



## BOOK NOTES

**Repenser l'habitat: donner un sens au logement** edited by *Roderick J. Lawrence* and *Gilles Barbey*, in French and English, Infolio éditions, Gollion, Switzerland, 2014, 405 pp. ISBN 978-2-88474-462-1. Comprising ten chapters: six in English, four in French, with translated abstracts, *Repenser l'habitat* embraces housing at different scales and as it appears in different social, cultural and historical circumstances. The contributions aim to bridge the gap between research and practice. A perspective on 'housing habitability' is developed that considers architectural, behavioural, cultural, economic, political, social and environmental factors contributing to the quality of life of residents (pp. 48-9 and 394). In Part 1, on *Understanding complexity and diversity*, Marion Segaud explores the anthropological question of boundary in housing through a Malaysian perspective. Maria Villela-Petit discusses the relationships between personal and social identity as played out in the appropriation of domestic space. Roderick J. Lawrence seeks ways to overcome the disconnection between housing design, housing policy and the 'cultures of domestic life'. Julia W. Robinson analyses the distinction between domestic residence and institutional housing. Sherry Ahrentzen and Kim Steele discuss the housing needs and spatial requirements of autistic adults. In Part 2, on how action-research in people-environment studies can be translated into design and building practices, Roselyn de Villanova explores the dwelling practices of Portuguese migrant workers who own two residences – one in France and one in Portugal. Carole Després *et al.* analyse the dialectic between residential habitus and built forms over 150 years in the suburbs of Quebec City, Canada. Ombretta Romice and Andrew Paul focus on the UK experience and plea for evidence-based 'creative regeneration'. Marie-Antoinette Glaser introduces a method to analyse changes in use, meaning and values of multi-family residential buildings. Ola Nylander presents an innovative residential project of his own that seeks to insure sustainability and adaptability

over the long term. Narrowly defined, *habitability* has been assimilated to material conditions to be translated into sets of standards and prescriptions. The editors call for a shift to principles that consider the long-term interactions of inhabitants and their residential environments.

**Building for a changing culture and climate: world atlas of sustainable architecture** by *Ulrich Pfammatter*, revised and expanded edition, translated from German by Jim Hudson, Dom Publishers, Berlin, Germany, 2014, 583 pp. ISBN 978-3-86922-282-0. The breadth and scope of this atlas, which presents just under 600 architectural projects from some 58 countries and from all continents, is impressive. It considers aspects such as place and history, as well as 'cultural relationships and connections', which is uncommon in a book on sustainable architecture. The reference to place and time is an invitation to think beyond the strict architectural scale, as far as space is concerned, as well as beyond the design-construction and building life-cycle stages when considering the temporal dimension. Pfammatter invites us to embrace *genius loci*, the 'built cultural memory' and to learn from long-term vernacular experience. Five thematic chapters are each broken down into three major themes that are in turn broken down into topical and problem-oriented design themes. For each of the latter, two to six illustrated case studies are presented. Though chosen for their relevance in contemporary contexts, a significant number of examples are from past centuries. Chapter 1 deals with the *genius loci* and engagement with local built culture. Chapter 2 explores building in extreme situations. Addressing the question of climatic change, Chapter 3 is concerned with such issues as adaptation strategies and bioclimatic architecture. Focusing on materials of the future, Chapter 4 sheds light on biomimetic strategies and, for example, revisits traditional construction methods. Chapter 5 explores architectural memory

through transformation, revitalization and rebuilding and considers such topics as the reintroduction of nature in urban areas and the revitalization of urban fabrics.

**Modeling cities and regions as complex systems: from theory to planning applications**

by Roger White, Guy Engelen and Inge Uljee, MIT Press, Cambridge, USA, 2015, 330 pp. ISBN 978-0-262-02956-8. This is a major contribution on land change simulation modelling, and in particular on the development and use of cellular automata (CA) models. It introduces to urban and regional dynamics an approach based on the theory of self-organizing complex adaptive systems. The technique models spatial dynamics. Relying on CA and other modelling techniques, *Modeling cities and regions* illustrates how simulating the spatial dynamics of urban growth and transformation can help understanding of evolving patterns of land use, distribution of populations and economic activity. Following an introduction to the general characteristics of the approach and a discussion of its potential and limitations, the book provides insights into how to conceive and implement CA-based models. It relies on detailed accounts of development and testing in different contexts over a period of 25 years, including in research linking CA-based models to other demographic, economic and transportation models. The authors contend that models based on complex self-organizing systems are significantly more realistic than other urban and regional models.

**Situational urbanism. Directing postwar modernity: an adaptive methodology for urban transformation** by Otto Paans and Ralf Pasel, Jovis Verlag, Berlin, Germany, 255 pp. ISBN 978-3-86859-258-0. An ambitious study and design project in Overvecht near Utrecht in the Netherlands is employed to introduce an original approach to urban design. The neighbourhood concerned consists mainly of large post-war housing estates. The book is divided into three parts. The first is an introduction to the theoretical orientations that inform the work. The second consists of a series of analyses conducted in Overvecht, and the third is a discussion of the ‘transformative vision’, as set out in diverse design proposals. The research

and design work relies in part on classical methods to examine the socio-economic context and aspects of the built environment at different spatial resolutions. The originality comes more specifically from what the authors term their ‘situational’ methods. Though only loosely related to the *situationist* movement and thought, they find inspiration in notions such as *dérive*, *détournement* and *psycho-geography* that relate to the possibility for the user to instil new personal – and perhaps subversive – meanings to place. The authors find these ideas useful for addressing the problem of ‘non-places’, which are defined as nondescript spaces that deter the development of lasting social relations. They are the polar opposite of ‘anthropological places’ that favour social bonding and are imbued with content and meaning. Much attention is paid to public space and its interface with private space. Public spaces and adjacent spaces are considered from a design standpoint in terms of use, limits and configuration, in order to create conditions that favour sensorial, cognitive, social and even economic engagement with the place. The proposed light-touch approach stands in sharp contrast to the grand design gestures that are characteristic of modernist urbanism.

