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## The spatial turn in social history: A review of recent research trends

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# The Spatial Turn of Social and Cultural History: A Review of the Current Field

**Fiona Williamson**

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Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin, eds, *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, Ashgate: Farnham, 2010; 267 pp.; 9780754666509, £65.00 (hbk)

Lin Foxhall and Gabriele Neher, eds, *Gender and the City before Modernity*, Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester, 2013; 266 pp.; 9781118234433, £19.99 (pbk)

Caroline Goodson, Anne E. Lester and Carol Symes, eds, *Cities, Texts and Social Networks 400–1500*, Ashgate: Farnham, 2010; 361 pp.; 9780754667230, £70.00 (hbk)

Matthew P. Romaniello and Charles Lipp, eds, *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe*, Ashgate: Farnham, 2011; 298 pp.; 9781409405511, £70.00 (hbk)

David Warren Sabean and Malina Stefanovska, eds, *Space and Self in Early Modern European Cultures*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2012; 353 pp.; 9781442643949, \$80.00 (hbk)

In 2010 Ralph Kingston highlighted how history's 'rediscovery of space and place' was firmly on the agenda for the twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> Four years on this article asks whether Kingston's claim is still valid or whether historians' passion for all things spatial has run its course. This article reviews five recent collections of essays connected by themes of urban space and place, and asks how far the exploration of space as a way of understanding the past is still proving an embryonic and constructive way of approaching the past.

Several of the volumes under review engage with a formative concept in shaping historians' understanding of built environments, modes of social organization and

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human identities: Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*. Our first collection (in chronological order), *Cities, Texts and Social Networks*, has an expansive temporal and geographical coverage in a field that, as editors Caroline Goodson, Anne E. Lester and Carol Symes argue, has been heavily influenced by a Wallersteinian focus on post-1500s urban development that has tended to marginalize medieval cities. The editors propose an alternative narrative to move urban studies away from civic, political and economic developmental accounts to focus instead on the long-term relationship between people, urban space and identity. By so doing the volume utilizes the critical theories of Walter Benjamin, Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau but revisits, revises and reunites these theories with others that grew from the critical lens on earlier Marxist and Weberian traditions.<sup>2</sup>

The volume is arranged thematically with emphasis on methodological parallels, the first section dealing directly with the deliberate manipulation of spatial imagery and civic identity in public building and restoration projects. Gregor Kalas reveals how Rome's inhabitants orchestrated a collective urban memory in their choice of restoring or altering public buildings and temples that emphasized particular patrons (normally emperors and senators), and historic and political legitimacy. The building works reflected and preserved specific value systems for posterity whilst simultaneously erasing less convenient aspects of the city's past. Meredith Cohen builds on critiques of Robert Branner's classic 1965 text that unambiguously connected royal patronage with Rayonnant architecture in thirteenth-century Paris. Arguing that a far wider variety of social groups, forces and interests were involved in creating architectural style, Cohen challenges the prominent position Lefebvre has given to hegemonic and religious powers in shaping urban space.<sup>3</sup> This perspective is especially welcome in a field that has rather blithely adopted Lefebvre's model with, little challenge to some of its central tenets. The sense of challenging prevalent views is continued through many of the essays. Hugh Kennedy's refreshing look at Islamic cities, for example, adds much to the debate on planned versus organic urban development in 'oriental' towns. Engaging with textual sources in his call for a dynamic interpretative framework to better understand urban foundation and early development, his approach complements Cohen and Kalas' essays with a non-Western-centric dialogue.

The second part of the volume more explicitly draws on contemporary texts to recreate medieval social, sacred and ritual topographies. In her study of Umayyad Córdoba, for instance, Ann Christys uses Arabic texts, histories and legal documents to consider how the city's religious and racial topographies were affected by repeated conquests. Paying close attention to the different terms used to distinguish particular urban features and the symbolic importance of the walled city over the suburbs, Christys' description of Córdoba's geographic and topographic transformation is a close lens into human integration. Her analysis reveals the production of urban space as a complex process of negotiation between different social groups at different times. Anne E. Lester uses wills as sources on the medieval cityscape in two very interesting ways, first as a descriptive articulation of urban space and second, as a way of identifying a topography of charity. By searching

Champagne's charters and testaments for narrative descriptions of urban places and bequests to found or augment benevolent civic building projects, Lester convincingly argues that scribes and donors became cartographers as they created a new charitable landscape.<sup>4</sup> Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Alizah Holstein investigate two key episodes of Rome's twelfth-century history to explore emotions and senses of civic topography. The study of inhabitants' emotional responses to the ritual inversion of civic public performance – the subversion of papal and imperial processions during the parade of the assassinated Cola di Rienzo's body in 1335, for example – can demonstrate Romans' level of acquiescence to such momentous events at the same time as shedding light on their concept of civic space. The essay is not always convincing but it demonstrates how historians are readily fusing social geography methodology with cultural history to re-read established areas of historic enquiry.

