

REVIEW

Reviews for the Special Collection on Architectural Historiography and Fourth Wave Feminism 2020

Andrea J. Merrett, Inés Toscano and Olivier Vallerand

Merrett, AJ. A Review of Doris Cole, *From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture*. Boston: i Press, 1973.

Toscano, I. A Review of G. Cascelli Farinasso, et al., *Arquitetas (in)visíveis*, 2014, <https://www.arquitetasinvisiveis.com/>; M. McLeod and V. Rosner, *Pioneer Women of American Architecture*, 2014, <https://pioneeringwomen.bwaf.org/>; I. Moisset, et al., *Un día/Una arquitecta*, 2015, <https://undiaunaarquitecta.wordpress.com/>.

Vallerand, O. A Review of Elizabeth Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*. Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2019.

Against the ‘Stars’

Andrea J. Merrett
Independent Scholar
ajm2167@columbia.edu

Doris Cole, *From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture*, Boston: i Press, 136 pages, 1973, ISBN: 0913222011

Doris Cole's *From Tipi to Skyscraper* (1973) was the first history of women in architecture published in the United States (**Figure 1**). Although a slim volume, it made a significant historiographical contribution to feminist literature in architecture when it was published. This contribution was due in part to the limited scholarly resources available but also to Cole's position outside academia, which allowed her to draw on sources that might have been frowned upon otherwise.

Cole's book was directly connected with feminist activism in architecture. Starting in the early 1970s, women architects in the United States began to organize in response to the mainstream women's movement. Feminist architects formed professional groups, mounted exhibitions, organized conferences, and petitioned professional associations to take the plight of women seriously. Although Cole's text was not overtly polemical, it can be seen as a form of activism. Natalie Kampen and Elizabeth Grossman (1983) observed that it was practicing architects like Cole and not historians who began the work of researching women architects of the past, much as artists had initiated the scholarship on the history of women artists. Feminist architects wanted to prove that, despite their low numbers, women belonged in the profession and that they were not new to it. In the introduction to *From Tipi*

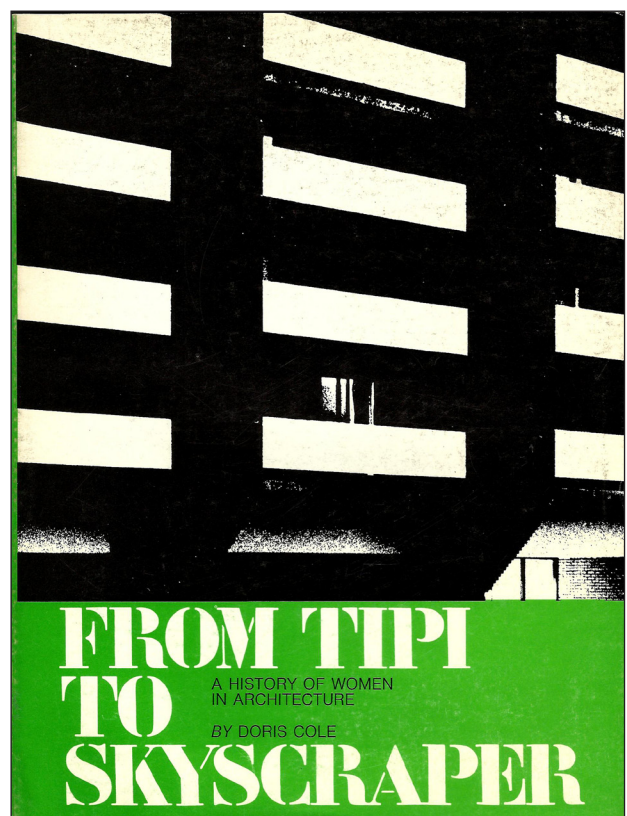


Figure 1: Cover of Doris Cole, *From Tipi to Skyscraper: A History of Women in Architecture*. Published with permission of MIT Press.

to Skyscraper, Cole explicitly states that one of her goals for the study was to encourage more women to become architects (Cole 1973: ix). She also wanted to challenge canonical architectural historiography, with its emphasis on the careers of individual male practitioners.

