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Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors by Denise Amy Baxter; Meredith Martin

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Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. 70, No. 4 (December 2011), pp. 538-539

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Society of Architectural Historians](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/jsah.2011.70.4.538>

Accessed: 25/01/2012 13:46

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Books

Denise Amy Baxter and
Meredith Martin, editors

Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Constructing Identities and Interiors

Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, Vermont:
Ashgate Publishing, 2010, 284 pp., 51 b/w
illus. \$119.95, ISBN 9780754666509

It is hard to believe that there was once a time when the decorated interior hovered at the margins of architectural history. Interiors are now the subject of such widespread and innovative scholarly attention that one can easily forget how undertheorized they used to be, and particularly how infrequently domestic interiors appeared in histories of the built environment. Recent decades have witnessed what could be called the “rise of the interior” within the study of architecture, a disciplinary shift that has significant implications for the eighteenth century. That era’s architects and patrons devoted extraordinary attention to the design and outfitting of interiors, and it could be argued that the interior broadly understood became a metaphor for new cultural practices and new sensibilities. This is the implication of Denise Amy Baxter and Meredith Martin’s vivid and stimulating collection of essays on eighteenth-century architectural space. The book contributes vitally to our understanding of eighteenth-century interiors, and its strength is that it conceptualizes the interior not just as pure space, but as

space engaging and overlapping with other conceptions of interiority that derive from political, social, and psychic identities. It also displays how creative the study of interiors has become and the richness of the material available in that century.

Baxter’s introduction frames the book with a series of theoretical formulations. These derive largely from Michel de Certeau’s notion of space as a “practiced place,” an important concept for this collection, and Henri Lefebvre’s understanding of space as a social production. The book seeks to present spaces not as static and unified, but as active entities contested by their occupants, in other words as inherently dynamic, unstable, and contingent. As Baxter puts it: “The architectural interior therefore not only functioned as a site to display an idealized self, but also as a continuum within which the self might be discerned or crafted, such that rank, class, or even authenticity or naturalness might be seen as roles to be enacted” (3).

The book’s first section is entitled “Crossing Boundaries, Making Space.” Martin opens the volume with a chapter on the ascendancy of the interior in eighteenth-century architectural theory, a most helpful and clarifying discussion that engages writings by Boffrand, Blondel, Le Camus de Mézières, and Adam. She weaves through these texts deftly in order to demonstrate how interiors assumed unprecedented prominence in eighteenth-century architectural writings, and furthermore highlights their increasing representation in ever more detailed illustrations. Martin shows that writers perceived this new emphasis on interiors as modern and linked it to Enlightenment-inspired reformulations of the self and the emotions. Max Tillmann then examines

Electoral Max Emanuel’s use of decorated apartments in his palace at Saint-Cloud, arguing that he crafted his ambivalent social position as a German monarch in exile through architecture. This resulted in a building that combined elements of a true political seat or *Residenz* with those of a *maison de plaisance* and thereby established itself in a political space between Munich and Versailles. Csongor Kis offers an important discussion of the archiepiscopal palace at Würzburg, best known today for its celebrated Four Continents Ceiling by Giambattista Tiepolo. Kis demonstrates that the palace’s interiors did not simply illustrate the ruling family’s history and status, but also positioned Würzburg relationally to both the imperial capital in Vienna and the Holy See in Rome. He achieves this by examining the temporal relationship between its decoration and the ceremonial etiquette used for ambassadorial visits. Concluding this section is Katherine R. P. Clark’s examination of the Saloon at Callaly Castle, Northumberland, the baronial seat of the Clavering family. Clark argues that a fireplace relief, adorned with Jacobite and Catholic symbolism, operated at both the local and national levels as challenges to secular and religious authorities. This “room for rebellion,” as she terms it, engaged in a process of “secular canonization” of earlier English kings in order to counteract the centralizing of power in London.

The book’s middle section, “The Interior as Masquerade,” is remarkable for the scholarly coherency of a wide-ranging trio of essays. Kathryn Norberg offers a discussion of the Parisian *hôtels* commissioned by well-known actress-courtesans, among them the Mademoiselles Guimard and Devrioux. She draws parallels between their domestic spaces and the spaces of

