

The second and largest part of *The Thinking Space* focuses on Paris, which is perhaps not surprising given the academic interests of the editors. Beginning with coffee shop culture in the mid-eighteenth century and ending with Jean-Paul Sartre's use of the café as somewhere to write during World War II, this section emphasizes the connection between the performative and the political in French café life. The theatricality of the café recurs in Leona Rittner's fascinating chapter on *Le bœuf sur le toit* (cabaret), first opened in 1921 and named after the Surrealist ballet. This is complemented by Gérard-Georges Lemaire's abridgment of his work on intellectual coffee shops and their attractiveness to Dadaists and Surrealists.

No collection on intellectual café culture would be complete without a chapter on Charles Baudelaire, and Edward J. Ahearn comments on the effect Haussmannization had on the Parisian café. Ahearn argues that in the prose poem 'Les yeux des pauvres' (1864), Baudelaire equates the pristine boulevard café with superficiality and materialism, rather than just being a space to write and think amidst the hum of the multitude. This essay is unique in the collection, focusing on how the vantage point of the coffee house window can also be perceived as a site of bourgeois privilege or a lonely location separated from the crowd.

Literary cafés continued to multiply during the fin-de-siècle and through the early years of the twentieth century. The penultimate part of *The Thinking Space* illustrates this trend in Italy, beginning with a chapter on the development of Venetian coffee culture in the late seventeenth century and ending with Stefano Giannini's reflection on the modern café and how it still exists as a stimulating space for twentieth-century writers. Rather than lamenting the loss of the intellectual environment of the literary café, as it is replaced by internet cafés and sterile coffee house chains, Giannini examines the use of provincial coffee houses as more than just settings in the novels of Piero Chiara (1913–86). This positive perspective on the fate of the café is continued in the concluding part of *The Thinking Space*, entitled 'Reflections', in which Fannie Peczenik gives an evocative first-person account of three Italian cafés, emphasizing the recurring idea in this collection that the café is a unique urban space which engenders unique ideas.

*The Thinking Space* is a diverse collection that supports existing scholarship on European café culture. It illustrates how cafés are distinctive spaces in the landscape of the city, and yet share traits and characteristics. The café is shown to be a reflexive space, modelled by the personality and presence of its regular customers, and this connection between space and ideas underpins some of the most interesting outcomes of the volume.

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**Helen Meller** (ed.), *Ghent Planning Congress 1913. Premier Congrès International et Exposition Comparée des Villes*. London: Routledge, 2014. xvii + 716pp. £95.00 hbk.  
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This remarkable book is a wonderful example of the flurry of cross-national knowledge circulations and information exchanges that occurred in the early twentieth century. Experts from local government, academia, architecture, planning and engineering came together at a number of international congresses

and exhibitions to share their ideas for building a safer and healthier society just as Europe slid inexorably towards war. There was a palpable air of excitement around such events, and this book, a product of this groundswell of action, captures this energy a century after its original publication.

The book is a facsimile copy of the original proceedings of the Premier Congrès International et Exposition Comparée des Villes, which took place in Ghent from 27 July to 1 August 1913. It was compiled by an organizing committee of Belgian reformers, including the founder of the Union of Belgian Towns, Emile Vinck, and the peace campaigner, Paul Otlet. The Congress, which temporarily placed Belgium at the heart of the international municipal movement, initiated discussion about social reform through two overlapping sections: delegates either addressed the different ways that towns could be planned, or the organization of communal life.

The book consists of written papers from many experts on different topics, ranging from the provision of public gardens to town extension planning to Otlet's bold proposal to host a world city, 'Un projet grandiose de Cité Internationale'. It is very much a document that espouses the importance of planning to manage urban society better. The book, beautifully produced, is a fabulous addition to the international series, edited by Helen Meller, of influential planning texts from around the world. The light editorial touch usefully preserves the text in its original form: it is inconsistently paginated; lacks a coherent structure; and reads like the organizers rushed to publication, but *that is the point* – as a material product, it encapsulates the frenzy of the nascent international movement as it was institutionalizing *at the time*. Otlet himself writes how municipal authorities faced a growing challenge in documenting their records, noting that the best solution was to learn from the experiences of other institutions like the Congrès Internationale des Sciences Administratives. The book thus represents a step into the unknown world of municipal internationalism where, for those present, collaboration and sharing were the key tools for building a better society. This book keeps this wonderful spirit alive.

