

predicaments, *London: a life in maps* nonetheless reveals the ability of architects, such as John Nash and Charles Barry, and master builders, such as Thomas Cubitt and James Burton, to transform the appearance of the city. Reflecting on matters of challenge to London society, the section on 'The Victorian metropolis' efficiently elicits the intermittent sense of crisis amongst the city's numerous public authorities in their improvement endeavours. The extent of the challenge reflects in part the fact that the city was never subject in previous times to a comprehensive plan (p. 115), notwithstanding Wren's proposed, but not implemented, city scheme following the Great Fire. Consideration is given to a variety of factors affecting nineteenth-century London's social and urban form. These included trains as a mediator of slum clearing due to 'rail land hunger', suburbanization associated with Acts to reduce fares for the labouring population (pp. 132-3), aesthetic fashions (pp. 138-44), the creation of cemeteries (pp. 144-7), the arranging of parks (pp. 148-9), the design of prisons (pp. 150-1), and the laying out of new roads like the Thames Embankment (p. 153), which were high-water marks of the metropolis's growing aspirations, self-confidence, and efforts to present itself as a worthy centre of nation and empire.

In the final section, 'The shock of the new', the twentieth-century's physical and social attacks on the city are spelled out. In addition to detailing the unrelenting suburban expansion of London, Whitfield describes the redevelopment of the urban core, for example after 1945 when architectural modernism and regional planning were embraced as part of the city's redefining of its image (p. 177). Highlighting many subjects previously examined, like architectural fashions, expositions, transportation, dockland expansion and objections to planning orthodoxies, this concluding section also clarifies the injurious role of the London County Council, British urban planners and German bombs, for as Whitfield makes clear the assault on London came from both endogenous and exogenous sources.

London: a life in maps is an interesting and important contribution to a hitherto somewhat neglected subject: the biography of urban transformation in cartographic form. Though not written specifically for urban morphologists, for no mention is made of prominent proponents, theories and methodologies, the book nonetheless successfully bridges the genres of morphological survey, urban history and mapping. It underlies the Conzenian observation of the value of town plans to historians. With its rich illustrations and insights

into the diversity of life and spatial transformation of London in the past 450 or so years, Whitfield should be praised for an erudite contribution – an exposé of the value of maps as historical documents, as sources of information, and as a means to investigate urban form. Although extremely fragmented owing to its many subsections, most of which are just two pages in length (including diagrams), and lacking in concluding comments to each of the four principal sections, *London: a life in maps* nevertheless provides a superb introduction to the notion of spatial continuity and change, and the abundance of factors that affect aesthetic and morphological expressions in a place, in this instance London. For scholars wishing to enlighten students about such matters, to shed light on the structure of cities and processes of intra-urban evolution, or to explain how the urban fabric develops its own distinct features within different historical epochs, then this book is an excellent starting point.

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The practice of modernism: modern architects and urban transformation, 1954-1972 by J. R. Gold, Routledge, London, UK, 2007, 352 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-25843-2

Published in 1997, John Gold's *The experience of modernism* was a major contribution to our understanding of the history of Modern Movement architecture. Focusing on the future visions of modern architects, the book drew on a vast range of primary analysis, including unpublished documentation and personal interviews with architects. *The experience of modernism* sought to capture the feeling of the time, exploring 'the fascination that modernism had for its advocates as well as identifying elements that later represented its pitfalls' (Gold, 1997, p. xi). In doing so, Gold highlighted the complexity and contingency that underpins the 'grand narratives' of modernist history. The book was also a passionate defence of aspects of architectural modernism in the face of powerful narratives of modernist failure.

The experience of modernism covered the period from 1928 to 1953. The cut-off point was the

discontent that surfaced at CIAM IX, but 1953 was also a key moment of change for British urbanism in terms of economic recovery and increased resources for investment in housing and reconstruction. The visionary ideals of the previous era were about to be absorbed into the mainstream of reconstruction. *The practice of modernism* takes up that story. Whereas the first book had concentrated on future visions, *The practice of modernism* 'explores what happens when those ideas come to influence practice' (p. xiv). It covers a period that starts with expectation and enthusiasm for future possibilities, but ends with almost blanket condemnation of post-war modernism – and the architectural profession as a whole – in the 1970s. As Gold points out, 'to say the least, it was a most remarkable reversal of fortunes in such a short period of time' (p. 12).

The practice of modernism has a broadly chronological structure based around three main thematic parts. The first explores the careers of British modernist architects and their professional environments. The opening chapters cover issues such as training, career choices and the working environment of public and private sector architects in the 1950s. Chapter 4 also offers a fascinating insight into the relationships (and rivalries) between architecture, planning and engineering. The author demonstrates, for example, how the traditional, élitist role of architects was challenged by a range of social and technological changes, including planning for the car and innovations in standardized building. Whilst the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act gave greater prominence to planning as a profession, the main rivalry was with engineers who nurtured their own radical traditions and 'were fully capable of looking after their own interests' (p. 67). The impact of inter-professional rivalries on the ground is explored through case-studies of Liverpool, Birmingham and London.

