

subjects, which I particularly enjoyed.

And if she wishes to pursue the contrast with modernism, I would like to know more about the two architects she mentions – Ali Tur and Chérubin – and their buildings. Judging from the photographs and the author's own comments, most buildings in these towns are owner designed and built. Nevertheless, it is architects that set the standards and provide the ideal. Related to design and construction, I would like to know more about the permitting and inspection of construction. The author provides a fascinating comparison of the elevation drawing of a building submitted for a building permit and a photograph of the building as built. Surprise! These appear to be two different buildings.

Then there are the really big issues relevant to Caribbean countries today – tourism and preservation. Gossier has been a tourist destination since the 1930s, which is the era of a photograph Dupré provides of what appears to be a large resort complex dated 1936. Tourism has swelled Gossier to a population of 15 000 or more today. Unlike Gossier, Trois-Rivières has fallen on hard times. Not being on the beach, it has not been a tourist destination, but it does have a collection of interesting stone buildings, 100 of which survived the 1928 hurricane and subsequent modernization. Apparently the government of Trois-Rivières has been protective of these buildings and supportive of preservation. Gossier appears to be a typical beach town, but I am intrigued by Trois-Rivières to the point of planning a visit. If I do not see some preservation oriented work on Trois-Rivières soon, I may write an article myself, in which case Dupré can take her revenge on me.

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**Lots of parking: land use in a car culture** by John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA, 2004, 308 pp. ISBN 0-8139-2519-3

This book delves into the mysterious and mundane topic of parking, and does so in a comprehensive, historical manner. Some of the major phenomena in the built environment of our times are parking lots, cars all over the place, the destruction of the pedestrian realm, the dysfunctionality of

downtowns, and the emergence of entirely new urban typologies such as the strip mall, suburban sprawl, and parking garages. Tremendous forces have shaped urban form for the better part of a century. They are linked to parking, but we seem to be ignorant of their exact nature. Or is it that we still stick with explanations of a quasi-religious nature that do not allow one to question pre-conceptions even in the face of obvious evidence to the contrary? Have we studied the actual phenomena using the scientific method? Actually, no: therefore this book is a very welcome addition to the new critical thinking about urban form.

I can heartily recommend this book to any urbanist, and to any person interested in urban structure. It contains information on the history of parking available nowhere else. Even if the reader is not specifically interested in parking lots, the fact is that twentieth-century urbanism is profoundly influenced by parking. What we naively imagine are urban downtowns and suburban precincts shaped by individual design decisions are nothing of the sort: the enormous needs of parking shape our cities, our houses, and eventually shape our psyche. We have so far ignored those forces, accepting the dogma that the car and easily-available parking everywhere were more important than urban structure itself. Few people seemed to notice that parking *replaces* urban structure and urban civilization.

We have seen downtowns destroyed – not by aerial bombing, but through the piecemeal demolition of perfectly good older buildings. In every case, the political process permitting such demolition promises replacement with 'taller and better' buildings, which are supposedly responses to the increased pressures of downtown space and rising real estate values. Nevertheless, what actually replaces many of those excellent buildings is a flat parking lot. 'Temporary' open parking somehow lingers for decades. This book studies the phenomenon like one would study a mysterious plague that turns vast regions of green growth into a desert. Aerial views of our cities clearly show that this 'plague' covers at times more than one-half of their total surface area. What about the urban forces that inexorably drive up buildings to become 'taller and better'? The myth of ever-higher density is undone by sprawl, and the lowest-density urban feature of them all is the vast open parking lot.

If a reader gets nothing else out of this book, at least he or she will discover a basic law of urban morphology: skyscrapers are linked to vast parking lots or monstrous parking garages the same way that a lizard is linked to its tail. There is no strict

separation, and if it ever occurs, it is only a temporary subterfuge to escape critical inquiry.

Paved parking lots obviously replace natural habitat. This self-evident reality has consequences reaching farther than is usually assumed. Because of the sheer extent of asphalted parking in today's megalopolises, they create major changes in drainage patterns (and threats of flooding from rainwater run-off), retain so much heat as to alter a city's climate, and pollute the groundwater.

In addition to setting up some preliminaries for studying real urban phenomena to revise the fanciful dogma of 'more cars for a better future', this book traces the history of parking. For example, it is interesting to read that the first open commercial parking lot is attributed to Max Goldberg of Detroit, opened in 1917 (although there is an earlier claim for Herman Schmitt in 1914). Surely this is a moment in history comparable to the invention of *Coca-Cola* in Atlanta by John Pemberton in 1886. Both were American inventions that had enormous effects on civilization all around the world. (Other commentators might wish to judge whether those developments were positive or negative!).

We are also treated to a history of parking garages, which is sadly a history of retrogression. I say this because the first multi-storey garages were apparently well designed, with beautiful façades blending into the urban fabric, and multi-use interiors that made their users comfortable. These developed, as everyone can verify, into monofunctional concrete dungeons, which are in most cases just as grim and unsafe as they look. The new parking garages (that is, built since the 1950s) intrude into the urban fabric like concrete Second World War bunkers, making no effort whatsoever to connect via mixed use or pedestrian scale. What happened was a certain stylistic development, in this case for the worse.

I was pleased to discover that Victor Gruen comes out as a hero who early on opposed the parking/skyscraper solutions that gutted our city centres. It is a pity that no one paid attention to him, or to Jane Jacobs, who wrote about human, pedestrian urban scale at about the same time.

The authors of this book do not look at anything outside the United States. This is an American history of parking: not a theoretical treatise, but a detailed history, from which a perceptive urbanist can draw the right conclusions. The authors do not offer dramatic and radical solutions for taming parking lots gone wild, but stop at simply describing the phenomenon. That is a necessary first step, for which we can all be grateful. Neither do they address parking problems in the suburbs, their study being limited to commercial parking in the city. Thus, the residential garage – which shapes contemporary suburbia – is left unexplored.

Readers should, however, be made aware that there exist practical solutions, which can regenerate life in our cities and suburbs. All we need is to implement them: perhaps we shall unavoidably step on a few planning authorities' toes; but it has to be done. Other authors have given both practical and theoretical suggestions. In these I loosely include the group of 'New Urbanists' as well as those who propose the 'Network City'. Though quite distinct in their theoretical foundations, both these groups of urbanists (which include Christopher Alexander, Andrés Duany, Léon Krier, Elisabeth Plater-Zyberk, David Sucher, myself, and many others) understand the city as a living structure, and know how to save it from parking toxicity.

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## Transmitting Architecture

After Barcelona, Berlin, Beijing and Istanbul, the worldwide community of architects will meet in Torino, Italy from 29 June to 3 July 2008, on the occasion of the Twenty-third International Union of Architects' World Congress. The general theme of the Congress is 'Transmitting architecture' –

architecture that communicates and is communicated, in all ways and in all locations, and involving every aspect of the profession.

Further information is available at [info@uia2008torino.org](mailto:info@uia2008torino.org)

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