



BOOK REVIEWS

Architettura come lingua. Processo e progetto (Architecture as language. Process and design) by *Matteo Ieva*, Franco Angeli, Milan, Italy, 292 pp. ISBN 978–889–1779397.

The book *Architettura come lingua. Processo e progetto (Architecture as language. Process and design)* begins with an extensive introduction by Giuseppe Strappa, consisting of a comprehensive essay on the intentions, arguments and theoretical position of its author. This writing precisely evokes the tone of the volume and the richness of its stratified layers of meaning. The book, organized into three sections summarized by a clear and at the same time complex premise, includes some unpublished writings prepared for conferences, seminars and articles. It represents a real treatise on architecture and its relationship with the city, which refers to the Italian tradition of urban studies, from Gustavo Giovannoni, Saverio Muratori, Gianfranco Caniggia, Paolo Maretto, Claudio D'Amato, Giuseppe Strappa and – in a more experimental and intermittent way – by architects such as Giuseppe Samonà, Carlo Aymonino, Aldo Rossi and Vittorio Gregotti. The relationship between city and architecture was the main component of twentieth-century Italian architecture. This is, however, contrasted by the *separation* between architecture and urban planning today. The Italian tradition of urban studies is re-interpreted by Matteo Ieva within this new paradigm that has emerged in recent years.

The first section of the book, 'General reflection on questions of method', summarizes the interpretive processes within an idea of knowledge intended as an operative analysis of the fundamental invariants that are at the basis of living itself. Themes that appear in this section include: the project as the creative outcome of a historical re-writing where the innovation is the evolution of the existing; the critical and at the same time

re-constructive essence of the project; architecture as a product of a lexicon which is articulated in the dialectic between language and word, that is in the existence of individual entities that arise from a general condition defined by the complete set of entities, mysteriously intertwining.

The second section deals with the concepts of city and urban morphology. Here Ieva, always with great explanatory clarity, addresses the relationship between type and model, the meaning and value of the urban form, the settlement evolution described in terms of continuity and discontinuity, and the fabric in its relationship with the route. The theme of regeneration is also discussed, where Ieva, distinct from often dominating dogmatism to freeze settlement logics in rigid forms, considers theory not as a dogma but as a cognitive system that must be able to decipher changing conditions that affect the living as a whole, in order to identify the most appropriate responses to the transformations induced by variations of cultural convictions, of the politics production: in short, of the society.

The third section of the book concerns the reading of urban fabrics. Trani, Liège and Valletta are the cities used to exemplify how urban analysis, through history, can increase the understanding of different phases of a settlement evolution, the relationships between the fabric and the buildings and the role of the different spaces of the city, from private to public, and from streets to squares. This understanding can, in turn, reveal the nature of urban settlements and their potential for new contents and purposes that can be worthwhile to pass from latent possibility to the test of reality. Urban analysis – by which we could include the Situationist drifts, the writings of Charles Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin – allows us to decode the city by identifying its layers and epochs, the evident and hidden meanings, the organic and disorganic parts or, as Bruno Zevi said, dissonant contexts. In summary, urban analysis corresponds

to the story of city life, to the scientific and creative investigation of a process in its continuous becoming.

The book reconfirms, with a remarkable conceptual accuracy accompanied by a clear and essential prose, the centrality of the study of living at different scales: in the dimensions of the landscape/territory, in the urban form and in the buildings. These are three ambits which are completely inseparable, and that architecture unifies. Architecture as a language expresses the human community as an entity which, recalling Friedrich Hölderlin, 'lives poetically'.

Architecture as a language. Process and design is an important book. It complements the voluminous literature on urban studies and presents knowledge that has almost completely disappeared from our schools of architecture. In the age of globalization, cities seem to grow randomly, accepting the absence of an authentic relationship between the city itself and architecture. Routes and fabrics are separated, and the buildings are no longer conceived and designed as concordant expressions of the city, but are sometimes in opposition to its memory by appearing as uprooted and unproductive realities. Places have disappeared in favour of widespread 'atopy' (non-places); public space has become a functional appendage of consumption; the physicality of the city is replaced in the collective imagination by its virtual simulacrum. Matteo Ieva's book highlights the importance of building in relation with the city, their renewal and continuity without which the word architecture only reveals an imposing 'celibate machine'.

Franco Purini, Department of Architecture and Design, Sapienza, University of Rome, Via Antonio Gramsci, 53, 00197 Rome, Italy. E-mail: franco.purini@virgilio.it

Wasser Stadt Wien. Eine Umweltgeschichte

by G. Haidvogel, F. Hauer, S. Hohensinner, E. Raith, M. Schmid, C. Sonnlechner, C. Spitzbart-Glasl and V. Winiwarter, ZUG Zentrum für Umweltgeschichte, Universität für Bodenkultur, Vienna, Austria, 2019, 495 pp. ISBN 978-3-900932-67-1.

The book is directed at Vienna's inhabitants, in order to make research, published in English in scientific journals over recent years, more accessible.

Nevertheless, this richly-illustrated book is also of great interest for urban planners and designers interested in the interrelation of water, urban development and urban form beyond Vienna.

The original title translates into *Water city Vienna. An environmental history*. It results from the cooperation of the Institute of Hydro-Biology and Water Management, the Institute of Social Geography (both at the University of Life Sciences, Vienna), and the Institute of Urban Design and Landscape Architecture (Urban Design Research Unit at TU Vienna). This cooperation and interdisciplinary approach shape the book. For example Chapter 7 describes the catalogue of methods and how drawing on practices from hydro-biology, water management, and urban planning and design are converged in morphological descriptions. The same chapter also explains how the digitization of historical information in a geographic information system allowed conclusions to be drawn about the relationships between human intervention in the water system and their effects on biodiversity, economy, and the daily lives of the inhabitants.

For the readers of *Urban Morphology*, chapter 5, 'Formen der Stadt' ('Morphology of the city'), is of specific interest. It builds upon the earlier chapters, which present the landscape transformation through the technical (de-)regulation of the creeks and rivers of Vienna (Chapter 2), how the city dealt with the risks and potentials provided by water (Chapter 3) and how water was used as a resource for the city (Chapter 4). The first section of Chapter 5 reminds us that, although most tributaries of the river Danube are channelled underground, water is still one of the strongest 'urban planners'. Until the mid-nineteenth century, the settlement extension of Vienna was directed towards the west, following the rivers and valleys coming from the Vienna forest. Until the present day the radial main streets of the otherwise very rectangular *Gründerzeit* city, referring to the tremendous economic upswing in the mid-nineteenth century, follow their path. Several sub-chapters trace the morphological transformation and the related interaction between technology, society settlement dynamics and architecture along those creeks and rivers.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Vienna extended towards the River Danube, which was made possible by intensive regulation of the Danube and the Danube canal, which formed an island, now the second and twentieth districts of the city. Section 5.3 illustrates how different spatial relation with the river, like the stability of the