The three essays that comprise the third section of the book reconsider the relationship between religion, ritual and civic identity. Scott G. Bruce examines the creation and subsequent reworking of the *vita* of Saint Maiolus. The original hagiography explicitly connected the saint to Pavia and drew parallels between the city and the ancient Biblical ports of Sidon and Tyre, but a much later and more popular account of Maiolus' life by a Cluniac monk overshadowed the civic typology that had won Pavia so significant a place in the saint's cult. Sarah Rees Jones also reflects on the formative role of saintly cults in developing civic consciousness in post-conquest English towns and cities. Focusing on some of the most significant cults, like that of William of York, in a period of intense urban development from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, Rees Jones argues that the 'acquisition of a miracle working saint' was an essential part of the creation of a new civic order. Like Bruce, Rees Jones argues for the centrality of contemporary literature in cementing this associative memory but also highlights the role of day-to-day ritual as the means whereby a town's governing elite could establish its own 'affective and effective communities'.<sup>5</sup> Finally, Franz-Josef Arlinghaus offers a re-reading of Max Weber's 'occidental city', arguing that a more nuanced approach is needed. Citing the examples of Braunschweig and Hildesheim amongst others, he contributes to recent scholarly debates on how medieval towns were often conglomerates of several independent entities, rather than a unified community.<sup>6</sup> Ritual, in Arlinghaus' view, whether grounded in religious or secular tradition, was a strategy appropriated to bring together the disparate elements of several communities in a new social reality.<sup>7</sup>

The themes connecting the final section of essays are familiar to urban scholars – charitable institutions, prisons and the public sphere – but instead of revisiting old ground the authors take fresh approaches to these aspects of civic life. Sethina Watson conceptualizes the extensive wave of hospital foundations in the decades between 1170 and 1250 as symptomatic of the redefinition of political space by emerging urban governments. Drawing on the arguments of historians including Miri Rubin, Carole Rawcliffe, Max Satchell and others, Watson successfully posits that the decision to found a hospital was a reflection of 'a claim to rule' and

integrally connected with urban political development: the town was the 'tablet' on which political authority was inscribed and thus claimed.<sup>8</sup> G. Geltner looks at how incarceration was portrayed in late medieval Italian art and literature. Geltner considers that prisons, like the hospitals of Watson's essay, symbolized an emerging urban political and civic consciousness.

Finally, Carol Symes' exceptional contribution reconsiders Habermas' denial of a medieval public sphere which, although other aspects of Habermas' proposals have been revised, has not been explicitly challenged. Symes argues that Habermas' definition of the public sphere as contingent with text was flawed and should be aligned instead with public participatory discourse of the kind that she identifies in Arras, a claim that inherently challenges the centrality of printing to the emergence of a public sphere.<sup>9</sup> Symes' often scathing critique of a scholarship that has conceptualized the Middle Ages as a 'temporal subaltern' because of the emphasis placed on printing and surviving documentation as a means by which to judge a society, her challenge of Habermasian theory, and her adoption of soundscapes, rather than print, as a way in to public discourse, is a good note on which to end this ground-breaking volume.

Our second volume, *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors*, builds on a field that has seen architectural historians and social historians working on common themes, including privacy, public space and the creation of self-identity, and appears on first glance to be an attractive and well-constructed, if not especially cutting-edge, collection. The volume was during a 2006 conference and this probably explains, at least in part, why the text reflects a mid-2000s historiography despite its 2010 publication date (*Cities, Texts and Social Networks* seems to have suffered less from a similar publication timeframe). Thus the volume does not offer ground-breaking insight, but the editors' careful selections and willingness to engage with new forms of material and empirical evidence ensure that the volume complements, rather than simply replicates, other work in the field.

The volume investigates how wealthy eighteenth-century Europeans actively shaped their identities through architectural mediums, paying close attention to the 'specificities of individuals, objects, and architectural design'.<sup>10</sup> The first section considers interiors as reflections of dominant cultural, religious or political narratives but also shows how space can act as a fluid, shifting and evolving element in forming identities. The first two chapters engage with textual sources to examine spaces that no longer exist in their original form. Meredith Martin looks at the influence of French architectural theory in European residential interior design, arguing its crucial role in cultivating an eighteenth-century European ethos and culture in which any distinction between public and private was 'wholly foreign'.<sup>11</sup> Max Tillmann investigates how Bavarian Elector-in-exile Max Emmanuel reconfigured his rooms at the palace at Saint-Cloud, reflecting his courtly but liminal status on the outskirts of Paris and on the margins of politics. Both scholars draw from histories of consumption and material culture as well as space to conceptualize interior decor as an essentially public way of asserting identity.

