

structure, and excessive production capacity problems, central government developed a national land plan and national urban system plan as a powerful counter measure to set constraints for local urban construction. In spite of their differences, local and central government approaches to planning share the common aim of planning for growth. Their effects on China's long-run economic performance remain unclear, as urban construction has contributed to a local government debt crisis. To understand these effects better, more time is needed for them to become fully exposed.

The theory and practice of urban planning as public policy are strongly shaped by certain political conditions. Tracing the history of Chinese planning practice allows Wu to identify specific characteristics of current Chinese urban planning. Different from the Western paradigm, Chinese urban planning concentrates more on resource allocation, which is the legacy of the planned economic system that functioned before the Reform and Opening Policy. Chinese planning is more a part of an inner-government process. What matters is the negotiation between local and central government, or even that between different departments within central government. Public participation and negotiation between stakeholders, which are quite common in Western planning, are rarely seen in China.

Urban planning practice has experienced several distinct periods, but one theme persists as a process influencing resource allocation. Chinese planning is regarded by both central and local governments as a method to promote economic development. The political motivation behind such growth-based planning is China's unshakable will to become a modernized country and to revitalize from the shame endured since the late-Qing Dynasty.

New conditions, such as a decreasing rate of urbanization and the increasing will to restrain urban expansion, has led the central government to propose a planning paradigm shift from incremental planning to inventory planning. As a consequence, professional knowledge structure and planning education in colleges will soon face changes. It is necessary for urban planners to find new methods to cope with this new trend. What will Chinese planning in the future look like? How will the structure of government change? Will planning for growth persist? More research is needed to explore these questions and produce answers. *Planning for growth* offers a useful

background to understanding how current debates in China are framed by the experience of recent, truly extraordinary, decades.

*Feng Song, Li Ningting and Ying Dai, College of Urban and Environmental Sciences, Peking University, Beijing 100871, P. R. China. E-mail: songfeng@urban.pku.edu.cn*

**La ville parfaitement imparfaite** edited by *Anne-Marie Châtelet, Michel Denès and Cristina Mazzoni*, Éditions La Commune Paris, France, 2014, 275 pp. ISBN 979-10-94148-02-0.

This collection of essays was compiled in honour of Michaël Darin, a founding member and first Secretary of ISUF and for many years a member of the Editorial Board of this journal. After graduating in philosophy and sociology in France in 1969, Darin trained at the Architectural Association in London. He later wrote a thesis under the supervision of Marcel Roncayolo at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*. Upon returning to France from London, Darin started almost immediately to teach architecture at Nantes while working as a young architect. In their introduction, the editors trace the portrait of an intellectual journey that is somewhat characteristic of the experience of French architects who entered academia in the months and years following May 1968. It was the time of the dissolution of the *École des Beaux-Arts* and its replacement by architectural schools (the *unités pédagogiques d'architecture*). There a nascent scientific research practice took hold, first very influenced by social sciences, then also concerned with the materiality of the city, 'urban architecture' and urban forms, under the influence of Italian typomorphological studies.

Aware of the wide diversity of essays received from eighteen different contributors, the editors deemed pertinent to indicate that all the contributions have in common an interest in architecture and the city, though explored through a variety of research approaches. The book is divided into four parts, interspersed by so-called *interludes*: the 'stratified city' (*la ville stratifiée*), 'scenes from city life' (*scènes de la vie urbaine*), 'scenes from architectural life' (*scènes de la vie architecturale*), and 'analytical studies' (*études analytiques*). The

three 'interludes' comprise a series of beautiful drawings by Bernard Barto; excerpts from Albert Brinckmann's 1907 *Platz und monuments*, introduced by Anne-Marie Châtelet and translated into French from the German for the first time by Daniel Wiczorek; and finally, excerpts from *Imagine di Roma* (1969) by Ludovico Quaroni, translated and introduced by Cristiana Mazzoni. The essays might appear eclectic. They include contributions addressing theoretical and methodological issues (by J. Gaucher; P. Pinon; J. Whitehand; F. Béguin; S. Malfroy; and J.-J. Treuttel), as well as contributions based on meticulous empirical work (by G. Bienvenu; A. Bondon; F. Bodet; B. Carrié; Y. Roujon; S. Hosseinabadi; G. Texier Rideau; M. Guignard; O. Meillerais; and B. Marchand). Geographically speaking, the reader is invited to travel from Nantes to Paris, including an architectural 'promenade' in 1960s Paris *Villes nouvelles* (M. Denès), and from there to Palestine, Switzerland, India and Italy. The authors borrow from a wide range of disciplines, including geography, architecture, archaeology, history, sociology and literary analysis.

Beyond the intrinsic interest of individual contributions, their diversity speaks of the state of morphological research in France, and beyond. First, this collection of essays offers a cross-section of current research on the built environment from that country, including from some of its prominent proponents. French researchers have been rather quiet at ISUF conferences and in the pages of *Urban Morphology* in recent years and though that is unfortunate, it is encouraging to see that the research effort has continued on subject matter relevant to urban morphologists. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, the contributions, either individually or collectively, highlight key challenges faced by urban morphology as a discipline. By the eclecticism of their methodologies and the variety of their topical matters, they speak volumes about the contemporary challenges faced by urban morphology and some of its struggles to remain relevant, or to be perceived as such. These challenges are not alien to the challenges facing the contemporary city, and in particular to the urgency to address the environmental crisis and galloping global urbanization. As the context calls for elucidation of rapid and drastic urban transformations and the articulation of responses to problems of unprecedented complexity, the discipline, in spite of remarkable successes, proceeds at a somewhat lethargic pace and still strives to adjust its methods. The task seems daunting.

