

environments. Students critique urban development sites and apply tools for investigative analysis to inform re-design of the site. As professed by Kropf and others, the studio/laboratory setting is well positioned to support multiple learning styles and encourage integrated thinking.

Vitor Oliveira's closing chapter offers a comprehensive approach to teaching an introductory course on urban morphology as a multidisciplinary subject. An outline syllabus introduces students to key topics, including urban history, principal analytical methods and their underlying theories and practical applications.

As a collective work, *Teaching Urban Morphology* provides a rich portfolio of theory, pedagogy and practice in support of comprehensive curriculum development. The editor's inclusive approach also suggests a need for further examples of integrative teaching methods to broaden the subject's reach and impact. Unrealized potential resides in cultivating an academic culture of urban morphologists willing to step outside of disciplinary comfort zones to engage students in transdisciplinary inquiry.

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**Interpreting specialised buildings** by Gian Luigi Maffei and Mattia Maffei, Altralea Edizioni, Florence, Italy, 2018 (first Italian edition 2011), 328 pp. ISBN 978-88-94869-08-8.

Twenty years after the publication of *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia* (Muratori 1959), Gianfranco Caniggia and Gian Luigi Maffei published another book that was fundamental to the process-typological approach to urban morphology and to the field itself, *Lettura dell'edilizia di base: Composizione architettonica e tipologia edilizia* (Caniggia and Maffei, 1979). It was followed by two related books, one on the analysis and design of basic buildings by Caniggia and Maffei (1984) and the other on the reading of specialized buildings by Maffei and Maffei (2011).

'Interpreting specialised buildings' is the long awaited English translation of the last of these books. With curatorship, introduction and critical glossary by Nicola Marzot, the book by Gian Luigi Maffei and Mattia Maffei is in three parts. The first

part discusses the characteristics that influence the evolution of specialized buildings. It includes different aspects, or phases, in a progressive understanding of how specialized buildings relate to the built environment. Accordingly, it addresses various aspects of specialized buildings: as landmarks; as materializations of special types; as specialized types, and as such, as mutations of base types (one of the key messages of the book); and in their relationship to the building fabric and the urban organism. The second part of the book concerns the characteristics that influence the formation of specialized buildings and the understanding of the scale of components and compositional relationships. This part proposes the consideration of landmarks as the materialization of typical organisms, organisms as the correlation of usage and distribution systems, and systems as a combination of elementary distribution-usage systems and typical technologies and materials. The last part of the book classifies specialized buildings according to their various typological series, that is, serial specialized buildings derived from a building type (such as palaces) or from the urban fabric (collective residences) and specialized nodal buildings (with a single longitudinal axis or with multiple-axes with a central floor plan). This part of the book is mainly structured in a number of tables and fact sheets, focusing on the interpretation of compositional components, the structural parts of the architectural layout and formative axes.

The book addresses three key challenges that urban morphology faces today: establishing the core, and the limits, of each morphological approach; exploring the relation between scientific research and practice on the built environment; and, finally, making explicit the added value of urban morphology to fundamental aspects of our daily lives in cities. 'Interpreting specialised buildings' will certainly have a central role in future reviews of the process-typological approach. While focusing on one particular topic, the book gathers the main theories, concepts and methods that have been developed over 7 decades of disciplinary history by different generations of researchers, lecturers and architects. It raises issues such as the tension between intentionality/critical consciousness and spontaneous consciousness, between the elastic-wooden and the plastic-masonry approaches to construction materials, and between polar (associated with nodal) and anti-polar (associated with serial), to name just a few. The critical glossary at the end of the book effectively provides an overview of this richness.

The book extends the concept of the typological process by explicitly applying it to specialized buildings. The concept is one of the most valuable in urban morphology and architecture. It enables understanding of the evolution of buildings, in their most structural elements, and establishes guidelines for their future transformation or design. ‘In this way, we solve the typical problem we come across in the crisis of present 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 / formalistic exercise performed by project architects’ (p. 11). Of course, the debate on such a powerful concept is extremely rich. How straightforward this process is from reading to design is one key topic of debate (see, for example, the different positions by proponents of the process-typological and the configurational approaches in Oliveira, 2018). Another key topic concerns the advantages of offering explicit and contemporary examples of the application of this morphological concept in architectural practice.

The book, and in particular Marzot’s introduction, proposes a ‘circular’ approach to architecture, in which basic buildings and specialized buildings are linked in a dialectic manner – as opposed to the isolation of the object proposed by functionalism – and where resources (taking a wide definition) are used in a responsible manner, aiming at contributing to making human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

## References

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**Seeing the better city: how to explore, observe, and improve urban space** by Charles R. Wolfe, Island Press, Washington DC, USA, 2017, 248 pp. ISBN 9781610917742.

Chuck Wolfe delivers an intriguing and earnest manifesto for a better city that celebrates the role of human observation of the people-place relationships in urban life. Through the advocacy of author-composed photographic images that capture what is seen and witnessed, the book sets out a strong agenda for ways of recording authentic representations of personal daily urban experiences.

*Seeing the better city* explores the pictorial capabilities of the modern mobile device as a tool for ubiquitous evidencing of ‘first-hand’ urban observations, a mode of documentary that can be uploaded onto social media platforms or web-based repositories for instant access and collective impact. It is stressed that the photographs must include people to accurately reveal the realities of the urban life under scrutiny and avoid the mistakes of much built environment imagery which fixates solely on the forms of architecture and urban space rather than the manner of its use.

An urban diary approach is introduced as a systematic way to construct a theme-based series of images. The author outlines a considered procedure called the LENS method (learn/explore/narrate/summarize) that directs the diarist to focus on particular locations of citizens’ activity within the built environment; for example, street intersections, pathways, public spaces, and interior spaces. The recommended documenting technique for each urban diary suggests a personalized perspective and intentional focus, with preparatory steps to scaffold a process for unique urban observations in which careful planning of an urban diary route is suggested. Framing a walk should have several aspects: it should contemplate the overarching theme, have a people-place focus, and include detailed subject matter such as the roles of transportation, nature, light and colour, history and symbols, and recognizable change in the urban landscape. The identification of special vantage points (‘urban mirrors’) is encouraged to provide points for optimal observation of urban life, effectively capturing the authentic human experience of the ‘place-users’ (p. 76). ‘Urban diary excerpts’ punctuate the book at regular intervals as examples of the authors’ own praxis, and are included as illustrative cases that describe the juxtapositions of human behaviour and physical attributes within the built environment.