Csongor Kis and Katherine R. P. Clark consider the wider ramifications of design in European politics. Kis argues that the design of the archiepiscopal palace at Würzburg was contrived to illustrate the Schönborn and Greiffenklau families' connection to other of Europe's most powerful houses, at the same time as it reinforced codes of etiquette to visitors in the layout and purpose of its rooms. Clark reveals how the Catholic Clavering family of Northumberland, despite their ailing fortune, demonstrated their allegiance to the exiled Stuart king by remodeling and lavishly decorating Callaly Castle during the 1740s. The refurbishment was a calculated gamble as, instead of appealing to a dominant political elite and an obvious source of patronage, it articulated the family's desire for a religious and political national alternative and can be read as a statement of support for an intended Jacobite rebellion.

The second section of the volume finds Kathryn Norberg and Stacey Sloboda considering how women manipulated domestic rooms as performance sites in which they articulated carefully constructed roles. Reminiscent of Martin's thoughts on how women expressed public identities in interior settings,<sup>12</sup> Norberg's study of Parisian courtesans who transformed their homes into extravagant stage sets in which they acted as a classical goddess or muse and Sloboda's piece on Elizabeth Montagu's lavish Chinese room in her London home, reveal the power of conscious and extrovert design in projecting an image and an identity, one which masked the more serious pursuit of patronage, ambition and intellectualism underneath a façade of false femininity. The term 'masquerade' is employed in each essay as a framework for understanding these social performances and as a description of the complex interlinking relationship between interior design and identity. Marc J. Neveu, however, focuses on the real thing: Venetian masques. Challenging Habermas' theory of public participation, Neveu explores the wearing of a mask as a physical and symbolic merging of public and private, a theatrical tool that enabled an actor to become involved in a public dialogue as it concealed important elements of identity, like gender or status, that traditionally restricted many people from fully engaging in public life.

The third and final section explores the display of art and artefacts in purpose-built museums and galleries. Anne Nellis Richter and Jeffrey Collins consider how public exhibitions made patriotic or nationalistic claims on their viewers through the conscious choice of exhibits and styles of display. Such contrivances instructed and fashioned public taste, and even national identity. Daniel Brewer, as a rather fitting last word, considers historians' subjectivity when examining past spaces. Inspired by the 2005 public opening of the eighteenth-century panelled *grand salon* of the hotel Gaillard, formerly of the rue Danielle-Casanova, Paris, at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Brewer investigates the idea that as historians we engage in a process of belated reconstruction that relies as much on our own situation in time as that of the historic focus of our enquiry.<sup>13</sup> Brewer explores museum space but, unlike the preceding two chapters, keeps a firm hand in the present as he forces the reader to think about the conundrum of spatial and temporal frameworks for the presentation of knowledge.

*Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe* is dedicated to reviving a scholarship on noble studies that, as editors Matthew P. Romaniello and Charles Lipp explain, has rather fallen out of favour in recent years. Their carefully constructed introduction firmly places the essays within a post-revisionist interpretative framework, rather than fitting into the traditional 'decline and failure' or revisionist 'adaptation and success' models to explain the changing situation for Europe's traditional elites from medieval to modern times. Romaniello and Lipp posit a more dynamic model of personal, social and political 'contested spaces' in which nobles maintained their status by negotiating and accommodating 'traditional mechanisms of authority' whilst working with new institutions and ideas to 'claim a dominant space within a changing society'.<sup>14</sup>

The first essay by Hamish Scott takes the form of a historiographical review, particularly highlighting the contribution of Lawrence Stone and Jean Meyer to noble studies. The chapter feels oddly disconnected with the remainder of the volume but it has value as a thorough introduction to the field. Three of the following chapters explore gender and family as contested noble spaces. Erica Bastress-Dukehart centres her discussion on the female body, specifically the womb of Margravine Agnes of Baden, Duchess of Schleswig-Holstein, as the centre of a scandal concerning the legitimacy and inheritance rights of her premature twin children born in 1432. Bastress-Dukehart argues that the centrality of legitimate offspring to the survival of noble families, and the proliferation of medical interest in the female reproductive system at around the same time, lent significance to the womb as a contested space.<sup>15</sup> The essay plays with competing ideas of space: the womb is a corporeal space, medical science an abstract knowledge space, and Agnes' torment and reluctance to defend herself publicly is an intrinsically personal and confining space within domestic and regional politics.