The second, and longest, part of the book consists of five chapters that range across key aspects of reconstruction and development, notably central area redevelopment, New Towns and social housing. The New Towns discussion (Chapter 7) concentrates on the central area of Cumbernauld and its impact on the London County Council's unrealized plans for Hook (Hampshire). However, it is the subsequent analysis of social housing that stands out as the pivotal section of the book. Chapter 8, 'the pursuit of numbers', examines state pressures for increased levels of housebuilding in the 1950s and 1960s, demonstrating how commercial pressures and the national target and subsidy regime encouraged experimentation with

high-rise flats and industrialized building methods at local level. The chapter concludes with a trenchant critique of the failures of 'no frills' industrialized housing and the culture of target-led housebuilding. These failures include a lack of funding for infrastructure and the cutting of costs on public spaces. Whereas Chapter 8 charts the devaluation of elements of the modernist vision, its companion chapter explores what happened when modernist architects were able to pursue their commitment to deliver a better society through social housing. Examples such as Lasdun's 'cluster blocks' and 'streets in the sky' schemes (Park Hill, Robin Hood Gardens), are placed in the context of sociological debate about the values of traditional housing forms.

The concluding part of the book explores the increasing diversity of architectural modernism in the 1960s. Chapter 10 pursues the earlier book's interest in movements, tracing the disbandment of MARS and CIAM, and the work of Team X. Tying up loose ends in the story of post-war modernism, the following chapter covers 'the continuing freewheeling progress of modernist thought in the 1960s' (p. 248), focusing particularly on conceptual experimentation with ideas of linear cities and megastructures. The concluding chapter details the beginnings of the anti-modernist backlash. Part of this is about the well-known story of the partial collapse of the Ronan Point tower block in May 1968, but Gold also traces the important role of the professional and academic critique of post-war modernist social housing in the *Architectural Review's* 'Housing Issue' of November 1967. The story post-1972 is to be taken up in a third book.

As with its predecessor, *The practice of modernism* demonstrates the value of primary research. More than 50 interviews were undertaken with key architects of the day, and their contribution is reflected in a series of anecdotal asides that bring the period to life. There are numerous examples, but one of my favourites is the insight that better students at the Regent Street Polytechnic in the 1950s were allowed to design on larger sheets of paper commensurate with their status. *The practice of modernism* is a pleasure to read. The conceptual themes of the earlier book are retained and extended, notably Gold's sensitivity to the complexities of Modern Movement history. However, as Gold acknowledges, the period from 1954 onwards takes that history into distinctively different territory. Whereas the previous era had been mainly about visions and propaganda, in the post-1954 period modernist architecture moved to mainstream practice; or, as Gold puts it, this was an

era when Modern Movement ideas would be held to account. One of the strengths of the book is the way that Gold unpacks the various forces that combined to undermine aspects of the modernist vision, notably the emphasis on meeting targets and the political turn to industrialized methods in social housing. But Gold is no apologist for modernist architects. Chapter 9 is critical of the limited social understanding of certain modernist architects involved in social housing projects, pointing to the bolt-on and shifting sociological justifications for projects such as Keeling House (p. 217). The author is similarly unforgiving of the indulgence of aspects of pie-in-the-sky-experimental thinking from the 1960s.

The practice of modernism deserves to be read widely. For those without a significant knowledge of the period, the book offers a solid grounding in the significant events, debates and developments of the period. Most of the major developments are covered through case-studies of notable projects and places, and the reader is guided clearly through the text. Moreover, with its wealth of observation and detail, this book is a good read in its own right. It is certainly sufficiently accessible to appeal to anyone with a passing interest in architecture and planning. And yet the quality of the scholarship

and Gold's eye for detail means that the book opens up new perspectives for serious scholars of modernist planning and architecture and post-war urbanism. *The practice of modernism* would be on my recommended reading list for built environment students at all levels of study, simply because it will lead to a better understanding of what happened and why in the 1950s and 1960s. The author does not labour the point, but there are some prescient lessons for what is happening in the current target-driven context for housing development. As with its predecessor, I will keep returning to *The practice of modernism* for fresh insights.

Reference

Gold, J. R. (1997) *The experience of modernism: modern architects and the future city 1928-1953* (Spon, London).

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Buildings & Landscapes: call for articles

The scholarly refereed journal *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* spans a wide range of topics – from commercial buildings in American Chinatowns to seasonal communities in Idaho, from linoleum flooring in middle-class kitchens to garrets housing urban slaves, from farmsteads to urban tenements, vernacular architecture and its settings shape everyday life. Charged with dense cultural meanings that speak to both makers and users, buildings and landscapes reflect behaviour, shape identity, orchestrate ritual, and negotiate social relationships.

The editors of the journal invite submissions of articles. The subject matter covered by the journal includes all aspects of vernacular architecture and everyday urban and rural landscapes seen through interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary methods. The submission of articles on topics within and beyond North America is encouraged. There is a particular interest in incorporating field work as a component of research.

Buildings & Landscapes has recently changed

from a biennial volume to an annual journal, and will become biannual in 2009. It is not necessary for articles to have been presented at annual meetings of the Vernacular Architecture Forum. All scholars in the field are eligible to submit manuscripts.

Manuscripts should conform to the Chicago Manual of Style. Contributors agree that manuscripts submitted to *Buildings & Landscapes* will not be submitted for publication elsewhere while under review by the journal. Two hard copies of the manuscript and photocopied reproductions of the illustrations should be sent directly to each of the two editors. Enquiries should be directed to one of the co-editors. The co-editors are: Howard Davis, Professor of Architecture, School of Architecture and Allied Arts, 1206 University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403-1206, USA (E-mail: hdavis@uoregon.edu) and Louis P. Nelson, Assistant Professor of Architectural History, School of Architecture, Campbell Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22904-4122, USA (E-mail: Lnelson@virginia.edu).