When Cole was writing her book, the majority of architectural history publications in the United States consisted of monographs on individual architects, particular buildings, building types, or periods and styles. The history curriculum in architecture schools focused on 'great men and great monuments', continuing the humanist ideal of the architect as a genius. As several scholars have demonstrated, including Linda Nochlin (1971) and Christine Battersby (1989), genius is a gendered concept. Its construction in the modern period was implicitly male and by definition excluded women. As Sherry Ahrentzen (1996) argues, this is especially true of the architect, a male hero-figure considered the sole creator of his oeuvre. This is a persistent myth despite decades of efforts to debunk it, a myth reinforced by the monographic approach to architectural history. Although in the 1970s and 1980s the focus of architectural history was broadening, the discipline continued to be dominated by figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, and Mies van der Rohe.

In a radically different approach to canonical histories of the era, Cole does not include the profiles of individual practitioners. Instead, her text offers a social history of women's engagement with the built environment and analyzes the contexts of women's lives that limited their ability to become professional architects and the opportunities available for those who did. In five chapters, she tells a progressive story of women's increased influence on the built environment in the United States, from non-professionals to trained architects. To tell this story, she draws on a variety of sources, including magazine articles, general history books, etiquette and domestic reform manuals, interviews, and, for the final chapter, the responses to a letter she sent out to practicing women architects across the country.

Beginning with the colonial period, she highlights how non-professional women designed, wrote about, and oversaw the management of buildings, particularly domestic spaces. Female members of indigenous tribes, for example, owned and were often responsible for the construction of the dwellings; authors of domestic handbooks and etiquette guides were as concerned (if not more so) with the technical aspect of building as the aesthetics of homes; middle- and upper-class women established settlement houses; and former slaves in the South founded colleges. Although few women became professional architects before the late 19th century, Cole argues that much of the work that women did to improve their homes and communities could be considered architectural as it dealt with the physical and social environments of both. Cole reports that more women gained access to architecture schools by the 1880s, but it was not until 1916, when the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture was opened exclusively for women, that a significant number of them received professional training. Cole ends the book with a survey of the contemporary status of women in the profession. As she does throughout the book, she emphasizes women's preoccupation with social concerns, even as they resisted stereotypes about the types of projects they were suited to, notably domestic architecture.

Cole's work set the precedence for feminist histories that refused to elevate a few 'stars' and instead included non-professional women and ordinary practitioners. Like *From Tipi to Skyscraper, Women in American Architecture* (1977) — which accompanied an exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum curated by Susana Torre — incorporates contextual analyses to explain the restrictions women had faced in becoming professional architects. As had Cole (who contributed a chapter to the catalogue), Torre also included domestic reformers, such as Catherine Beecher, and other non-professional women who played an important role in shaping the built environment, particularly the design of houses. This expanded definition of architecture and the inclusion of non-architects was continued in other feminist architectural histories published soon after the exhibition. Both Gwendolyn Wright's *Moralism and the Model Home* (1980) and Dolores Hayden's *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981), two key texts in early feminist literature in architecture, fell outside the purview of canonical architectural history. Following Cole, they did not focus on individual women architects. Instead, Wright's book was a social history of housing in Chicago from 1873 to 1913 which examined the role that builders, women writers, and domestic reformers, as well as professional architects, played in shaping the ideology around the home and the design of houses. Like Cole, Wright relied on unorthodox sources such as women's magazines. Hayden's book excavated the history of the 'material feminists' (as she called them), multiple generations of reformers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries who sought to improve women's status in society by restructuring domestic labor and environments.