Katherine L. Turner investigates the physical and ideological space of the Florentine convent of *La Concezione* where daughters of noble families were cloistered during a period of intense religious reform.<sup>16</sup> Turner views this sacred space as an extension, symbol and expression of the political and temporal power of the Medici family, as opposed to a female or a religious space. Finally, Grace E. Coolidge demonstrates how mistresses helped shape the successful public performance of noble masculinity, but also had the power to transmute harmonious domestic space into contested space by claiming alternative directions for family inheritances.<sup>17</sup> As the nobility were commonly defined in direct relation to their family and their lineage, this fascinating essay reveals the ambiguities that characterized noble masculinity, the public, yet private, nature of noble family space, and the ability of women of different ranks to negotiate, protect, or intervene in family affairs, and even to create masculinity in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spain.

Approaching the court as an actively created and contested space, Susannah Humble Ferreira argues that the early sixteenth-century Portuguese monarch Manuel I worked to cultivate a heightened culture of architectural extravagance, extended networks of patronage, and championed noble educational reform at a



time of extensive relocation (and redefinition) of courtiers to ever more permanent, often urban, spaces. Humble Ferreira explains how nobles were not necessarily limited by increasingly powerful monarchs but could benefit from working the system in conventional, and unconventional, ways. Ryan Gaston's essay touches on similar themes, showing how the crown (personified by the powerful Count-Duke of Olivares), managed its nobles by introducing educational reforms aimed at engaging the nobility with public service. Gaston allocates the monarch (and his advisors) a pivotal role in shaping an identity for the modernizing nobility but shows how nobles actively negotiated and manipulated the crown's educational strategies to promote their own family interests, enabling their sons to climb the ladder in governmental and military positions.

Cornelia Soldat likewise makes the relationship between the monarch and the nobility the focus of her essay on early modern Russia. She explains how, in contrast to noble practices common to Western Europe, the Russian nobility appropriated religious symbols and sacred burial spaces to affirm their family lineage and power. This essay brings together several of the themes addressed above, yet reconceptualizes them in a new and radically different environment, revealing how Russian nobles appropriated many of the same tools as Western elites in their search for power but managed them in defiance of, rather than in confirmation of, the hierarchy of monarchical rule.

Many of the essays in this volume examine the nobility's strategies for adaption or redefinition as new money, monarchs, or simply changing socio-economic dynamics transformed their identity. This process is not always considered a negative one, or one imposed upon nobles by external forces. Underlying Humble Ferreira and Soldat's research is the assumption that nobles possessed sufficient agency to create and contest the very concept of nobility. Elie Haddad tackles this theme in his discussion of the challenges presented to the traditional elite by the rise of the *noblesse de robe in France*. Haddad's analysis of changing ennoblement law explores the meaning of what it meant to be noble as a moveable and increasingly contested feast, one where fundamental assumptions about how nobility was transferred – from a grant of title from the king or by blood – were continually challenged and never entirely resolved.<sup>18</sup>

Like Turner and Soldat, Sukanya Dasgupta examines the complex arsenal of strategies available for nobles to affirm their legitimacy and consolidate their power. Focusing on the nobility's ability to adapt or redefine and, building on Lefebvre's notion of the social production of space, Dasgupta argues that commissioning English country houses became synonymous with a process of creating uncontested elite spaces in a changing socio-economic landscape. As one of the most enduring symbols of noble status in England, the presence of stately homes demonstrates how noble power was channelled through a variety of geographic and political sites away from the court. There are parallels here with M. Safa Saraçoğlu's essay on the transformation of the provincial Ottoman nobility which explores how shifting regional socio-economic dynamics pushed nobles into seeking new spaces to exercise power, in this instance the expanding



judicial and administrative sphere of the modernizing and centralizing Ottoman state.

The final essay to directly address the theme of redefinition is that of Matthieu Marraud who looks at the relationship between the nobility and the bourgeoisie in Paris between 1650 and 1750. Marraud views the process of ennoblement as a system of exchange, rather than simply one of top-down patronage. His study of Parisian families reveals how mobility was practised in preference to defensive strategies and that the close relationship between the nobility and the bourgeoisie did not threaten but strengthened the former's position. Marraud frames the nobility in the context of a dual dialogue of social and political components rather than as a static group.<sup>19</sup> This flexible approach allows him to better reach into the complex realities of nobles' position in relation to state, civil society, family, and each other.

The penultimate essay in the volume is by Jerzy Lukowski on the subject of the Polish nobility and it raises some interesting points of divergence from the themes above. Honing in on the late eighteenth century as a period of extreme socio-economic transition in Poland, Lukowski explores how the challenges facing nobles across Europe were manifest in a country where republicanism held a dominant place in elite political thought. The situation was quite unique for the Polish nobles because, as Lukowski points out, the threat of the increasingly powerful middling sort which, he argues, so assaulted the nobility in countries like France and England, had been crushed during the structural changes of the First Partition in 1772 and a system akin to serfdom still prevailed in the country at large. The Polish nobility thus faced a subtly different range of trials from many of their European counterparts; largely comprised of ideological challenges from within their own ranks about the place, function and rights of nobles and peasants in a modernizing world.

