in which ideas and values acquired identity and social weight as public opinion.2 Wittman’s objective is to discover who spoke on behalf of what public and to what purpose. His book complements Thomas Crow’s landmark study, Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris (1985), and builds on the rich, ongoing scholarship devoted to the history of the popular press in eighteenth-century France.3

Architecture, Print Culture and the Public Sphere merits a place on graduate seminar reading lists as a bridge between print-based studies and visual studies. Accessible from both points of departure is the book’s central theme of the role of the press in transforming architectural meaning. Wittman describes how discussion of buildings in books and periodicals shifted the source of architectural knowledge from lived experience to abstract principles. Buildings, he argues, became placeholders for ideas shaped in the public sphere, and under such circumstances criticism depended as much on familiarity with those ideas as on first-hand acquaintance with the architecture under review. Wittman presents his case effectively. His writing is clear and concise, and vivid examples support his arguments.

Wittman has organized the book chronologically in four sections. The first examines the efforts of the French Royal Academy of Architecture, founded by Louis XIV in 1671, to fulfill its mission of determining and promulgating aesthetic and practical standards for architecture. This endeavor became a textbook demonstration of the law of unintended consequences, for as the academicians debated their options in the formulation of a universalizing doctrine, they offered a model for others outside their circle to do likewise and propose doctrines based on different conclusions. The emergent popular press facilitated the spread of such unofficial discourse beyond the confines of isolated salons to a relatively diverse audience composed of all those with access to journals and newspapers.

Among the issues the academicians faced was the difficulty of reconciling the ideal of Renaissance classicism, rooted in Greco-Roman antiquity, with the living tradition of Gothic architecture and its importance to architectural meaning. Wittman’s social weight as public opinion.2 Wittman’s objective is to discover who spoke on behalf of what public and to what purpose. His book complements Thomas Crow’s landmark study, Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Paris (1985), and builds on the rich, ongoing scholarship devoted to the history of the popular press in eighteenth-century France.3

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Wittman devotes the second part of his book to an examination of how writers with political agendas adopted architectural criticism to challenge royal policies without appearing to attack the king. He draws his primary examples from the many commentaries published at midcentury addressing the completion of the east façade of the Louvre and the design of the Place Louis XV (today’s Place de la Concorde). Authors who felt that the administration of Louis XV was neglecting Paris employed both projects as vehicles to urge the king to have greater engagement with the city. Some framed their position by claiming to speak for a vaguely defined public that valued such royal monuments as part of a collective heritage. Invocation of an interested public not only magnified the author’s voice, it also ascribed the public a degree of ownership in the matter under discussion. Suggestions for the public exhibition of projects for the Place Louis XV, for example, implicitly granted