Pierre Pinon's work illustrates how we have yet to fully understand the influence of Roman plans on the current urban forms of many French city cores. Bernard Carrié is intrigued by the fact that successive attempts at controlling building alignments (*alignements*) along the streets of Paris in the nineteenth century never succeeded in fully concealing the rugged reality. More recent historical periods have produced new spatial configurations such as those stemming from the strange *pas de deux* between private developers and public authorities (Bodet; Bondon; Bienvenu), or from functionalist and technocratic planning practices (Denès). Progress is slow, when trying to grapple with the complexities of the palimpsest that is the built landscape, and the work is labour intensive. Adding to the difficulty is the character of an ad-hoc urban assemblage – or patchwork to borrow an expression from Darin himself – assumed by the built environment over the last century. Pointing to the work by M. R. G. Conzen and others on fringe belts, Jeremy Whitehand insists in particular on the usefulness of theories and methods that tackle and explain how different pieces of the urban mosaic are laid out relative to each other in the built landscape. While remaining realistic about how the heavily labour intensive empirical research on urban form limits the opportunities, Whitehand is right when stressing – yet again! – how the lack of understanding of historico-geographical processes is detrimental to contemporary planning practice and policy. Pinon revisits similarly what is a recurring theme for French morphological research: the plot and the allotment system. In what many see as an inaugural study in urban morphology by the so-called French school, and building upon Marc Bloch's historical cartographical work, Boudon *et al.* insisted on the importance of the plot as the smallest common denominator of all elements, legal, social, and pertaining to the history of the land in both the city and the countryside (Boudon *et al.*, 1977, p. 37). They argued that 'social and economic history could find in the laboriously established property cells matrix, a monitoring principle and precise mapping' (Boudon *et al.*, 1977, p. 11). Pinon stresses that the allotment (or plot) is more resilient and has high inertia. While being often reified in a built object, such as a fence or a party wall, it is intangible as if 'floating' above the ground, and going up and down with it. He contends that the allotment is the 'memory of urban topography'. Advocating the development of an 'archaeology of the land', Pinon clarifies the notions of *imprint*, *trace* and *model*,

arguing that the traces revealed by archaeological investigation refer to abstract models, which, once unveiled, allow the restitution of past urban landscapes.

Archaeologist Jacques Gaucher has evocative words to describe the complexities of the urban phenomenon, noting that in his discipline, cities can be approached either by their social forms or by their spatial and material forms. The city, he says, is 'the fruit of multiple rationalities, of conscious and unconscious productions: the city configures topographically an area of interactions that stem as much from everyday experience as from important events; from the global as from the local; from purposeful actions as from the unplanned; from memory as from design; from incremental production as from grand-scale schemes; from practice as from representation; from structure as from history' (p. 19). Gaucher argues that urban morphology and archaeology share the view, borrowed from historical topography, that the city is a unique material phenomenon, which can be apprehended from 'within', hence offering an opportunity to lay the foundations of a specific type of knowledge (p. 20). He is echoing the view, expressed some 25 years earlier by Jean Castex and others that, although to a certain extent a city is a material projection of social, political and economic systems or structures, this projection proceeds through various systems of spatial symbolization, and is manifested in a form, the *built space*, that has its own consistency and resilience (Castex *et al.*, 1980, p. xi). Such a perspective is at the heart of the urban morphology research programme. It still permeates most of the contributions collected here, and it constitutes the best argument in favour of the discipline.

#### References

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*Pierre Gauthier, Department of Geography, Planning and Environment, Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve Boulevard West, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H3G 1M8. E-mail: pierreg@alcor.concordia.ca*

**L'architettura come processo: il mondo plastico murario in divenire** by *Giuseppe Strappa*, Franco Angeli editore, Milano, Italy, 2014, 297 pp. ISBN 978-88-917-0597-6.

Architectural morphology is the analysis of the material and spatial relationships of buildings and their components. Applied morphology manuals teach how components ought to be assembled and recommend architectural composition principles and standards. Grounded in the Italian morphological tradition, Giuseppe Strappa's study explores the question of materiality in architecture by focusing on the relationships between the plastic figurative characters of the wall, and the construction techniques used in its production. However, it needs to be borne in mind that in Italian the meanings of a wall and of masonry are intertwined. The Italian language suggests a stereotomic quality of the wall, as Gottfried Semper (2011) would have put it. The etymology of the word relates to 'stereo', the Greek word for solidity and hardness as well as to 'tomo', the word for 'cut', thus connoting a material depth.

This dual connotation structures the whole book. A masonry wall offers, with both sides and thickness, a set of congruent objectives to organize material, and to define and relate it to the outlined spaces. The plastic solidity of its components finds its source in the landscape. The ground provides support for the stacking of pieces extracted from the earth's crust. Time and space are experienced in a tangible way – quite literally – and architectural delight emerges from these mutual references. The title of the book itself is open to multiple interpretations. The author eloquently outlines, with several examples, how morphological architectural theory is firmly based on empirical observations, while aiming to respond to the practical expectations of an applied art.

Strappa invites the reader to explore a century of modern architecture stemming from different sources and building traditions, but his contribution is culturally rooted in a Mediterranean inheritance. The journey goes back to the sources of Western building culture, with a bold interpretation. The author contends that modern architecture's evolution entailed a shift in design focus from the 'wall' to 'space'. Wall architecture, in its design and construction, imposes a spatial limit. However, such a limit also constitutes an interface, a space of mediation, which engages both the interior and the exterior. The masonry wall, in its material and depth, invites a dialogue with both sides, as well as