**The new century of the metropolis: urban enclaves and orientalism** by Tom Angotti,

Routledge, New York, USA, 2013, 198 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-61510-5. This expands on the author’s *Metropolis 2000*, published in 1993, where he groups metropolitan regions into three categories based on their planning regime: the *US metropolis*, characterized by land-use and social-spatial segregation; the *Soviet metropolis*, representing the centrally planned socialist city; and the *dependent metropolis*. The latter category includes the largely economically deprived cities of the developing world, which are subjected to the desiderata of the advanced capitalist powers. But so much has changed in the subsequent 20 years! *The new century of the metropolis* helps in taking the measure of these changes, such as increased interdependence, the ‘financialization’ of the economy, and the increasing role played by real estate and urbanization as economic driving forces. Based on case studies and examples from the US, Latin America, India, Palestine-Israel, China and the former USSR (with

the collaboration of Samuel Stein), Angotti develops further the notion of *dependent urbanization* and introduces the concepts of *urban orientalism* and *enclave urbanism*. *Enclave urbanism* is defined as ‘the tendency towards the fragmentation of cities by class, race, gender and other social dividers’ (p. 22). It produces a sharply divided metropolis, which can reproduce local and global inequalities, and which eludes democratic planning. *Urban orientalism* is equated with ‘the tendency of experts at the center of global power to present their own subjective, culturally-biased views of the rest of the urban world as if they were fact’ (p. 16). Angotti’s arguments are the most compelling when he illustrates how enclavism and so-called orientalism are enmeshed with current forms of capitalism and their associated environmental toll. The economic foundation of urban growth, he contends, is the accumulation and expansion of capital in cities, based in part on the appropriation of resources from rural areas and an insatiable appetite for commodities.

**Building the urban environment: visions of the organic city in the United States, Europe and Latin America** by *Harold L. Platt*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, USA, 2015, 301 pp. ISBN 978-1-4399-1237-9. This book documents the rise and decline of the modernist’s *organic city* paradigm. The metaphor of the city as a living organism permeates modern planning since its origins, from Geddes to Mumford and Le Corbusier. Platt posits that understanding how these paradigmatic ideas have led to conflicting interpretations and varying modes of operationalization is key to appreciating more fully the history of urban change after the Second World War. The struggles and shifting positions of power between *planners*, *policy makers* and the *grass roots* play a central role here. The expression ‘grass roots’ refers to city people engaged in collective acts of informal planning and resistance against public policy (p. 9). Three periods are covered. *Constructing modernism* explores the immediate post-war period (1945–60). *Deconstructing modernism* analyses the uprising against the planners (1960–68) and the contesting of the organic city (1968–80). Relying on an impressive bibliography, chapters alternate between a discussion of theories of planning and case studies on practices

of city planning in Europe, United States and Latin America. The book retraces the contours and the vicissitudes of an approach to urban development that had postulated the rational control of nature and society, and that has been instrumentalized by the actions of local and national growth machines and their faith in the ‘technologically sublime’. We learn how this approach lost its ascendancy to contestation and the production of hybrid spaces that are the result of environmental and socio-political mediations in action. New light is shed on ways in which environmental and planning debates have been, and still are, intertwined.

**Paris / Babel: une mégalopole européenne** edited by *David Mangin*, Éditions de la Villette, Paris, France, 2013, 413 pp. ISBN 978-2-915456-79-0. This is a compendium of ideas developed by the architect and urban planner David Mangin with the collaboration of his students in architecture at Marne-la-Vallée. In its form and content, *Paris / Babel* reflects both the breadth and scope of Mangin’s knowledge of Paris as well as his ability to navigate between heuristic endeavours and projections into possible futures, and above all, his ability to communicate complex ideas to a large public. The first part of the book is an attempt to decipher the physical and spatial forms of Paris, its recent transformations, and the pulse of its daily population movements and activities. It aims at making sense of multiple territories and temporalities. Complex realities are communicated by a wide variety of simple but compelling diagrams accompanied by short texts. The mapping of the evolution of transportation infrastructures, samples of residential tissues, and various specialized amenities, is accompanied by the mapping of such things as varied ‘semi-wholesale’ Asian retail facilities in the Belleville neighbourhood, and the cartographic and photographic survey of the daily car commutes of the parents of young children. The second part explores scenarios, tendencies and options concerning a number of themes and issues. Rather than precise projects, it presents processes, conveyed also in diagrammatic illustrations. In addition to contributing to the understanding of Paris and introducing stimulating ideas for the future, this book is an exceptional pedagogical tool.