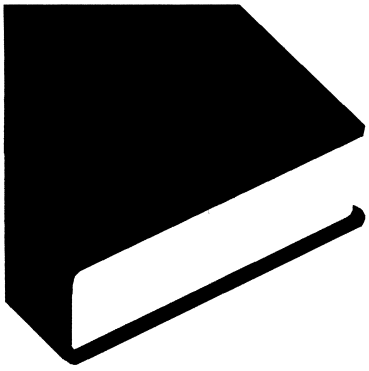

BOOK REVIEWS

Expansive discourses: urban sprawl in Calgary 1945 – 1978 by *Max Foran*, Athabasca University Press, Edmonton, Canada, 2009, 276 pp. ISBN 978-1-897425-13-8.

Calgary, Alberta is a city that perhaps exemplifies, within the Canadian context, sprawl. Since the end of the Second World War, it has spread outward in the form of low-density suburbs composed primarily of single-family houses. While not nearly as shocking as the sprawl found in many places in the United States, Calgary's urban form has attracted criticism for a number of reasons: excessive land consumption, destruction of farmland, increase in auto-dependency, lack of options in house type, and low quality of much of the public realm. How this has occurred is an important question, as it reveals much about the planning paradigms that have influenced city growth, and is also a commentary on the social and cultural values that produced these ideas and forms.

Max Foran, a historian and long-time educator, currently teaching at the University of Calgary, has painstakingly reconstructed the who, what, when, where and why of Calgary's suburban development during the period 1945-78. Author of many books and countless articles, Foran is at his best when recounting the stories behind the many deals that created the city. His research is impeccable, his love of intrigue and drama is obvious, and he brings alive the sequence of events and processes that eventually became the pattern of development now taken for granted.

Although many readily blame the development industry for Calgary's urban pattern, Foran identifies 'five influencing factors in the suburbanization process', including the City of Calgary and the land development companies, the policies pursued by the provincial government and the Central (later Canada) Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), and, importantly, the house buyer.

Essentially, the decision by the City in 1953 to allow the private sector to finance and construct the emerging suburbs signified the beginning of what was to become an extended age of design-by-default by the developer. Several development companies were poised to take advantage of this situation and were well equipped to plan and construct the neighbourhoods that were required by the booming and newly affluent population.

Foran organizes the book chronologically, with Part One covering the period between 1945 and 1963, documenting the origins of the patterns that were established. Part Two deals with 1963 to 1978, describing the continued expansion of Calgary's suburbs through the process of annexation, which is Calgary's method of choice for dealing with growth. The City has a practice of maintaining a 30-year land bank, and satisfies that by annexing land for future growth. This guarantees that the city will continue to spread as low-density suburbs, making the provision of public transportation more difficult and expensive. Foran explores the relationships between the City and the development industry, including one map showing the development industry's land holdings outside of the city limits prior to one annexation.

Calgary has always been friendly to the interests of developers, and it is also a city with a history of rejecting progressive plans, from the Mawson Plan of 1914, to the Urban Design Plan of 1978, to the 2009 process known as Plan-It Calgary. This last plan was intended to be a radical departure from the status quo, and was based on visionary principles about sustainability and urban quality. However, what was eventually adopted was a severely watered-down version. Much of the opposition to the goals of the plan, which would have gone a long way towards combating patterns of sprawl, came from the development industry, which is now

highly organized, politicized and institutionalized.

As is usual with his work, Foran has provided a highly detailed account of the historical events leading to what we see today and many stories about the personalities who were involved, but the contribution to the planning and design disciplines is limited by some errors and omissions. First, it is frustrating that Foran stops at 1978. The greatest value of this book is likely to be in the lessons learned but, since it ends with events 30 years ago, the application to today is missed. The evidence is there just waiting to be elucidated, and it is to be hoped that Foran is busy on a second volume. Although the book is about urban development, there is relatively little discussion of physical urban form, and no comment on the qualities of the built environment – just underlying assumptions that what was produced was bad. There are far too few photographs and maps to complement the text and help the reader to see what the processes, decisions and policies produced. There are also several errors in the captions to the photographs (for example, those on pages 48 and 66 identify the directions incorrectly), some of the maps are graphically crude (particularly the maps showing Calgary's annexations), and many of the photographs are too general, or are unlabelled (for example, the cover photograph of the 1990s suburb of Royal Oak in north-west Calgary, is not identified in the text).

These limitations aside, *Expansive discourses* is an important book. The audience who would probably benefit the most includes City officials and the development industry. Students and professionals in the environmental design disciplines would benefit from consideration of this book alongside another that includes more graphics that illustrate the city's evolution, so that they could more completely understand the physical results of these many years of deals and decisions.

