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support the ownership needs of an emerging middle class and as a formal building block of nineteenth-century expansion. Strickland establishes the parcel as a principal form derivative for the development of Manhattan row-house neighbourhoods; parcel width was dictated by residential construction technology; parcel length afforded construction of suitable house forms with associated rear yards and collectively created an open-space system. As land pressures in New York intensified, the open-space system was abandoned in favour of near 100 per cent lot coverage. This resulted in the construction of tenement buildings, one of America's first non-sustainable housing prototypes. According to Whitehand, similar pressures generated high-lot-coverage housing forms for the working class in England and problematic social conditions.

Kropf describes the parcel in the context of large-footprint buildings in Westminster. Building configurations created an identifiable plot or open space, which had little to do with ownership boundaries. Castex identifies precedents for modernist development in the buildings surrounding Garnier's Opera in Paris. The monumental, large-footprint buildings covered entire city blocks. Collectively the essays reveal that erosion of the parcel as a visible physical element robbed nineteenth-century planning of one of its most powerful tools for positive city building.

The concluding essay by Scheer bridges to the present by interpreting the underlying value of nineteenth-century fabric to the contemporary American planning context. Scheer constructs a case in support of design guidelines that identify and preserve typological rather stylistic elements of inherited morphologies.

Most of the case studies offer powerful insight into the individual and collective meaning of nineteenth-century building blocks, parcels, buildings and streets and the varying capacities of existing morphologies to absorb their impact. The book would be even stronger if the editor had provided an epilogue to weave the overarching ideas together and to address the need for a connection to the present in the diachronic spirit articulated during the closing sessions in the recent ISUF conference in Florence.

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Civic realism by Peter G. Rowe, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1997 (first paperback edition, 1999), 256pp.

It seems impossible not to notice increasing investigation of the nature of 'reality' in recent literature. The relations between society, politics and environment have always been central in studies on urban design, and much ink has been spilled on how cultural and socio-political intentions are reflected in the urban environment. However, it is rather rare to come across work analysing the mechanisms of achieving a dignified civic character of a unified city in our currently fragmented and pluralistic context. Peter Rowe, who is the Dean of the Faculty of Design at Harvard University, offers us one such fascinating work.

The book describes the subject area of civic urban design, and aims to understand public space together with the processes that make and reshape it into a place with civic character. Topics include the role of state and civil society in its construction; architectural dimensions of civic realism; individual and collective uses of space; and how civic places both constitute and represent civic aspects of life.

The author begins with the argument that 'publicly accessible spaces can have a direct, clear civic orientation that reminds us who we are and should become, in contrast to narrow definitions of the term civic in our cities'. 'Civic realism' describes an orientation toward making urban architecture into a civic entity as distinct from simply personal or public experience. Particular cases explored include the Piazza del Campo in Siena, urban spaces of Barcelona, the Grand Projects of Paris, post-war Rome, the New York grid, and Plečnik's proposals for Ljubljana in Slovenia. The underlying theme is the reconciliation between the continuation of the traditional morphology of the city and the improvement of public services as well as environmental quality. The qualities inherent in creating a good civic space include a sense of responsibility and a desire to pass it on to posterity. Rowe concludes that these cannot be manufactured on demand without favourable socio-political conditions: the best place-making occurs across the divide between state and civil society not only because collaboration between public associations and private sectors promote enhanced resources but also because exaggerated moments of interaction enhance place making and

identity.

Having given a brief philosophical account of realism, and a critique of realist art, Rowe also draws a number of interesting points. Each case is accompanied by a useful historical overview of its socio-political context. For instance, the assemblage of property parcels and discrete symbolic references to administrative unity in thirteenth-century Siena should be of prime interest for scholars in urban morphology. He also formulates a definition of 'civic realism' and offers tests to distinguish good civic realist projects.

Architecture's role in accommodating diverse social and political dimensions is also explored. Rowe raises the issues of 'resistive practice' and of 'tolerance' to accommodate social differences within a civic character. The architectural concepts of 'ordinary' and 'specificity' are argued as useful ways of overcoming this paradox. Rowe suggests 'game playing activity' to connect the formal attributes of architecture with the assimilation of anti-establishment tendencies. Architecturally speaking, a position is taken against singular orthodox theories, and a judicious eclecticism is advocated. The author also emphasizes that civic space design should offer transcendental and critical dimensions in addition to figurative architectural devices (e.g. clock towers) which have familiar, popular, traditional references.

Accommodation of different populations validates the content of the book for current situations in many cities of the world. Rowe skillfully manages to synchronize his answers with the questions constantly being raised in readers' minds throughout the book. His fluent narrative style, the smooth transitions between sections, and the rather appealing format of the book offer an engaging read about the well-interwoven relationships among architectural and urban form, social life, administrative principles and political conjuncture. The author successfully intertwines his striking statistical and factual data into this fluent textual work.

Rowe's work helps make concrete the ideas of Harvey, Lefebvre, du Certeau, Arendt and others. This book may aid architects and planners to understand their place within the socio-political system. It is a useful guide for those who are interested in an evolutionary approach to the shape and appearances of urban spaces.

Fragmentary excerpts of short stories, which precede and close each chapter, provide the

quality of a novel, which contributes to the involvement of the reader. One may feel that the visual material could be enriched in terms of cartographic illustrations, although monochrome photographs seem to convey the essence of the message in each chapter. This may, perhaps, emerge as a disappointment for readers in architecture and urban morphology. Overall, it is a book definitely worthwhile, rigorously researched, academically referenced, neatly chronicled, and elegantly written.

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L'urbanisme face aux villes anciennes by Gustavo Giovannoni (with an introduction by Françoise Choay), Le Seuil, Points Essais series, Paris, 1998, 349 pp (first published in Italian, 1931; second edition, 1995).

Looking back on our neighbours' forefathers can open new paths. The Italian architect Donatella Calabi (1997) having rediscovered Marcel Poëte, Françoise Choay has now introduced the French public to the major work of Gustavo Giovannoni, *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova*. This paperback edition is an abridged version of the facsimile edition by Francesco Ventura, the parts omitted being legislative texts, outdated case studies and illustrations.

The first section of the book consists of a theoretical and somewhat traditional description of the evolution of European cities through the ages (ancient, medieval, baroque, neo-classical, industrial and modern cities) in terms of both architecture and planning. For reasons of clarity, Giovannoni separates history into two parts, before and after the Industrial Revolution. Although he starts the modern period with the Industrial Revolution, he shows a clear rejection and misunderstanding of this part of urban history. According to him, emergent town planning is a discipline that aims to preserve the remains of the historic city, correct the excesses and illnesses of the industrial city and make them compatible with the modern city.

In the second section of the book the historic and the modern city are no longer considered as separate entities but discussed from the standpoint of their relationship to one another, especially in terms of how they are to be understood and organized. Giovannoni makes a clear distinction