



BOOK NOTES

Habitat: vernacular architecture for a changing planet edited by *Sandra Piesik*, Thames and Hudson, London, UK, 2017, 600 pp. ISBN 978-1-4197-2880-8. In 600 pages, 1000 illustrations, and input from over 120 contributors, *Habitat* pursues two sets of objectives. First, it traces a portrait of vernacular architecture around the world. Secondly, it responds to the Paris Agreement invitation to develop adaptation strategies based ‘on the best available science combined with traditional knowledge systems, by surveying various experiments that engage vernacular knowledge, including the use of local materials and techniques in contemporary buildings’. Building traditions are examined according to the Köppen-Geiger five global climate zones, complemented by a geological map of the world. Each case study describes the geography and climate, materials, construction techniques, and building plan and form. The cases presented trace what is possibly the most extensive compendium of vernacular building traditions. The second part of *Habitat* explores, in a series of appendices, ways of capitalizing on the invaluable source of knowledge that vernacular traditions constitute. The first presents examples of ‘contemporary vernacular’. The second surveys traditional built-in strategies for seismic, flood, and typhoon protection. The third presents different cases through the lenses of the science of materials. Topics explored include building with plants, softwood, bamboo and snow; the thermal properties of plant and earth-based materials; and textile applications for architecture. *Habitat* is of value both to the general public and those involved in the making of the built environment.

Writings on architecture and the city by *George Baird*, Artifice Books on Architecture, London, UK, 2015, 291 pp. ISBN 978-1-908967-54-1. This collection of essays by architect and urbanist Professor Emeritus George Baird, first published between 1967 and 2013,

is organized in six parts. Each explores ways to make sense of architecture based on different conceptual frameworks. *Architecture and semiotics* (four essays) includes one of Baird’s best known contributions, ‘La dimension amoureuse en architecture’. This and other essays find inspiration in structural anthropology, linguistics, and semiotics. *Architectural theory between structuralism and phenomenology* expands the frame to include a phenomenological perspective. Perhaps the most interesting section for the readers of this journal, *Urban morphology and building typology* (four essays), introduces Baird’s thoughts and empirical work in Toronto, later expanded to other North American contexts. *Critical biography* explores in eight essays the work of architects such as Rem Koolhaas, Ignasi de Solà-Morales, Colin Rowe and Joseph Rykwert, who aimed at developing alternative approaches to modernism, with mixed results. *Public space* presents Baird’s reflections in three essays. *On the ‘critical’ in contemporary architectural theory* concludes the book with two essays. This collection can be read as a historical chronicle of some important theoretical debates unfolding in architecture as reactions against modernist doctrine and prescriptions. What permeates it is engagement with ordinary built environments and urban contexts in symbolic, experiential, structural – including morphological – terms, and exploration of architectural propositions that aim at doing so.

The social role of buildings: an account of materiality and meaning in urban outcomes, by *Lauren Dean*, Stockholm Studies in Sociology, New Series No. 65, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden, 2017, 195pp. ISBN 978-91-7649-602-2. Stemming from a dissertation in sociology at Stockholm University, this book investigates the genesis and transformation of a nineteenth-century multi-dwelling building type known as the *ciudad* in Santiago de Chile. Though not informed by the process typology

theory per se, it provides an interesting dialogue around the notion of architectural type as it is understood by morphologists. Starting with a review of how sociology has – only sporadically and scantily – approached the material world, such an investigation is proposed along with a framework to do so. Key to the argument is the idea that sociological thinking has in the past had a tendency to conceive manufactured objects either as manifestations of human labour, as a commodity, or as a reflection or embodiment of social forms and structures. More recent approaches have recognized that artefacts, including buildings, can be at the centre of reciprocal relations. Dean develops the argument that material things have a *constitutive* role. She aims at deciphering societal, material and signification changes in the appearance and later transformations of the *cit * building type, considered at the urban, neighbourhood and architectural scales. Mobilizing a variety of methods, such as morphogenetic and typological analysis, participant observation, photographic survey and image analysis, the analyses trace the genesis of a type. A study of the use of the term *cit * reveals variations. At one time the term appeared to connote lower-class. Recently the Barrio Italia witnessed the opposite phenomenon. When the conversion of *cit s* for commercial use increased their prestige, the name started to be used to designate commercial spaces resulting from the conversion of buildings of other types.

Stadt in der stadt bauen. Building the city within the city edited by *IBA Hamburg* and *Uli Hellweg*, in German with English translation, Jovis Verlag GmbH, Berlin, Germany, 2014, 208 pp. ISBN 978-3-86859-285-6. This book reports outcomes of the International Building Exhibition known as IBA Hamburg. The IBA is a German planning and development instrument aimed at developing and showcasing new concepts and approaches, and also intervening in particular areas – in this case southern Hamburg districts. A special investment programme by the City of Hamburg helped to leverage large public and private investments for the duration of the project from 2006 to 2013. The city has since mandated IBA Hamburg to keep operating as a public project developer. *Building the city within the city* documents the groundwork of a continuing

urban experiment, highlighting key principles, purposes, and delivery mechanisms. The expression ‘within the city’ encompasses both material and social aspects. IBA Laboratories involves both experts and local citizens. Noteworthy innovations include those in building technology; architecture; physical and land-use planning; energy infrastructure; public spaces; and community planning. Of considerable interest is Hamburg’s new approach to the century-old tradition of IBAs in Germany, and in particular the renewed governance model for urban development that stems from it. This is the creation of a public area-specific development agency, which has signed a contract with about 130 local institutions and civil society associations to aid participation and decision-making.