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City and cosmos: the medieval world in urban form by *Keith D. Lilley*, Reaktion Books, London, UK, 2009, 256 pp. ISBN 978 1 86189 441 0.

The distinguished historical geographer Keith Lilley, well known for his leading research on mapping in the Middle Ages and the geography of urban form, has produced a stunning new volume that explores the idea of the city in the medieval imagination. In a finely-detailed yet compelling account, Lilley considers the powerful and enduring link between medieval conceptions of the city and geometrical forms that expressed the work of God, highlighting the place of urbanism within a divinely ordered hierarchy. It goes almost without saying that such concerns have been marginalized in traditional morphogenetic town-plan analyses, and this treatment is an immensely welcome means of injecting extra life, colour and – above all – a flavour of the lived-in experience of the medieval world into the field. Nonetheless, it is a great merit of this book that it has been written by a scholar with a strong record of empirical research in the field of urban morphology, which is also drawn upon to good effect.

The coverage is principally north-west European, with England and France particularly well represented. The text is divided into three parts, each of two chapters. Part I deals primarily with urban form as revealed by medieval map-makers. The image of heavenly Jerusalem in particular is seen as an underlying model for an idealized Christian imagining of medieval urban form, and a variety of geometric forms – circles, squares and especially crosses that recur in town plans – are shown as redolent with rich religious and other symbolism. Here as elsewhere, the range of case studies covered is excellent, with English *burhs* and French bastides standing out as particularly compelling examples. Part II looks at the multiple meanings of town foundation. The agency of lordship in town planning is examined critically, and a persuasive model for the processes of medieval town planning and surveying is developed. The underestimated symbolism of the material culture of town planning – in particular reed and compass – also stands out. Part III examines what are styled the 'moral topographies' of towns, and demonstrates how town plans were also backcloths for performances and religious processions that lent a sense of unity to urban identities which were in so many other ways fractured. The metaphor of the city as akin to the body is a persuasive one: this section looks at the impact of urban laws on the social and moral organization of towns and explores the active marginalization through acts of town planning of sectors of the community, including prostitutes, lepers and displaced ethnic groups.

The volume is handsomely produced and richly illustrated. A sixteen-page full colour section

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.

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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,

and the rhetorical functions of built space. Some of these are quite new topics although, even on the more familiar ones, the contributions are interesting, informative and offer something new: for example in Podoler's chapter on identity and the construction of the past in Seoul, and Lagae's contribution on colonial built heritage in Lubumbashi.

The editors' introduction clearly sets the context in terms of theoretical debates on the relationship between, on the one hand, the activities and products of planning, architecture and urban design and, on the other, agency, knowledge production, place creation and use. Key to their argument is the assertion that 'the planned landscape is ... a symbol of the political power of the state, which struggles to establish a particular collective identity' (p. 1). Successive chapters give examples of the deliberate creation of place, the suppression of aspects of the past, the manipulation of heritage, and so on. All are quite familiar arguments, although it is very helpful to see these new examples (Haussman's Paris and socialist Berlin are perhaps too frequently used).

It might, though, be interesting to explore these concepts through a slightly different lens. Much detailed morphological work has shown that many urban landscapes are products of incremental, small-scale and 'unplanned' processes occurring over substantial periods, with the gestation periods of some developments taking decades. Although these processes normally work within an overarching framework of control, which could clearly be described as 'a symbol of the political power of the state', it is hard to see in these everyday, ordinary urban landscapes any particular drive to establish a 'particular collective identity'. And such processes can, over time, significantly change the character and appearance of their locality; removing or re-constituting some 'memorials' and adding new structures (and creating new opportunities for new memories) through redevelopment and infill. So one could question how widely applicable the processes highlighted by the editors might be. Sandercock, whose critical comments on modernistic planners are cited by the editors (p. 1), has an interesting perspective on the lowest level of agency in the built environment – the often unregarded, small-scale, individual and community-driven change unrelated to the big picture of State power, aspiration and control.

In this context it is particularly interesting that the editors choose as their first substantive chapter Eizenberg's study of the creation of community gardens in New York. The production and use of these informal gardens, particularly by ethnic migrant communities, is set in the theoretical context of invoking a pre-urban, often pre-migration, life; and the process of developing these gardens as a struggle with authority. This is identified as another of the book's central themes: that 'different communities living in urban spaces struggle to legitimize their identity and diasporic memories through spatial practices' (p. 2) in the creation and use of space. The chapter highlights that these communities can be active actors rather than merely passive consumers of the spaces provided by the State and its planning systems. Reference to the recent trend for 'guerrilla gardening' might have made this point even more forcefully!

