



Fall 2005

Global City Blues, by Daniel Solomon

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Recommended Citation

Lara Katz, *Global City Blues*, by Daniel Solomon, 45 NAT. RES. J. 1122 (2005).
Available at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nrj/vol45/iss4/12>

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At the very back, the book contains checklists, giving readers an opportunity to begin their own life lists of species of the Sandias.

Overall, I found this book to be exactly what it set out to be: an introduction to all the parts that came together to make up the Sandia Mountains and continue to keep the ecosystem thriving. It stands up to any field guide I have and through its comprehensive approach is all I will need to explore the mountains with a fresh eye.

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Global City Blues. By Daniel Solomon. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2003. Pp. 253. \$24.00 hardback.

Take a moment to conjure these three scenes in your mind: First, you are driving down a nondescript three-lane highway, sun glancing off the other cars that surround you, a never-ending parade of strip malls and chain restaurants choking the view as far as you can see (which is most likely only to the bumper of the SUV in front of you). Second, you are on an airplane, descending over the outskirts of a city. Below you stretches a rolling tide of cookie-cutter houses, sparkling cars nestled in wide concrete driveways hugging the empty streets that wind through a sprawling suburban landscape. Third, you are sitting in a fluorescent-lit cubicle on the whatever-floor of a high-rise building, hugging your sweater around you in the frigid air (it's the middle of July), with the glare of a computer screen illuminating your pale, un-sun-touched skin.

My guess is that almost everyone has experienced these three scenarios in some form or another and the sensations they evoke are generally not very pleasant. If you have ever been in a place like those just described and found yourself wondering exactly how the places where we live became so devoid of life, Daniel Solomon, in his book *Global City Blues*, provides an answer from an architectural perspective. Solomon proposes that the notions of modernity and progress that dominated the post-World War II social, economic, and political environment resulted in the building of urban environments that disconnect us from our fundamental, genetically-wired needs. Such needs include the need for human interaction; for gathering places; and for a sensory link to the natural world, the air, the quality of light at different times of day and in different weather. The practice of architects and town planners under the tenets of modernism has resulted in a systematic demolition of town fabrics that located people in time and space. Such integrated town fabrics have been replaced with isolating and dislocating urban topographies comprised of air-conditioned

buildings designed with little regard for the surrounding space and segregated spheres of activity that can only be navigated by automobile.

While this proposal forms the essence of Solomon's book, it is distilled from an eclectic series of independent essays woven through with several common themes. One of these overarching themes is modernity's preoccupation with time, the idea that everything is an embodiment of the distinct essence of the time of its production. Solomon contrasts such notions of time with notions of place. The aim of New Urbanism, the movement co-founded by Solomon, is the making of distinctive places, in whose buildings and layouts particular histories can be read and continuity between past and present can be felt.

Another common theme that Solomon explores is the way that modern design segregates, rather than integrates, the constituent elements of the city. Modernity dictated that "the uses of the city—dwelling, commerce, work, play, and civil-administration each needed its own enclave and they did not belong all mixed up with one another." This way of thinking about the uses of the city has resulted in a breakdown of town fabrics that provide for mixed uses and more connected ways of living—where it is possible to walk to the store and to encounter different types of people along the way.

These themes create a framework that is embodied in Solomon's skillful breakdowns of the architectural histories of particular cities such as San Francisco, Shanghai, and Berlin. While these case histories can become a bit too technical for a reader unfamiliar with architecture and town planning, for the most part they are fascinating examinations of the influence of ideas upon the living world. At times the examples are particularly disturbing, as in Solomon's illustration of how town planners in Berlin between 1953 and 1989 destroyed more of historic Berlin than did World War II. Three pictures of the same area, one pre-war, one immediately post-war, and one from the late 1980s, drive the point home. The first picture shows a beautiful section of the city with historic, monumental architecture, pleasant streets, and a river lined with trees. In the second picture, the view is more ragged, but the essential components are intact and just in need of a little rehabilitation. The third picture is devastating, yet eerily familiar—the historic buildings are gone, the street is widened into a multi-lane freeway and the view is dominated by desolate, featureless office buildings. Solomon writes about similar processes presently at work in Asian cities as the economies explode, the middle-class rises, and the automobile takes over.

While Solomon sometimes employs dramatic and depressing case histories to illustrate his theories, his message does not dissolve into an anti-modern, anti-urban, anti-progress rant. Much of the book is

devoted to an explanation of the New Urbanism movement and how this new way of thinking about building and city planning has begun to undo the damage wrought by the dictates of post-war modernist thinking. Solomon presents concrete methods for developing town fabrics that are satisfying places to live and work and a conception of urbanism that connects people while gracefully accommodating new technologies. This approach to town planning allows for an embracing of progress without the erasure of the past.

Solomon uses real-life cities around the world to breathe life into abstract, academic concepts such as modernism, globalization, and urbanism. His prose manages to be both lucid and profound, effortlessly conveying his message even to a reader with little knowledge of architecture and town-planning. The vision of cities that he presents is solid, practical, and fundamentally good. Solomon's innovative articulation of concrete methods of building design and urban planning in terms of basic human values make his lessons invaluable for those who seek to improve both the places they live and the quality of their lives.

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Class of 2006

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