



BOOK NOTES

The feel of the city: experiences of urban transformation by *Nicolas Kenny*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Canada, 2014, 300 pp. ISBN 978-1-4426-1581-6. At the turn of the twentieth century many cities underwent urbanization and industrialization on an unprecedented scale. Urban historians and geographers have studied these phenomena at length. For their part, historians of planning focused on attempts at the time to rationalize urban development. Relying on urban history and the history of the senses, *The feel of the city* adopts original lenses to revisit the period. Two medium-sized industrial cities, Montréal and Brussels, provide the setting for an enquiry into their populations' 'corporeal engagement' with their rapidly changing environments. A rich corpus of testimonies and indirect accounts of the material conditions of industry, the home and the street provide access to the experiences of city dwellers. The portrait that emerges highlights how urbanites were able to attribute meanings to the rapid and drastic changes they were experiencing.

Decoding the city: urbanism in the age of big data edited by *Dietmar Offenhuber* and *Carlo Ratti*, Birkhäuser, Basel, Switzerland, 2014, 192 pp. ISBN 978-3-03821-597-4. This is an exploration of the use of 'big data' to help understanding of both urban dynamics and the better design and management of cities. Big data are 'massive amounts of machine-readable information ... generated by sociotechnical systems', such as cell-phone networks, credit card systems or social media networks (p. 7). The editors have invited eighteen collaborators to contribute thirteen chapters, grouped around three topics: the source and collection of data; its representation in models and through visualization tools; and the usefulness of big data for design and place making. What is likely to strike a particular chord with urban morphologists is the effort of imagination required to represent visually and map such information. Spatial and temporal dynamics are translated into often spectacular graphic representations that help the exploration of tools that aid understanding of relatively uncharted urban realities. In what is

probably the contribution most applicable to the work of morphologists and urban designers, Andres Sevtsuk illustrates how 'graphic plan interfaces of network models' (p. 158) could lead to a fuller appreciation of the interactions between the form and function of places.

New suburbanisms by *Judith K. De Jong*, Routledge, New York, USA, 2014, 237 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-64217-0. *New suburbanisms* develops the idea that today's American city is largely the product of the mutual influence and hybridization of urban and suburban forms. Designers and planners are invited to accept and draw the consequences from that evolution. Evidence of 'sub/urbanism' – spelled this way to indicate reciprocity – is found in different objects and contexts: such as heavily designed and programmed publicly accessible places; parking infrastructures; retail spaces; and housing forms. The evolution of retail forms exemplifies the reciprocity of urban and suburban realities. The author develops the notion of *flattening* to convey the idea that urban and suburban realities are collapsing into one another. She encourages academics and practitioners to think beyond simplifications and stereotypes of the suburbs. But she might elicit a circumspect reaction when prompting them to engage with new manifestations of sub/urbanization with a non-judgmental attitude.

Rail and the city: shrinking our carbon footprint while reimagining urban space by *Roxanne Warren*, MIT Press, Cambridge, USA, 2014, 336 pp. ISBN 9780262027809. Based on a wealth of information from abundant secondary sources, and using examples from Japan, Europe and North America, architect Roxanne Warren delves into the relationship between the rail and the city. Though the interconnection of urban development and communications has been visited very often in recent decades, she makes an original contribution. She does so first, by embracing the complexity of the problem: considering a wide

array of factors pertaining to social perceptions, regulatory and technical issues, and broader economic and environmental conditions. Secondly, realistic solutions are put forward to remedy the problems that are exposed. The richness of the approach is most apparent when the author untangles webs of relationships between factors that are usually assessed in isolation or in pairs. For instance the development and prospects of the Transit-oriented Development approach are considered, pinpointing the challenge to compact development and housing affordability that is posed by parking. Warren contends that minimal parking regulations and general expectations toward so-called free parking, are taking an enormous toll. Helping readers, in particular non-specialists, to understand how transport planning, urban development and urban living conditions are intertwined is no small achievement, considering that an environment in which the automobile predominates is the only frame of reference for a large part of the population in the USA, and increasingly in other parts of the world. Helping readers at the same time to imagine and visualize possible futures is remarkable.

The informal American city: from Taco trucks to day labor edited by *Vinit Mukhija* and *Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris*, MIT Press, Cambridge, USA, 2014, 344 pp. ISBN 9780262525787. Growing inequalities often translate into the growth of informal economic activities and social practices. While such circumstances contribute to making some manifestations of informality more visible and tangible, other manifestations of that multifaceted reality remain hidden or go unnoticed. Moreover, as practices evolve, the boundaries between the formal and the informal, understood here in both spatial and social terms, might blur or be the object of renegotiations. The editors and their collaborators explore these dynamics in a series of case studies conducted across the USA, which document and analyse manifestations of informality in an array of urban settings and contexts, ranging for instance from community gardens to street food trucks, or from garage sales and street vending to informal markets of off-street and on-street parking. Collectively, they debunk misconceptions and myths concerning informality – for example, that it always affects poor neighbourhoods and populations, or the belief that formal and informal activities and settings are distinct and easily distinguishable. Though

informality will always exist (p. 295), planners and urban designers have been little motivated to learn about it and draw conclusions for their professional practice. The second part of the book contributes to bridging that gap by exploring some of the implications of informal urbanism for institutional planning.