The strengths of *Contested Spaces of Nobility* are its willingness to engage with interdisciplinary methodology, to cross national borders and build from, rather than work with, existing historiography. Likewise, the frequent reference to other chapters by authors in the book suggests a close working relationship during the creation of the volume, and that this attention to detail is replicated throughout the volume is a credit to the editors. However, as a text that flags the importance of reviving a neglected field it succeeds very well but as a text that engages with the spatial turn it is limited. Although all the essays discuss spaces in which nobles operated, from the physical spaces of the court or country house to the functional spaces associated with their roles and duties, the discussion of space is more often than not the access point into noble history, rather than an exploration of space per se. As such the title is perhaps misleading, pointing the reader in a direction that is only partially addressed.

The volume edited by David Warren Sabean and Malina Stefanovska in 2012 is a showcase of global approaches to the spatial question. The first section draws from the understanding of *habitus* now so familiar to historians of space and place, but the discussion of the relational development of identity, culture and place does not feel tired. Chapters 1 and 3 explore how the self was reconfigured in relation to emerging new spaces. Gadi Algazi charts the development of the domestic study,

from a position of rarity and even suspicion in the Middle Ages to a commonplace expression of social status by the early modern period, noting how its development was integrally linked to changing cultural assumptions about private scholarly behaviour. Anne C. Vila homes in on the practice of private study in her essay on the Republic of Letters in eighteenth-century France. Exploring stereotypes of scholars and medical fears about excessive studying, she posits that study rooms were conceptualized in terms of a duality, a place in need of moral regulation to restrain the eventual debilitation of body and soul resulting from excessive scholarship and also as a private, cultured space for the free and unfettered enrichment of the mind (and ultimately, society). David Packwood and David Shields also explore intellectual spaces, the latter in a study of the eighteenth-century Witenagamot, a club of disparate booksellers, publishers and readers of various backgrounds and political opinions, who met at the Chapter Coffeehouse of Paternoster Row, London. The essay engages with multiple manifestations of space and self in the corporeal and mental spaces connected to the club and its patrons.

In a slight departure, Déborah Blocker explores the royal court – which she describes as the ‘primary symbolic space where power was exercised and represented’ – though the lens of the theatrical productions produced by Cardinal Richelieu between 1635 and 1643.<sup>20</sup> Reminiscent of Humble Ferreira and Gaston’s essays on Portuguese courtiers and Spanish nobles respectively in *Contested Spaces*, Blocker reconfigures the court as an independent space, not fixed to a place but to a person. With this space as a backdrop, the performance of Richelieu’s plays – deliberately designed to promote deferential courtly behavioural ideals – were lent extra force. These plays, Blocker argues, offer a way of understanding early modern notions of subjectivity and subject where the early modern courtier was awarded only limited autonomy for self-definition and development.

The final essay in this section, by Michael Taormina, also focuses on the nobility, in this case the idea of a crisis as the traditional paradigm on which their self-identity was predicated – military service, land and title – was gradually being eroded.<sup>21</sup> Taormina engages well with abstract methodology, using Saint-Armant’s nature poetry as a way into contemporaries’ understanding of the noble self, concluding that noble self-definition relied far more on individual performances within defined spaces of sociability (the court, the salon, the estate) than provenance.<sup>22</sup>

Part two of *Space and Self* explores selfhood in contemporary philosophy, theology and cartography. The overwhelming conclusion is that the early modern sense of the self was radically different from today but, arguably, this finding is based on a small sample of elite actors, those people with explicit knowledge of mechanical natural philosophy or Puritan theology. Tom Conley, for example, explores how Descartes and Montaigne perceived the self in relation to emergent ethnographical and topographical studies, arguing that as people learned more about the world they redefined their sense of self in response and, just as

cartographers, colonists and engineers set out to map and define new territories, contemporaries relocated themselves in new space created by expanding global knowledge. Robert Dimit and Erec R. Koch explore how human emotions, especially fear and love, were thought to stem from the complex mechanisms of the body, rather than the soul. In so doing, both authors argue for the importance of Cartesian ideas and natural science as a way of explaining the body and thus, the self. Andreas Bähr takes the most extreme view of the mechanical, corporeal self in his analysis of how contemporaries understood the role of fear in dream narratives as a product of early modern medical knowledge where skin was imagined as a permeable membrane through which humours and spirits flowed, and the dreamer moved between different corporeal and celestial spaces.<sup>23</sup> Bähr explicitly warns of a gulf between the early modern and the modern subject.