The two chapters on post-war reconstruction do address that wider, more formal, State-level of space production. Reconstruction after catastrophe is usually at such a scale that State intervention and resources are needed; and especially after wartime destruction, political upheaval and societal change, processes of reinterpretation come more into action – the remembering and forgetting of the book's title, spurred often by dissonant and unpleasant heritage issues. Stalingrad, for example, presented Soviet planners with a *tabula rasa* in a way that many damaged cities did not. Trubina explores the product of this reconstruction – an iconic representation of Soviet invincibility, but renamed Volgograd in 1961 – not only through the built product but also through the communication of this 'rhetorical space' experienced by contemporary guided tours. The tours are stereotyped and the space paradoxical. Part of the paradox is the layering of Soviet and Stalinist symbolism; but in reality are not most urban places 'paradoxical'? Rodenstein explores the rebuilding of Frankfurt am Main not in terms of its *first* post-1945 rebuilding, but the 2007 decision to reinstate parts of the lost medieval street grid and replicate several buildings. Her argument links these planning decisions with the remembering/forgetting processes, suggesting that these are normal functions and that forgetting, in the urban context, does not occur intentionally. Meaning and self-image, central to Frankfurt's story, are regularly reviewed as circumstances, politics, populations and even individuals change.

The final chapter, Hatuka's 'epilogue', is an interesting exploration of collective memory, sense of place and place-making. She addresses a crucial question: given that both remembering and forgetting 'is a routine reality for so many people, why does it still have so much significance?' (p.

193). She relates this to issues of twentieth-century change – the destruction of world wars, the mass movement of peoples across national and cultural borders, and their assimilation into new cultures. The changes to urban areas, and the processes explored in this volume, are strategies of coping with change. They may be, she says, related to Freud's theory about 'working through' the traumas of repressed memory.

Overall this is an informative and challenging book, and it usefully adds to our knowledge of processes of urban change and use. The chapters cover some difficult ground, but this is vital in understanding how radically new communities change their surroundings: and as formerly minority ethnic groups become majorities in the new century, this is likely to take on greater significance. Some chapters could be stronger: having visited Seoul I looked in vain for some issues in the chapter on that city's identity and the construction of its past, but interesting details on the reinstatement of some sites were submerged in the political era-level overview. Nevertheless, on the whole this is a worthwhile and challenging book. This is a part of Ashgate's series 're-materializing cultural geography' and, despite the rather heavy use of the currently-fashionable jargon of cultural geography, there are several other volumes with relevance to urban morphology here.

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ISUF 2012: New urban configurations

The Nineteenth International Seminar on Urban Form (ISUF 2012) will take place in Delft, The Netherlands on 17-20 October 2012, hosted by the Technische Universiteit Bouwkunde, Department of Architecture and Urbanism, in collaboration with the European Association of Architectural Education. The theme of the conference is 'New urban configurations'. Topics to be covered include:

- Innovative building typologies
- Infrastructure and architecture
- Complex urban design
- Green spaces and the city
- Transformation of historical centres
- The European city

A key feature of the conference will be the last of a series of symposia during 2011 dedicated to Saverio Muratori. There will also be a post-conference excursion, which will include visits to both Rotterdam and Amsterdam. For further information contact Professor Nicola Marzot (e-mail: N.Marzot@tudelft.nl).

Urban coding and planning

Urban codes have a major influence on urban form. They are the subject of a new book which investigates the nature and scope of coding, its purposes, the kinds of built environments associated with it, and its relationship to urban planning. Edited by Stephen Marshall, *Urban coding and planning* (Psychology Press, London, 2011) brings together historical and continuing traditions of coding from many different parts of the world.

Contributions include:

Karl Kropf: Coding in the French planning system – from building line to morphological zoning

Nick Green: A chronicle of urban codes in pre-industrial London's streets and squares

Vibhuti Sachdev: Paradigms for design – the Vasta Vidya codes of India

Qinghua Guo: Prescribing the ideal city – building codes and planning principles in Beijing

Yoshihiko Baba: Machizukuri and urban codes in historical and contemporary Kyoto

Jonathan Barnett: How codes shaped development in the United States, and why they should be changed

Gerald Steyn: Coding as 'bottom-up' planning – developing a new African urbanism

Barrie Shelton: Adelaide's urban design – pendular swings in concepts and codes