

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.

Wolfe skilfully draws on seminal literature to substantiate a theoretical background and establishes a connection between Lynch and Cullen that advocates a method of photographic sequencing to observe and document the visual components of the city, empowering the urban observations of citizens through the 'voice' of the image.

The urban diary approach has relevance to urban morphologists as its techniques can contribute to aspects of history, planning, architecture, geography, and anthropology (p. 59). Longitudinal studies and compilations of individual photographic chronicles can chart characteristics of the active use of a particular place, or evidence physical variation in its built environment. In essence 'the urban diary is a kind of archaeology... it interprets our urban landscapes, including symbols of change' (p. 80).

Seeing the better city offers an accessible toolkit of methods aimed to enhance how we can see and understand the city, and capture an urban experience whether it is a positive or negative aspect. Constructing an urban diary can have several practical applications: as a learning and teaching tool, and importantly in engendering community

participation in relation to matters that affect policy and regulation of the urban environment. As such 'photographs can be helpful supplements to verbal and written descriptions of improved urban space' (p. 24), or provide expression and advocacy to citizen groups who may lack a platform or voice. Methods to objectively decode photographs are an aspect worth further development, as it is important to systematically categorize the attributes contained in each photograph to clarify its content and draw out meanings.

In light of the recent advent of the global urban sketching movement, it would be reasonable to anticipate that an urban diary network, following the guidelines outlined in this book, could gain similar momentum as a powerful instrument of a shared visual commentary with widespread connectivity and application.

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