Despite the perception that feminist architectural history in the United States began with the recovery of the histories of individual women architects, an examination of the first publications, especially those of Cole, Torre, Wright, and Hayden, demonstrates that the goals of feminist architects and scholars in the United States were broader and included non-professional actors and vernacular domestic architecture routinely left out of architectural histories. This was a viable strategy to increase the number of women in the history of a field that mostly excluded them. The expansion of actors shaping the built environment became a hallmark of a new feminist historiography in architecture and would lead to later texts such as Alice Friedman's *Women and the Making of the Modern House*. Cole's reliance on non-conventional sources of evidence, out of necessity in her case, helped legitimize them for feminist scholarship in architecture.

Although the early scholarship mostly lacked the discussions of gender, race, and class that preoccupy today's intersectional feminists scholars in architecture, we remain indebted to this work for initiating a field of study that went beyond a definition of architecture which included women in a range of roles, both professional and non-professional. As feminist historians re-reading this work today, we are reminded of whose shoulders we stand on as we continue to challenge canonical histories.

Online Resources on Architectural Historiography during Fourth Wave Feminism

Inés Toscano

Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Weimar, DE

ines.toscano@uni-weimar.de

I. Moisset et al., *Un día|Una arquitecta*, 2015, <https://undi-aunaarquitecta.wordpress.com/>; G. Cascelli Farinasso et al., *Arquitectas (in)visíveis*, 2014, <https://www.arquitectasinvisiveis.com/>; M. McLeod and V. Rosner, *Pioneer Women of American Architecture*, 2014, <https://pioneeringwomen.bwaf.org/>

The three online resources discussed in this review, *Un día|Una arquitecta*, *Arquitectas (in)visíveis*, and *Pioneer Women of American Architecture*, exemplify the impact of the fourth wave of feminism on architectural historiography. Not only do they share the mission of bringing marginalized women architects to the attention of the wider public, but they also use digital technology and the internet as new platforms to denounce sexism and create alliances among feminist architects. The chosen websites were all launched by collectives of American architectural historians and are among the most activist platforms in America today. In particular, they make extensive use of biographies, written in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, that are available through various media and therefore contribute in an important way to the iteration of the feminist movement in architecture.

Un día|Una arquitecta (One Day|A Woman Architect) is a blog established in 2014 by a collective of Spanish-speaking women scholars of architecture in Argentina. Just as the title suggests, their goal at that time was to post one biography of a woman architect every day for one year. Initially founded and edited by Inés Moisset, Daniela Arias Laurino, Zaida Muxí, Florencia Marciani, Cecilia Kesman, and Gueni Ojeda, the community expanded as more collaborators gradually joined, and today over

seventy specialists, mainly from Latin America and Spain, are involved. Launched on International Women's Day, 8 March 2015, *Un día|Una arquitecta* has since completed four cycles of the initiative and is planning a fifth one in 2021. To date, it has published over nine hundred academic digital articles in Spanish on historical and contemporary cases of women architects. In 2018, the blog was visited over one million times by engaged readers who suggested new cases to add (**Figure 2**). The archival work was further expanded by collaborating with other institutions and digital networks that have linked and published the articles, and the editors have participated in women-only Wikipedia edit-a-thons that have increased the number of women architect entries on the site from just 2% in 2015 to 8% in 2018. In addition to the use of social media such as Facebook, they took part in the radio program *Arquitectos al aire*, which also has a YouTube channel. Moreover, the online trend has led to concrete architectural exhibitions, the publication of architecture magazines and the e-book *Nuestras Arquitectas: Re-mapeo y Nuevas Cartografías*, by Inés Moisset and Carolina Quiroga. In 2016, *Un día|Una arquitecta* was awarded the Milka Bliznakov Research Prize of the International Archive of Women in Architecture from Virginia Tech. The jury highlighted the use of digital tools and the internet to expand archival content to a wider audience. As a political initiative, in 2017 *Un día|Una arquitecta* launched a signature petition, called 'Compromiso 30%', demanding a minimal involvement of female participants in professional events, including panel discussions, held in Argentina and Spain. Through digital activism and the community's participation, they exposed images of all-male or dominantly male panels.

