



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Interpreting basic buildings** by *Gianfranco Caniggia* and *Gian Luigi Maffei*, Altralinea Edizioni, Firenze, Italy, 2017, 240 pp. ISBN 978–88–94869–07–1; **Interpreting specialised buildings** by *Gian Luigi Maffei* and *Mattia Maffei*, Altralinea Edizioni, Firenze, Italy, 2018, 328 pp. ISBN 978–88–94869–08–8.

Gian Luigi Maffei, who passed away last year, left a considerable legacy of published work of which these two volumes are English translations of two fundamental texts of what has become known in ISUF as the process typological school. The first volume, co-authored with Gianfranco Caniggia, was initially published in Italian in 1979 and, by 2001, it had reached its twelfth edition. It had been translated into French (1996) and Spanish (2000) before the first English edition appeared in 2001. This makes this work another example of the tardiness to publish English translations of widely-acclaimed books, even though English-language readers form the largest potential market. The second of the reviewed volumes is co-authored with Gian Luigi's son Mattia Maffei and was first published in Italian in 2011. They are two of the 44 works Gian Luigi published during his career, most of which was spent teaching at the University of Florence. He was the second President of ISUF from 2006–2010.

Nicola Marzot, who in 2001 coordinated the first English translation of *Interpreting basic buildings*, has curated both the later volumes discussed in this review. In each book he has also provided a helpful critical glossary of the terminology used. These are different in each case and complement one another very effectively. Unlike the glossary which he published in the first English translation of *Interpreting basic buildings*, the new ones have longer entries and are arranged alphabetically rather than thematically. Jeremy Whitehand

contributed a four-page note on building interpretation and ISUF, and Anne Vernez Moudon an eight-page introduction to the first English edition; and these have been replaced by a shorter note on the works' international significance by Whitehand and a new introduction by Marzot. There have been some changes in the text which make for an easier understanding, for example 'individuation' is replaced by 'manifestation'. Nevertheless, the text of both books is often complex and dense. Since complexity is a characteristic of the Italian language, perhaps Anglophone readers should not expect a translation to lose all the cultural qualities of the original work. The first English edition was reviewed in *Urban Morphology* by Hess (2002) and it has been widely referenced and commented on for nearly two decades in the urban morphology literature (for example Cataldi *et al.*, 2002; Kropf, 2001; Oliveira, 2016).

*Interpreting basic buildings* is a keystone in a tradition more than a century long, which dates from Giovannoni (born in 1873) and runs through Muratori to Caniggia, Cataldi, Maffei and Paolo Maretto, and flourishes today with their successors in ISUF Italy. Exceptionally for ISUF, it is a school exclusively established and dominated by architects. For Anglophone architects it is interesting that this tendency ran through the period that saw the supremacy of modernism in their profession. The earlier members practised as architects – something that would be difficult today for university teachers. Their buildings, such as Muratori's office block in Bologna and Cannigia's Quinto Housing in Genoa, challenged the tenets of modernism without reverting to a version of neoclassicism that was so often the solution adopted by post-modernism in Anglophone countries. The executed works of the Muratorian School were the result of the detailed investigations of Italian buildings and settlements in order to understand the laws by which they had evolved,

and which were published in volumes such as these two.

The earlier book, *Interpreting basic buildings*, examines the evolution of housing types as the main urban component and is organised according to a range of levels of resolution or scale, from individual buildings, streets and blocks, to settlements and their organisation at a sub-regional scale. The approach emphasises the continuity of change over time as represented, for example, by the cultural mutation of the type from a single cell primitive shelter to different forms such as courtyard and row houses. The main focus is on Italy but Northern European forms, derived from timber as opposed to masonry construction, are also included.

The second volume, *Interpreting specialised buildings*, starts with a preamble by Gian Luigi Maffei in which he clearly explains process typology as aiming to solve ‘the crisis of modern-day architecture where products clash with each other and violently conflict with the living fabric of their surroundings because they are usually the products of a mere solipsistic formalist exercise performed by project architects’. He asserts that architects should proceed by ‘extracting the laws of behaviour, development and mutation in regulating man-made structures from existing buildings’. There would not be ‘an acritical acceptance of past construction methods’ but an incorporation of their work ‘into the unbroken tradition of codified laws and behaviours of particular cultural areas’ (Maffei, 2017, pp. 10–11).

The book explains how special buildings derive from basic residential buildings to accommodate an increased range of functions and as churches, monasteries and hospitals: they act as landmarks in the urban organism. It argues that they were designed by architects as opposed to housing, which had been the work of end users. They were, therefore, more susceptible to influences outside the local culture. This concept is explained by the greater ‘level of intention’ of the architect who often creates a building removed from the architectural language of the local culture. This concept is illustrated by comparing two churches, one of the fourteenth century and the other of the twentieth century.

These concepts are developed in the first chapter which explores the dialectical relationship between the specialised building as landmark and the urban organism. The second chapter is a detailed discussion of the way in which special types have evolved. Multi-storey apartments are included here, although the way in which the term ‘stairwell’ is used to

define types in this discussion is not always clear. Since the multi-storey apartment block has become such a widespread and fundamental element of the modern urban fabric, one wonders whether it has transmuted into a basic type.

Both books are veritable treasure-chests of illustrations, mainly line drawings that are identified as Tables. There are plans, sections and elevations of individual buildings, urban tissues and whole settlements. They include plans, sections and elevations of Roman temples in Baalbek, Pienza city centre, a town centre in Ethiopia, Japanese courtyard housing, nineteenth-century blocks in Copenhagen, Pennsylvania Station, New York, and Muratori’s Bologna office building. The sources for most of these line drawings are given in *Interpreting basic buildings* where student theses are acknowledged as the origin of most of them. However, no sources are given for the illustrations in *Interpreting specialised buildings* and it is regrettable that only a few have an indication of the relevant scale, although there are some helpful illustrations that compare plans of different buildings drawn at the same scale.

## References

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- Hess, P. M. (2002) Review of Caniggia, G. and Maffei, G. L. (2001) *Architectural composition and building typology: interpreting basic building*, *Urban Morphology* 6, 53–4.
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**Building regulations and urban form, 1200–1900** edited by *Terry R. Slater* and *Sandra M. G. Pinto*, Routledge, Abingdon, UK, 2018, 329 pp. ISBN 978–1–2724–8537–3.

This notable book gathers different perspectives on the relationships between building regulations