

contains some marvellously vivid medieval maps, and the book is full of instantly intelligible plans of selected towns and cities. End-notes are full and thorough and highlight the broad and commendably interdisciplinary nature of Lilley's research. There are no criticisms; rather the merest quibbles. The volume starts off with an introduction ('The city-cosmos ideal') that is not the book's most accessible moment, and while the text generally succeeds in putting across complex ideas effectively, the reader must be alert not to trip over the differences between cosmology, cosmography and cosmimetry!

As Lilley recognizes, dry morphological studies of townscapes can only take us so far. This text is intensely thought-provoking and opens up radically different avenues for medieval urban research and for understanding the depth and complexity of Christian and other symbolism in the urban world. It is of huge interest to historical and cultural geographers, but medievalists in general, and archaeologists in particular, need to read it.

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**La comédie urbaine. Voir la ville autrement** by Michaël Darin, Infolio éditions, Collection Archigraphy, Gollion, Switzerland, 2009, 560 pp. ISBN 978-2-88474-583-3.

'It is at the scale of the city that we better see the work of time in space', wrote Paul Ricoeur (2000, p. 187) in *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. A city, explained Ricoeur, confronts within the same space different times, offering to the eye a sedimented history of taste and culture. The city thus gives itself to both seeing and reading.

Michaël Darin's book is an invitation to see and read European cities so as to understand and recognize their imperfections and anomalies, as well as to inspire us to grasp better the multiplicity and diversity of the actors involved in making cities what they are. Time and a great number of actors explain why the city is what it is in Darin's view, and key to this is the *comédie urbaine*, an urban comedy which generates, according to Darin, an 'imperfect city'.

The work is organized into seven autonomous parts, seven books so to speak, along with some additional sections because, explains Darin, all the parts of the composition are conceived to be read

independently of each other. Yet each of the seven books has its own purpose and takes on the subject of the urban comedy through a specific approach, starting from what we can all observe in our cities: local processes forging local urban distinctions, the imprint of the evolution of broader affairs tied to the design of cities and their urban spaces, and the ideas and people behind the main works undertaken within settlements – in this instance in French cities during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

The first 'book' explores the notion of urban landscape as cultural landscape, but also the city as a 'work in progress'. One of the main purposes of this first book is to go back to the concept of city improvement, and one of its corollaries – the building line – so as to explain why built realities do not correspond to desired original projects. The subject of the second 'book', the city as a collective creation, investigates the city as a complex and contradictory organism. The city is made of permanencies as well as continuous and successive actions or operations that collide with each other in the form of urban design. The geographer Marcel Roncayolo (1996, p. 7) noted the significance of 'consolidated time', and Darin explores a similar phenomenon.

The third 'book' is dedicated to another essential aspect of urban studies: the words used to speak about the city and how we come to define key urban features: such as boulevards, avenues and places. The definition of these terms grants no place to ambiguity and seems, at first sight, to be very clear in linguistic terms. Yet by looking at a city map their meaning is less obvious. As urban forms evolve with time so the words used to qualify urban elements are subject to changes, and thereby misuse. The use of words is, of course, very dependent upon the framework in which they are conceived, which includes the image of itself that a city wants to promote. Evidently questions relating to city conceptualization and imagery are of great importance. More often a city's imagery and its reality do not match. Furthermore, a city could be modelled upon an image conceived by a select few architects, urban planners or politicians. This, states Darin, offers a fundamental urban contradiction: architects, for example, conceive cities and seek to bring immediate improvement to the structure and life within them, but the urban reality never matches the concept, in part because cities are formed by a host of agents and urban development is a lengthy process that requires time to bring changes.

The fourth section of *La comédie urbaine*

interrogates city images with reference to developments during the first half of the nineteenth century, for example in the form of cuttings through older parts of the urban tissue prior to the launching of Paris's *Grands Travaux*. The transformations of the city during the nineteenth century are analysed through different perspectives: destructions, perception of the inhabitants, economic and political aspects, the improvement of traffic, sanitary conditions, and urban renewal (albeit with reference to the 'new' typology of modern residential property). A main conclusion reached by Darin is that a gap exists between original intentions and built reality. The main actors, 'singular actors', are the subject of the fifth 'book' which is dedicated, notably, to the thoughts and works of Haussmann and Le Corbusier. Accordingly, Darin explores the notion that *grands plans* are never the work of a unique thought, and to this end he asks key analytical questions such as: who historically 'owned' the paternity of Paris's *Grands Travaux*? Napoléon III or Haussmann? With regard to Le Corbusier, Darin uses the master of Modernism as the pretext to explore themes and contexts tied to the urban solid and void, and the new relation created between buildings and vegetation. Notably he builds on the opportunity to explain the evolution of the street and with this he concludes that the city is essentially a collective work, even if in the case of Paris we can recognize a few *Grands Hommes* of specific influence.

The sixth 'book', entitled 'Disturbing transfigurations' points to the 'defects' and 'intrusions' that have appeared in cities through time, 'disturbing' the envisaged original order of the city – for example, its façades, street layouts, block designs and building block plans in relation to plots. Significantly, the line of enquiry adopted by Darin helps reveal that the city is a collage of different elements, linked together over time and by various dynamics and processes. The difficulty shown, therefore, by Darin with reference to those individuals working on trying to restore the 'original state' of some historical parts of the city is to identify the aforesaid 'original state', which, more often than not, never existed anyway. What kind of inferences does this imply? And what imperfections exist thus deep within city formation? Well, it is imperative to appreciate the imperfections of our settlements; the products of social, cultural, and physical contexts drawn out over a long period of time. Furthermore it is vital to realize that cities are made of improvisations, compromises and adaptations that often contradict the original intentions and ideals behind urban

plans. But, as Darin suggests, do we not find some beauty in those irregularities?

To conclude, Darin's book is for the stroller, the *flâneur* who wishes to take time observing with great attention the surrounding urban scene, and the individual curious to understand the reason behind the many elements that constitute the urban form or, in this case, constitute the parts of the urban comedy.

## References

- Ricoeur, P. (2000) *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* (Seuil, Paris).  
 Roncayolo, M. (1996) *Marseille les territoires du temps* (Editions Locales de France, Paris).

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**Remembering, forgetting and city builders**  
 edited by *Tovi Fenster* and *Haim Yacobi*,  
 Ashgate, Aldershot, UK, 2010, 205 pp. ISBN  
 978 1 409406679.

To attract, and be of relevance to, an urban morphologist a book needs more than the words 'city builders' in its title, but this is a good start. In the broadening of focus on agency in urban morphology and in other aspects of urban studies in recent years too, the issues of memory, remembering and memorials have generated a substantial literature. In many urban areas there are formal and informal 'memorials' – war memorials, place names, associations with characters and events, and even unregarded relict features of past urban landscapes. To them, this book adds the useful corollary of forgetting: why are some things unregarded or deliberately disregarded?

The book is a wide-ranging collection of ten chapters plus epilogue. Chapters cover locations ranging from New York to Lubumbashi (Congo), and from Frankfurt to Volgograd. Themes, or the subjects of specific case studies, include community gardens, the construction of everyday spaces by different communities, memory and place, the implications of post-war reconstruction,