The contributors to *Arquitectas (in)visíveis* (Invisible Women Architects) are less formal in their pursuit of gender equality and more expansive in their use of media. This collective began as a group of undergraduate architecture and urbanism students at the Universidade de Brasília who critically researched and collected data on historically omitted women architects. On International Women's

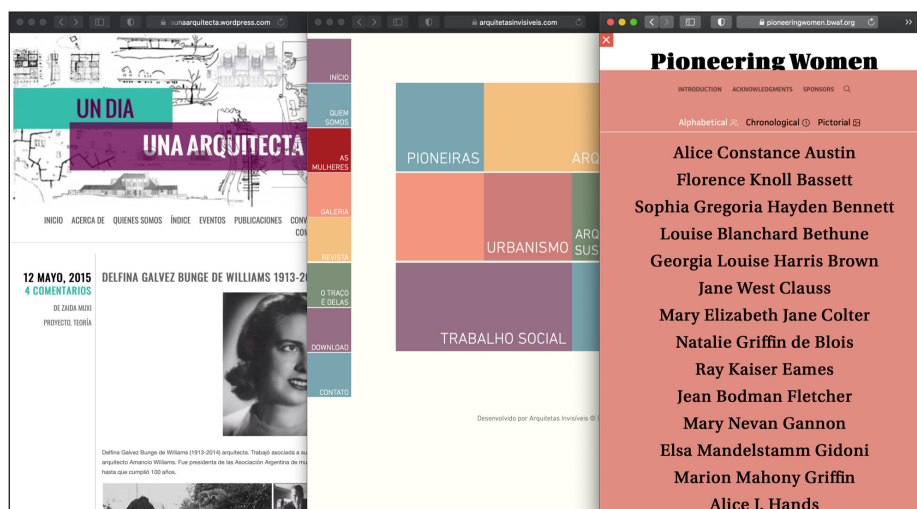


Figure 2: Screenshot showing the homepage of the websites *Un día|Una arquitecta*, *Arquitectas (in)visíveis*, and *Pioneer Women of American Architecture* [last accessed 13 November 2020].

Day 2014, Gabriela Cascelli Farinasso, Hana Augusta de Andrade, Julia Mazzutti Bastian Solé, Laura Pita Viera, and Luiza Rego Dias Coelho released the Facebook page *Arquitetas (in)visíveis*. An online community grew by sharing articles of interest on feminism and architecture and their initial research on 21 women architects. In the context of their institution, these young women architects (average age of 22) organised an exhibition with lectures that drew the attention of the UnBTV, the television channel of the University of Brasília. On International Women's Day 2015, they joined forces with the site *ArchDaily* and published a compilation of biographical entries about 48 women architects. With this data they created their own official website that is structured according to different categories (pioneers, in the shadows, architecture, urbanism, landscape architecture, social architecture, sustainable architecture) and has a blog section for discussions (**Figure 2**). Over time, they were invited to participate in conferences, architecture exhibitions, and TEDx Talk Brasília. They soon realized the need to create a space of dialogue between various people researching gender issues in the built environment from various disciplinary angles, such as psychology, sociology, geopolitics, and the arts. Through an open call for papers, they published the first edition of their magazine, *Pioneiras*, in August 2016, and the second edition, *Nas Sombras*, in March 2018. In parallel, they expanded their reach of narratives to YouTube and Instagram. Also, their documentary, *Poeira e Batom – 50 mulheres na construção de Brasília*, has been shown at various film and feminist festivals. Nowadays, they run *O traco é Delas*, a podcast in Portuguese about the traces of women builders.

