

first half of the volume, the remainder of the work more directly confronts the historical role of urban planning in shaping the suburb. This part opens, somewhat surprisingly, with an overview of the development of new towns in Singapore – highly directed suburban expansions which stand in stark contrast to the previous case studies. Next, Corsini investigates the effects of the disconnection in architectural vocabulary between Rome's housing projects and historic city. Stanilov, however, offers the most scathing indictment of the potential weaknesses of planning, showing how a sprawling regional shopping centre outside Cincinnati grew with the direct involvement and co-operation of local planning authorities. The remaining chapters then examine the roles of planners, developers, and citizens in shaping the future of the suburb. Topics covered include efforts to remodel and retrofit Swedish public housing to modern architectural styles and energy standards, the effect of Portland, Oregon, USA's urban growth boundary on the morphology of new developments, and debates over official conservation for aging English suburbs.

While the two halves of the book raise intriguing ideas, several weaknesses stifle the strength of the volume as a whole. Perhaps the most significant of these is the sparseness of the editorial commentary through most of the work. Although Stanilov and Scheer provide a short introduction to the work, it seems tangential to many of the issues raised in the chapters. The editors' introductions to each of the book's four parts are even briefer, functioning more as outlines than as explorations of the common themes among the essays. A clearer articulation of these themes – for instance, a more explicit discussion of differing attitudes toward planning as a cause of suburban variation, or an application of the principles proposed at the end of the volume's first half to the cases discussed in its second half – would make the work far more cohesive. Furthermore, the varying standards of illustration among the eleven chapters can be frustrating to the reader. While most essays are well-appointed with clear and relevant maps and photographs, those on Singapore and Rio de Janeiro – areas with which many readers may not be familiar – are notably minimally illustrated. Public housing in Singapore forms an important counterpoint to many of the other case studies, yet its morphology is presented primarily through abstract, often poorly-labelled schematic maps and not a single photograph.

Both of these weaknesses, however, are fairly minor. While many of the diverse ideas threaded through these case studies are not immediately

apparent, they are a feast for the dedicated reader. Stanilov and Scheer offer the reader a wide-ranging and thought-provoking review of suburban morphology, presenting both new insights on familiar suburban landscapes and an introduction to alternative paths.

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Morphologie urbaine. Géographie, aménagement et architecture de la ville, by Rémy Allain, Armand Colin, Paris, France, 2004, 254pp. ISBN 2-200-26262-0.

This book is a comprehensive coverage of the different components of urban morphology.¹ It addresses the spatial and social relationships involved at every scale of urban form. The author aims to cover in a synthetic way, and with reference to major theoretical works, the main characteristics of the Italian, British and French schools of urban morphology. From the perception of urban reality, to the study of its constituent parts, and finally to development and redevelopment processes (*rénovation urbaine*), this book complements the main publications dedicated to urban morphology in French in the last 5 years.

The intended principal readership is students of architecture, urban planning and geography. The book's structure and content accord with city planners' preoccupations with such contemporary questions as the renewal of the urban fabric and gentrification. The diachronic approach found in the book *Formes urbaines*,² which concentrates on a single scale of investigation, is supplemented in this book by an attempt to systematize complex relationships at various scales. In the absence of a glossary, the reading of this book becomes even more profitable if accompanied by the recent book by Gauthiez,³ albeit that not all the complex processes described here are systematically defined in Gauthiez's '*vocabulaire*'.

The five core chapters of the book (namely Chapter 3 on *La macroforme: morphogénèse et contrôle*; Chapter 4 on *Plan et maillage: le dessin des rues*; Chapter 5 on *De la maille à la parcelle*; Chapter 6 on *Volume urbain et tissu constructif*; and Chapter 7 on *Rues, places et parcs: les espaces publics en tissu continu*) give a sequential analysis,

at various scales, of the different dimensions and components of urban form. At each scale considerable insight is provided, combined with excellent self-explanatory figures and many examples. In the following chapters, the use of a systemic approach also offers the possibility for the author to give some clues to the study of various 'old' and 'new' processes, such as the vertical city, urban sprawl and urban renewal.

A clear overview of urban morphological concepts is provided. From a conceptual point of view, the first two chapters are surely the richest of the entire book. In Chapter 1 (*Formes urbaines et paysages urbains*) there are three main issues for urban morphology: an epistemological embedding, a systemic approach and a semantic questioning. This chapter is concerned with specific meanings of 'urban form' and 'cityscape'. It starts with the ambiguity of the concept of form, which is related to, on the one hand, a perceived reality (a phenomenological point of view) and, on the other hand, the expression of a constructed reality (a constructivist point of view). He explores both the perceived and experienced urban landscape, linked to and influenced by, for example, the position of the observer, the emotions and the rhythms of discovering the city. This approach is quite close to Henri Lefebvre's tripartite distinction (*espace perçu, espace conçu* and *espace vécu*) and therefore gives an appealing epistemological embedding of the discipline. Rémy Allain echoes here some current issues of French social theory, which have also been studied by some American geographers, such as Edward Soja.⁴ In doing so the author combines various sources of knowledge, such as the sociology of perception and the geographical analysis of landscapes inspired by phenomenology and adapted to the city, and provides an interesting framework for work in urban design and urban studies linked directly to urban morphology.

Allain's systemic approach uses the interlocking of scales as the main thread of his exposition. It leads us to a robust intellectual construction of the complex relationships between forms, means (*moyens*) and ideologies. Aiming at a cross-disciplinary integration, this book provides an excellent, comprehensible method for a more global study of urban morphology, including the historical understanding of urban systems as a whole. As every system is historically determined, urban morphologists should deal simultaneously with the evolution of the built environment and the evolution of functional and productive systems. By doing so, full account is taken of the temporal dimension, seen as another kind of scale for morphological

study. This multi-scale analysis allows the specific morphological sub-system (built forms), to be grasped. When combined with economic and political sub-systems, the main aspects of the configuration of the urban system (*système urbain*) are covered.

