



BOOK REVIEWS

The urban towers handbook by *Eric Firley* and *Julie Gimbal*, Wiley, Chichester, UK, 2011, 264 pp. ISBN 978-0-470-68474-0.

The skyscraper occupies a unique position in architectural and popular imaginary. It is an object of intense fascination as an icon or a symbol, evoking romantic ideas of the urban skyline. It is the quintessential image of the metropolis as an artfully-crafted composition of spires, domes and masts. It is also regarded with scepticism, as a blunt instrument of commercial real estate speculation and architectural ambition. The tall building is governed by the imperatives of image-making – the iconic silhouette and the dramatic profile. It is a performer for the larger public. As such it forms part of the ensemble that makes up the urban skyline, rendering it a highly public or collective form. The tall building as commercial real estate reminds us that architecture and indeed cities are largely commercial entities; historically points of convergence and trade, built as frameworks for commercial activities, moving goods and housing businesses. Architecture as image-based icon and architecture as a real estate instrument are two qualities that are amplified by the skyscraper as a building type.

Eric Firley and Julie Gimbal's book *The urban towers handbook* sets out to investigate the complex relationships between the urban tower as an architectural structure and the role that it plays in a larger urban ensemble. They allude to their preference for the tower's base – how it meets the ground, and the city – versus the glamorous tops of towers, or how they represent themselves against the skyline. In their investigation they confront a number of skyscraper conceptions and misconceptions, and urban legends and metropolitan myths: the tower as a singular figure versus the tower as part of an urban field condition, the tower as a generic or global type versus the tower as a

highly site-specific local building type, and the tower as a resource-intensive energy consumer versus the tower as part of a high-density and compact land-use plan that is inherently energy efficient.

The myth of autonomy or singularity is addressed in the first chapter where tall buildings are organized by the way they engage their urban contexts, either as solitaires, gateways, clusters, patterns or fabrics. Even the free-standing tower, exemplified by the Kingdom Centre in Riyadh, is explicitly aware of the role of the tall building in the urban context and as part of a larger composition. The selection and organization of projects highlights the degree to which they participate in an urban ensemble. Johnson and Burgee's Puerta de Europa towers form an urban gateway, while the Rockefeller Center forms a multi-block and hierarchical composition. The authors also feature a number of vertical cities, including Hong Kong and Monaco, as examples of high-rise cities that form extreme urban patterns and types. The showcasing of a city instead of individual buildings is a significant editorial choice. The presentation of high rise *fabric* highlights the urban tower as capable of producing *typicality* rather than exceptionalism. It shifts the focus from the architectural (and the architect) to the urban.

The city can be understood as an accumulation of material, processes and people. It can also be understood as the overlapping of dense networks of codes. To design an urban building involves complex negotiation with the regulatory structures in place in cities. Indeed the tall building could be understood as shaped primarily by forces that are external: regulations, zoning laws and building codes that govern height, massing, setbacks and sometimes the building materials used in any given context. The second chapter investigates the specific zoning laws of several cities, including London, New York, Hong Kong and Frankfurt. This chapter also highlights how *local* the building

type is, as zoning laws prescribe particular urban forms. New York's set back skyscraper type emerged out of the 1916 zoning resolution as a means of controlling building bulk to ensure access to light and air. This is distinct from London's view corridors, which control bulk to preserve certain views of St Paul's Cathedral, and Paris's zoning which limits building heights in the historical centre but is more permissive at the perimeter. The in-depth analysis of local zoning codes explains so much of the urban morphology of high-density cities, and underscores the fact that distinct urban fabrics owe more to the genetic structure of regulatory codes than to the individual authorship of architects.