The group behind *Pioneer Women of American Architecture* relied on large budgets for creating this historiographical website. In 2012, the aim of the Beverly Willis Architecture Foundation was to uncover a group of women born before WWII who broke sexual and racial barriers and made important contributions to North American architecture, urbanism, and interior and furniture design and to empowering young architecture students and practitioners. From a jury selection of 50 profiles of pioneer women, the directors, Mary McLeod and Victoria Rosner, selected the authors for each profile and developed a format for the project. In line with the prestige of the project, *Pioneer Women of American Architecture* was launched in October 2014 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The website is straightforward and easy to use. It starts with a list of 50 cases leading to well-researched biographical entries with a complete biographical apparatus (**Figure 2**). The editors expressed their intention to eventually add more case studies documenting the careers of women architects in America.

These three online resources of feminist architectural history engage with new media in various degrees and provide us with free scholarly knowledge on women architects. At the same time, they also attempt to position themselves as authoritative in this expanding field. The website *Pioneer Women of American Architecture* has remained a canonical resource closer to the concerns of third wave feminism. Not only does it expose her-stories

from women who practised in North America, omitting connections with issues of racism and sexism as a global campaign towards intersectional feminism, but it also fails to build a bridge with the new generation of female architects whom they aim to motivate to study architecture. By contrast, the Brazilian case of *Arquitetas (in)visíveis* is a platform targeted at young activist architects and students that invites other disciplines to discuss the patriarchal and colonial power structure in the built environment across the North/South divides. In line with Generation Z, the collective mobilises various social media to discuss racism, LGBTIQ+ rights, and fascism. Additionally, it has enhanced the architecture-related gender research in Portuguese and encouraged the networking of scholars in this minority language. Similarly, *Un día|Una arquitecta* has also taken advantage of a growing scene of Latin feminist-activism and the online trending topic of International Women's Day to give visibility to under-researched, non-western cases, both historical and contemporary, in the Spanish language. With the power of digitisation, the project has broken frontiers and for the first time has connected Latin American architectural researchers with Spanish-speaking emigrants in Europe and the United States. However, it has maintained the blog format since its inception and as a result, the content is not rapidly accessible nor visually appealing enough for the new generation of architects.

In the shifting ground of websites, content platforms need to actively engage the youth, who are not only mobile-native and highly integrated and dependant in social media but also socially responsible. As discrimination is still rampant in the profession, it should be also asked whether the use of biographies – a legacy of second wave feminism – is helping to achieve a more egalitarian architectural profession or if it continues to position women as vulnerable and isolated subjects in the architecture discipline.

A Community of Education and Exploration: Reframing Understandings of the Bauhaus

Olivier Vallerand

The Design School, Herberger Institute for Design and Arts, Arizona State University, US
olivier.vallerand@asu.edu

Elizabeth Otto, *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*, Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 289 pages, 2019, ISBN: 9780262043298

Few design and architecture institutions have achieved such wide and scholarly recognition as the Bauhaus. Its centennial in 2019 unsurprisingly led to numerous exhibitions and publications that both celebrated and challenged its legacy and impact on the last century of art, architecture, and design. The MIT Press alone – which had already celebrated the school's 50th anniversary in 1969 with its translation from German of the authoritative *Bauhaus: Weimar, Dessau, Berlin, Chicago* (Wingler

1962) – published three new books: *Bauhaus Futures* (Forlano, Steenson, and Ananny 2019), *Gyorgy Kepes: Undreaming the Bauhaus* (Blakinger 2019), and Elizabeth Otto's *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*, reviewed here (Figure 3).

Haunted Bauhaus is an enlightening discussion of rarely told histories that Otto also shared in two volumes co-edited with Patrick Rössler: *Bauhaus Bodies: Gender, Sexuality, and Body Culture in Modernism's Legendary Art School* (Otto and Rössler 2019a), and *Bauhaus Women: A Global Perspective* (Otto and Rössler 2019b). The book discusses the embodied and politicized experiences of the *Bauhäusler* and *Bauhäuslerin* – terms describing the male and female members of the school that are used to focus on the community of individuals rather than the 'master'-student relationship – and reframes the commonly understood narrative of the Bauhaus as a paradigm of rational modernism. Otto presents instead a diversified array of 'anti-utilitarian experiments in occultism and spirituality, communal and individual expressions of gender and sexuality, and radical politics' (Otto 2019: 3). By doing so, she moves away from the small number of major figures usually discussed and makes visible those concepts and people that histories of the Bauhaus have systematically overlooked or relegated to the margins.

