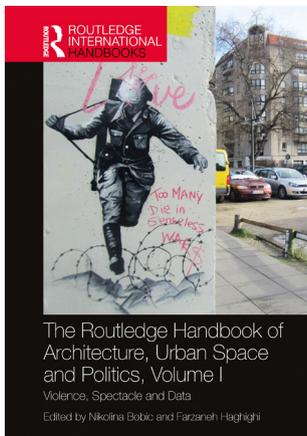


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# *The Routledge Handbook of Architecture, Urban Space and Politics, Volume 1: Violence, Spectacle and Data* Edited by Nikolina Bobic and Farzaneh Haghighi Routledge, 2022, 630 pp.



There has been a longstanding, reductionist reading of architecture and urbanism as passive and neutral reflections of the forces within which they are situated. This reading discards their vital and active role in the construction of events and the politics of their spatialisation. The first volume of *The Routledge Handbook of Architecture, Urban Space and Politics*, edited by Nikolina Bobic and Farzaneh Haghighi, addresses this theme by focusing on the spatial politics of governing and how architecture and urban spaces are deployed as tools to maintain oppressive power relations alongside their violent structures of control, surveillance, and segregation.

The volume offers an informative and insightful collection of contemporary case studies and critical perspectives on how different forms of power and their operational systems—specifically hegemonic and oppressive ones—shape environments and bodies subjugated to them across different scales and geographies. Divided into five parts, with an opening introduction and a general conclusion, the collection covers multidisciplinary topics discussing colonial and state violence, security and borders, political ideologies and questions of race and identity, politics of representation and spectacle, and surveillance in relation to mapping landscapes and big data.

The volume's introduction explains the crucial need to re-examine architecture and urban space in relation to politics and power, especially within an oppressive environment. Through a comprehensive and critical commentary on recent global events, the editors successfully set the ground by providing a general background to introduce the collection's themes. This is done through reviewing relevant histories and theories whilst connecting them to the contemporary examples that are investigated by the handbook's contributors. With such an open framework, the volume leaves readers with more questions about the complex associations that come alongside the "spatialization of politics" and "politicizing the space."

A prominent aspect of the handbook is that it includes a comprehensive collection of contributions, thanks to an editorial approach with a wide geographical reach in selecting the volume's contributors. As such, the collection combines wide-ranging topics, disciplines, and examples from different cultures and geopolitical situations. However, my hope is to see contributions from different geographic regions in the second volume, for example, the Middle East and Africa. As well as expanding the scope and geographic reach, this approach would give a voice to scholars from different regions of the world to write about the implications of oppressive powers on their local architecture and urban landscapes. Besides that, writing from the ground and the lived experience—as many of this volume's contributors have done—usually reveals new perspectives and different insights compared with talking about a situation from a distance.

The volume explicitly encourages readers to develop an active dialogue with the spatial and operational aspects of oppression across the world. In doing so, the reader starts to uncover the complex entanglements of architectural spatial politics and urban processes in relation to their forms and aesthetics. This kind of reading raises more questions about the volume's core theme whilst drawing connections and parallels between the different geographies and cultures. By applying this kind of critical mapping to any geography's specificities and forces throughout the process of scrutinising its architectural and urban situations, a better understanding of its political and cultural complexities can be achieved.

My own research interests and concerns led me to pay particular attention to a number of topics discussed in the volume. These are the ones relating to the politics of representation, dispossession, and extractivism. Specifically, the use of mediating technology and aesthetics to direct people's perception of space in favour of a certain political propaganda. With the proliferation of image production and mass media technologies, architecture and urban spaces have played a crucial role in shaping people's minds and bodies through orienting their perceptions. Hence, the violence that comes alongside that by constructing aesthetic images and representations to serve a certain political ideology. These aspects are particularly discussed in the sections "Spectacle and the Screen" and "Mapping Landscapes and Big Data." For example, Christina Deluchi argues in her contribution that strategies of replacement, erasure, and disconnection were deployed as a result of urban and architectural interventions, top-down development projects, and the political process of constructing a global image of Medellín, Colombia. These strategies aimed to reorient both global and local perceptions of the city. Similarly, Aikaterini Antonopoulou argues that the material presence of architecture and public spaces in Athens was used as a stage for filming the city, while also representing certain subjectivities as "mediated spectacles" through the use of technology.

By looking at the big picture and employing critical mapping techniques, it becomes possible to investigate oppressive spatial narratives and explore the politics and poetics of space. This is an essential step towards imagining alternative spatial practices and potentially transforming current socio-political realities. This volume extensively and insightfully discusses themes in relation to that in an inspiring and thought-provoking way. Overall, I would recommend it for students, educators, and practitioners alike, coming from different disciplines related to architecture, urbanism, and politics. It presents new and critical perspectives on a wide range of timely issues in relation to power and spatial practices.