Mesoamerica is long due for a comparative analysis on urbanism, and this monumental tome is an important collective project in that direction. Gathering twenty-three scholars working in various parts of Mesoamerica, with research spanning archaeological and historical analyses, the volume focuses on “how communities at various points in the process of urbanization represented themselves in the art and architecture of several iconic” Mesoamerican centers (Fash and López Luján, 2). The volume explicitly sets out to define urbanism or evaluate Mesoamerican centers and cities in a comparative context of past urbanism. Indeed, some hardcore archaeologists may object that some of the centers treated in the volume—e.g., San Lorenzo, Chalcatzingo, and San Bartolo—were not cities. Yet I agree with the spirit of this volume that urbanism includes long-term processes and practices that preceded and, in fact, produced the phenomena that most social scientists and architects consider cities.

As the title hints, the volume explores both art in Mesoamerican centers and Mesoamerican centers as art. It explores, on the one hand, elaborate artistic expression in Mesoamerican centers as narratives detailing mythico-historical origins (Mexico depictions of Quetzalcoatl and Tollan), pictorials legitimizing ascendant ruling authority (early murals in San Bartolo), and images anthropomorphizing divine powers (the multifarious deities depicted in Teotihuacan murals). The volume explores, at the same time, Mesoamerican centers as art; that is, the significance of centers and cities as “political, aesthetic, and cosmological symbols” (Carrasco, 444). Across the pre-Columbian Americas, emerging centers and cities were constructed as “exemplary” places, to use geographer Paul Wheatley’s term; as cosmograms that not only presented core urban physiognomies as cosmic topoi, but through multiplex referential practices (sensory, material, ritual, and so forth), urban form embodied the powerful spiritual forces that inhabited those features. For example, Eduardo Matos Mocetzezuma demonstrates that the Aztec Great Temple and its two summit shrines recreated the two mountains that Aztec considered to occupy the mythical center of their cosmos. This volume demonstrates that Mesoamerican centers and cities manifested powerful landscapes in their own right, the potency of which was enacted in material art, ritual performances, and cyclical reconstructions.

The volume sounds two chords that I find particularly salient for architectural historians. The first is a distinctly Mesoamerican notion of urbanism that is deeply rooted in New World pre-Columbian history. Many of the urban and proto-urban centers treated in this volume make particular reference to mountains. Attention to mountains is common across the native Americas, yet in Mesoamerica, centers came to be associated with a perception of mountains as conjoined mythical-physical places. When the Spanish arrived, every community was associated with a particular “mountain of water,” or “hill of sustenance,” denoted by the Aztec (Nahuatl) term altepetl. During the sixteenth century, altepetl were depicted as bell-shaped hills containing water. Several chapters indicate that Mesoamerica’s emergent urban history was tied up with the mythical concept of altepetl beginning at least during the Classic period, and likely much earlier, beginning with the Olmec.

Multiple chapters in The Art of Urbanism argue that the concept of altepetl transcended the urban center. Built centers explicitly referred to regional physical landscapes, as famously manifested in Teotihuacan’s visual relationships to surrounding peaks and Maya temples’ construction as human-wrought mountains topped with cave shrines. By the Classic period these monuments encapsulated and transformed, largely to elite ends, already ancient practical ecologies of peoples relating to their environments. Copan, Teotihuacan, Cholula, and Tenochtitlan centered on humanly wrought mountains, which as altepetl united diverse geographies and peoples under an emergent elite class. Mesoamerican centers, construed as altepetl, promoted both centralizing practices and regional, communal integration.

Chapters focusing on Late Postclassic centers refer to the pan-Mesoamerican concept of Tollan, an ancient ideal to which later Mesoamerican centers ascribed—most famously the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan. Tollan referred most generally to an ideal center—a Mesoamerican ancient template and urban utopia—and specifically a verdant, watery, fertile “place of reeds” (Fash and López Luján, p. 6). Chapters in this volume consider waterlike mountains central to Mesoamerican urbanism. Water surrounded early Olmec centers like San Lorenzo, and it is central to the Maya emphasis on watery caves as places of creation. Emphasis on water and watery caves continues into the Classic period, as resolutely manifested in the modified cave under the “House of the New Fire” platform in front of the Sun Temple at Teotihuacan, the location of El Tajín near permanent springs so that its ball court was flooded during rituals of regeneration, and iconographic depiction of water-management practices at Copan. Across the long history of Mesoamerican pre-Columbian history, urban centers emphasized the centrality of water.

