

FRANCIS TIBBALDS AWARD SHORTLISTED BOOKS 2015

For the fifth year, the UDG Awards programme includes a Book Award. Publishers were invited to nominate one of their recently published books. In the following pages, eight finalists are reviewed by a panel chaired by Louie Sieh. It will choose the winner, which will be announced at the Awards event in March 2015.

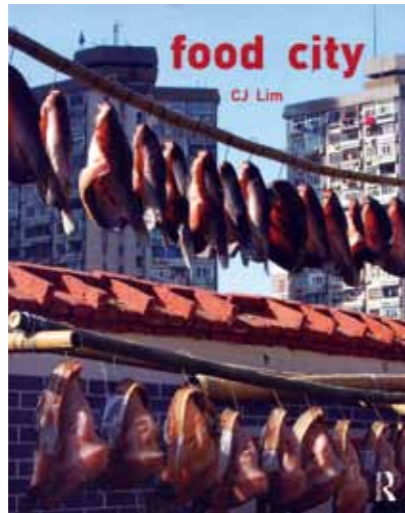
Food City

CJ Lim, Routledge, ISBN 978-0-415-53926-5

Urbanism and agriculture are inextricably linked, developments in agriculture enabled cities to form and grow. Today the agricultural processes that sustain cities are often far removed and the equitable supply of food and its synergy with the natural environment is becoming increasingly strained. The story of food and the city set out by CJ Lim expands upon Carolyn Steel's (2008) *Hungry City*, making visible the pivotal role of food in cities and offering a Manifesto for a modern city ordered around a re-localised food economy.

The first nine chapters give an account of food in relation to other drivers such as business, community, energy and health, each chapter taking an international tour through current initiatives and projects, building towards an argument for the Manifesto. *Food City* can at times read like a compilation of hipster trends, including transition towns, slow food, street food, urban agriculture, cupcakes and city bees. But buried here and there are interesting examples such as the People's Restaurants in Brazil designed to end hunger and malnutrition, the Makati Vendors Program in the Philippines regulating and sustaining street traders, or Law 42 in Havana that gave citizens urban rights reconnecting the city with food production.

The second part of *Food City* is an annotated and illustrated, 'improbable but not illogical' Manifesto for London, where a Food Parliament hovers over the city controlling food as the core economy of the city. This has grown out of Lim's architecture studio at the Bartlett, UCL. In this fictional and necessarily ironic vision for London, all citizens are conscripted into an agro-ecological system and given the 'freedom' to exercise a new green religion. The vision is artfully depicted in comic strip explanations and elegant but surreal drawings populated with animals; humans appear as faceless drones. The components of the city vision such as vertical



farms, ponds on roofs, and pies in the sky have been chosen for their visual potential. The narrative is infused with homely references to London's venerable institutions: the City, the Queen, Parliament.

As drawings in their own right they express joyfulness in how things work but the accompanying narrative seems out of sync with earlier observations. Even if it is at times tongue in cheek, the vision tips into a dystopia, and it is a shame not to see the civic qualities identified in projects in the first part of the book take shape more meaningfully in the Manifesto.

At the core of *Food City* is the idea that dependency on 'the global vending machine' (e.g. only 2 per cent of New York's food is produced within the city) makes cities extremely vulnerable and that planning should do more to regulate food security. Ideally such a shift in policy could open up opportunities for civic engagement and shared land ownership and new city infrastructures such as can be tangentially seen in *Food City*.

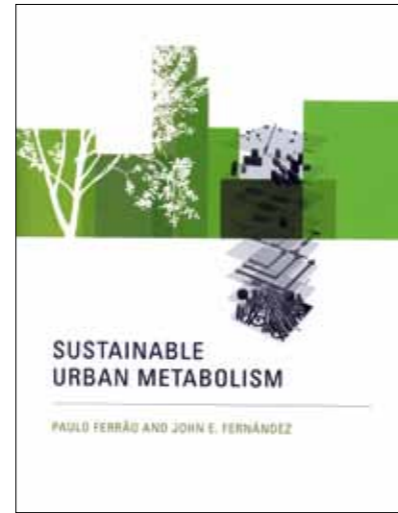
● Juliet Bidgood

Sustainable Urban Metabolism

Paulo Ferrão and John E. Fernandez, The MIT Press, ISBN 978-0-262-01936-1

A manual for cities in the Anthropocene era, this book begins to map out an expanded horizon for readers wishing to plot the future of sustainable urban design, pertinent especially since in recent times the policy hooks for promoting sustainability have proved so slippery. Rather than defining a city by a singular quality such as its carbon emissions or its economic performance, *Sustainable Urban Metabolism* aims to build the arguments and identify the tools for creating integrated models of cities.

