

Frederick Law Olmsted. Architecte du paysage [Frederick Law Olmsted: architect of landscape]

by Catherine Maumi, Paris, Editions de La Villette, 2021, 349 pp., € 37
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Peronism and, later, between the popular and right-wing sectors of this political movement, all within the context of heightened paramilitary actions in the 1970s.

As a result of authoritarian regimes, more than 90% of villa residents were evicted, and their homes were systematically destroyed using bulldozers as part of the repression's advance. Snitcofsky's analysis of this period demonstrates the political significance of the conflicts between the eradication and settlement of villas as a response to the issue of urban informality. This is due to the importance of real estate valuation within the structural reform of the Argentine state, as well as the organizational capacity of the affected sector, which formed alliances with the labour movement, the Catholic Church, and professional groups.

Finally, an epilogue concludes the historical journey, presenting a series of trends that bring us up to the present day. It provides an update on how the state has addressed the urban and housing 'problems' of the villas and explores the transformations in the challenges of daily life and the collective approaches to solving them.

In summary, *Historia de las Villas en la Ciudad de Buenos Aires* reconstructs the way in which, within the urban interstices abandoned by state planning, the organization of the materiality of life unfolded through the construction of social and political relations among individual and collective subjects. They contested the production, use, and appropriation of urban space. Furthermore, by restoring the link between villa dwellers and the world of labour, Snitcofsky underscores the centrality of productive dynamics in the transformation of the territory.

This book provides an insight into the historical formation of informal settlements in Buenos Aires and allows a dialogue with similar processes in other regions. It stands as a significant contribution for individuals interested in the historiographical reconstruction of territorial development. Moreover, the book provides valuable insights for those engaged in the analysis of social struggles for access to urban space and current spatial inequalities. In particular, it is essential for those interested in the spatial transformations established by military dictatorships and authoritarian regimes in Latin America, and their ongoing consequences.

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Frederick Law Olmsted. *Architecte du paysage* [Frederick Law Olmsted: architect of landscape], by Catherine Maumi, Paris, Editions de La Villette, 2021, 349 pp., € 37 (paperback), ISBN 978-2375560358

The pivotal contribution of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822–1903) to the design of American urban parks has been broadly described by scholars in diverse fields, offering a plurality of points of view. His leading role in establishing landscape architecture as a new professional practice in the United States is widely acknowledged, and his writings and papers have been extensively published, as exemplified, for instance, by the comprehensive collection of 11 volumes issued by Johns Hopkins University Press since 1977.

Two hundred years after his birth, the book by Catherine Maumi offers a novel perspective. Awarded the French *Prix littéraire René Pechère* in 2022, the book uses the intellectual biography of Olmsted as a lens to question the complexity of the American landscape in its different urban, rural, and natural components. The book introduces a new system of values and scientific paradigms – which relies also on the

European perspective of the author – to dissect the history of American urbanization during the nineteenth century. Maumi traces the evolution of Olmsted's thinking, delving into personal traits and unexplored aspects of his complex life and multifaceted personality as a farmer, botanic, horticulturalist engaged in scientific agriculture, journalist, progressist intellectual and writer, traveler, educator, public official, and consultant.

The author is not novel to this research field. In her previous studies, she extensively inquired about American architectural, urban, and territorial culture, as exemplified by her books *Thomas Jefferson et le projet du Nouveau Monde* (2007), *Usonia, ou le mythe de la ville-nature américaine* (2009) – an illuminating interpretation of the myth of city-nature as a generational system of American landscape, and *Broadacre City, la nouvelle frontière* (2015): her recent book, *Frederick Law Olmsted. Architecte du paysage* returns on the same topic posing new interesting questions in the history of American landscape.

In the book's structure, the highly detailed and documented introduction by the author is followed by a selection of 21 written and visual documents, organized in four chapters: a helpful and varied collection of plans, project reports, institutional surveys, personal correspondence, newspapers and specialized articles, book reviews, conference proceedings, unpublished notes, and memories. A preface by the landscape architect Michel Desvigne questions the contemporary role of Olmsted's idea of 'structural landscape'.

The four sections dissect Olmsted's intellectual biography and testify to the evolution and systematization of his thinking, emphasizing the changing scale of his object of inquiry over four periods: from the pioneering design of urban public parks to the theorization of the American parkway, to the 'invention' of the suburb, up to the engagement in the debate on the preservation and restoration of natural sites at the end of his life.

