The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876-1926 (review)

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Technology and Culture, Volume 45, Number 4, October 2004, pp. 842-844 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2004.0186*

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These theoretical constructs never obscure the main narrative. Schiffer takes an archaeologist's joy in material evidence. Instruments and experiments are described in loving detail. Explanations are clear and accessible, and my only quibble concerns a need for more diagrams to guide the reader visually. Schiffer concludes that artifacts motivate and channel technological thinking, highlighting in particular the role of the investigator's playful instincts.

Schiffer the anthropologist is at his best in revealing the symbolic functions of electrical artifacts. They served variously as signs of prestige, of modernity and progress, and of safety. To alternative medical practitioners, they signified a concern for the whole human being, especially compared to the often barbaric practices of contemporary physicians. Finally, Schiffer makes an additional case for the import of eighteenth-century electrostatics as a precursor of telegraphy, the internal combustion engine, xerography, and even nanotechnology. While this is suggestive, it is enough to show that electrostatics enjoyed its own day in the sun, which Schiffer documents with persuasive enthusiasm.

ARTHUR MOLELLA

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The Middle-Class City: Transforming Space and Time in Philadelphia, 1876–1926.

By John Henry Hepp IV. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. Pp. ix+278. $36.50.

In this fluent study, John Henry Hepp traces the geography of middle-class life in Philadelphia between the Centennial Exposition in 1876 and the Sesquicentennial in 1926. He uses "three quintessentially bourgeois enterprises" (p. 8), department stores, newspapers, and transit, as starting points for an analysis of how a city-within-a-city emerged during the late 1800s that middle-class residents could experience as a complete world—"one great big stretch of middle class" (p. 169)—despite the obvious coexistence of a huge working class, along with a formidable elite.

Hepp begins with the assertion that the Victorian middle class undertook to imprint a "scientific worldview" on its environment (p. 2). The middle class defined "science" broadly to encompass classification, organization, and system as well as the expansion of knowledge and technological innovation. Basing his argument on a dogged combing of diaries and other manuscripts distributed among Philadelphia's archives as well as on printed sources, Hepp insists that the Victorian effort to create an orderly city arose from a "middle-class faith in progress and the future" (p. 8).

Standard texts such as Robert Wiebe's *Search for Order* (1967) have depicted a fearful middle class reacting defensively to the social and moral changes wrought by urbanization and industrialization. Middle-class Philadelphians endeavored to create an orderly city, Hepp shrewdly counters, more often from an optimistic attraction to order than from anxiety over disorder.

Hepp first examines how transit, train stations, retailing, and newspapers all reflected the imposition of bourgeois taxonomy on urban space. Railroad timetables and department-store sales calendars reordered time and space in the name of predictable movement and commerce. Between 1880 and 1900, genteel newspapers such as the *Evening Telegraph* and the *Public Ledger* as well as less discriminating competitors such as the *Inquirer*—like their counterparts across the United States and Western Europe—reorganized their contents into functional departments with predictable places in each day's edition. For Hepp, newspapers offered such a self-evident print analog to the reordering of urban space that editors did not need to explain these new conventions to readers, who did not bother to ask.

The imperatives of commerce could turn "science" into a tool for eroding the self-contained city that the Victorian middle class had constructed. As the white, immigrant working class grew more assimilated and prosperous, transit companies, department stores, and newspapers found they could use "scientific" methods to broaden their appeal beyond the middle class to a mass market. John Wanamaker, Jacob and Isaac Gimbel, and their competitors added bargain basements to draw in workers and white ethnics, while upstairs departments became calibrated by price and status to target differentiated segments of the populace. The *Evening Bulletin*'s studied blandness, which appealed to all and offended none, explains its crushing circulation victory over the genteel *Public Ledger*, renowned for intelligent, accurate reporting.

As more blue-collar Philadelphians could afford trolley fare, apartment houses crept into middle-class, row house neighborhoods. New Jersey seaside resorts lost some of the middle-class respectability that the cost of train tickets had previously afforded them. By the 1920s, Hepp argues, "the early twentieth-century multi-classed metropolis" was displacing the "Victorian middle-class city" (p. 124). Yet Philadelphia and other American metropolises retained a "middle-class taxonomy of space" (p. 214), segregated by class and race and segmented by function. The middle class strings together its city today by automobile instead of trolley.

Hepp makes an excellent case for science as a principal force driving Victorian urbanism. Even so, many works on Victorian cities—for example, Donald J. Olsen's *The Growth of Victorian London* (1976) and *The City as a Work of Art* (1986)—reveal that the middle class left space in its orderly world for sentiment and mystery. Victorians used systematic methods and

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industrial materials to construct transit stations with intricate ironwork to go to Queen Anne or Craftsman homes, Gothic churches, and Romantic parks. In contrast to the functionalist strain in twentieth-century modernism, Victorian urbanism supplemented rationality with turrets, carvings, odd angles, and haunted corners. Hepp has effectively identified the structured plot around which the Victorian middle class constructed its Philadelphia. In the myriad diaries and letters he consulted, he may have overlooked the unexplained twists and the eccentric characters that gave life to Victorian cities as well as Victorian stories.

ALAN LESSOFF

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Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston.

By Nancy S. Seasholes. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003. Pp. xiv+532. $49.95

Many coastal settlements have expanded their land area by filling in along the water's edge, but Boston probably leads all other North American cities in the amount of land created through filling. In *Gaining Ground*, Nancy Seasholes gives readers a blow-by-blow account of this process, which added about 5,250 acres of land, or approximately one-sixth of the area of the city, to Boston's perimeter.

Seasholes's purpose is to document landmaking from the start of European settlement in the seventeenth century to the present. Her focus is on projects in the water-washed northern parts of the city, which includes the downtown as well as formerly separate towns that Boston annexed. Landmaking, she explains, is a term coined by archaeologists, and it means making land by filling areas covered by water. Thus, it differs from other methods of gaining usable land, such as draining.

Because topographical change is such a prominent feature of the city, the topic has already been treated by many writers, including Walter Muir Whitehill in his standard, if unreadable, *Boston: A Topographical History*, which is still in print in a third edition, updated by coauthor Lawrence Kennedy. Such earlier works contain errors, however, and none are as comprehensive as *Gaining Ground*.

Seasholes's method was to first locate and date filled areas using historical maps, then "to find out why and how these areas were filled" (p. 431). Why did Bostonians make so much land? One reason is that the topography lent itself to filling. Colonial-era settlement was on a small peninsula, practically an island, surrounded by shallow water and dotted with inconveniently tall hills. Bostonians cut down the hills and used this earth to build up the shoreline. Another reason for filling was that city's concen-