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Matthew Gandy is a geographer at University College London whose work focuses on cities, how they work, and how their workings are represented in art and literature. His first book, entitled *Concrete and Clay* (2002), about New York, won a prize. Since its appearance, he has published dozens of articles and several edited books, and his output has earned him election to the British Academy. This latest book concerns six big cities at various points in their recent history: Paris, Berlin, Lagos, Mumbai, Los Angeles, and London.

The chapter on Paris focuses mainly on the nineteenth-century episode of urban modernization known as Haussmannization. It presents the story of the replumbing of the city as “predicated on a holistic conception of the relationship between the body and the city that drew on a series of organic analogies” (p. 29). The chapter ranges from financing of sewer construction to analysis of the paintings of Georges Seurat, providing a few new wrinkles to a story familiar to all historians of urban reform.

The Berlin chapter contains much more on representations of the city in German culture, primarily in the early twentieth century and, within that, especially the Weimar years (1919-1933). The cultural representations of Berlin most interesting to Gandy come from literature, cinema, and photography. Rather little of this concerns water directly. The part of the chapter devoted to urban planning and reform does take up themes related to water, especially access to swimming in the lakes of western Berlin and its suburbs.

The next chapter, on Lagos, is entirely different in subject and style. Gandy draws minimally on Nigerian culture, mentioning a few examples of literature but not of cinema, photography, or anything else. That is perhaps because his main theme here is malaria reduction through mosquito control, not of great interest to Nigerian artists. Malaria control efforts began early in the twentieth century and from the outset included

swamp drainage —the respect in which this chapter touches on water. The 1940s come in for particular attention here.

Gandy's chapter on Mumbai is more squarely focused on water. He offers a quick history of water supply since the early nineteenth century and a longer disquisition on the pronounced inequalities of water access in the last few decades. He includes a sketch of current dreams of rebuilding Mumbai along the lines of modern Shanghai or Singapore (projects that would require more authoritarian government than Mumbai and India presently have). Gandy scarcely resorts to art and literature in this chapter.

His Los Angeles chapter, on the other hand, delves deeply into literary and cinematic depictions of twentieth-century L.A., particularly the often-dry cement bed of the Los Angeles River. Even the obscure history of painting of the Los Angeles River merits discussion here. Gandy also offers a brief history of flooding along the river, mainly since the 1930s, and an account of engineering and water management efforts.

The final substantive chapter is about London, the city where Gandy works. His focus here is on floods and flood control efforts, mainly in the second half of the twentieth century. He devotes many pages to the Thames Estuary, downstream from London, a landscape likely to be affected by storm surges and rising sea level. While there is a good bit on the engineering of flood control here, especially the Thames Barrier finished in the early 1980s, Gandy draws more heavily on literature here than in any other chapter. He reviews the novels that depict London in various catastrophic scenarios, quotes passages from Dickens and Conrad concerning the mouth of the Thames, and even some Soviet utopian science fiction that has nothing to do with London.

These six chapters are only loosely connected. Water and cities appear in all of them, but in very different ways. The time periods under consideration vary considerably. The use of art and literature is inconsistent, chapter to chapter, sometimes central (London and Los Angeles), sometimes marginal (Lagos, Mumbai). The connections between art and literature on the one hand, and water management on the other are also loose and sometimes unclear. If there is a unifying thread to the book, it might be reflections on a question Gandy poses at the end of the book: "why has technical expertise failed to provide universal access to potable water or better protection from floods?" (p. 221). The answer seems to lie, unsurprisingly, in inequalities of wealth and power. It is not a requirement that a book should be tightly focused. If taken as a set of essays on loosely related themes, the book is consistently interesting and sometimes illuminating. I found the chapter on London to be the best.

The book's main defect is an often opaque writing style. Gandy is capable of writing clear and direct English. He writes a blog in perfectly clear and accessible English. Some passages in this book are written so that ordinary readers can understand his meaning. But he frequently chooses to write in a way that almost all readers will find unclear and some will find pretentious. Two sentences give some idea of Gandy's prose:

The metaphorical grid surrounding the experience of the uncanny is ultimately a mystification of material reality in its implication that urban origins lie concealed beneath the surface of the city, rather than constituted through the more distant sets of social relations and spatial interconnections that sustain capitalist urbanization. The urban uncanny is a spatial fetishism of absence, a mythological response to the unseen and the unknown which weaves together popular misconceptions of how cities function with dominant ideological responses to urban disorder (p. 50).

Although I am a native speaker of English I cannot tell what Gandy means here. Several hundred sentences in the book are equally mysterious, and several thousand required me to read them twice or three times before I could understand them. The research effort behind the book is considerable. The notes and bibliography take up 113 pages, and the text only 224 pages. Gandy has read widely in the urban history and urban planning literature in English and supplemented that with many works in French and German. He relies mainly on published literature in the aforementioned fields and others as well, but has also consulted a handful of archives. The book is handsomely produced, with many illustrations and maps.