The first section, 'The Invention of Great Public Parks in the United States', introduces the origins of the principal axes of Olmsted's thinking as a landscape architect, rooted in his innovative vision of urban parks. For Olmsted these were devices to reinforce social relations, avoid forms of class division and social fragmentation, and contrast the antidemocratic values of American nineteenth-century society. In particular, the selection of writings includes his Central Park proposal with Calvert Vaux in 1857 and the landscape project of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition in 1893. Also other cases are mentioned, such as Jackson Park in Chicago or Franklin Park in Boston.

Facing his engagement as a landscape consultant for designing a new interconnected system of parks in Boston, the second chapter introduces his novel idea of the parkway as a green, open, continuous infrastructure to envision and organize the American metropolis of the future. In the third chapter, Maumi finally proposes the invention of the suburb as a new expression, at a territorial scale, of Olmsted's 'park-parkway' system. The preliminary reports for the design of the suburban villages of Riverside outside Chicago and Terrytown outside Manhattan show the critical role of this new residential model, the suburb, as a device to expand the city and avoid its densification. According to Maumi, his idea crossed the contemporary approaches in designing suburban gardens by A. Jackson Downing and William Kent.


The long-term legacy of Olmsted's thinking is addressed in the fourth chapter in relation to his contribution to the emerging debate on the preservation and restoration of natural landscapes. On the one hand, his papers and reports draw attention to his active involvement in the preservation of the natural parks of Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove, which resulted in the approval by Lincoln of the first protection laws, in 1864 (Yosemite Act), and the creation of a natural reserve in the Yosemite valley. On the other, in his preservation project for Niagara Falls, Olmsted defined an ambitious protection plan from private exploitation and the creation of a public reserve in 1887. The plan opened to his new ideas on restoring the 'wilderness' of the American landscape as a public realm, advocating the preservation of the landscape and its public accessibility. This novel interest was also tested through his ambitious attempt at creating Biltmore's 'scientific forest' at the end of his career, leading to a new

educational model resulting in a broader strategy for the creation of the first schools of forestry at the beginning of the new century.

The detailed analysis of Olmsted's life and the cross-reading of personal traits and visual and written documents allows the author to place Olmsted in a novel perspective, releasing his figure from conventional and ideological constructions and interpretations. She successfully positions Olmsted as a landscape architect and social reformist at the center of the flourishing nineteenth-century American debate on nature, at the crossroads of multiple positions. On the one hand, Maumi insists on the distance from the transcendentalist positions of H. D. Thoreau and R. W. Emerson – and from their investigation of the spiritual dimension of the natural landscape. Olmsted's lack of interest in the contemporary aesthetic categories of landscape design and its pure conservation. On the other, she criticizes the misleading interpretations that describe the Olmsted's reformist approach as purely progressist or conservative, as well as the definitions of 'ecologist' or 'environmentalist' inappropriately used to address his interest in the *genius loci*.

As Maumi argues, Olmsted was the expression of an East-Coast intellectual environment, and his formative years – the European journeys and surveys, the networks of exchange and personal relations between Europe and America, and the exploration of the Southern States – deeply influenced his understanding of the natural landscape as a unifying cultural element for the diversity of American territories. This is another crucial point for Maumi, who defends the idea that Olmsted's vision of landscape as the interaction between natural elements and forms of human civilization can only be understood by considering his specific fascination with technologies and artificial solutions.

Besides creating an unconventional repository of documents, the book's most noteworthy goal is to bring a new light on Olmsted's approach to nature and his contribution to the 'poetic of American landscape', pointing out the social and political dimension of the landscape architect. In this period, this new profile gained momentum as a profession, as an alternative to architects, engineers, and gardeners.

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Jakarta: the city of a thousand dimensions, by Abidin Kusno, Singapore, National University of Singapore Press, 2023, 263 pp., SG\$34/US\$28 (paperback)

Over the past two decades since his publication of *Behind the Post Colonial*, no scholar has more persuasively assessed the transformation of twentieth century Jakarta (and urban Indonesia in general) than Abidin Kusno. *Jakarta: The City of a Thousand Dimensions* brings his analysis to the present through a critical appraisal of how the urban environment and governance have been shaped since Indonesia's transition to decentralization. Although key elements of Suharto's New Order governance system persist, Kusno, along with a host of scholars, document how the limited capacity of local governments to exercise their new powers and responsibilities has allowed, indeed welcomed, the private sector to continue to exercise influence on the key facets of urbanization as it did under the New Order government. Many of these private actors now guiding local development are the same who benefitted from New Order patronage. One difference stems from the leadership of Joko Widodo, first as Governor of Jakarta,