

Architectural anthropology. . (Book Review) *Roxana Waterson.*

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AMERLINCK, MARI-JOSE (ed.). *Architectural anthropology*. xv, 213 pp., maps, figs., illus., bibliogr. London, Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2001.

L58.95 (cloth)

This book is a commendable effort to build bridges in several directions -- between architecture and anthropology, between the possible contributions of both biological and social anthropology to our understanding of the built environment, and also between the Spanish-speaking and the English-speaking academics in this field. Amerlinck, a professor of anthropology at the University of Guadalajara, has already published several works in Spanish on this topic. In her introduction, she proposes that architecture and anthropology still have much to learn from each other, and hopes that a more fully interdisciplinary relationship can be developed through collaborative research projects that would utilize more effectively the skills of both disciplines.

Two distinguished researchers on the built environment -- Amos Rapoport and Nold Egenter -- contribute theoretical papers. Rapoport would prefer to draw both anthropology and architecture into the wider interdisciplinary field of 'Environment-behaviour studies' which he himself has done so much to define, and therefore deems the definition of a field of 'architectural anthropology' to be too narrow to be useful. Egenter's paper is perhaps the most thought-provoking in the volume. Beginning from the concept of 'constructivity', Egenter defines 'architecture' in the broadest possible terms as 'all that hominoids and hominids built and build' (p. 43). This opens the way for a fascinating consideration of primate nest-building, and speculation on the probable deep evolutionary history of hominid construction using vegetal materials. Since such activities cannot be expected to leave archaeological traces, Egenter proposes that we find other means to think about them. Pongids do an enormous amount of nest-building over the course of their lives, Their nests are always 'rooted', suitable plants being bent over and woven into a stable structure on the spot where they are growing, but early hominid tools could have served very well to cut materials and remove them to chosen sites elsewhere. Although the building of pongid nests is an individual affair, the placing of nests in a group conveys elements of the group's structure. Of particular interest is a recent study in which sub-groups of bonobos have been seen in the wild to use leaves, twigs, and even large branches as communicative 'signs in the landscape'. If a group splits, one party may leave a series of signs in the form of leaves, plants, and branches pressed down or bent over in the direction of travel. Large branches are even planted deep in the ground beside the trail. One of Egenter's novel arguments is that the semantic functions of this kind of activity, of architecture in general, and even of the domestic use of fire, may have had primacy over the direct provision of shelter. If he presses his argument a little too insistently at times, at the expense of other theories, the paper is none the less exciting in pointing to the potential significance of a 'protocultural' activity which has been

surprisingly neglected in most studies on hominoid cultural behaviour. A surprising omission, though, is any consideration of the role of women in the development of constructive processes. His diagram (p. 50) of 'The evolution of man (sic), habitat and architecture' is illustrated with highly conventional drawings of male hominids striding ever more bipedally towards the future; yet, in fact, women play a predominant role in constructive activities in a wide range of African societies, not least hunter-gatherers like the Ju of the Kalahari.

The rest of the papers are by anthropologists. Jay Edwards and Riva Berleant-Schiller both examine interesting areas of what they term 'architectural creolization'. The former looks at the intriguing cross-overs between cultures, as well as between colonized areas in distant parts of the world, in the development of the early colonial buildings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while the latter examines the bicultural settlements of eighteenth-century Moravian missions who took in Mohican converts in Connecticut and New York. Berleant-Schiller warns us not to expect architectures to provide a simple means of 'reading' a culture; in this case, built forms were mixed, but with a predominance of Moravian structures, while other sources reveal to us that, in an unexpected number of ways, Mohicans succeeded in continuing with many of their own cultural practices in the face of Moravian religious demands. Hetty Nooy-Palm provides a well-illustrated summary of aspects of the Sa'dan Toraja house, while Denise Lawrence-Zuniga discusses recent transformations of houses and uses of space in a small town in rural Portugal. The volume as a whole is a welcome addition to the growing literature on this important field of research.

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