The authors, working in the context of the MIT Portugal Program focused on research into engineering systems, bring a systems approach to the field of industrial ecology; it



is interesting to see the rigors of the scientific method deployed in ecology generally, brought into a discussion about the city.

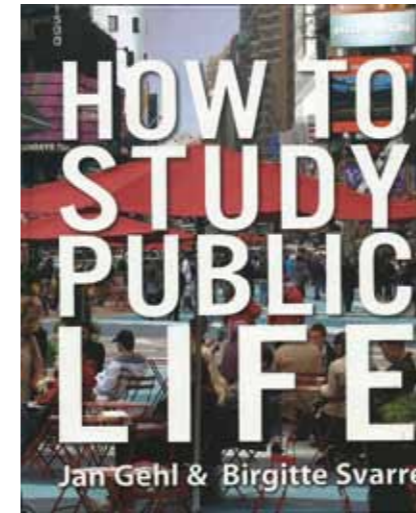
A contemporary idea of cities develops through the book. Globalisation and intensifying urbanisation are seen as interdependent and each city is part of a global network depending on 'multiple linkages between.... communicating hubs of urban systems'. Cities are described as distinct metabolisms with their own characteristics, each generating flows of water, material, energy and nutrients.

The book proceeds in four parts: firstly industrial ecology is introduced as a means of more rigorously defining sustainable development. Then the tools and methods available to assess the resource intensity of cities are explained, and a new model is proposed integrating the different dynamics of urban areas to describe an urban metabolism. The book concludes by identifying case studies from developing countries.

The purpose of understanding the city as a metabolism is identify and manage material and resource flows, and become more efficient. The authors give an account of studies in Vienna, Hamburg, London and Lisbon that have modelled the stocks and flows of materials through the city. In Lisbon researchers tracked biomass, fossil fuel, metals and non-metallic minerals: 80 per cent of the 11 million tons of material used in one year were non-renewable, and 64 per cent of these were in construction. Already this demonstrates that the current focus in sustainable development on fuel, water, food and transport obscures the impact of the material of the city itself.

In their opening chapter, the authors note that 'there is an indisputable link between information, comprehensibility and democracy'. To be able to understand the systems in which we participate, we need to foresee the consequences of our actions well enough to take responsibility for them. The rethinking and modelling of the city as a metabolic system could be used to identify other long-term drivers for sustainability that could be widely owned and perhaps withstand hard times.

● Juliet Bidgood



How to study public life

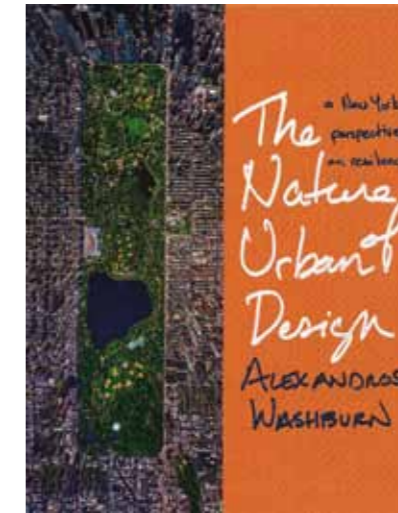
Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre, Island Press, ISBN 978-1-61091-423-9

One of the difficulties of urban design is that some of its most fundamental aspects are so intangible. In *How to study public life*, Jan Gehl and Birgitte Svarre have firmly grasped the nettle that is public life, drawing on Gehl's work across 50 years, to give us a practical guide for understanding the 'interaction between public life and public space', to help us improve how people live from day to day. It highlights the 'influence of physical conditions on the extent and character of life in individual streets'; 'much more than aesthetic qualities determine whether a public space is valued and used'. This gives direction to better integrate the disparate elements involved.

The book is essentially a summary of public life studies. Chapter topics are: scope and methods of observation; review of historical studies; series of themed studies; array of public space-public life studies; a focus on Copenhagen across 50 years of public life policies. All of these are presented with extensive notes and bibliography, and diagrams and photos throughout.

Reflecting the practical nature of these types of studies, the book is very readable, though the text could have been snappier, each chapter with a short overview and broken down into clear parts, with extended descriptions of photos and diagrams. Specific examples are used throughout, although at times, incisive comments and wider relevance are lacking.

