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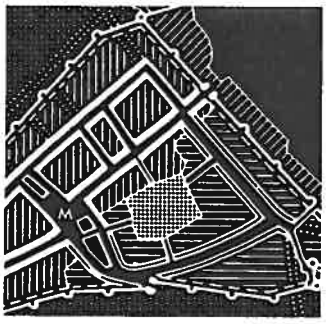

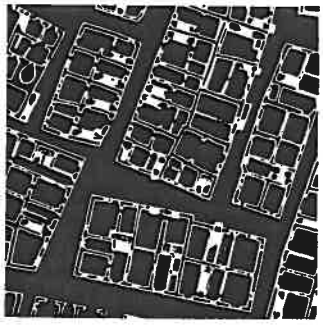

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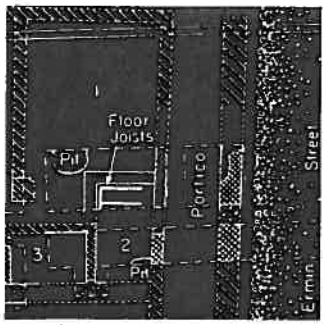

arguing that the traces revealed by archaeological investigation refer to abstract models, which, once unveiled, allow the restitution of past urban landscapes.

Archaeologist Jacques Gaucher has evocative words to describe the complexities of the urban phenomenon, noting that in his discipline, cities can be approached either by their social forms or by their spatial and material forms. The city, he says, is 'the fruit of multiple rationalities, of conscious and unconscious productions: the city configures topographically an area of interactions that stem as much from everyday experience as from important events; from the global as from the local; from purposeful actions as from the unplanned; from memory as from design; from incremental production as from grand-scale schemes; from practice as from representation; from structure as from history' (p. 19). Gaucher argues that urban morphology and archaeology share the view, borrowed from historical topography, that the city is a unique material phenomenon, which can be apprehended from 'within', hence offering an opportunity to lay the foundations of a specific type of knowledge (p. 20). He is echoing the view, expressed some 25 years earlier by Jean Castex and others that, although to a certain extent a city is a material projection of social, political and economic systems or structures, this projection proceeds through various systems of spatial symbolization, and is manifested in a form, the *built space*, that has its own consistency and resilience (Castex *et al.*, 1980, p. xi). Such a perspective is at the heart of the urban morphology research programme. It still permeates most of the contributions collected here, and it constitutes the best argument in favour of the discipline.

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L'architettura come processo: il mondo plastico murario in divenire by *Giuseppe Strappa*, Franco Angeli editore, Milano, Italy, 2014, 297 pp. ISBN 978–88-917–0597-6.

Architectural morphology is the analysis of the material and spatial relationships of buildings and their components. Applied morphology manuals teach how components ought to be assembled and recommend architectural composition principles and standards. Grounded in the Italian morphological tradition, Giuseppe Strappa's study explores the question of materiality in architecture by focusing on the relationships between the plastic figurative characters of the wall, and the construction techniques used in its production. However, it needs to be borne in mind that in Italian the meanings of a wall and of masonry are intertwined. The Italian language suggests a stereotomic quality of the wall, as Gottfried Semper (2011) would have put it. The etymology of the word relates to 'stereo', the Greek word for solidity and hardness as well as to 'tomo', the word for 'cut', thus connoting a material depth.

This dual connotation structures the whole book. A masonry wall offers, with both sides and thickness, a set of congruent objectives to organize material, and to define and relate it to the outlined spaces. The plastic solidity of its components finds its source in the landscape. The ground provides support for the stacking of pieces extracted from the earth's crust. Time and space are experienced in a tangible way – quite literally – and architectural delight emerges from these mutual references. The title of the book itself is open to multiple interpretations. The author eloquently outlines, with several examples, how morphological architectural theory is firmly based on empirical observations, while aiming to respond to the practical expectations of an applied art.

Strappa invites the reader to explore a century of modern architecture stemming from different sources and building traditions, but his contribution is culturally rooted in a Mediterranean inheritance. The journey goes back to the sources of Western building culture, with a bold interpretation. The author contends that modern architecture's evolution entailed a shift in design focus from the 'wall' to 'space'. Wall architecture, in its design and construction, imposes a spatial limit. However, such a limit also constitutes an interface, a space of mediation, which engages both the interior and the exterior. The masonry wall, in its material and depth, invites a dialogue with both sides, as well as

modulated exchanges between them: the openings, alcoves and niches are the mediating signs. In its material and weight, the masonry wall speaks of past, present and future times: of geological time, as well as of the more limited period during which a wall will continue to circumscribe and encapsulate a portion of space. By making space its main material, modernist architecture became self-referential and inward-looking. The shift entailed trading interface and mediation for a spatial logic of fragmentation, from architectural to urban form and territorial landscapes.

The author also makes the case for a review of twentieth-century architectural 'doxa'. Architectural theories, ideas and experiments are explored through a series of international projects. The broad set of examples and the extensive accompanying bibliography is impressive, and exemplifies the erudition of the author. Wall design and construction, as spatial and material statements, are the objects of the investigation. Intentions and material manifestations are deciphered in order to reconstruct the process of development of modernist architecture. Architecture is not exactly on trial, although the term '*processo*' might signify that as well. What is questioned, however, is the conventional theoretical framework as applied to the architectural history of the past century in particular, and notably in Anglo-Saxon academic circles.

Comparisons in this book are made on the historical *longue durée*, looking in particular for timeless, or time-free, architectural principles that could inform today's practices and reflexions. Strappa's investigative and interpretative work is a powerful demonstration. There was no need to frame this volume as an answer to the modern movement or as a critique of the current weight given to images in the assessment of 'performing' architecture. The international style and the modernist dogma are historically set and destined to become dated, as soon will be 'virtual' architecture, given its limitations. As Strappa presents it, architecture is about 'being and acting' in people's everyday experience. The built environment serves as a device and a principle for anyone crossing the wall of time and space.

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Lords and towns in medieval Europe: the European Historic Towns Atlas Project

edited by *Anngret Simms* and *Howard B. Clarke*, Ashgate, Farnham, UK, 2015, 552 pp. ISBN 978–0-754–66354-6.

Lords and towns in medieval Europe is a thorough and detailed examination of the founding and development of European towns during the medieval period. It is divided into five sections comprising chapters written by experts in their field. Part I includes an introduction to the European Towns Atlas Project, to which this volume is intended to contribute (p. 9). Chapter 1 by Anngret Simms examines the history and goals of the project. Chapter 2 by Dietrich Denecke covers the analytical methods employed, with particular emphasis on historico-topographical comparative analysis. Part II of the book provides detailed case studies that focus on towns in the core area of medieval Europe, many of which were built on Roman foundations. Francesca Bocchi, in Chapter 3, focuses in detail on political power in Italian towns, beginning in antiquity and proceeding chronologically to the high Middle Ages. As case studies, Bologna and Florence are examined. From here, the examination moves to France, and specifically Bordeaux, in Sandrine Lavaud's Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, Daniel Stracke and Thomas Tippach provide an overarching examination of the development of the German towns atlas, immediately preceding Peter Johanek's comprehensive discussion of towns, urbanization, trade, law and territorial consolidation in the Holy Roman Empire in Chapter 6. This is followed by Josef Žemlička's consideration of the development of the Bohemian town of *Litoměřice* (Leitmeritz) in a concise Chapter 7. Chapter 8 by Ferdinand Opll explores the founding and medieval urbanization of Vienna and Wiener Neustadt, Austria, providing an example of how geometry may be used to explain the general layout of medieval towns. The geometric interpretation is continued by Martina Stercken in Chapter