

maps, and architectural drawings, all thoroughly analyzed by the author, this book also serves as an important reference tool.<sup>3</sup>

*China's Covered Bridges and Woven Arch Bridge* not only greatly expand our knowledge about tangible bridge architecture in China but also contribute to our understanding of the intangible craft practices, social customs, and religious beliefs that were essential to the creation and meaning of the bridges. Even though timber bridges may not endure much longer into the future, the work done by these scholars will help to ensure that the bridges and their associated cultural practices are thoroughly investigated and documented for posterity.

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## Notes

1. Earlier scholarship in English has been focused largely on the distinctive “Wind and Rain” bridges of the Dong minority in southwest China. See, for instance, Xing Ruan, *Allegorical Architecture: Living Myth and Architectonics in Southern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Klaus Zwirger, *Vanishing Tradition: Architecture and Carpentry of the Dong Minority of China* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2006); Li Xuemei and Kendra Schank, “Time, Space, and Construction: Starting with Auspicious Carpentry in the Vernacular Dong Dwelling,” *JSAH* 70, no. 1 (2011), 7–17.

2. Ronald G. Knapp, *Chinese Bridges: Living Architecture from China's Past* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 2008).

3. Liu Yan has created a Chinese-language database of historical woven arch bridges along with an interactive map: Min-Zhe Woven Arch Bridges Database, <http://w-bridge.wiki> (accessed 18 Oct. 2023).

Jorge Otero-Pailos, ed.

### **Historic Preservation Theory: An Anthology, Readings from the 18th to the 21st Century**

Sharon, Conn.: Design Books, 2022, 608 pp.  
\$70 (paper), ISBN 9780578547145

Jorge Otero-Pailos's collection is an important contribution to historic preservation's intellectual infrastructure. Many well-known texts are included; others are presented in valuable English translation (e.g., works by Camillo Boito and Gustavo Giovannoni, who are both important to my own teaching). Other pieces are novel and revelatory (Countee Cullen's 1925 poem; Francis Lieber's 1863

wartime policy), and some well-known works are reset in the context of preservation's intellectual history (from Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger to Kevin Lynch and Jane Jacobs). In comparison to previous preservation theory anthologies and analyses, *Historic Preservation Theory* is a leap ahead in number, variety, and geographical-disciplinary-perspectival diversity. The collection rightly and assertively goes beyond the literature on preservation per se, linking developments in preservation thinking to other narratives of architectural culture, cultural policy, and intellectual history. The anthology is unquestionably valuable, diverse yet directed in its choices, and well crafted. However, the question that persisted for me, a teacher of preservation theory, was “How useful is it?”

Presenting preservation theory to professional students as a history of theory is not the best approach. The chronological presentation of “original primary sources” here seems to presume a history-of-theory approach. Precedent and evolution are of course very important perspectives, but these ultimately yield to a more instrumental project of constructing contemporary theory that works for right now and guides future-facing decisions. Otero-Pailos's collection is deeply committed to refining the intellectual histories of preservation theories. Intellectual work is necessary and valuable, but we should recognize its limits. It is an end in itself for a very small audience. Otherwise, intellectual production gets put in the service of workable theories applicable in practice (for instance, relating directly to contemporary issues of public policy, public space, community engagement, political economy, ecology, public health, and so on). Much more could be said about this; I mention it here to clarify my biases in reflecting on the benefits of the present book and its core concern for the intellectual history of theory.

The editor's introduction sets the overall interpretive frame of the anthology and raises a few overarching issues worth noting and debating. The ideas of the “Enlightenment” have pride of place in the collection: “We are working within an intellectual tradition that stems from the Western Enlightenment” (xx). Do they still resonate in preservation theory today? Yes, in received value systems, in scholarship, in public policies. The a

priori valuing of the original expressions of these ideas sends us looking for traces of the original still at large (like looking for the authentic fabric in a much-altered building). More to the point, though, the issues of the Enlightenment—or, more aptly, modernity—continue to unfold and prompt societies and creatives to respond anew, to create new modes of preservation in response. In other words, I find it less consequential that the old issues have endured in their original form and more consequential that they continue to evolve and be valorized. The question is how much the contemporary field continues to be nourished by original ideas and issues (the first third of the book), as opposed to their evolving uses.