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public theaters, identifying the common iconography to which they gravitated. This included representations of classical prototypes, learned women, and women of sensibility. Stacey Sloboda's chapter examines the Chinese Room that Elizabeth Robinson Montagu erected in her London house around 1750. Sloboda offers a nuanced account of this space based on abundant surviving textual references, showing that its chinoiserie decoration enabled a form of social masquerade, one behind which Montagu hid radical intellectual ambitions. Sloboda likewise associates chinoiserie with the intellectual goals of the Bluestocking social group (of which Montagu was a member) and therefore expressly with the art of conversation. The section concludes with Mark J. Neveu's essay on masks in Venetian culture. Neveu notes that masks were required for participation in various parts of the Venetian public sphere, particularly the *ridotto*, or gaming hall, and the leasable theater boxes called *palchi*. Neveu builds his argument less out of actual buildings, however, than out of libretti by Carlo Gozzi and Carlo Goldoni, through which he argues that the mask enabled and likewise challenged the nascent modern public sphere. All three of these chapters fruitfully transpose ideas from Joan Rivière's classic essay on femininity as masquerade to the consideration of architectural interiors.¹

The third section explores "The Politics of Display." Anne Nellis Richter's fascinating chapter deals with private home art galleries, which she characterizes as an emergent phenomenon in England around 1800. Art collectors like Walter Ramsden Fawkes and Sir John Leicester opened their personal galleries for public viewing to make up for the perceived failures by the Royal Academy, particularly in the areas of moral instruction and the promotion of English culture. Richter demonstrates that these galleries reconciled fashion and art by celebrating conspicuous consumption and British imperialism. Jeffrey Collins leads the reader to Rome and to two of its celebrated museums, the Capitoline and the Museo Pio-Clementino. In an erudite reading of their collections, Collins characterizes the eighteenth-century public museum as a "work

in progress" whose contours shaped notions of identity. The Capitoline collection was installed with attention to aesthetic quality and historical continuity in order to become an "antiquarian's bible," while the Pio-Clementino's installation attempted to create a mystical otherworldliness that enabled artistic communion with the divine. The volume concludes with a wonderful essay by Daniel Brewer that ruminates on the role of a single room in the formation of both eighteenth-century and contemporary consciousnesses. That room was once the Grand Salon of the Hôtel Gaillard on the Place Vendôme in Paris, but is now on display at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. It today generates a "historical exoticism" for museumgoers quite different from its original purpose, which Brewer shows was defined by the desire of an *arriviste* French tax collector to establish his social standing in 1720s and 30s Paris. He posits that many of the mechanisms for producing, affirming, and displaying identity in eighteenth-century France persist in modified ways through our reception, consumption, and interpretation. Brewer builds on Walter Benjamin's idea of damaging the past in order to enable its survival, which he relates to the commodification of culture that is promoted in museums.

Baxter and Martin's collection of essays confirms how much can be gained by examining eighteenth-century interiors in greater detail. Its greatest value lies in the methodological examples it provides for reading interiors using perspectives derived from multiple academic traditions, as well as the interdisciplinary possibilities suggested by those readings. The eighteenth-century interior, the book ultimately says, formulated individual identities even as individuals formulated interiors, and architectural space does indeed emerge here as activated, temporal, and contested. The book's only lacuna is a chapter on a religious interior, one that demonstrates how the concerns expressed in secular spaces were paralleled or modified in the decorated spaces of worship. But that is a minor quibble with a book that proves unusually insightful and illuminating.

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Note

1. Joan Rivière, "Womanliness as Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Macdonald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35–44. Originally published in the *Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 1929.

Lu Donnelly, H. David Brumble IV,
and Franklin Toker

The Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania

Buildings of the United States series.

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press for
the Society of Architectural Historians, 2010,
656 pp. 342 b/w illus., 91 maps. \$75, ISBN
9780813928234

The Buildings of Pennsylvania: Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania builds on an 80-year tradition of documenting Western Pennsylvania architecture. Lu Donnelly, principal author and volume editor, served as survey director of the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation's "Allegheny County Historic Sites Survey" of 1979–84, which recorded some 8,500 sites. Other published surveys include *Pittsburgh's Landmark Architecture: The Historic Buildings of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* (1997), by Walter C. Kidney, *Landmark Architecture of Allegheny County Pennsylvania* (1967), by James D. Van Trump and Arthur Ziegler, and *The Early Architecture of Western Pennsylvania* (1936), by Charles Morse Stotz. The new *BUS Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania* volume is a guidebook to selected extant buildings from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century in thirty-one counties—in effect, the western half of Pennsylvania. As Donnelly observes in her excellent introduction: "Some [buildings] were designed by famous architects, others by architects whose work is locally known, and some by unknown architects or carpenters. Some buildings perform their functions with grace and beauty or clever utility, while others respond so well to their setting and evoke such vivid images of the lives of their builders that they demanded inclusion" (1).

Written by a team of researchers including Donnelly, David Brumble,