Exterior conditions, such as zoning regulations, govern the maximum extent of a tower's form; the interior is governed by the informal codes of leasing cultures, floor-plate sizes, core-to-perimeter dimensions, and industry preferences for open plan or perimeter offices. The residential tower, made up of a granular structure of individual units, is distinct from the open-floor plate of the office tower. The slender shafts of many French tall buildings are a result of labour laws that insist that workers sit within 5 m of a glazed exterior wall. The leasable depths of many tall buildings in Tokyo reach 18-20 m, resulting in deeper floor plates and bulkier towers. These internal and organizational conditions are equally determining of the tower's form, but are underemphasized in this book. Indeed, the tower could be defined by the intense calibration of space and performance both internally and externally; where the compactness of the elevator core, the optimization of its leasing depth and its maximization of its building envelope are all equally important factors in its overall efficiency, and its ultimate success.

The final chapter, entitled 'High-rise and sustainability', addresses the building type relative to questions of sustainability and energy. The author, Philippe Honorat, a mechanical engineer with WSP Flack + Kurtz, acknowledges the tall building as an energy intensive building type. He notes the trend towards urbanization in both the developed and developing world as urban populations continue to grow. From a land-use point of view, the tall building is a key component of urban networks that share resources, such as public transportation, and encourage collective use of space, such as parks and recreation spaces. Given its inherent density and shared resources, tall building is a key component of our urban future.

The urban towers handbook is an extremely well researched, clearly illustrated, and beautifully

written resource. The larger agenda of the book – to understand the tall building as a figure within a wider urban field – is important and underappreciated. The role of the tall building in our rapidly urbanizing and energy conscious urban future demands more attention and this volume makes great strides towards achieving it.

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The life and death of the Australian backyard by *Tony Hall*, CSIRO Publishing, Collingwood, Australia, 2010, 176 pp. ISBN 978-0-643-09816-9.

This finely researched and well presented book provides a compelling account of how powerful social and economic forces, in conjunction with ineffective and often archaic planning controls, have combined to dramatically affect Australian suburban form since the 1990s. The book's primary aim is to trace the disappearance of the Australian backyard – a resource that, Hall argues, offers multifarious benefits for both individual households and wider society – in order to generate discussion and debate on this often ignored, yet highly significant, phenomenon. Hall also draws on his extensive experience as an urban designer, town planner and former local councillor in the UK, to illustrate how this phenomenon could be reversed through simple regulatory changes, more proactive design guidance and a return to traditional Australian values.

The book commences with a lucid exposition of the suburban backyard, including commentary on its genesis, and its aesthetic, ecological, environmental, social and utilitarian values. Hall argues persuasively that retaining substantial backyards will enhance the wellbeing of individuals and the community – a point that is reinforced throughout the book – although he launches almost immediately into a detailed analysis of the form of older Australian suburbs that would, perhaps, have been better left for a later chapter. As a consequence, the reader has to wait until the book's second chapter to reach crucial introductory material, including a definition of the backyard. Despite this, Hall's examination of the form of older Australian suburbs, which includes data on average lot sizes, setbacks, dwelling footprints and

backyard areas, supplemented by numerous photographs, establishes a sound empirical basis for his analysis of Australia's newer suburbs.

Hall's analysis of a selection of post-1990 residential developments from across Australia is the central focus of the book's key chapters, and arguably its greatest strength. He seamlessly integrates the findings of painstaking and methodical research with high-quality aerial photographs that give the reader an unparalleled, birds-eye view of contemporary suburbia. The data and photographs reveal a ubiquitous trend towards larger dwellings that consume almost all available land within their lot, leaving little room for backyards, which are often well below 100 m². This contrasts dramatically with Hall's earlier analysis of older residential areas defined by smaller dwellings and substantial backyards in the order of about 150 m² to 400 m². In addition, Hall points to accompanying changes in housing design. In newer suburbs, houses 'frequently have a deep, square shape creating large internal spaces without natural light and ventilation' (p. 41). Added to this is 'a trend towards fewer and smaller windows' (p. 41) – a consequence of small side and rear setbacks, high opaque fencing, and a desire to minimize building costs – which reduces outlook and opportunities for households to benefit from natural climatic control. The dominance of integral garages and driveways at the front of dwellings also reduces the aesthetic quality and safety of local streets, providing yet another reason for people to insulate themselves from the outside world and the communities in which they live.