The title of the book refers to Avery Gordon's (2008) concept of *haunting* to 'illuminate how content that is repressed or unresolved can escape and manifest obliquely despite the systems that usually contain it' – in this case,

the 'non-Taylorized bodies and non-normative sexualities' that 'haunt the margins of the Bauhaus' (Otto 2019: 3–4). Otto argues that this marginalization occurred early on because of intertwined phenomena that she convincingly highlights in her exploration of the life of *Bauhäusler* and *Bauhäuslerin* beyond their time at the school. Many of them were never included in canonical histories of the Bauhaus because of the impact of Nazism on the careers of women, of post-war notions of genius attached almost exclusively to male artists, and of anti-gay laws that persisted until late in the second half of the 20th century. The themes of gender and sexuality lie at the core of her book. Not only do they frame the three central chapters, but they also serve as important backgrounds for the first chapter about the spiritual influences that explicitly shaped the school's early years, and for the concluding chapter that covers the political debates that became increasingly important at the Bauhaus and eventually led to its closure in 1933. The significance of this political history was downplayed by both historians and prominent Bauhaus members, both because of the Nazi involvement of several members during the Second World War and because of the leftist and communist activities of other members during the Cold War. While postwar histories of the school have mostly centered on the few members who emigrated and developed a successful career in safer contexts, Otto focuses instead on the majority of those who could not or chose not to move away and who embraced or fell victim to the Nazi regime. Beyond the visibility given to these less celebrated figures, her approach underlines the close links between social norms and politics and gendered and sexualized assumptions and highlights the more rarely discussed ties between spirituality and sexuality, in line with an emerging branch of queer studies that tie faith and belief to sexuality rather than opposing them.

Because of the three architects who famously led the Bauhaus, its histories have often been skewed towards architecture, while only 21% of its students actually studied architecture primarily. In her attempt to challenge traditional histories of the Bauhaus, Otto carefully challenges this. In fact, only the final chapter on politics specifically speaks of architecture, when Otto discusses the involvement of Bauhaus-trained architects in Nazi governmental buildings and concentration camps. She also steps away from common accounts tying women to the weaving and textile studio, and highlights instead women's importance as exceptional contributors throughout all the school's departments. To do so, Otto pays detailed attention to visual representations and relies on analyses of images to understand not only the collective and self-expression of Bauhaus members but also their commentaries on the school and its social and political context. The beautifully illustrated book design explores the rich filmic, photographic, and collage/montage production of many *Bauhäusler* and *Bauhäuslerin*, regardless of the main discipline for which each of them was known. Otto explains how this visual production subverts and shifts the technological and rational focus most often tied to the Bauhaus. Particularly striking are the links she makes between the Bauhaus and the production of 'spirit' and 'séance' images

