

By studying initiatives taken by Birmingham, UK in an attempt by the city to reinvent itself physically and symbolically in the 1980s and 1990s, Tim Hall and Phil Hubbard try to understand the 'morphology' of a city network, 'as complex and contradictory as the landscapes it creates' (Chapter 16). They stress the need for developing a suitable actor network theory.

Local responses to technical requirements pertaining to the construction of railroad infrastructure are examined in Arthur J. Krim's study of Baltimore and Philadelphia in the USA, and Manchester and Liverpool in the UK (Chapter 8). Richard Harris documents the reality of the owner-builders of Peoria, Illinois in the mid-twentieth century, to conclude that land market as well as technical considerations, such as access to standardized house plans and materials, have gradually made self-built residential developments indistinguishable from comparable speculative developments (Chapter 11). Peter J. Larkham retraces the production of some 200 reconstruction plans at the apex of 'technocentric' planning in Britain after the Second World War, to show how technocratic rationality confronts local agency and dynamics (Chapter 13). John R. Gold is interested in the design of megastructures – the technical systems that worked as shared and extensible frameworks – as exemplified by the city centre of the new town of Cumbernauld, UK (Chapter 14).

In a study that relies both on classical town-plan analysis and the examination of the actions of local agents in two New Zealand port cities, Kai Gu shows how different social contexts and dynamics led to different spatial and physical outcomes (Chapter 15). Finally, in an attempt to study the impact of urban morphological theories and methods on the work of 'shapers of urban form', Nicola Marzot considers how morphological and typological 'readings' have influenced the work of architects such as Muratori, Rossi and Aymonino (Chapter 12).

What all the contributions to *Shapers of urban form* share, in spite of their diversity, is a common epistemological approach to the study of urban form. First, each piece seeks to produce new knowledge, though relying more or less intensively on empirical work. Secondly, while focusing on agency as well as on an array of social, technical and political-economic circumstances under which groups of agents have operated, the contributions all trace the portrait of *external conditions* that inform the morphogenesis of different places and times. In brief, they share a cognitive and externalist approach (Gauthier and Gilliland, 2006).

As such, they do not focus on the system of the built landscape per se, nor do they provide minute accounts of material transformations. Some readers, core morphologists, might still have appreciated more abundant illustrations of the built environments analysed. Yet by its scope and the quality of the research presented, this book is generous in a number of other ways. It is certainly a significant contribution to the understanding of cities in evolution.

Reference

- Gauthier, P. and Gilliland, J. (2006) 'Mapping urban morphology: a classification scheme for interpreting the study of urban form', *Urban Morphology* 10, 41–50.

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

Cities by design: the social life of urban form by *Fran Tonkiss*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2013, 204 pp. ISBN 978-0-7456-4897-2.

Tonkiss brings together for a scholarly audience a range of urban theories on the too often oversimplified physical, spatial, economic, cultural, political and social aspects of contemporary urbanization. She discusses seminal works and a range of more recent texts in a skillful historiography of contemporary urban thought, from Lynch to Jacobs, Beauregard to Koolhaas, Lefebvre to Latour, Appleyard to Mumford and more in a parade of views on city design. She repeatedly underlines the gaps between these theorists' points of view and makes connections between the multiple challenges of urban morphology more broadly. The book's primary contribution is to underscore and explore frameworks that have shaped an understanding of cities as social compositions.

Readers are challenged to consider urbanization through several disciplinary lenses, and a range of actors. It is evident from the first page that the contemporary city is not simply comprised of

'iconic architectures and other top-down developments, but also formal and informal practices that shape urban environments, produce and address urban problems, organize people as well as ordering space' (p. 1). The 'expertise' of various fields is problematized by highlighting how their contributions to place making are sequenced. The core themes in urban design – connectivity, permeability, accessibility, and integration – are regarded as being as much 'social concerns as they are spatial conditions' (p. 3).

Design is defined as a force that communicates 'social practices and processes that shape spatial forms, relationships and outcomes in intentional as well as in less intended ways' (p. 5). A range of underlying or sometimes invisible forces are highlighted that provide the tectonic space upon which the physical infrastructure of the city is built, occupied and adapted over time. Defining design is difficult because of the contrasts between the predominant disciplines that claim to 'design' cities. Tonkiss argues that this difficulty arises from disciplinary tendencies that too often disregard the power dynamics at play in the very communities and physical environments to which an attempt is being made to give shape.

The lens of ordinary urbanism is therefore used frequently in the book to counter globalizing urban theories, many of which tend to homogenize cities and the forces that have shaped them. Three important points arise from this: first the critique of prevailing conventions within urban theory; secondly, a concern with the distinctiveness of different cities; and thirdly, an emphasis on the range of actors engaged in the process of city making. Tonkiss extends the 'informal' to touch on all hues of the economic spectrum, arguing that when wealthy populations are concerned, informality is a very distinct but critical factor in the shaping of contemporary urban relationships and physical outcomes. She switches the discussion of 'informality' to urban processes as a whole, and goes beyond the more familiar and sometimes overstated bottom-up points of view. When she says 'the infrastructures of everyday life are composed out of embodied labour, mundane materials and quotidian connections' (p. 24) she is expanding these phenomena into the realm of somehow measurable and comprehensible networks. The reader is being persuaded to recognize the ubiquitous rickshaw or the human sign as profoundly similar to the less immediately visible elite business tycoon's extra-legal appropriations. And as those two unique but arguably intersectional characters – the deregulated

wealthy and the 'informal' poor – are compared, Tonkiss is suggesting the critical need to recognize that both those who seek to understand the city and agencies that try to act on it or influence it need to think about the human clay as well as about the concrete (p. 25).

In the first six chapters, Tonkiss chronicles and elaborates a series of diverse ways that social actors influence and ultimately shape contemporary urban compositions. She repeatedly underlines, from a range of perspectives and with meaningful spatial designs, difficulties related to the advancement of societal objectives. The good intentions of designers are called into question, as seemingly blindly ambitious and even quixotic, and often unable to generate real support for peoples' lives, and livelihoods. The multiple concerns of segregation, homogenization and at times disconnection, among other urban issues in crisis, are highlighted. However, in the seventh chapter there is a switch from the past to consider 'The possible city'.

The book's conclusion illuminates a powerful and yet understated force that is making micro-utopias possible all over the world, not in the mere occupation of ideal places somewhere in space, but rather in the act of self-making and in the re-making of existing underutilized and latent sites for new uses. That act of recalibrating placelessness, or what Kevin Lynch calls the 'non-place' as a means of offering people different possibilities for new spaces and alternative ways of adding or even measuring value, is less about a projective or speculative attitude than it is about an ownership of tangible possibilities, grounded in present conditions.

Simon M. Bussiere, Ball State University, College of Architecture and Planning, AB204 – 2000 University Avenue, Muncie, IN 47306, USA. E-mail: sbussiere@bsu.edu

Urban morphology, architectural typology and cities in transition edited by *Yinsheng Tian, Kai Gu and Wei Tao*, Science Press, Beijing, China, 2014, 197 pp. ISBN 978-7-03-040218-9.

The process of rapid growth and transformation of Chinese cities in the past 30 years is creating great challenges for understanding and managing their urban landscapes. At the same time, a wide range