The assertion that “historic preservation is a discipline” (xii) looms large in the introduction. Clear judgments of “inside” and “outside” (xix), canons, and critiques are built up from the idea of a “discipline” organized around “safeguarding.” (In a related vein, the introduction plumbs the variability of the field's lexicon and even what we call the field, be it preservation, conservation, or something else.) The presumption that historic preservation is a discipline needs interrogation. The fact (borne out by the present collection) that preservation has always drawn ideas and methods from other disciplines (history, art history, architecture, physical science, and so on) signals that historic preservation is more accurately a “field” or a community of practice as opposed to a “discipline” possessing an exclusive theoretical and methodological domain. The anthology serves the profession's disciplinary ambitions by consciously reproducing the Western bias (while also wisely acknowledging the same and noting recent departures from it). Otero-Pailos affirms there is no single Western way of thinking (“the discipline is not a cultural monolith”; xi), and in the end he posits the collection as a long dialogue and debate serving those enthusiastic for preservation's status as a discipline as well as those skeptical of it. Notwithstanding (indeed because of!) the positions staked in this thirteen-page essay, it could be the basis of a great critical-reading assignment in a graduate course.

The heart of the book is the anthology of primary sources: ninety-six entries in chronological order, prefaced by the introduction (plus a QR code on the next-to-last page linking to a

website that opens many more possibilities for learning about and contributing to this subject). Most readers will, as I did, immediately scan the list of entries: John Ruskin, Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, and Alois Riegl are here; significant space is devoted to Enlightenment groundings; there is a great collection of most-recent works (1990s to the present). Every reader will find a few lesser-known favorites (mine are Giovannoni, Van Wyck Brooks, and Lewis Mumford) and a few mind-expanding new thinkers (Lieber, Harry Fett, and Max Dvořák were all new to me).

The entries are short (averaging five to six pages, never more than ten), and each is introduced by a considerably shorter editor's introduction (about a page). These short introductions are clear and engaging, do tons of work contextualizing authors and texts, and will serve as excellent prompts for discussion. I read across these introductions first, rather than following the actual order of the pages, and I came away with a new understanding of the arc of preservation's intellectual development. Occasionally, the introductions seem too schematic and brief, or overinterpret a single essay as a scholar's whole contribution (I sensed this with Giovannoni, Lynch, and Mumford). Each entry warrants so much more contextualization and analysis—one wants more of them and more from them. Collecting these short introductions (and inevitably expanding them somewhat) would be an even more significant contribution to the intellectual infrastructure of the preservation field. (As an aside, there remains a paucity of book-length scholarly works

on preservation theory—and several of the richest are sampled here: works by Salvador Muñoz-Viñas, Laurajane Smith, and Daniel M. Abramson.)

The chronological presentation of the ninety-six entries belies the very different subjects opened by them. For instance, three consecutive pieces by Vittorio Gregotti, James E. Young, and Edward Said—each brilliant, deep, and deeply important—produce a head-turning, disorienting effect when read in sequence. This is multiplied by the amazing intellectual and disciplinary range of the entries and might have been remedied by the introduction of some other analytical structures (e.g., philosophies of value, politics of the colonial, differentiating design intentions, notions of materiality, sensibility, and aesthetics—all would be amply supported by this collection). The chronological and thematic do mesh brilliantly, though, in the entries representing the period from the 1990s to the present; this is a very compelling run addressing a paradoxical gap for many students in the current moment.

Inevitably, a reader (myself included) can think of other themes that should be addressed more robustly in an anthology: for example, Indigeneity, values theory, technological effects. Chinese scholarship on preservation theory is represented by a Liang Sicheng essay; what about other Chinese voices, such as Wu Hung or other contemporary scholars? The transformative theoretical work in Black geographies of heritage (Katherine McKittrick, J. T. Roane, T. L. King) would be another welcome addition. Noting what is absent, I acknowledge, is the weakest criticism,

and this is offered in the spirit of enabling other readers to take this rich collection and challenge their own models of preservation theory.

I will enthusiastically use this anthology in my own teaching. The collection maps, celebrates, and complicates historic preservation as an intellectual territory. More than simply collecting texts, *Historic Preservation Theory* succeeds at meeting the important pedagogical goal of putting ideas on the table, setting them into motion, throwing them up in the air. It is not the last word, but it is a major contribution to the activation of learning and debating preservation theories.

In a practical vein, the relative absence of footnotes or references is puzzling, particularly in the volume introduction and the ninety-six essay introductions. The richness and range of these writings need the support of references (citations to the original pieces are provided). The scholarly and pedagogical intent of the whole work leads a reader to expect them.

More than a collection of historic preservation theory sources, Otero-Pailos's book presents a protointellectual history of the preservation field, and one hopes he will expand on it. Based on his nearly twenty years leading the journal *Future Anterior*, which has done more than any other journal to broaden the intellectual discourse of preservation, one expects Otero-Pailos will have more to say on the many themes threaded throughout this collection. The preservation field should look forward eagerly to such a continuation of the present volume's work.

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