This section also considers the impact of the Reformation in forming ideas about self, an area which Lee Palmer Wandel claims has been neglected by scholars. Frédéric Gabriel sees autobiographical writing as a way in to understanding Puritan mentalities and examines the notion that ‘the self is a metaphor but also a territory to be converted’.<sup>24</sup> The Puritan emphasis on self-examination and denial, he argues, fundamentally changed the way the self was viewed during the Puritan Reformation. Palmer Wandel likewise suggests that Puritanism, and Puritan cartographers, transformed early modern map-making. She argues that the movement of religious exiles created a new religious and geographic terrain, one that transformed inhabitants’ sense of European space and their place within it. Christopher Wild also appropriates cartography as a way of crossing the conceptual boundaries of space and self and, in bringing together several of the other themes raised in previous chapters – nature, poetry and cartography – argues in his study of melancholic imagery that a new sense of abstraction resulted from viewing the world from a cartographer’s perspective.

The final section is titled ‘New Dimensions: Interstices and Intensities’. The included chapters certainly claim new directions but the editors’ selection of only two essays, with no apparent connection between them, lends the book a rather unbalanced feel. The essays themselves are innovative and well written. Robert Batchelor challenges the volume’s European focus with an essay on China, highlighting how concepts of space and self in London were influenced by the priest and cartographer, Matteo Ripa. Batchelor successfully unites several recent methodological and historiographical practices by also engaging with the global dimensions of the transmission of knowledge, as well as space and self. The final contributor, Jean-Philippe Antoine, employs a range of ideas about space, poetic ideals, descriptive analysis, antiquity and iconography to reread Johann-Joachim Winckelmann’s descriptions of the Elgin Marbles. He suggests an alternative to current views on Winckelmann’s conceptualization of body, space and self, one which construes his work as an allegory of his contemporary present, as much as a comment on the ancient past.

Overall, *Space and Self* is structurally unwieldy and tends towards the impenetrable in places. The introduction fails to engage with spatial methodology, or to

site the collection within the historiography, and prioritizes the discussion of self over that of space. Nevertheless, the combination of Sabeian's obvious scholarly engagement with aspects of self, individualism and the body with Stefanovska's knowledge of French literary history and memoirs means that as a study of self, the collected essays are truly interdisciplinary, geographically diverse and forward-looking.

Lin Foxhall and Gabriele Neher, as joint editors of *Gender and the City before Modernity* have brought together an extensive collection of essays on pre-modern gender from urban centres as diverse as ancient Carthage, Anglo-Saxon Winchester, Isfahan and Nanjing. The volume is part of the 'Gender and History Special Issue Book Series' and, as such, the book's predecessors set the bar high in terms of their scholarship and contribution to feminist historiography. The broad geographic, temporal and disciplinary framework offered by the contributors allows the volume to tackle some of the difficulties in recovering gender history whilst paving the way for a better understanding of the potential differences in historic and cultural interactions with, and conceptualizations of, the pre-modern city. The essays collectively highlight the importance of gender to the shaping of a city itself.

The text engages with, and builds on, a recent literature based on a situational experience of gender and gendered identity. The themes covered are not new – urban topographies; symbolic space and boundaries; citizenship and civic life; transitional, liminal, public and private spaces – but the presentation of such a variety of cities and experiences challenges some of the underlying assumptions that have underpinned these avenues of exploration. In similar vein to Goodson, Lester and Symes's volume, for example, Henri Lefebvre's *Production of Space* is constructively explored and critiqued. The authors also make good use of recent methodological approaches, including sound, smell, touch and vision, highlighting the incredible diversity of spatial experiences and identities by class, culture, ethnicity, life cycle or function, and the 'multi-dimensional' and 'highly nuanced' nature of urban space itself.<sup>25</sup> A number of the essays re-assess the concept of public participation in civic affairs. It is well known that women were normally prevented from aspects of civic life, including becoming citizens, but several of the essays raise the important point of *levels* of inclusion. Prostitutes, for example, had fewer avenues to participate in civic life than respectable married women, but might carve new, informal pathways to prominence, as Monica Merlin demonstrates in her chapter on the courtesans of the Nanjing pleasure quarter.<sup>26</sup>

The chapters are loosely grouped through themes, a fact reflected in the structure of the editors' introduction. This allows the reader to better appreciate connections across time and space. Gillian Ramsey begins with a study of the Seleukid queen Laodike III at a time and in a place where cities faced repeated challenges from dynastic factionalism, political manoeuvring and violent takeovers. Ramsey highlights the very clear presence of women in public spaces and in her profile of queen Laodike's energetic activities, Ramsey artfully reminds us of the many women who played significant and prestigious political roles in the civic sphere.