This book should be read in conjunction with the more coherent *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects Town Planning Conference*, held in London in 1910, which is also included in the series. Together, they vividly illustrate the emergence of the 'Urban Internationale' of people, institutions and tools to study the 'modern city' during the twentieth century. Singularly, *Ghent Planning Congress* is an important record of proceedings for this historic moment in the international planning movement. It is also – as a section on the proposed organization of a permanent congress of towns exemplifies – a record of the origins of the intermunicipalist network because it marks the formation of the Union Internationale des Villes (UIV), which subsequently influenced later dialogue about municipal administration, particularly during the inter-war years when the fate of democratic local self-government was under threat. It is a significant document for marking, in the words of the organizers themselves, 'une première étape vers une étude internationale et comparative' (p. xi) of cities and local authorities.

William Whyte's introduction is excellent. He is critical of the document itself ('a poorly produced and apparently intractable text' (p. v)), whilst documenting the fast-changing context within which the organizers cobbled it together. He also discusses the contemporary responses to the Congress, noting how little attention it received in the professional press. Particularly helpful for readers are the short

biographies provided for the speakers, which save a lot of time in tracking down some of the lesser-known participants.

The proceedings themselves list the various delegates, categorized into representatives of government, unions of towns and professional associations. Towards the end, the secretariat-general provides a useful list of documentary sources on urban administration, organized by country. This points towards some of the best work that the UIV subsequently did as a clearing house for municipal information. The proceedings also hint at the coming age of statistical information with papers from the statisticians Ugo Giusti and Paul Meuriot. Meuriot's paper, 'The general progress of the major cities in Europe from 1800 to the present day', expertly frames many of the issues that the professionals subsequently tackled. It is a pity that the organizers buried it in the middle portion of the programme, and did not give it the prominence it deserved.

Multiple diverse voices were heard during the Congress, addressing a variety of practical topics, interspersed with more idealistic talks about future planning scenarios. What links all the participants is their resounding belief in the necessity of technocratic expertise and the development of a scientific approach to manage urban problems. As Frank Koester puts it in his excellent paper, the modern city 'is in fact a great factory', the conditions of which were dependent on the 'technical experience' of the engineer and the planner, as well as the 'aesthetic technique' of the landscape designer and architect. Notable speakers, their papers reproduced, include Joseph Stübben, George Pepler, Patrick Abercrombie, Raymond Unwin, Edgard Milhaud and Adolphe-Augustin Rey. Planning historians, and those with interests in transnational history, will obviously be interested. The volume paints a picture of an evolving professional voice amongst planners, engineers and architects. There is also a good focus on planning in colonial cities – with papers on Indian, North African and Latin American cities.

The book would make an excellent addition to any research library and should be consulted by researchers interested in the development of international local government and the international planning movement. It also looks at home on my bookshelf alongside similarly formative works in planning and international local government by T.C. Horsfall, George Montagu Harris and J.C. Nettlefold.

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**Mahnaz Shah**, *Le Corbusier's Venice Hospital Project: An Investigation into its Structural Formulation*. London: Ashgate, 2013. xxv + 222pp. 133 figures. £65.00 hbk.  
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'Don't kill Venice, I beg you', wrote Le Corbusier in 1962 in a letter to the mayor of Venice, Giovanni Favaretto Fisco. Fisco had contacted the architect to work on a design for a new civil hospital for Venice. Le Corbusier, however, strongly opposed the possibility of building a high-rise structure, exclaiming 'I am distressed thinking that Venice is able, through the invasion of excess, to become an atrocious swamp similar to all the cities of North America, South America, and now Europe. Yes, I have created skyscrapers 220 metres tall, but I have placed them where they