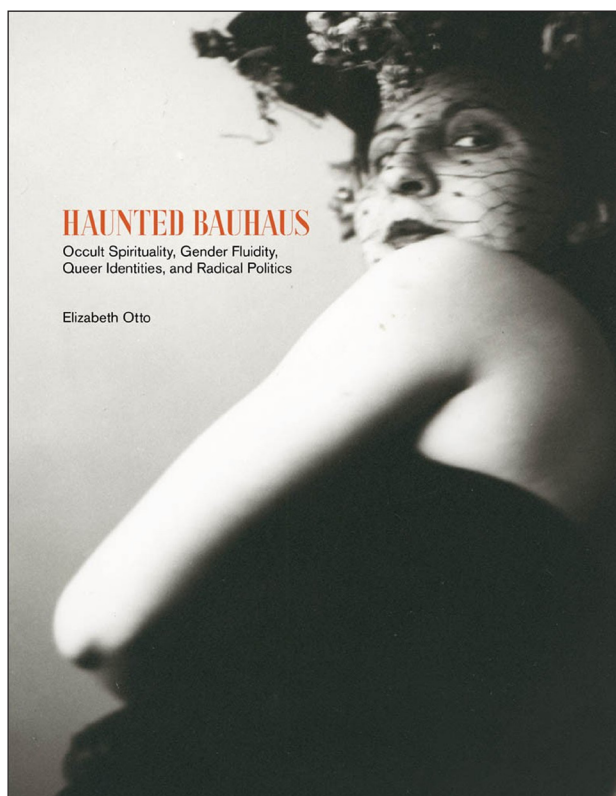


Figure 3: Cover of *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*. Photo credit: The MIT Press.

by occultists, reminding us of the spiritual beliefs behind the rational ideas for which the Bauhaus is known. She also carefully analyzes how the visual production of many *Bauhäusler* and *Bauhäuslerin* plays with gender norms, for example challenging and moving fluidly between the 'virile' image of the engineer and the eroticized image of an exaggerated femininity.

Starting from issues of representation – making visible the margins – and expanding this exploration to the interpersonal relations that shaped the production of Bauhaus members allows Otto to frame gender and sexuality as a broad spectrum that reflects the complex ways in which they were performed. As such, she understands the school's overall project to rethink and remake all aspects of life as integrally linked to broader attempts during the Weimar Republic to challenge how normalcy is understood around both masculinity and femininity. She thus revises and unties the utopian focus on play of the Bauhaus from 'unified, hard-bodied, military masculinity' (Otto 2019: 89) and moves towards more fragile and uncertain masculinities, acknowledging the interest that Bauhaus 'New Women' had in transformation. By thinking about how objects and identities are constantly shifting, they sought to meet and adjust to new needs as women were finally starting to be recognized as equal to men. Both chapters on gender convincingly demonstrate that while many *Bauhäusler* and *Bauhäuslerin* were actively thinking about this, the particularly strong group of female students, facing the school's higher admission standards, fueled the school's creativity in a society that still held them in check. Marianne Brandt is one of Otto's central figures, involved in the metal workshop – still seen as the domain of the male 'artist-engineer' – and in the photographic production of playful explorations of both male imagery and hyper-femininity.

The chapter on queer identities, while still engaging, is somewhat less successful. Otto is restricted in her attempts to queer the Bauhaus as little evidence survives. Like other scholars, she cannot discuss queer people in depth because they often had to hide, and traces of anything that would make visible their identities were limited or completely destroyed. Despite the relative progressiveness of the Bauhaus, this invisibility persisted well into the second half of the 20th century due to legal oppression and social pressure. Otto does not unearth completely new histories, as the queer identities of most of her examples have already been discussed by other scholars, but she also does not really expand on how we can understand their experience as 'queering the Bauhaus'. So, while Otto succeeds in bringing together a number of queer figures that have rarely been discussed in histories of the Bauhaus, once again using striking visual evidence such as the double-exposure image of Heinz Loew and Hermann Trinkaus that opens the chapter, she does not develop a sustained understanding of how a queer experience influences one's life and work. As such, *Haunted Bauhaus* reads more as a first step towards further exploration of a queer Bauhaus.

Otto's deep research and understanding of the Bauhaus archives and of existing scholarship (Baumhoff 2001; Muller 2009; Smith 2014) is clear in her visual analysis

and in the light she shines on the complex and contrasting political and social experiments and relationships within and around the school. If theoretical concepts such as Gordon's theory of 'haunting' or Elizabeth Freeman's (2010) 'queer hauntology' are used as framing devices rather than further developed to deepen our understanding of the Bauhaus, they still intrigue and help shape a context for the relationships explored in the book. Spirituality, politics, gender, and sexuality might seem like a broad spectrum of topics, but Otto brings them together in a highly readable way that highlights how we should think of them as more than ghosts haunting in the background; they are essential actors that deserve a place in the ongoing narrative of the Bauhaus and its heritage.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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