Taken together, Hall's account of these changes to Australian suburban form paints a bleak picture. The absence of substantial areas of private open space, especially to the rear of dwellings, will inevitably have an adverse impact on the health of people and the natural environment. Of particular concern to Hall is the absence of natural vegetation and pervious surfaces to absorb rainwater, remove pollutants, protect biodiversity and modify the microclimate. Smaller backyards also limit the potential for households to use these spaces for recreational, social, and utilitarian purposes, including clothes drying, water collection, waste disposal and home food production – all of which epitomize sustainable lifestyles.

In the second half of the book, Hall explores the forces behind Australia's changing suburban form, questioning why the planning system has done little to halt the decline of backyards in newer suburbs, and suggesting measures to improve the current situation. In particular, he provides evidence to

support the view that obvious 'suspects', such as policies for urban consolidation and higher densities, are not in fact the cause of the trend towards smaller backyards, noting that large backyards can be accommodated at densities well in excess of Australian standards. Instead, Hall points to troubling socio-economic trends – namely, longer working hours and a reclassification of the house as a financial, rather than lifestyle, investment. He notes: 'in the current mind set, the backyard is not perceived as having any financial value as an investment, whatever its advantages may be' (p. 94). This results in housing forms that maximize floor area at minimal cost: typically single-storey, deep-plan dwellings with integral garages, few windows and no eaves. Given this scenario, minimal land remains for backyards. Of notable concern is that Australian planning regulations have done little to prevent the backyard's disappearance. Hall attributes this to the lack of requirements for private open space, which stems from insufficient empirical evidence on both the dimensions and use of backyards. Encouragingly, he suggests that existing planning regulations could overcome the problem by specifying rear setbacks of 8–10 m and limiting the size of dwelling footprints to no greater than 40 per cent of the lot. Hall also argues cogently for the value of design guides and site-specific design briefs, in conjunction with dialogue between planning authorities, developers and political representatives. Finally, he closes with a call for a broader discussion of the social values and attitudes that lie behind the backyard's demise in Australia's newer suburbs: a discussion that properly demands the attention of all Australians.

The life and death of the Australian backyard is an excellent book, and a worthy recipient of this year's Planning Institute of Australia's 'Cutting Edge Research and Teaching Award'. Although the book's primary audience is Australian, it contains valuable lessons for everyone interested in suburban residential form, housing design, environmental sustainability, public health and social change. Despite occasional typographical errors, Hall's book is a fascinating analysis of suburban design and planning in an Australian context, and a significant contribution to scholarship in the field.

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Shrewsbury: an archaeological assessment of an English border town by *Nigel Baker*, Oxbow Books/English Heritage, Oxford, UK, 2010, 256 pp. ISBN 978-1-842-17315-2.

Nigel Baker's volume on Shrewsbury presents the final publication of the archaeological assessment for the county town of Shropshire, first undertaken in 1998 and revised and updated between 2003 and 2006. It arises from the programme promoted and partly funded by English Heritage over the past 15 years to create Urban Archaeological Databases (UAD) for important towns and develop coherent research strategies for their future management. However, as might be expected from an author with such wide-ranging expertise in urban archaeology, it goes beyond a simple synthesis of previous archaeological work in Shrewsbury to become a major monograph on the history and development of one of England's best preserved historic towns.

The volume is well structured to achieve its varied goals. Part I contains a full assessment of Shrewsbury's archaeological record in five chapters. After a brief introduction, Chapter 2 outlines early antiquarian discoveries and post-war archaeological investigations within the historic core, and presents the evidence of historic maps from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion of 'the shape of Shrewsbury' outlining the town's landscape setting and the significance of terracing to its development. This is followed in Chapter 4 by a predictive deposit model for buried archaeology defined by a series of landscape and activity zones, and in Chapter 5 an assessment of the town's standing buildings. Whilst this section is designed to meet the needs of urban planners responsible for managing Shrewsbury's historic environment, it also presents a sensitive analysis of the character and survival of medieval urban archaeological deposits and monuments which is of wider relevance than for Shrewsbury alone. Part II provides a narrative history of the town in seven chapters, drawing on the below-ground and above-ground archaeological evidence. Baker describes Shrewsbury's origins in the Anglo-Saxon period and its medieval and post-medieval development up to c. 1700, followed by a summary of the later post-medieval period which is rather disappointingly brief. Part III consists of a short chapter outlining key research priorities for the future. The volume is well supported by a gazetteer and a series of large-scale maps showing existing sites and monuments in the UAD, as well as an extensive bibliography.

