



BOOK NOTES

Good buildings on a small planet by *Rasmus Rune Nielson*, Arvinius + Orfeus Publishing, Stockholm, Sweden, 2017, 239 pp. ISBN 978-91-87543-89-0. This is an account of the innovative work at different scales by eight Danish architectural firms. As stated by its author, this book does not have high theoretical ambitions. Yet it seeks to achieve conceptual clarity. The doughnut model by economist Kate Raworth is one key source of inspiration. In it, a regenerative and distributive economic system is conceived as a space (a doughnut) bounded *outward* by an ecological ceiling that marks the limits beyond which nine of Earth's life supporting systems are irremediably compromised, and *inward* by a so-called social foundation boundary within which twelve basic social needs (including food, housing, energy and social equity) must adequately be met for all. A central tenet of the proposed approach is to decouple as much as possible *growth*, which is necessary to serve social needs, from *resource consumption*, which compromises ecological supporting systems. The circular economy (in which wastes are reintegrated in the cycle as resources) and the sharing economy (in which tools and goods are pooled) are seen as promising avenues to foster such decoupling. Raworth's model is then articulated with the *Copenhagen model for climate adaptation and city nature* (p. 22). Also made of concentric rings, the latter model illustrates, in planning and architectural terms, the services that nature and biodiversity (the middle ring) can provide with regard to climatic adaptation and other environmental challenges as represented in the outer ring (for example, food provision and CO₂ reduction), and services contributing to quality of life (sensing, community building, belonging, coexistence and learning) in the inner ring. The latter are deemed the human drivers of sustainable development. The whole demonstration is meant to emphasize that successful transitioning must not be an exercise focused on reducing, restraining, and abandoning conveniences and amenities,

but should lay emphasis on increasing the quality of life for the multitude.

City riffs: urbanism, ecology, place by *Richard Plunz*, Columbia University GSAPP and Lars Müller Publishers, Zurich, Switzerland, 2017, 160 pp. ISBN 978-3-03778-500-3. This collection of essays and interviews by Columbia University architecture and urban design professor Richard Plunz revisits work conducted with his students in European, American and Asian cities between 1993 and 2016. Plunz develops the idea of a 'field-based urbanism', by analogy to field ecology. Field urbanism, he contends, provides 'context forensics', that can supply the motif for the production of city 'riffs', namely urban design interventions anchored in the local building fabric and cultural experience. Part personal journal, part essays, the case studies will elicit a variable level of interest depending on the reader's familiarity with the contexts discussed. Taken as a whole, the essays speak more about the influence of the general conditions and local iterations of political economy on the material development of cities, than about physical planning and design per se. The book contains very little graphic material, save for the final 'plates'. These help to illustrate the afterword, entitled 'nesting', in which Plunz briefly develops the concept inspired by field ecology and the work of Gianfranco Caniggia on building types – according to which it is possible to identify generic similarities in 'spatial patterning', as well as 'nested hierarchies', which could inform urban design.

Parallel cities: the multilevel metropolis by *Jennifer Yoos* and *Vincent James*, edited by Andrew Blauvelt, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA, 2016, 240 pp. ISBN 978-1-9359-6312-7. Abundantly researched and generously illustrated, *Parallel cities* begins by tracing the origins of the multi-level city to two sources. The first is utopian attempts at developing

new types of communal spaces. The second is rationalist and functional approaches to tackling the problems of the industrial city, associated with the promises of technological advances in transportation and building construction. Examples include Eugène Hénard's *Cities of the Future* in the 1910s; futuristic visions of Manhattan; and Le Corbusier and CIAM urbanism. The multi-level city ideas were manifested in concrete projects in the UK from the 1950s, before spreading to the USA and Asia from the 1960s onward. The functionalist precept of spatial segregation of modes of transportation became central, while social utopian proposals rapidly receded. Yoos and James identify a tension between what they deem a *communitarian conception* and a *cosmopolitan conception* of the three-dimensional city. The former seeks the creation of novel spaces that favour social interactions, whereas the latter is based on the assumption that the systems act as a matrix and have the potential to grow infinitely. Whether utopian or technocratic and functionalist in nature, the insistence on creating an alternative city that departs from thousands of years of urban civilization might well shed light on our 'imagined fears of the city' to paraphrase Anthony Vidler.

Tabula plena: forms of urban preservation edited by Bryony Roberts, Lars Müller Publishers, Zurich, Switzerland, 2016, 256 pp. ISBN 978-3-03778-491-4. This book was stimulated by a terrorist attack in 2011 against a government complex in Oslo, Norway, which gave rise to a heated debate between proponents of historical preservation and those of demolition and reconstruction. A collaborative team formed by the Oslo School of Architecture and Design (OSAD) and the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation (GSAPP) challenged the authorities' decision in favour of demolition and reconstruction. A third approach was devised that addressed the broader question of the 'unproductive opposition between the interests of architectural preservation and urban growth'. It stresses the importance of mobilizing the various protagonists of urban development, including specialists from the disciplines of preservation, architecture and urban planning, in order to embrace the complexities involved in the 'analysis

and alteration of the existing'. Four sections and an addendum detail these ideas. The first section centres on agency. Section two sheds light on planning and design strategies deployed in eleven conceptual or realized projects spanning the last 60 years or so that redefine the terms of engagement with inherited built forms. The common principle is to devise interventions that redefine part-to-whole relationships to ensure coherence at the scale of a site comprised of diverse built objects. The third section focuses on the collaborative master plan produced by the OSAD and the GSAPP for the Oslo government site. The fourth section explores the pedagogical implications of the novel approach for the design and planning professions.

Interpreting basic buildings by Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei, Altralinea Edizioni, Florence, Italy, 2017, 240 pp. ISBN 978-88-94869-07-1. This is a new edition of a classic in the field of urban morphology, edited by Nicola Marzot, who also provides an introduction and a critical glossary. Initially published in Italian under the title *Composizione architettonica e tipologia 1: Lettura dell'edilizia di base* in 1979, this opus has been translated into Spanish in 1985 and French in 2000, and was first translated into English in 2001. As highlighted by Jeremy Whitehand in his foreword, few authors have the long-lasting impact on their discipline that Gianfranco Caniggia has had on urban morphology. Co-author Gian Luigi Maffei points to some of the reasons for such an achievement. Starting with his empirical work on Como, Caniggia made a series of fundamental theoretical advances, revolving in particular around the notions of type and typological process. The fundamental contribution of the second generation of Italian morphologists, such as Caniggia, Maffei, Paolo Maretto and Giancarlo Cataldi, has been to translate Saverio Muratori's philosophical explorations and brilliant intuitions into a scientific apparatus. Caniggia and Maffei's book is seminal for outlining a method of morphogenetic enquiry and for articulating key theoretical notions that are still at the core of the urban morphological research programme. It remains to this day one of the most synthetic presentations of the process typological theoretical framework.