This theme also inspires the contributions on ancient Greek city space by Lisa C. Nevett, James Davidson and Clare Taylor. Taylor, like Ramsey, highlights female participation in public life with a close lens on women's networks and friendships that allows her to see across the artificial boundaries created by status, and Nevett convincingly argues how too literal an interpretation of the surviving sources (most written by a small group of elite men) has obscured a realistic understanding of women's actual urban experiences, an observation that has preoccupied many gender historians. Also focusing on the social lives of Athenian women, Nevett explores women's visibility in the landscape and seeks to understand how factors such as age and social class might affect their experiences. Nevett's angle is not new, indeed it borrows heavily from the work of the late Alexander Cowen, to whom this volume is dedicated, but her blend of architectural and archaeological awareness, evidence of inhabitants' social lives, and knowledge of the peculiarities of Athenian law makes for a nuanced and intelligent analysis. Davidson starts from a similar premise in her critique of a discourse that has been governed by male-centred texts and sources, and argues that much evidence (including the simple application of common sense) reveals how the prescription and practice of Athenian women's lives differed. Approaching the subject with an eye on the gendered lexis relating to architectural spaces, Davidson highlights Athenians' highly sexualized approach to spaces and bodies and the complex duality and coexistence of different physical and symbolic spaces in the city. The idea of the body as a symbolic space of its own is one that will be familiar to the editors of *Space and Self*, but is also considered here by Davidson and Merlin as a vital part of a cultural historiography that has seen either the body, or the functions of the body, as a way in to understanding historic gender identity.

Caroline Dodds Pennock considers the situation in pre-Spanish conquest Tenochtitlan, where, in contrast to Athens, women were allowed full citizenship and shared many of the same legal and employment privileges as their male counterparts. She too fixes on an idea of duality that has come to define so much gender scholarship, but, in direct contrast to current popular arguments about the essential artificiality of such models, maintains that the ideology of separate gender identities had a major impact on people's everyday lives. Her compelling line of reasoning subtly shifts an Aztec historiography that has focused more on the political than the personal, but also recent ground-breaking work conceptualizing Aztec gender relations as highly complementary and reciprocal. She does this by reconfiguring the domestic in its local context, rather than by using generic models, revealing how domestic space in Tenocha was placed in opposition to foreign, as opposed to public, spaces. Thus domestic space could, broadly speaking, be placed within the bounds of the political, civic sphere.<sup>27</sup> Dodds Pennock explores a city and a time with very limited surviving sources, as do several of the other authors. Indeed, one of this volume's assets lies in the contributors' ability to employ innovative ways of interpreting limited evidence to uncover women's lives. Emma Loosley, for example, uses evidence of material culture and architecture

as a way in to women's experiences in seventeenth-century Iran, arguing that our sense of women leading closed and closeted lives in this region has stemmed as much from the legacy of nineteenth-century Orientalism as a lack of sources to redress the imbalance.

In a volume purportedly devoted to the exploration of gender, only three of the essays give as much place to men's as well as to women's lives. Helen Foxhall Forbes's study of Winchester's rather unique religious communities in the late 900s reveals that gender was less important than social status, personal connections, or the difference of being a member of a lay or a religious community, in governing social segregation during, and even after, contemporary's lives. Foxhall Forbes's evidence of these religious communities – especially their cooperation and rivalries – demonstrates how it is impossible to speak of separate male and female religious spaces. Foxhall Forbes and Ross Balzaretto both engage with limited sources and turn to evidence of property holding, landownership and manuscripts, the latter in the context of tenth-century Milanese religious communities, to explore elements of the spatial ordering of monastic lives and concepts of social and physical marginality and segregation. In so doing, both authors raise important points about the relationship between urban space, monastic space, power and gender. Finally, continuing a preoccupation engagement with sound, smell and touch in urban landscapes, Alexander Cowen considered how far it is possible to deem one or another urban space as gendered. In echoes of former essays on liminal spaces and the projection of domestic life into public space in early-modern Italy, Cowen focused on the function of public balconies in Venetian society, as windows into private life, stages to project images and the setting for secret liaisons.<sup>28</sup>

*Gender and the City* highlights the impossibility of attaching fixed meanings to either gender or to space due to the complex and shifting nature of those entities. Although some generalizations can be made, the performance of gender in city space was unique to that city and to that point in time. The volume engages with established frameworks and ideas in urban, gender and spatial historiography, rather than offering new directions, but stands out in the quality of its scholarship, the ability of the authors to read limited sources in new ways, and their willingness to think across and into diverse spaces, places and times.