Breaking down individual aspects that constitute behaviour in public space achieves a way to understand the qualitative quantifiably. This renders individual aspects of public life comparable and therefore useful as part of a design process. The authors stress the importance of manual observation rather than relying solely on for example, video and vehicle counters, although these can be useful too.



Public life studies are not detail-design focused, but it is stressed that 'their focus is public life in interaction with design rather than design itself'. This offers general principles rather than design guidelines: assemble rather than disperse, integrate rather than separate, invite rather than repel, and open up rather than close in.

From the tail end of the 20th century, the acknowledgement of the effects of car dominance and a rise in inter-city competition, have resulted in an increased profile for public life. This highlights shifts in political agendas that require cities to be more attractive as places where people want to live, work and visit, and in social agendas that demand healthier, safer and more sustainable cities. This book is very relevant to this ongoing work.

● Marc Furnival

The Nature Of Urban Design: A New York perspective on resilience

Alexandros Washburn, Island Press, ISBN 978-1-61091-380-5

This is a book about cities, predominantly New York. Against the complexities of achieving built-out schemes, the former chief city urban designer enthusiastically sets out to show how all of us can help make the 'individual actions of proposed buildings better for the neighbourhood, more profitable for the developers and more resilient for the city', balancing political, financial and design interests.

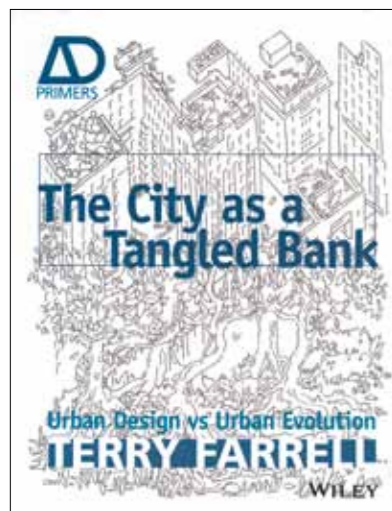
The book's stated brief is to convince non-urban designers of the benefits of good design. Chapters cover: why we should care about cities, urban design process, the products of urban design, the case study of New York's High Line park, and strategies for making cities more sustainable and resilient, with flooding being an underlying theme. The book is well illustrated throughout with snapshot style photos and some diagrams.

The case study of the High Line linear park, the abandoned elevated train line running down the west side of mid-town Manhattan, is a good example of process; politics, finance and design coming together to achieve a successful intervention to transform an entire neighbourhood. The zoning solutions employed unlocked the scheme by reversing intractable conflicts of desired outcomes between stakeholders, securing funding and providing much needed residential accommodation, including 20 per cent affordable housing. The clearly stated goals included not only retaining the burgeoning art district, but also augmenting it to maintain and enhance the genuine mixed-use nature of the area.

The final chapter on resilience highlights the increasingly relevant links between scales of intervention and their implications. These range from cleverly simple solutions such as raising street grates to make seats and bicycle parking whilst augmenting the city's flood defences, to calculating the five-fold benefit of a dense city office tower over its suburban equivalent when including the transit energy of its users.

Whilst the case of greater sustainability for cities has been well made, the connections with the wider environmental agenda need further consideration. It has become a platitude that more than half the world's population lives in cities. The remaining three thousand million or so people should not be forgotten, nor the importance of those rural areas, for their cumulative effects on the environment or large-scale food production. Doing so would belie important links between rural and urban. The urban of urban design increasingly looks too narrow a term, at least when discussing sustainability in all its breadth.

● Marc Furnival



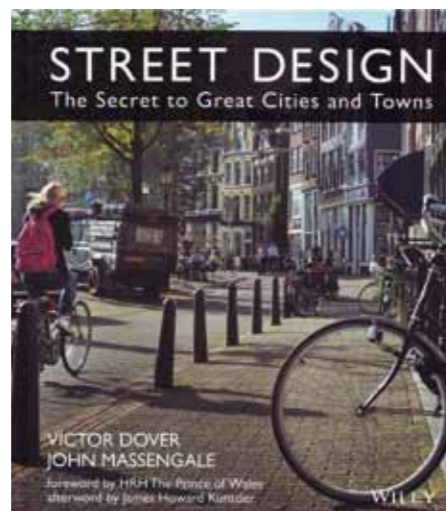
The City as a Tangled Bank: Urban Design vs Urban Evolution

Terry Farrell, 2014, John Wiley and Sons, ISBN 978-1-118-48734-1

In this book, Terry Farrell argues that because cities evolve in response to complex influences, architects and designers who seek fixed answers in built forms and impose them on the city, would do well to revisit their ways of thinking and working. The book is a call to arms for this change in professional attitudes, albeit illustrated with insightful anecdotes, illuminating diagrams and some evidence, many drawn from his own projects.

