

ZOË THOMPSON. *Urban Constellations: Spaces of Cultural Regeneration in Post-Industrial Britain*. Theory, Technology and Society. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. Pp. 224. \$119.95 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2015.185

As the wave of British industrialization receded in the 1970s, '80s and '90s, it left exposed a redundant infrastructure of disused docklands, empty factories, and lead-drenched tipping sites. Generations of skilled workers were left at a loss in places such as Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Sheffield, and East London, watching their livelihoods evaporate with nothing to take their place. Beginning under Harold Wilson's first government, certain towns and neighborhoods have been subject to more than forty years of successive ad hoc regeneration strategies. While Labour governments in the late 1960s and 1970s introduced a raft of targeted stimulus projects, Margaret Thatcher's government in the 1980s sought to attract capital by suspending planning controls and subsidizing private enterprise. Elected in 1997, Tony Blair's Labour government hoped that a network of set-piece architectural wonders would give former industrial cities an edge in the global competition for capital and jobs by raising their profile. The inspiration was Bilbao, a marginal Spanish city in the Basque country that was apparently rescued from a dismal spiral of deindustrialization and sectarian warfare by the Frank Gehry-designed Guggenheim Art Museum, which opened in 1997. For Tony Blair's cohort, "culture," in the form of art galleries and concert halls, became vested with almost magical restorative power. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, northern cities were peppered with glass cubes and glowing monoliths, often with grammatically dubious names (the BBC's new headquarters in Salford was branded MediaCityUK, while the giant community arts complex in West Bromwich was called simply "the Public").

Zoë Thompson's *Urban Constellations: Spaces of Cultural Regeneration in Post-Industrial Britain* is an attempt to chart the meaning of this new landscape. She proceeds through a series of four case studies of high-profile cultural regeneration projects in northern cities: the Lowry (an art gallery and concert theatre in Salford), the Deep (an aquarium in Hull), the Sage (a music venue in Gateshead), and the Public (the now-failed community arts hub in West Bromwich, on the outskirts of Birmingham). Thompson is not immediately concerned with the politics that produced these spaces, their contribution to local labor markets, or even the broader philosophy of cultural regeneration from which they originate. Instead, she is interested in the "phenomenological and experiential aspects of the cultural sphere" (2). Thompson's background is in cultural studies, and she analyzes these four spaces using the dueling theoretical lenses of Walter Benjamin and Jean Baudrillard. From Baudrillard Thompson takes an interest in the autonomous proliferation of signs and symbols and their capacity to shut down and reconstitute traditional forms of political opposition. From Benjamin she takes a hopefulness that aesthetic work might achieve a form of political intervention. It is at times unclear whether Benjamin and Baudrillard are being used here to shed light on northern regeneration projects, or whether northern regeneration projects are being used to shed light on these two figures, such is their relentless presence throughout this book.

Readers who may be less interested in the somewhat technical theoretical discussions centering on these two thinkers will appreciate the detailed and at times lyrical descriptions of some of the buildings that Thompson visits. There is something fascinating and enigmatic about these places for Thompson. At the Deep she marvels at the strange sight of tourists eating fish at an aquarium's canteen, and at the baskets of souvenirs in the gift shop, their mass-produced nature and the "concomitant issues of pollution and threats to ecological balance" that somewhat belie the aquarium's claims to natural conservation (111). At the Lowry she is interested in the specter of social class, one that "haunts" this resolutely postindustrial building, through the paintings of Lowry himself as well as in the dress up box of proletarian hats and coats for visitors to try on (44). At the Sage in Gateshead she finds a statue built to commemorate a local fiddle player, someone who once lived in the neighborhood that

the Sage had recently obliterated (155). By reading these structures against the grain, Thompson finds many of these contradictions, reveling in the capacity of such ironies to disrupt the officially sanctioned stories that are told about regeneration projects. At their best, her notes on these skeptical wanderings past fish tanks, chrome-cladded rest rooms, and bloated gift shops resemble the literary psycho-geography of Ian Sinclair (whom she frequently cites).

Given how tactile and vivid these descriptions are, then, it seems surprising that Thompson is so relentlessly dependent on the abstract and esoteric writings of two critical theorists from starkly different twentieth-century contexts. Indeed, those who lack a deep knowledge of Benjamin and Baudrillard's writings may not find much of use in this book. For the nonexpert, it is never entirely clear how the fish tanks in the Deep relate to Benjamin's analysis of cinema, or why the premature closure of a community arts hub in West Bromwich should prompt a digression on Baudrillard and the impossibility of a messianic cessation of history. There is something qualitatively new about the explosion of art making in warehouses and curricula schools across the developed West in the last thirty years that this book doesn't fully account for. Whether in giant set-piece galleries, dank hipster lofts, or the breezy lobbies of technology start-ups, "culture" and "creativity" are playing an increasingly central role in the everyday world of the postindustrial West. This new culture industry is bigger, of course, than the handful of galleries built in northern cities in the first decade of the twenty-first century. When writing about these projects Thompson at times conveys a totalizing sense of awe, similar to that used by Benjamin to describe the Parisian arcades. However, it is more than likely that, starved of state funding under the present Conservative government, these fragile buildings will be swept away by the next bout of failed regeneration strategies.

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ASHLEY COHEN, ed. *Lady Nugent's East India Journal: A Critical Edition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 402. \$125.00 (cloth).
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In 1811, Maria Nugent accompanied her husband, General George Nugent, on his posting to India as commander-in-chief. As was the norm at the time, the couple left behind in England four small children. Indeed, previous experiences in the West Indies had confirmed for them that the colonial outposts were not suitable places in which to raise young children. The Nugents had lived in Jamaica from 1801 to 1805 while General Nugent was the governor. During that time, Lady Nugent wrote a journal; and when she traveled to India she took up her pen once again. Ashley Cohen and Oxford University Press have now brought this fascinating material to light in a new scholarly edition.

Cohen's introduction informs us that Maria Nugent (née Skinner) was born in 1771 in colonial New Jersey (xiv). Her grandfather had fled to North America from Scotland in the wake of the Jacobite uprising in 1715. In 1783, her father's loyalist activities during the American Revolution caused the family to move again; they returned to Britain, eventually settling in Ireland. Thus, by the time Maria Skinner married General Nugent, she was well acquainted with the difficulties of life throughout the empire. Indeed, Cohen's supplementary material is particularly useful in terms of locating Lady Nugent in the wider transnational contexts of British colonial history. The original text and Cohen's additional material demonstrate the crossings and connections of a particular class of people who moved around the empire, congregating in certain places, and creating powerful colonial communities.

In her introduction, Cohen emphasizes that the empire offered opportunities for financial security and upward mobility (xv); this was important for General Nugent, who was