One of the most striking conclusions of the volume as a whole is the long-term effect of Shrewsbury's distinctive topographic position. Located on a hill within a loop of the River Severn, the town site is almost an island except for a narrow land corridor to the north; it was here that pre-Conquest defences and later the Norman castle were erected. The town possessed two medieval bridges, the 'English bridge' on the east and the 'Welsh bridge' on the west, each with suburban settlements. The naming of the bridges highlights that Shrewsbury was for many centuries the 'border town' of the book's subtitle, a major defensive point in the contested March of Wales. The restricted site had a significant effect on the development of the urban landscape; the entire hilltop site within the river loop has been subject to extensive terracing, both small-scale initiatives within individual properties or groups of properties, and large-scale landscaping operations, most notably the city wall, constructed between 1220 and 1242, which cuts across several groups of tenements on the east and west sides of the town. The town's buildings often have deep cellars or undercrofts to take advantage of the terraces and create level building platforms. All of this has had a severe negative impact on the survival of earlier buried archaeological deposits, although some areas of valuable early archaeology may be preserved within medieval courtyards, making these priority areas for preservation and future research.

Baker highlights that the lack of archaeological evidence makes the origins and early development of Shrewsbury very difficult to assess. In the Roman period the regional capital was 5 miles to the south-east at Wroxeter, where a significant post-Roman elite centre has also been identified, but there may have been a river crossing on the medieval town site. Shrewsbury first emerges as an historic centre in the seventh or eighth century around two prominent Minster churches, St Chad's and St Mary's, both located on the highest point within the river loop; a royal residence is known from a charter of 901. There is evidence for the development of churches, defences and domestic occupation in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the Norman Conquest had a significant impact on the urban landscape with the construction of the castle and the foundation of a Benedictine abbey in the eastern suburb. There is no firm evidence for formal planning in the layout of streets and tenements, but Baker argues that this reflects the underlying topography which made geometric planning difficult to apply; a concern with shaping the urban environment can be seen in the creation

of a new market in the thirteenth century on the site of an infilled bog or pool known as the *Gumbes-tolemore*. Shrewsbury retains a significant collection of large stone houses belonging to members of the prominent mercantile and gentry elite dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as well as extensive survivals of stone and timber-framed houses from the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which are fully described and analysed according to their construction and plan forms. However, with only limited archaeological investigation of urban tenements, the evidence for economic development and material culture from the town remains sparse, and only a limited amount is known about the city's medieval parish churches and friaries.

In this substantially researched and erudite work, Baker makes good use of the available archaeological evidence for medieval and post-medieval Shrewsbury, as well as honestly and critically reflecting on gaps in our knowledge and the limitations of what has survived. In so doing, he has produced a major contribution both to our understanding of the unique landscape of one of England's best preserved medieval towns, and through this single case study raises important questions for our understanding of medieval town development and urban archaeology as a whole.

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Urban maps: instruments of narrative and interpretation in the city by *Richard Brook and Nick Dunn*, Ashgate, Farnham, UK, 2011, 250pp. ISBN 978-0-754676-5-77.

Urban maps discusses new ways and tools to read and navigate the contemporary city. Each chapter investigates a possible approach to unravel the complexity of contemporary urban forms. Each tool is first defined, introducing its philosophical background, and is then discussed with case studies, showing its relevance for the navigation of the built environment. Urbanism classics such as the work of Lynch, Jacobs, Venuti and Scott-Brown, Lefebvre and Walter Benjamin are fundamental in setting the framework of the volume. In the introduction cities and mapping are first discussed, the former are illustrated as 'a composite of invisible networks devoid of landmarks and overrun by nodes' (p. 3),

and 'a series of unbounded spaces where mass production and mass consumption reproduce a standardised quasi-global culture' (p. 6).