The book has nine chapters plus an introduction and conclusion, but their signposting capacity is limited, being only milestones in the narrative. The narrative is better presented through themes set out in the conclusion, which may be seen as advice towards a 'more developed understanding of planning'. Farrell calls for designers to immerse themselves in the city, to draw inspiration from nature and its forms of organisation, to develop an understanding of urbanisation and the role of designers in it, to recognise that the principal role of the urbanist is connecting and communicating in order to 'master the chain reactions' from invention to application of urban innovations, to pay attention to what he calls 'the DNA of habitat', patterns of human occupation that may explain physical form, and to be alert to how identity is built over time. He sets out a 'call to advocacy' for designers to act as if the place was their client.

Built environment designers are magpies, gathering a range of ideas, precedents and stories, selectively adapted to construct, or 'post-construct', their design proposals. The best designers fashion a coherent, rich, enjoyable and often surprising case for their design. Farrell writes this book as he might weave a case for a design proposal, so that the 'evolution' of the title is merely the main one of many motifs that he collects to argue, exhort, advise and share insights and



knowledge from a successful. Clear definitions of concepts are not always present, and language is used more to sweep the reader along towards conclusions, than to incisively clarify how ideas such as 'emergence' or 'complexity' can help designers design. The reader chances upon a story here and a diagram there, as if there were delicious little snacks hidden in the pages, which quite successfully distract from the lack of concise argument.

This is a book to be dipped into, rather than to be used as a foundation of a theory of urban design. I think it succeeds because it continues to raise some of the issues all architects, planners and urban designers need to be reminded of. While it does not say anything truly groundbreaking, experienced urban designers are likely to identify with Farrell's points, and those new to urban design might gain an insight into the practice of urban design.

● Louie Sieh

Street Design: The Secret to Great Cities and Towns

Victor Dover and John Massengale, 2014, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., ISBN 978-1-118-06670-6

In the past few years, books about elements of the cityscape have been a popular publishing theme: boulevards, squares and streets themselves, have all been covered recently. This trend is extended by this book on streets by two American practitioners and leading members of the Congress for New Urbanism.

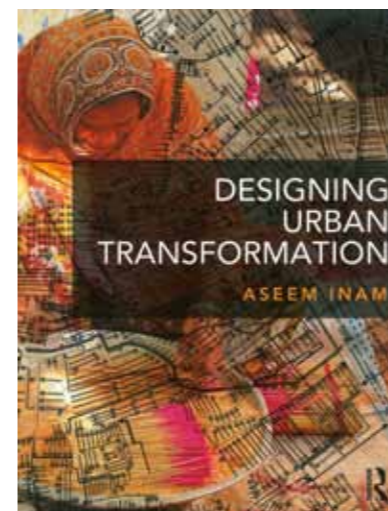
Drawing on their own personal and professional experience of streets, as well as a widely, if not rigorously scoped search for examples of 'good streets', the authors have produced a readable book about this most ubiquitous element of the urban landscape. The book is packed with examples dealing almost exclusively with the Western canon of street design and street design issues, touching on as diverse subjects as the design of

rural roads or how to design 'bumpouts', and covering scales from city-wide grid to details of paving materials. The sensitive descriptive analysis of streets experienced and the ability to comfortably discuss the range of design issues tell of an intimate knowledge of the process of designing, the designing of streets, and a great love for their favourite streets. Indeed, if it is possible to run out of things to say about streets, then this book is exhaustive of their design approaches and issues, at least in western cities.

What lets the book down is the weak signposting. This 400 page tome is divided into only six chapters. Apart from the introduction and conclusion, chapters are about Historic streets, Street systems and networks, Retrofitted streets and New streets. The bulk of content within each of these four chapters are good examples organised around eleven types of streets, such as Boulevard and Avenue, Main Street, Neighbourhood Street and Pedestrian Passage and Step Street. These cut across the four chapters. Each example is thoroughly described in terms of what design and designable features make them successful, and each is presented with photographs and drawings, and especially, street sections, each clearly presented within itself. However, not all the sections on the eleven street types are described in the same systematic fashion, and not all types are even defined, with some sections launching straight into examples. The book is further interspersed with asides into various aspects of street design (for example LEED for Neighbourhood Development or how they measure walkability), mini-essays about the favourite streets of various colleagues and pithy proverbs about street design. While these are interesting and often helpful, they do add to the jumble of threads running through the book.