The Art of Urbanism is an excellently produced, fabulously illustrated, and highly informative volume. It demonstrates some of the usual weaknesses that tend to characterize edited volumes; not all of the chapters directly address the central themes, and chapter quality varies. Yet the
publisher and the editors clearly worked to minimize these issues, creating a final product that brings a decisively new and exciting contribution to Pre-Columbian studies. Most surprising are the generative conjunctures of ideas and directions for further research that this volume decisely conveys. The Art of Urbanism successfully communicates the excitement of the Dumbarton Oaks Pre-Columbian Symposium that produced this volume. Auspiciously, the symposium was held at the Museum of the Aztec Templo Mayor in Mexico City in 2005, thirty years after Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, one of the volume’s key contributors, initiated the excavations that recovered the Aztec sacred center. This volume will positively influence research on Aztec and earlier manifestations of Mesoamerican urbanism.

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Thomas Müller and Romana Schneider
Das Klassenzimmer vom Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis heute / The Classroom: From the Late 19th Century until the Present Day
Tübingen, Germany: Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 2011, 304 pp., 400 color and 400 b/w illus. $65, ISBN 9783803033482

Jonathan Zimmerman
Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory

All of a sudden, architectural historians are thinking about schools. I hope this is evidence of a new trend to document educational landscapes, because for too long, far too long, places made for children to learn (and live and play) have received short shrift from our scholarly community. The encouraging evidence of interest includes a new history of children’s spaces in Denmark, several of open-air schools in Europe, and one study of British schools.1 In the United States, architectural historians have started to consider spaces for children, including in this journal.2 But the absence of book-length works on school design in the U.S. is puzzling, because schooling is the central experience of modern children and schools the central site where modern childhood is lived. For many reasons, the social construction of childhood changed in the nineteenth century, prompting parents to treasure children for their emotional contribution to family life and child savers to insist kids deserved to learn and play, rather than work. The transition was not easy or smooth, but as education came to be the job of every child, communities built public schools and hired architects to design many of them.

Imagine the extent of this public works project, as important as any other in shaping a modern nation. Architects, some well known, others less so, designed buildings that, coupled with compulsory education, fulfilled the state’s interest in teaching children to read, write, and calculate. In the nineteenth century, this significant claim on the public purse demanded construction of hundreds of thousands of buildings in the U.S., from one-room schools in the country to grammar and high schools in cities and suburbs, and the manufacture of huge quantities of equipment, including desks. Immediately, these and other artifacts showed the cultural landscape of public education to be a tangible measure not only of adult hopes for childhood but also of failure to execute them. Taxpayers (many of them parents) expected schools to uplift children, yet accepted dilapidated and decrepit buildings; educators used schools to experiment with progressive reform including the use of modern architecture, yet organized classrooms to discipline and punish children; politicians defined schools as essential building blocks of a democratic society, yet used them to advance children to specific social futures, conditioned by race, gender, and social class.1 Consequences matter. Children learn from three teachers, according to Loris Malaguzzi, Italian leader of the movement for child-centered education: the instructor, their peers, and the classroom space.3

This point, that space is the third teacher, runs through Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory. Historian Jonathan Zimmerman is not an expert in architectural history, but this remarkable book, one of a kind, has much to offer architectural historians, even if thinly illustrated and intended for a general audience. Small Wonder, which benefits from the author’s highly regarded book, Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools, opens with this anecdote: in 2002, a conservative politician used images of the one-room schoolhouse to promote the controversial federal program No Child Left Behind, and a progressive used the same image to criticize it. It is telling that each called on “America’s most enduring educational symbol” to stand for competing goals (1). Zimmerman goes on to explain how and why the little red schoolhouse turned into such a capacious cultural icon. “Across the political and ideological spectrum,” he writes, “everyone envisioned the schoolhouse they needed to see” (4). He insists, though, that politics and ideology cannot on their own explain the appeal of the image, including in consumer culture. A wide array of textual, visual, and material sources, notable in a book of modest length, supports the claim that nostalgia for the one-room school helped make sense of recurring themes in U.S. history. Zimmerman highlights hope for and ambivalence about progress, faith in individualism and desire for community, and demand for an enduring emblem of the nation, and he shows the image of this building proved especially useful when enduring inequalities and searing disputes, including those about race, fractured the pibility in a nation hell-bent on imperial expansion.

Regardless of clashes or locale, the building type didn’t change much, although country children did not attend schools of equal quality. The first section, “History,” describes the small one-room building, “static in appearance, layout, and organization,” usually built of log or wood frame with a pitched roof, sometimes but not