

colour illustrations; it has also meant that referencing is rather less than an academic reader might expect, and its style sometimes awkward; and that some issues are explained rather more sketchily than one familiar with the outpouring of work on British suburbia might expect. However, this means that the book is in general appropriately focused on its main target readership.

This more populist approach is evident in the book's subtitle: 'how and why the semi became Britain's most popular house type'. Despite the range of information provided, this does not seem to be fully answered, and perhaps a more traditional concluding chapter could have done so more clearly.

There are 12 main chapters, following a standard chronology from the first, 'From the Restoration to the end of the Georgian era' to the final two, dealing with the period from 1990 to 2005. In fact this chronological breadth is very welcome, since most work focuses on a much shorter period; it is helpful to see the earlier emergence of suburbia and something of the most recent responses to the UK government's responses to 'sustainable development' and its pressure for higher densities within existing built-up areas. He gives some interesting examples of recent estate layouts incorporating a mixture of house types including semi-detached and detached, together with floor-plans and photographs of some more unusual houses that depart from familiar conceptions based on the ubiquitous inter-war 'universal plan'. Nevertheless, there are some even earlier examples of the semi-detached form than Jensen recognises (Coventry has an early timber-framed pair, for example).

The typo-morphologist will find little reference to the detailed work in the Italian tradition. Questions of the early origins of this peculiar dwelling form are hardly explored save for the useful reminder in chapter 2 that his earliest examples were rural. Nor is there reference to the 'micro-morphology' of English suburbia as detailed in the work of Whitehand, Carr and others over the past decade and more. In fact, readers already having such a familiarity with suburban form might even query Jensen's definition that 'each semi-detached house has the advantage of giving access from the front to the back of the house without having to pass through the house itself' (p. 10) – true in many cases but not all; and especially given more recent trends towards side extensions leading to the phenomenon of 'terracing'.

Despite the promise of the wide chronological sweep, Jensen does focus much of the book on the inter-war period (3 chapters). In these he

demonstrates great interest in the Tudor revival style, and develops a classification of external house form and applications of 'Tudorbethan' style.

But his focus on the semi perhaps misrepresents the variety seen even in some of the larger inter-war estates such as Edgware, where there are numerous detached houses interspersed amongst the semis. Other styles including Art Deco and moderne are also explored, and in the latter he comes closest to engaging with morphological concerns about agency: who designed and built these houses and estates? His examples of moderne estates were developed by companies (Crittall, Bata) and he begins to explore relationships between architect and both builders and the local authorities.

Inevitably, it could be suggested that this could have been dealt with in much greater detail; but Jensen's focus is on a broad country-wide overview, not the street or estate scale, nor the company scale necessary to uncover more detailed information. At the overview scale, perhaps more exploration of regional variations would be useful. Nevertheless, accepting this designed limitation, this is a fluent, interesting and informative book. While it does not have the academic rigour and richness of Muthesius's study of the terraced house, it would certainly provide a useful introduction to the semi as a major component of English suburbia.

Reference

Muthesius, S. (1982) *The English terraced house* (Yale University Press, New Haven).

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The American suburb: the basics by Jon C. Teaford, Routledge Publishing, New York, USA, 2008, 271 pp. ISBN 13-978-0-415-95165-4 (pb), ISBN 13-978-0-415-95164-7 (hb).

In 2007-2008, there have been at least 18 books published on the topic of suburbs and suburbanization: thus new books on this topic might have a relatively high standard to meet or exceed. Yet author Jon C. Teaford, Professor Emeritus of History from Purdue University, has

managed to produce a concise, readable discussion which falls within the most recent framework of America's ongoing suburban discourse: he neither champions nor vilifies the suburbs but rather works to dispel many of the myths which have arisen from the relatively polarized debate on the suburb. As he explains, in writing this book he set out to 'reject the superficial notion that suburban America is some homogeneous, featureless blob, stretching on seemingly forever in an undifferentiated sprawl of settlement' (p. xiii). He has laid out his arguments in seven chapters entitled 'Creating suburbia', 'Diverse suburbia', 'Commercial suburbia', 'Governing suburbia', 'Housing suburbia', 'Planning suburbia' and 'The basics'.

Teaford frames his discussion within what is perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of American suburbs: that, unlike areas that are often termed suburban in Great Britain or Europe, they are without exception separate political entities from the larger cities they surround. It is this political and economic independence, in terms of taxation, which governed their early development and continues to shape them for the future. He begins with a brief discussion of the rise of suburbs before the age of the automobile with well-known early railroad commuter settlements and the picturesque, bucolic, upper-middle-class, romantic suburbs of the late-twentieth century. However, he continues this early history with a striking alternative view in his discussion of the industrial settlements that arose around meat-packing, mills and other noxious or power-source limited industries during the nineteenth century. Although it has perhaps been more common to interpret these settlements as 'towns' rather than 'suburbs', their subordinate relationship to cities in many cases lent itself to suburban functions and certainly many such settlements never attained the qualities which might be ascribed to central cities. Examples of such settlements include Chicago Heights, Granite City, South Omaha and South San Francisco.

His historical survey continues in a more conventional fashion with discussions of the rapid growth of American suburbs during the twentieth century, first with the advent of the automobile and later with the explosion of new development after the Second World War. But in addition to telling the familiar story of Levittown and its imitators, he also notes that well-established, affluent suburbs, such as Scarsdale, New York, also experienced rapid and substantial growth in the post-war era. These historical discussions end with the multi-dimensional maturing of the suburbs as shopping centres and corporate campuses follow their

customer bases, employees and opportunities for inexpensive development in the suburbs.