Illustrations are a mix of proposal drawings, aerial photographs, contemporary and often historic photographs including before and after illustrations. Colour plates clumped into one section in the middle of the book are a rather old-fashioned approach to presentation.

● Louie Sieh



Designing Urban Transformation

Aseem Inam, 2014, Routledge, ISBN 978-0-414-83770-5

Many practitioners who combine professional experience with an academic role seek to reconcile the two, drawing lessons from one to apply to the other. Aseem Inam is in this territory, having undertaken projects in diverse locations, from deprived Karachi to the affluent fringes of Los Angeles, and taught at institutions including Parsons and MIT.

Designing Urban Transformation seeks to draw threads between these direct experiences and a range of interventions in cities around the world. The thesis underpinning these references is that existing design methodologies lack a suitably holistic view of the conditions shaping the city, and tend to prioritise the aesthetic and spatial over other characteristics.

Inam advocates an approach that he terms Pragmatism, building on a philosophical model developed in the United States from the last quarter of the 19th century onwards. Its proponents argue, in place of a dogmatic and ideological outlook, for an attitude of knowledge applied to practical problem solving. In pursuit of his argument, Inam draws on a wide range of seemingly disparate reference projects, which he assesses not in visual terms but in the context of the wider urban forces they have shaped or help exemplify. These projects include the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Village, Boston's 'big dig' and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Each of them is discussed in some detail both in terms of their physical form and location in time; the broader trajectories of the cities in which they are located and their social and economic characteristics, are also covered. The book is organised according to a series of thematic chapters building towards 'urbanism as a creative political act'.

Designing Urban Transformation declares it is aimed at practising urbanists, including but not limited to those classifying their practice as urban design, architecture



or landscape, with a broader sweep including urban policy and development. Inam's sincerity is not in question, but the text is so broad and the loci of intervention so varied and seemingly random, that it is hard to draw coherent or practical threads that most readers would find useful. Inam's urbanism is close to New Urbanism but distinct from it. His text includes many truths and truisms, but its call to arms is cast so widely that it lacks the incisive and radical edge that one might have hoped for. His studio at MIT proposed comedic improvisation as a design methodology; it is a shame that the book as a whole did not carry this wit and lateral approach all the way through.

● Jonathan Kendall

Smart Cities: Big data, civic hackers, and the quest for a new utopia

Anthony M. Townsend, 2013, W. W. Norton & Company, ISBN 978-0-393-08287-6

Smart Cities is a thorough and fascinating exploration of the interrelationships between cities and technology, particularly the transformative impacts of digital technologies. This is a big book, addressing big ideas. Its author knows his subject intimately, writing directly from first-hand experience, supporting the sweep of his argument with reference to personal experiences and professional relationships.

Smart Cities is written for an audience interested in the intersections between urban design, city planning, telecommunications and computing. Townsend's book is the product of more than a decade of research and consulting activity. Its temporal sweep takes us from 19th century engineering industrialisation and urban expansion, through to contemporary challenges to the city raised by the possibilities of emergent hacks and the mining of so-called Big Data. In all these cases, Townsend is an advocate and

ambassador for the opportunities that technological progress makes possible, but he is not a blind zealot. Far from it, his eyes are wide open to the risks and challenges that allow technological power, as with all other forms of power, to exacerbate disadvantages within and beyond the city.

The range of his enquiry is both impressive and somewhat daunting to the reader. Many of the sources quoted will be familiar to built environment academics and professionals with an interest in the city (Cerda, Geddes, Christopher Alexander and Jane Jacobs are all cited) but the sweep of the text brings in far wider issues. These include the power relationships in society between the affluent and the marginalised, between the individual and the state and between the individual and the body corporate. Townsend's horizons are global, and the reader is transported between downtown Manhattan, the favelas of Rio and the markets of Moldova to name but three.

The journey is fascinating, if dizzying, requiring high levels of concentration. This is not a book to skim through, but to read carefully, not least when the particularities of wireless technologies and protocols for communication are discussed in some detail. This is not to say that the work requires a level of prior computational knowledge, and Townsend writes well and clearly. The book would be more accessible if the reader could navigate more easily using subheadings and illustrations (it has neither), or with a structure that was chronological rather than thematic, but is worth the effort for those who want to immerse themselves in one of the most profound subjects that affects us all.

● Jonathan Kendall