In the first chapter, 'Brand, image and identity', the emerging role that commercial logos have in the definition of urban space is discussed in detail. Branding pervades Western, or Westernised, societies at multiple scales: a strong visual culture is based on the repetition of images that create a network. The chapter discusses brands in a general sense, including logos, signs, advertisements, and also branded architecture. The latter is investigated through specific typologies, such as the 'cardboard box', the 'graphic building', and the 'pure sign'. Every category addresses a particular use of design to brand an architectural item or a space.

The second chapter turns to 'networks'. 'Rather than contributing to a reduced sense of awe, networks have the capability to enrich and extend our everyday experience and understanding of the city' (p. 114). Discussion ranges from physical relationships to digital networks, from the geographical scale of poli-nucleated cities to specific artistic experimentation like *Soundcities* by Stanza or *Blur Buildings* by Diller Scofidio and Renfro. Technology is extensively used to introduce different points of view on the built environment. New media and other devices allow the creation of networks based not on physical or special relationships but on social and cultural ones. In this way the 'mapping of space' is not directly related to the built form, but more to human behaviour.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to film as a way to represent the perception and navigation of the built environment. Lefebvre's discussion of spatial practices, representation of space and representational spaces provides the theoretical framework of this section. Several contemporary films, dealing with experiences of particular urban, suburban or marginal built environments, are introduced as case studies, with the examples mainly consisting of British films depicting middle-class dramas. The role of technology is also introduced presenting CCTV networks as a means of monitoring and mapping people's use of space.

Chapter 4 deals mainly with graffiti and artwork. The tension between ownership and use of space is presented, arguing that the urban environment is increasingly being privatized. The social role that the arts have in defining the identity of a place, especially reclaiming its ownership, is discussed. Graffiti is argued to be a form of branding. Daniel Buren, Espo and Eltono are just some of the artists presented, stress being placed on how the repetition of their work in the urban environment is creating

new forms of local landmarks.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to 'objects'. These are discussed as physical interventions that may generate or activate the potential, or latent meaning, of a place (p. 189). Arts and installations have a central role in the discussion, and their role as potential landmarks to navigate space or frame select views is illustrated. This chapter also illustrates different experiences and provocations. In some cases objects provide elements in the city, in others the allegorical representation of the built environment through artworks is the centre of the discussion.

To sum up, the aim of the book is quite ambitious, illustrating possible ways of understanding the contemporary city. The range of ideas and case studies presented is valuable, and there is an up-to-date review of current literature. Mainstream philosophers are quoted to provide a theoretical background to the discussion and suggest new interpretations of views about the navigation of built space. An introductory overview of the selected tools is provided, but the discussion is not developed with a common approach across the five main topics investigated. In some chapters, the review is particularly broad, covering physical and digital realms, geographical discourses and detailed design solutions. Different experiences are compared to provide a general introduction to each topic, the first two chapters covering their topics in a multidisciplinary way. In other sections, for example on 'films' or 'marks', the discussion focuses on a specific aesthetic or ideological approach: several examples are given, but they do not cover a range of positions as in the earlier chapters. Great importance is given to the use of the arts in defining new ways of navigating the urban environment. This is an interesting approach although not innovative. Visual cues have been applied to the urban fabric since ancient times; also films are now a well recognized method of reading, designing and understanding the built environment.

The book is an interesting introduction to alternative ways to read cities and a valuable collection of experiences about navigating urban form. It does not introduce new ideas. It provides an advanced summary of current debates in art and new media more than in urban studies or design.

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Avaliação em planeamento urbano by Vítor Oliveira, U. Porto Editorial, Porto, Portugal, 2011, 301 pp. ISBN: 978-989-8265-70-8.