The chapter entitled 'Diverse suburbia' interprets diversity in several different ways: as economic diversity, with the contrast between troubled inner suburbs that now function as impoverished urban neighbourhoods and increasingly affluent enclaves; and as racial and ethnic diversity, with discussions of African American and Latino suburbs; and as havens for illicit activities, as in the chains of gambling and prostitution establishments operated by Al Capone and others in the Chicago suburbs during the early-twentieth century.

Teaford begins his treatment of 'Commercial suburbia' with a declaration that 'basic to an understanding of American suburbs is the fact that suburbia is the pre-eminent zone for business in the United States' (p. 87). Within this context, he then outlines the main arguments and examples of 'edge' and 'edgeless' cities and the most recent incarnations of the shopping mall. Having discussed the regional characteristics of shopping mall retailing, he then presents a chapter addressing the controversies over regional political authority ('Governing suburbia') in which he focuses on the contradictory processes of fragmentation of political units of territorial authority and more recent efforts to consolidate authority (the 'new regionalism') by merging cities and counties or establishing regional bases for administering key infrastructural systems.

The chapter on 'Housing suburbia' focuses exclusively on issues of affordability and highlights the legislative and judicial decisions in New Jersey and Massachusetts which have virtually required suburban communities to provide some affordable housing. From the perspective of urban morphology, this is perhaps one of the weaker chapters as it fails to address the many interesting changes in house form and the re-conceptualization of housing that have taken place in American suburbs in recent years.

'To sprawl or not to sprawl', begins the final substantive chapter ('Planning suburbia'). This chapter presents a summary of the case against sprawl as opposed to its defence by Robert Bruegmann (2005) in *Sprawl: a compact history*. As Teaford summarizes, 'suburbanites only oppose the sprawl of others: one's own sprawl is the American dream' (p. 196). The remainder of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of smart growth.

The book ends with a brief, five-page chapter summarizing its three primary messages: (1) that American suburbs are diverse, (2) that American

suburbs are an expression of a desire for freedom, and (3) that incumbent suburbanites themselves are a threat to the suburbs as their resistance to change draws increasing challenges.

This book is well written and provocative in its style, and would certainly engage students and researchers alike as a companion or counterpoint to other readings on this topic. It would not, however, stand adequately on its own as an introductory course on American suburbs. Most egregious, perhaps, is that this book has not a single illustration. Teaforde expressly dismisses the significance of this omission at the start of the book, stating that 'if the readers of this book seek illustrations, they should look out their windows with eyes free of the blinders of past stereotypes. Contemporary suburbia is all about us' (p. vii). In so doing, not only does he assume an exclusively American readership, but he apparently assigns to all readers the remarkable ability to envisage the many discussions of past landscapes contained in the book through the lens of whatever present

landscapes they have experienced. As I finish writing this review from the confines of a traditional courtyard house in central Beijing, which has no windows to the world beyond its walls, I am left wondering how one would interpret Teaforde's discussion without benefit of either personal experience or extensive prior research on this subject.

Nonetheless, this book is lively and provocative and would make a worthwhile addition to an undergraduate course list.

Reference

Bruegmann, R. (2005) *Sprawl: a compact history* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago).

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Sixteenth International Seminar on Urban Form

The Sixteenth International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF 2009) will take place in Guangzhou, China from Friday 4 September to Monday 7 September 2009. The theme of the conference is Urban morphology and urban transformation. The organizers and the Council of ISUF invite participation in the Conference by interested academics and professionals. Topics on which proposals are particularly welcome include:

- Urban morphological theory
- Urban morphology, planning and design
- Urban form in Asia
- Traditional urban form
- Urban heritage and change
- Geospatial technology in urban morphology

Proposals for papers should take the form of abstracts of papers, in either English or Chinese. They should be prepared in the following format: title of paper, author(s) name, affiliation, address, e-mail address, telephone number, key words and 250-word abstract. They should be addressed to Professor Yinsheng Tian, Department of Architecture, College of Architecture and Civil Engineering, South China University of Technology, Guangzhou 510640, P. R. China (e-mail:

ISUF2009@scut.edu.cn). Abstracts of papers must be received on or before 31 December 2008. Notification of whether abstracts have been accepted will be provided by 1 March 2009. Those whose abstracts have been accepted will be required to pay a registration fee by 15 June 2009 to have their papers included in the conference programme. The registration fee includes membership of ISUF, and conference lunches and dinners.

Following acceptance of abstracts, submission of papers (not exceeding 4000 words) is optional. If submitted, they should be received by Professor Tian by 15 July 2009. Authors should consult the notes for the guidance of contributors to *Urban Morphology*, available on the ISUF website (www.urbanform.org) or in recent copies of the journal, before preparing their papers. Selected papers may be published after the conference.

The official conference languages are English and Chinese. A number of excursions to places in the city and the region will be featured. There will be a New Researchers' Forum, in which researchers new to the field are invited to take part.

Enquiries concerning the conference should be forwarded to Professor Yinsheng Tian (e-mail: ISUF2009@scut.edu.cn), or Dr Kai Gu (e-mail: k.gu@auckland.ac.nz).