(R )concilier architecture et r habilitation de l’habitat by *Christian Moley*,  ditions le Moniteur, Antony, France, 2017, 280pp. ISBN 978-2-281-14126-9. The current wave of refurbishment of multi-unit residential buildings inherited from the 30-year post-war boom in France is the focus of attention in this book. As in numerous countries, the period witnessed large-scale production of relatively cheap housing, often in large housing estates and following CIAM precepts. The principal concern is significant architectural refurbishing and urban regeneration projects aimed at improving the quality of the built environment and quality of life. Many examples are referenced, including 181 that are illustrated and analysed at some length. Most are social housing, including a number of buildings held in private co-ownership. Well illustrated with evocative ‘before and after’ colour photographs and architectural drawings, the case studies are presented in a classification of projects according to their scale, architectural types and the nature of the transformations. Chapters four to nine deal in turn with operations centred on the dwellings: the fa ades; semi-public spaces; the building base and its surroundings; added floors and densification; and, finally, building extensions, urban form and mixed uses. Within these categories, attention is given to the specific circumstances, constraints and opportunities associated with different building types – such as the towers and mid-rise concrete-slabs (*barres*) – and urban tissue conditions. This work is a call to recognize *r habilitation* as an architectural discipline

in its own right. Morphologists will appreciate the explicit references made to the typological methods focused on ordinary architecture and its broader urban context. Architects, urban planners and designers confronted with the material degradation of modern housing can learn from the French experience.

What's in a name? Talking about urban peripheries edited by *Richard Harris* and *Charlotte Vorms*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Canada, 2017, 358 pp. ISBN 978-1-4426-2696-6. Sixteen collaborators joined editors Harris and Vorms to reflect on the vocabulary and terminology applied to the peripheries of Asian, European, and North- and South-American cities. Students of urban form and urbanization more broadly can gain insight from this set of studies of the lexicon used to depict, and reflect on, the expansion of cities at their outskirts. Harris and Vorms warn us about the pitfalls of linguistic imperialism, as epitomized in the hegemony of English language in research and international policy-making, which can lead to the projection of 'Anglosphere' concepts and realities into quite different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the urban periphery is multifaceted. For example, the city's expansion can be the result of outward, organized population migration, or the influx of populations into so-called informal settlements. Whether, and how, a reality is named is dependent on the ways in which global and local contexts are intertwined, and varies according to who is talking, when and to whom. The analysis of such dynamics sheds light on the types of urbanization at the local level while creating the possibility to develop broader theoretical formulations based on regional and international comparison. The same can be said of urban morphology. This book considers thirteen case studies in addition to a conceptual contribution by Christian Topalov. The case studies are organized in three groups. The first investigates in five different cities whether there exists a general consensual word to signify the urban fringe. The second delves into the naming of low-income areas at the urban fringes of four cities, while shedding light on 'processes and dimensions of stigmatization'. The last group comprises four contributions on

the types of, and attempts at, social differentiation as denoted by the designation of new residential developments at the urban periphery.

Ibid./ in the same place: nine lessons and six possibilities about on-site resilient revitalisation strategies for informal neighbourhoods, edited by *Oscar Carracedo*, ORO Editions, Singapore, and National University of Singapore, 2016, 178 pp. ISBN 978-981-09-9316-0. The argument is made here that so-called informal settlements are indeed 'strong forms of self-organised and self-built environment' as well as physical, infrastructural and social assets that call for rigorous analysis and cautious and thoughtful engagement on the part of planning and architecture professionals. Based on the analysis of some 30 cases of revitalization in Asia and Latin America, a systemic approach is proposed: nine 'lessons learned' are translated into principles and concrete sets of actions. These are the subjects of the first part of *Ibid./*. Each is substantiated and graphically illustrated by pertinent examples. The first lesson, *Connect*, concerns the need to spatially integrate the informal city within the formal one by physical connections, as a way to foster social and economic opportunities. *Collectivise* refers to the importance of public collective space, particularly as a means of social cohesion. *Decentralise* points to spread out decision making and public involvement. *Train and educate* stresses the empowering virtues of initiatives in such matters. *Shelter* approaches housing as a dynamic system of continuous adaptation rather than as a final product. *Intensify* refers both to the creation of transformative synergies and strategies maximizing formal and informal sectors' toil and investments. *Activate* is about mechanisms and strategies that could catalyse 'autonomous upgrading'. *Secure* refers to ensuring legal tenure status. Finally, *Map* signifies documenting to analyse physical and social contexts. The second part of *Ibid./* comprises studio projects developed at the National University of Singapore and the Technical University of Madrid. They exemplify in detail how the aforementioned principles can be translated into concrete interventions.