



BOOK REVIEWS

Streets and patterns by *Stephen Marshall*, Spon, London, UK, 2005, 318 pp. ISBN 0-415-31750-9

This book is a densely-written and profusely-illustrated exploration of streets (of all types from motorways to alleys), their patterns, and their impact on urban form. The underpinning philosophy is a desire to understand how these street patterns could contribute to better urban design, building from the argument that there is a mismatch between the recent urban design-led agenda promoting mixed-use street grids and the conventional modernist hierarchical approach to streets and land-use zones. Hence we have produced some individually well-designed areas – at least according to contemporary wisdom – but they are often poorly-connected to wider networks of movement. The author comments that he hopes to review some of the ‘unchallenged truths’ seen in many texts on urbanism; to explore the ambiguities and contradictions between form and function, and to provide ‘something more than a facelift for design guidance’. This is very welcome. Why do some concepts become unchallenged, or even unchallengeable? Is it merely the influence of dominant paradigms and famous names – and, after all, the book begins with the futuristic modernism of Buchanan’s *Traffic in towns* (1963) and its proposed and uncompromising transformation of Bloomsbury.

To fulfil this challenging ambition means revisiting some abstract and technical issues ranging from graph theory to road hierarchies. The book itself has two main strands: ‘the design debate’, seen in Chapter 2’s review of literature and concepts of how the roles of streets could be reconciled, what patterns are felt to be desirable, and how more functional urban layouts could be designed around these more favourable patterns. These issues resurface in the last three chapters (8-10), which cover street systems, the generation of street patterns, and how these can inform good

practice in urbanism.

The second strand is a detailed investigation of ‘structure’, and occupies the central five chapters. It includes examination of the nature of structure, and how it may be represented and analysed through various approaches. Chapter 7 draws these ideas together to present a single conceptual framework. Theory is then applied to the ‘design debate’ in Chapters 8-10.

The conclusion is that fixed ideas and unchallenged truths need to be unfixed and challenged. There is more than one kind of hierarchy or grid that could deliver desired patterns and outcomes. They could – what a radical suggestion – even be combined: they are not mutually exclusive, and it is quite conceivable that an ‘arterial connector boulevard’ street type or a ‘dendritic tartan gridiron’ street pattern could function well. But would the complexity of professions and people involved in decision-making at the level of street network creation actually employ these radical ideas? Marshall’s suggestion is a form of design code, a ‘transport code’, rather than a simplistic design guide based on a set and limited street typology. Such a code could cover route type, necessary connections, permissible connections, and connection types.

The illustrations are usually very useful, even the small and simple marginal sketches. Most are clearly reproduced, although some have been scanned and have not reproduced particularly well. Some are surprising and thought-provoking, such as the magnified spider’s web chapter head graphic, where nodes are emphasized by drops of ‘glue’. The comparison of 60 street patterns, in what is admitted to be an ‘eclectic – even idiosyncratic’ selection, is also fascinating. That these were not reproduced at a constant scale was infuriating for a geographer but is, of course, irrelevant to the network analysis for which they are used.

This is a thoroughly-researched book. The text and illustrations are copiously footnoted, the notes being both references and additional comments.

The citations draw on a very broad literature, and it is interesting to see the types of links being made here. The literature has been thoroughly digested, as is shown particularly in the appendices detailing the sources of particular concepts and oft-repeated quotations or concepts (e.g. Appendix 2 for a range of 'desired patterns and properties'). In several cases these are welcome expansions of ideas represented as tables or illustrations within the main text. It is unusual to see so much explicit comparison of the ideas contained in so many citations. Yet all of this does lead to a very dense, complex text.

I read the book with the benefit of some knowledge of urban form, but having given little thought to the complexities of streets *per se*. For me, this was an extremely informative and helpful book. It explains some of the basics of network types and means of analysis, and explores the consequences of different street and network types for urban form and design. It could, perhaps, have been strengthened through greater use of non-UK examples; and perhaps the complexity of ideas and categories could be more clearly communicated through case studies. How is the author's suggested code to be implemented in the complex reality of contemporary urban form? This book is fascinating at the intellectual, academic, level. But I doubt that it will convince many practitioners – highway engineers, planners and designers – and this is a real missed opportunity.

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London: a life in maps by Peter Whitfield, British Library, London, UK, 2006, 208 pp. ISBN 978-0-7123-4919.

In *London: a life in maps* Peter Whitfield, former director of Stanford's International Map Centre, traces the morphological evolution of London through the lens of a corpus of cartographic pieces dating from the mid-sixteenth century to the end of the last century. Split into four sections, 'London before the fire', 'The age of elegance', 'The Victorian metropolis', and 'The shock of the new', some of which contain up to twenty short subsections, this book gives a fascinating insight into features of spatial transformation within

England's capital city, and the political, commercial, cultural and aesthetic agents promoting change over continuity.

Opening with an informative glimpse of London prior to the Great Fire of 1666, an event shown to have hastened the evolution of cartography in England due to the post-disaster need for scaled maps rather than evocative illustrations (p. 55), the first section of the book reveals, amongst other things, the nature and significance of the earliest comprehensive images of the city. Noting how the first city-wide images of London coincided with the onset of a phase of urbanization that was to last for over 400 years (p. 9), Whitfield outlines the settlement's westward spatial migration and the foundation of physical changes (p. 12) that subsequently included the laying out of London's first planned residential square, Covent Garden, the architectural and spatial antecedent of the development of West London in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Taking post-restoration and Georgian London as its subject, 'The age of elegance' appraises the triumph of private (aristocratic) initiative, money and taste (p. 56) in the layout of London. There is a focus on the unfolding patterns of squares and streets in the West End, thoroughfares wide enough to accommodate wheeled transport – a distinctive indicator of class status (p. 59). Especial attention is given to the growth and form of districts such as Mayfair, St James's, Vauxhall, Soho, and Kensington. However, as Whitfield demonstrates, the Georgian period was not only characterized by the arranging of exclusive suburban estates. Hence attention is given to the often overlooked growth of Whitechapel (pp. 80-1). Highlighting matters such as increasing maritime activity, post-reformation society's lenience towards foreigners, and the city's intolerance of particular industries, namely those that had an unpleasant effect upon polite society's ears and nose, Whitfield describes how these and other factors encouraged the distinct character of East London to be established some 100 years prior to the commencement of the Industrial Revolution. Accordingly, London's unique socio-morphological configuration is unravelled and shown to comprise contrasting East and West Ends, between which was sandwiched the City whose financial mechanisms underpinned both worlds.

By the third section, 'The Victorian metropolis', matters such as London's immense demographic surge, poverty's comprehensive presence, and the pursuit of wealth (p. 107) are brought to the fore. Expounding the struggles of the city's authorities to deal with growing social and environmental