

Book Review

— *Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity*, by Fabiola López-Durán, University of Texas Press, 2018

Fabiola López-Durán's recent book challenges and unravels the little-known history of the French eugenics movement in Argentina and Brazil from approximately 1900 to 1960, and its impact on public health policy, urban planning, and architectural design. Generally, the book builds upon broader arguments regarding the relationships between political power, the state, and society in the production and reception of architecture and urban design. The text extends ideas initially explored in the 1980's by architectural theorists and historians including Manfredo Tafuri's neo-Marxist history of modern architecture in relationship to society, workers, and capitalist markets, and Barbara Miller Lane's examination of architecture and ideology in Nazi Germany; as well as recent post-colonial critiques of foreign domination, capitalism, and culture in twentieth-century Latin American architecture and urbanism by scholars in the 1990's and 2010's such as Robert Alexander González, Luis E. Carranza, and Fernando Lara.

López-Durán's introduction reveals the underlying premise of the book: that the influential ideas of the French evolutionist Jean Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829) who claimed, "that [physical characteristics and behaviour] induced by the environment were biologically transmitted...from generation to generation... [and became] a critical instrument in the crafting of modernity in France during the Third Republic (1870-1940) and in the culturally and scientifically influential nation states of Latin America." (5-6) Thus, the book aspires to "spark a new understanding of modernity as an elaborately conceived ethos of progress and rational order that was carried out by systematic spatialization;" utilizing "a methodological approach through which the dynamics of modernity and eugenics are investigated." (14-15) The author investigates transnational issues related to post-colonialism, gender, race, class, and the built environment by utilizing a range of critical tools from social criticism; not only critiquing modernism as merely an aesthetic practice, but examining for the first time to my knowledge, the eugenic dimensions of modernism in urban

design and architecture in Latin America, and in the process, re-evaluating heroic figures of modernism such as Le Corbusier and Lucio Costa.

Chapter 1 examines the origins of utopian visions for urban societies in Latin America transformed by sanitization, segregation, and sterilization in novels and medical journals written by physicians. Chapter 2 assesses the influence of the architecture and landscape design of the 1889 Paris World's Fair with exhibits on workers' housing, social hygiene, and colonized peoples; as well as members of the "Musée social," an organization that studied the social problems of French society, including architects who developed hygienic urban plans for major Latin American capital cities, including Brazil. The urban design of Rio de Janeiro with the levelling of the mountain of Morro do Castelo, is revealed in terms of hygienic and eugenic agendas. Chapter 3 explores modernism in Argentina in relation to the project of improving a weak society in terms of a hygienic urban plan for Buenos Aires developed by Emilio Coni that included disinfection stations, worker's housing to encourage healthy reproduction, and *puericulture* health and education centres. Chapter 4 is the most persuasive of the book and examines modernism, eugenics, and the normative standards in the iconic work of Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier's little-known interest in eugenics is examined in terms of *puericulture*, medical correction, and his desire to "engineer modern life," and "instrumentalize nature" (149) in the design of his L'Esprit Nouveau Pavilion. Le Corbusier's interest in "whitening" and "improving" (180) the human race are revealed in his sketches and writings following his travels to Brazil including his ideas for creating a "new Brazilian man" (182) in his design for the Ministry of Health and Education, as well as his ideas regarding the standardization of the human body in his Modulor system.

The most compelling portions of the text utilize little-known projects and trajectories of professional careers to support the author's arguments regarding eugenics and race. These include the following: the little discussed design by Élisée Reclus for a "Great Globe" project for the 1900 World's Fair in Paris in which society is perceived as an abstract subject under surveillance and management (1); the useful observation that the pursuit of eugenic urban planning and architectural projects occurred in both leftist and conservative regimes in Latin America (8, 11); the dehumanizing exhibition of colonized people at the 1889 Paris World's Fair including recreations of villages in North Africa and jungles of South Africa (49); the little-discussed aspirations of Neo-colonial architecture by French architects in Rio de Janeiro (71); the racial policy of dispersing black citizens of Rio de Janeiro to prevent their perceived immorality (78); the astonishing claim by Lucio Costa on the necessity for selective racial immigration for the creation of good architecture (80); the little-known architectural plans of the French novelist Émile Zola to facilitate racial improvement (87); Le Corbusier's little-discussed observations regarding the problems of race and degeneration after his trips to South America and his architectural responses (155); and his interest in the Alexis Carrel, a Nobel prize

winning eugenic white supremacist who played a leading role in implementing eugenic policies in Vichy France (156); among others.

The author draws upon on scarce primary sources from newspapers, magazines, advertising, and interviews. Footnotes are well researched, extensive, and detailed, while the bibliography indicates the work of a thorough scholar who has examined scarce sources. The graphic design of the book is well composed and features sharp photographs from rare archival sources. Areas of the book that could be improved in future editions include further editing the at times repetitive text, as well as occasional overstatements and totalizing claims. However, these are minor flaws in what is an important book of innovative scholarship that breaks new ground. López-Durán's book is timely given the current racial tensions of the United States, and will be useful to scholars of urban and architectural history, theory and criticism, public health policy, and political and economic history of Latin America; and especially to those interested in the social and cultural criticism of modernist urban design and architecture in relation to ideology, politics, and race.

Edward R. Burian, University of Texas at San Antonio
eburian@aol.com