project could have benefited from higher-quality images. This, however, does not contradict the fact that Shah's book provides an important impetus to study Le Corbusier's projects in relation to its urban context, moving from a formal analysis of architecture to an analysis of the urban ramifications.

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Elihu Rubin, *Insuring the City: The Prudential Center and the Postwar Urban Landscape*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012. 248pp. 50 b&w illustrations. 2 maps. £33.85 hbk.
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This book documents the fascinating planning and construction history of Boston's Prudential Center, and to a lesser extent its legacy. As the aptly chosen title suggests, the conception of this multifunctional office and shopping complex came at a time when American inner cities faced severe challenges and an insecure future. By the 1950s, the tremendous rise in car ownership and consequent scattering of people and jobs as well as services jeopardized the economic viability of Boston's city centre. Planners and city officials responded to these suburbanization tendencies by cutting highways right through the old urban fabric and constructing modernist office blocks and shopping facilities, by which they hoped to revitalize the lingering central districts. Over the last few years, this pivotal time in the history of Boston and other American cities has increasingly gained the interest of academic scholars, best exemplified in Christopher Klemek's *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (2011) and Samuel Zipp's *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (2012).

The merit of Elihu Rubin's topic and approach is threefold. In the first place, by focusing on a second-tier city with similar problems, he moves our attention away from New York and other western metropolises – emphasizing the universality of the urban renewal agenda. In the second place, he avoids making the pejorative judgments that have come to dominate the general public's view of the architecture and planning methods of the 1950s and 1960s, stating that we are doing a disservice by ignoring the perspective of planners who were fearful that American cities were dying. Thirdly and most importantly, Rubin focuses on corporate instead of municipal planning, thereby opening up new perspectives on the actors involved in the comprehensive redevelopment of central districts. At the time the Prudential Insurance Company presented its plans for the establishment of a Northwestern Home Office in Boston in 1957, it was already halfway an expansive programme of administrative decentralization, for which it was setting up regional offices in several American downtown and midtown locations. This way, Prudential thought it could not only administer business activities more efficiently, but also visually boost its local reputation as a modern company that was working in the public interest. By clearing slums and promoting highway construction, Prudential thought it was insuring the survival and growth of the American inner city.

After introducing Prudential's general urban vision, Rubin goes into local specifics. The original 1957 plan for the Prudential Center, situated at the site of

an abandoned railway yard in midtown Boston, encompassed an office tower standing at 749 feet tall, commercial arcades, a hotel and convention centre, department stores and luxury apartments, making it the city's most significant post-war redevelopment project. Prudential even succeeded in integrating the Boston turnpike extension into its vision – demonstrating how neatly the plans fitted into the prospects of the Motor Age. The insurer managed to establish itself as a quasi-public entity that was fighting urban blight and increasing accessibility, exemplified by the tax breaks it secured.

In the book's closing chapters, Rubin discusses the Center's architecture in more detail. Special attention is given to Charles Luckman, the pragmatic soap salesman turned architect who dotted American cityscapes with office architecture during the first post-war decades. For Prudential, hiring Luckman instead of one of the era's more famous architects was part of reinforcing its solid and business-like company profile. After speculating on alternative architectural outcomes and planning decisions, Rubin concludes we should understand Prudential's urban renewal agenda as a vote of confidence in the future of Boston's struggling inner city. The company genuinely thought its interests converged with those of the public at large, by providing life insurance and fiscal security as well as reshaping the cities in which its clients lived.

Rubin pays extensive attention to the wheeling and dealing between Prudential, city and turnpike officials. This might overburden the unknowledgeable reader sometimes. While most of the information is indispensable, the book does not consistently and chronologically link the city's historical, economic and social backgrounds to the emergence of 'The Pru'. Consequently, one gets a full grasp of how and when events took place, but not always why things turned out the way they did. This minor analytical shortcoming might have been tackled by spatially and topically zooming out every now and then, by which (inter)national events would have been taken into account as well. Yet, on the whole, this is an impressively detailed study of the complicated interplay between corporate, political and architectural actors, who imagined and built post-war urban America.

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Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence*, ed. Lisa Lowe and Judith Halberstam. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 376 pp. £60.00 hbk; £15.99 pbk.
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I have always found the term 'safe space' an ambiguous concept within the urban landscape. Who is safe within this space, how does this space differ from other 'unsafe spaces' and who, in this framing, is imagined as the threat? More broadly, the idea of 'safety', when viewed in relation to urban histories of identity politics, is troublesome and one that Christina B. Hanhardt rigorously explores in her work *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence.*

For Hanhardt, who is Associate Professor of American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, wider social changes around public safety initiatives,