Performative urbanism: generating and designing urban space edited by *Sophie Wolfrum* and *Nikolai Frhr. v. Brandis*, Jovis Publishers, Berlin, Germany, 2015, 191 pp. ISBN 978-3-86859-304-4. *Performative urbanism* stems from a symposium of the same name held in Munich, Germany in 2013. It is an exploration of the dialectical interplay between the materiality of architecture and the usage and actions that take place in that framework. The argument here is that *space* is produced by that interaction. As a consequence, as a spatial and temporal meeting ground, an architectonic situation is ‘performative’. Some will recognize themes in such formulations developed in linguistics, geography and cultural studies in recent decades. There are both cognitive and practical benefits from paying closer attention to the ways in which space is fabricated, either by the practice of a specialist who draws a map, or by the practices of people who use the physical space for purposes not accounted for by the said map producer. The adjustments between the material context and its user experience reflect the continuing social production of space.

Borrowed city: private use of public space in Seoul by *Marco Bruno*, *Simone Carena* and *Minji Kin*, Damdi Publishing Company, Seoul, Korea, 2013, 227 pp. ISBN 978-89-6801-012-5. This illustrated, visually appealing work on the use of public space by private citizens for their own personal benefits, is in Korean, with an English translation. Even the most secluded city dweller, makes use of public space and its infrastructures. But some people do so more systematically and intensively. They ‘borrow’ the space for a few hours at a time or semi-permanently, for example for commercial activities, agriculture, social gatherings and storage. The authors document and survey systematically the spatial tactics and material devices deployed by these users. Their findings are illustrated in a combination of colour photographs and axonometric drawings. Important

questions are raised about the functioning and status of public space. Lessons can be learned from the ingenuity deployed by the local population for day-to-day adaptations of its built environment. These informal economic and social activities, whether tolerated or actively prohibited by the authorities, are always the objects of informal social negotiations locally. Their social acceptability lies in part in the needs they fulfil for the benefit of the broader community. Some morphologists will find solace in these forms of collective experimentation and engagement with the built environment: the manifestations of spontaneous consciousness are rare in the context of advanced capitalism.

Landscape urbanism and its discontents: dissimulating the sustainable city edited by *Andrés Duany and Emily Talen*, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC, Canada, 2013, 315 pp. ISBN 978-0-86571-740-4. Twenty-one authors, including a number of prominent figures from academic and professional planning circles discuss the shortcomings of Landscape Urbanism (LU). Curiously, the authors all identify with New Urbanism (NU), which they see as a competing paradigm to LU. Some contributors interrogate the relevance of the approach, while others explore the reasons that might explain its appeal. Lines of inquiry include the institutional and broader contexts of political economy that could contribute to the popularity of LU with some decision makers, and the limitations of the approach for addressing some important social issues. Some authors consider whether the approach is based on sound scientific or normative principles. Not surprisingly some NU adherents criticize LU precepts on historical grounds, pointing to the limitations of Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne urban design. Others point to the failure of LU to deliver the ecological benefits that the approach claims to yield. On the one hand, it is argued that LU does not foster the compact urban environments that have the best environmental performance per capita. On the other hand, it is maintained that heavily designed LU landscapes do not usually produce environments that can approach the ecological diversity found in natural settings. Yet NU is not without limitations of its own. It is

healthy for its proponents to reflect on these, as some have modestly started to do here.

Self made city. Berlin: self-initiated urban living and architectural interventions edited by *Kristien Ring*, Jovis Publishers, Berlin, Germany, 2013, 224 pp. ISBN 978-3-86859-167-5. This beautifully illustrated book – in German with an English translation – presents 125 *self-made* projects, comprising essentially residential architecture, but also including a handful of projects at the urban scale. The term *self-made* refers here to projects such as co-operatives – as opposed to public housing or market-driven initiatives. Prior to the year 2000, generous public subsidies combined with favourable urban development policies allowed artists and non-conformist populations, including squatters, to settle in vacant buildings and underused spaces. The times were conducive of experimentation in housing and urban living. When some 15 years ago these conditions ceased, the experimentation was funnelled into privately funded self-determined participative small-scale projects. These initiatives fulfilled a need, while adapting to the particular socio-economic circumstances of residents that market-driven development had failed. In spite of dealing with seemingly difficult conditions, self-initiated projects have produced exemplary residential architecture and urban development in Berlin (p. 16). These projects are illustrated and analysed in *Self made city*. Their selection was based on architectural quality, affordability and social focus, among other things. The circumstances of development, the financing methods, the urban integration, and the innovative architectural solutions were documented for each project. Enriched by interviews with key actors, a remarkable experiment that has delivered high social, environmental and economic benefits is traced. This is timely in light of the fact that scarcity of developable land and roaring real estate prices in Berlin threaten to destroy this type of development. Many planners outside Berlin will probably want to take note of the transformative virtues of an 'urban design geared toward a strategy rather than a result' as journalist Florian Heilmeyer puts it (p. 11).