Collectively, these volumes are a fascinating study of how the spatial turn of social and cultural history has evolved from the mid-2000s. Moving through a phase heavily influenced by the studies of Lefebvre, de Certeau, Bourdieu et al., scholars are now embarking on the early stages of a useful period of revision whilst broadening the geographic, empirical and chronological parameters for study. Building in other historiographical approaches, such as the sensory turn, this progression is natural but also exciting, as it is leading scholars – such as those above – to produce innovative and thought-provoking texts that challenge established claims and perspectives in fresh new ways. The spatial turn is indeed here to stay.



## Notes

1. R. Kingston, 'Mind Over Matter? History and the Spatial Turn', *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (2010), 111–21, 111.
2. Caroline Goodson, Anne E. Lester and Carol Symes, eds, 'Introduction', *Cities, Texts and Social Networks 400–1500* (Farnham 2010), 3–5, 12–13.
3. Meredith Cohen, 'Metropolitan Architecture, Demographics and the Urban Identity of Paris in the Thirteenth Century', *Cities, Texts*, 68, 98–9.
4. Anne E. Lester, 'Crafting a Charitable Landscape: Urban Topographies in Charters and Testaments from Medieval Champagne', *Cities, Texts*, 129.
5. Sarah Rees Jones, 'Cities and their Saints in England, c. 1150–1300: The Development of Bourgeois Values in the Cults of Saint William of York and Saint Kenelm of Winchcombe', *Cities, Texts*, 195, 206, 213.
6. Franz-Josef Arlinghaus, 'The Myth of Urban Unity: Religion and Social Performance in Late Medieval Braunschweig', *Cities, Texts*, esp. 221–4.
7. *Ibid.*, 226.
8. Sethina Watson, 'City as Charter: Charity and the Lordship of English Towns, 1170–1250', *Cities, Texts*, 240, 261–2.
9. Carol Symes, 'Out in the Open, in Arras: Sightlines, Soundscapes, and the Shaping of a Medieval Public Sphere', *Cities, Texts*, 286.
10. Denise Amy Baxter, 'Introduction: Constructing Space and Identity in the Eighteenth-Century Interior', in Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin, eds, *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors* (Farnham 2010), 1–12, 3.
11. Meredith Martin, 'The Ascendancy of the Interior in Eighteenth-Century French Architectural Theory', in Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin, eds, *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Farnham 2010), 15–34, 16–17.
12. Martin, 'Ascendancy of the Interior', 30.
13. Daniel Brewer, '(Re)Constructing an Eighteenth-Century Interior: The Value of Interiority on Display', *Architectural Space*, 215–32, 216.
14. Matthew P. Romaniello and Charles Lipp, 'The Spaces of Nobility', in Matthew P. Romaniello and Charles Lipp (eds), *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham 2011), 1–10, 2–4.
15. Erica Bastress-Dukehart, 'Negotiating for Agnes' Womb', *Contested Spaces*, 41–59, 45.
16. Katherine L. Turner, 'Il monastero nuovo: Cloistered Women of the Medici Court', *Contested Spaces*, 127–46, 127.
17. Grace E. Coolidge, 'Contested Masculinity: Noblemen and their Mistresses in Early Modern Spain', *Contested Spaces*, 61–83, 61.
18. Elie Haddad, 'The Question of the Imprescriptibility of Nobility in Early Modern France', *Contested Spaces*, 147–66, 148, 166.
19. Mathieu Marraud, 'Nobility as a Social and Political Dialogue: The Parisian Example, 1650–1750', *Contested Spaces*, 213–32, 231.
20. Déborah Blocker, 'Theatrical Identities and Political Allegories: Fashioning Subjects through Drama in the Household of Cardinal Richelieu (1635–1643)', in David Warren Sabean and Malina Stefanovska (eds), *Space and Self in Early Modern European Cultures* (Toronto 2012), 112–33, 115.
21. Michael Taormina, 'Noble Selfhood and the Nature Poetry of Saint-Armant', *Space and Self*, 134–50, 134.



22. Ibid., 135.
23. Andreas Bähr, 'Spaces of Dreaming: Self-Constitution in Early Modern Dream Narratives', *Space and Self*, 219–38, 222.
24. Frédéric Gabriel, 'Loci Theologici: Authority, the Fall, and the Theology of the Puritan Self', *Space and Self*, 183–99, 191.
25. Lin Foxhall and Gabriele Neher, 'Introduction' in Lin Foxhall and Gabriele Neher, eds, *Gender and the City before Modernity* (Chichester 2013), 1–19, 7.
26. Ibid., 13.
27. Caroline Dodds Pennock, "'A Remarkably Patterned Life": Domestic and Public Space in the Aztec Household City', *Gender and the City*, 38–56, 39–40.
28. See for example, A. Cowen, 'Gossip and Street Culture in Early Modern Venice', *Journal of Early Modern History*, Vol. 12 (2008), 313–33.

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