Vítor Oliveira presents a multifaceted discussion of urban morphology and the urban planning process. He suggests a distinct methodological framework for evaluating urban planning practice in Portugal through a comparative analysis of two Portuguese cities and their municipal plans (*plano director municipal*). The book introduces a fresh perspective on the evaluation of urban planning. While strongly engaging with the current Portuguese situation, Oliveira uses his knowledge of international methods to provide a wide critical perspective on evaluative practices.

The chapter on 'Evaluation in planning' provides a literature review of three topics: the historical development of planning evaluation theory and methods of evaluation; an analysis of contemporary discussion of regional and urban planning; and an analysis of current practice in planning evaluation. References to publications on evaluation methods make an important contribution to this chapter. From the perspective of urban-economy evaluation he isolates five approaches for analysis: cost-benefit analysis; planning balance-sheet analysis; goals-achievement matrix; multi-criteria analysis; and environmental impact assessment. His analysis of contemporary discussions on regional and urban planning recognizes the value of Lichfield, Kettle and Whitbread's *Evaluation in the planning process* (1975) for introducing many issues considered in *Avaliação em planeamento urbano*. He takes up the issue addressed by these authors of how to integrate evaluation into planning. Work by Alexander and Faludi (1989) on the 'policy-plan/programme-implementation process', the European Commission's 'Means for evaluating actions of a structural nature', the 'plan implementation evaluation', and Richard Norton's methodology are primary references on which Oliveira builds the theoretical and methodological framework of his book.

The following chapter takes the investigation of planning evaluation into issues associated with urban form (see also Oliveira and Sousa, 2012). The main concern of this chapter is to understand how urban planning practice has been approached, and has influenced the form of the city. Urban morphology emerges as a crucial issue. This chapter also provides for Portuguese readers an interesting international perspective on urban

morphology. Oliveira not only acknowledges two of the three schools of urban morphology, as introduced by the International Seminar on Urban Form (Moudon, 2001) – namely the Italian and Anglo-Saxon schools – but also the normative and qualitative approaches of urban morphology in relation to urban planning. At the same time he tries to close the gap between planning evaluation and the literature of urban morphology. This chapter concludes by evoking a promising line of future research on urban morphology by exploring an international panorama of planning practices in relation to urban morphology. Oliveira thereby provides possible methodological frameworks for the introduction of mechanisms to control urban form at different scales.

Chapter 3 introduces a methodological framework for evaluation of municipal plans. The review of the international literature and the assessment of Portuguese municipal planning instruments is highly informative. The methodology is placed against the evaluative methods identified in Chapter 1, providing the reader with opportunities for further thought. Matters relating to the implementation stage of urban plans are built on by providing criteria for evaluating the performance of plans. The fact that any plan, at any stage, can be evaluated to improve its quality and local planning procedures encourages further comparative studies.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the application of the proposed methodological framework to Lisbon and Porto. With reference to the *Plano director de Lisboa* (dating from 1994) and the *Plano director do Porto* (dating from 2006), Oliveira analyses and compares two distinct realities: the first concerns a municipal plan that was already approaching the end of its life of implementation; the second a municipal plan that was implemented very recently. The methodological framework relates not only to the planning system relevant to each municipal plan and its legal framework, but also to the urban management process and the changes occurring within the street layout and the built fabric. Thus a broad perspective is provided of the impacts of the different decisions affecting urban form performance. In Chapter 6 the two aforementioned case studies are compared, and in Chapter 7 final conclusions are drawn.

Despite a number of charts and tables testifying to the planning management processes and the proposed methodological framework, the book lacks images that could usefully illustrate and reinforce urban realities to the reader. Such images could also have contributed to the bridging of

theory and practice. Planning management and planning evaluation could have been conveyed in the less abstract way presented by Holanda and Tenorino (2010).

A systematic, coherent evaluation of urban planning practice is presented in *Avaliação em planeamento urbano*. Oliveira demonstrates the need to bridge the gap between planning theory and planning practice, and in so doing he reveals the need to integrate the evaluative instruments that seek to inform planners and stakeholders about current decisions and their future outcomes in urban design. A promising area of research for urban morphologists is set out.