In the first chapter there is also a very interesting, although very short, discussion of the semantics of urban morphology. The author chooses Albert Lévy's spatial terms, 'urban distribution' (*distribution urbaine*) and 'urban conformation' (*conformation urbaine*), to analyse the meaning of urban facts. Urban distribution informs us about the relative position-relationships, like north-south, in-out, or continuity-discontinuity, which express social links and their characteristic representations. Urban conformation, as a subsumed concept of urban distribution, is better understood as a relational system of the component elements. It results, for example, in the geometry of street networks and the polarization of forms. If we follow the logic exposed here, it becomes possible to reduce the concept of urban fabric to an instantiation of the global concept of urban conformation.

This idea of 'spatial language' still leaves open a wide range of possible semantic questions about urban form. In fact, the concept of 'language' found here is chiefly metaphorical. Thus, by basing the semantic analysis on an analogy of its constructive principles only, and without fully developing the methodological tools of linguistics, the author risks reducing the semantics of urban form to its figurative use only. In other terms one can surely build an interpretative model starting with the concept of urban fabric, which is to be understood as the set of physical elements working as a system, though one must also understand it as the result of several other systems, each one having its own expression. This singularity can therefore be called the condition of unicity of urban form. Although urban form is multiple in its expression as a result of different processes, in its temporal and spatial scales and in the ways we perceive it, it is unique as a signifying structure. Indeed, morphological structures are meaningful because of their representation, but also because of the act of utterance. In fact, the historical context in which the interpretation process is performed is essential to the comprehension of the relational system (synchronic point of view). This argument is reassuring in that the semantic model used in urban morphology comes within the scope of pragmatics, initiated by Charles S. Peirce.

At the end of this complex chapter, Rémy Allain

describes the main methods and sources for the analysis of urban form, which are developed in the following chapters. Here, the sources and the scales of analysis are well described in a very short but relevant way. This methodology, together with the systemic approach and the relational semantic system, is the framework for the construction of a 'grammar' and can provide a useful paradigm for a systematic study of urban form.

To complete the requirements of the dynamic analysis, the diachronic point of view is then specified, in Chapter 2 on *L'économie et l'utopie: les facteurs explicatifs des formes urbaines*. This deals with the concept of process. Here, the author develops his argument by deconstructing different causal modes: first, he shows the influence of each cause (social, economic, political and cultural) separately over the evolution of urban form. Then, by using again the systemic analysis of the interaction of different causes, he gives a comprehensive insight into the complexity of morphological processes.

This approach, seen as a system of complex causality, is based on a dialectical point of view in which the confrontation between processes and inertial elements is the main explanatory engine of morphological changes. Indeed, the creation and transformation of the city shape is analysed via the dynamics induced by socio-economic developments, innovative techniques and cultural or political influences on the production of forms. These productive forces encounter a 'site resistance' illustrated by topography and cultural legacy. Here Allain uses Fernand Braudel's conjuncture cycles (the French traditional analysis of temporal, economic and historical analysis of urban growth) as the main framework for the economic study of cities and shows the difference between the Kondratieff cycle of about 50 years and the Conzenian concept of the morphological period. This analysis is therefore completed with the examination of the cultural filters and 'unconscious schemes', called by the author 'utopias', that counterbalance the importance of the economic trends. By doing so, he aims to generalize this multi-causal influence as the main temporal key to the comprehension of the evolution of urban form but avoids deterministic and cyclical types of explanation.

This book can be regarded as a very useful bridge between a classical descriptive and aesthetic approach to old places and manuals on urban studies, which still see the city only as the 'spatial bucket' for social and economic processes. It is also the starting point for a renewal of interest in the

dynamics of urban form and its multiple interaction with social theory. In this sense this book reflects an excellent and contemporary analysis, showing that the main questions about the future of city forms cannot be simply thought of, or taught, as an old and dusty discipline. The definition of our twenty-first century's inhabited space is not reduced to museum or generic cities, but instead is full of opportunities for the reinvention of urban form with a better understanding of historically complex processes.

Notes

1. Special thanks to Sylvain Malfroy for his advice on a draft of this review and to Jeremy Whitehand for his corrections to the final draft.
2. Panerai, Ph., Castex, J. and Depaule, J-Ch. (1977) *Formes urbaines, de l'îlot à la barre* (Dunod, Paris). See also Panerai, Ph., Castex, J. and Depaule, J-Ch., English edition and additional material by Ivor Samuels, translated by Olga Vitale Samuels (2004) *Urban forms: the death and life of the urban block* (Architectural Press, Oxford).
3. Gauthiez, B. (2003) *Espace urbain. Vocabulaire et morphologie* (Editions du Patrimoine, Paris).
4. Soja, E.W. (2000) *Postmetropolis: critical studies of cities and regions* (Blackwell, Oxford).

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Building Utopia: erecting Russia's first modern city, 1930 by Richard Cartwright Austin, Kent State University Press, Kent, Ohio, 2004, 225 pp. ISBN 0-87338-730-9.

Building Utopia combines family biography with business and revolutionary history, telling the story of the Austin Company's efforts to design and construct a factory town near the Russian town of Nizhnii Novgorod in the early 1930s. The narrative revolves around a hitherto untouched source – namely, letters sent by 25 year-old Allen Austin, then a young engineer working in Nizhnii Novgorod, to his father Wilbert Austin, Austin Company owner and head, in Cleveland, Ohio. By adding commentary, background detail, and