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Arquitetura e urbanidade edited by Frederico de Holanda, FRBH Edições, Brasília, Brazil, 2011, 2nd edition, 222 pp. ISBN 978-85-64222-04-5.

Arquitetura e urbanidade (Architecture and urbanity) is a major book for urban morphologists prepared by Frederico de Holanda and a number of his colleagues (Claudia Garcia, Eliel Silva, Franciney França, Gabriela Tenório, Geraldo Batista

and Vicente Barcellos) in the University of Brasília. First published in 2001, this is the second edition. It is composed of seven chapters, four by Holanda and three co-authored with his colleagues. Two of the seven chapters amplify the versions in the first edition.

Fundamental issues relating to urban morphology are raised in *Arquitetura e urbanidade*. The first, notably, is debate on space syntax and the relation between space and society. Holanda has made a number of contributions to this subject in recent decades. His perspective is rooted in the Brazilian morphological tradition. Indeed, the main goal of the book is to understand how the configuration of Brazilian cities and buildings affects the social life of their residents, workers and visitors: how it has an influence, through a system of barriers and permeability, pedestrian movement and interaction; and, how it enables, or restrains, the human need to meet different sorts of spaces.

Another important concern of the book is the concept of 'urbanity'. Like many authors, from Jane Jacobs to Lars Marcus, Holanda brings this concept to the centre of the debate in *Arquitetura e urbanidade*. Drawing on previous research work, and a book on Brasília published last year (Holanda, 2011a), the author argues that 'urbanity', in physical terms, should mean an increase of built forms in relation to open spaces: an increase in the number of doors facing the public space system, so as to reduce the number of blind walls; and finally, the reduction of 'segregated' spaces. This concept of urbanity provides the framework for the evaluation exercises that are developed in the book.

The diversity of urban scales is fundamental to the thesis offered. Indeed, the main arguments of the book are grounded in rigorous morphological analysis carried out at many different scales: the city-region (Brasília metropolitan region, including both the capital city and the satellite cities, in chapter 2), the city (*Nova Iorque*, a small town in the state of *Maranhão*, in chapter 4), the street (the so-called W-3 in the capital city, in chapter 3), the urban block (the SQN-109 *superquadra* in Brasília, in chapter 5) and finally, the plot and the building (including both a sample of 27 residential buildings in Brasília metropolitan region, in chapter 6, and Holanda's own house, in the satellite city of *Sobradinho*, in Chapter 7).

The relation between morphological description and explanation, on the one hand, and design prescription, on the other – both in planning and architecture – is also explored. Indeed, Holanda offers the reader a detailed description of how he consistently bridges the gap between a quantitative

analytical methodology and a sensitive design process. He illustrates this linkage with examples of buildings constructed in recent decades.

Another significant issue is the evaluation of urban form. A rigorous method is proposed for assessing both projected developments and their implementations. He visits the objects of evaluation (urban areas and buildings), speaks to their residents, and develops an 'applied morphology' that assesses the actual performance of urban tissues and buildings. Furthermore, Holanda incorporates 'time' in this evaluation method, returning to the evaluation objects to understand how urban forms perform over time.

Finally, this book contributes to understanding the city of Brasília, a settlement built after the so-called *Plano-Piloto* (prepared in 1957). Holanda has already published some remarkable books on the Brazilian capital, and on its main designers, Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer (see Holanda, 2010, 2011a, 2011b). What has made, and what still makes, Holanda's work so relevant for those who want to know more about this iconic city is that, although Holanda has a real passion for Brasília, he offers us a scientific evaluation of the city. He clearly identifies its main strengths today, and the opportunities it must capitalize on in the near future. He also points out the fundamental problems of, and the threats to, Brasília, in environmental, social and economic terms.

The origins and the main developments of the 'configurational approach' in Brazil (and to a certain extent, in Portugal) cannot be properly understood without knowing the work of Frederico de Holanda. This book is a clear example of his rigorous, but passionate, contribution to urban morphology. It is to be hoped that an English version of this book will become available in the near future.

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