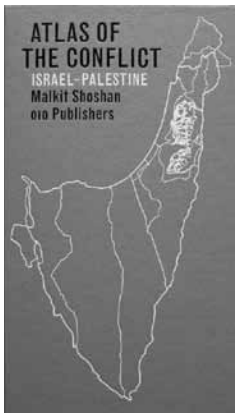
Resurrecting Robin Hood

Mapping conflicts and sustainable cities



Building Ideas: MJP Architects
Nicola Jackson, edited by Ian Latham
Right Angle Publishing
London, 2010
254 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-95328-486-3
£35.00 (hb)

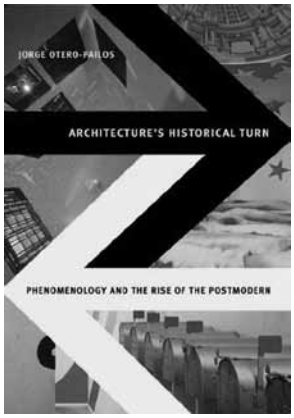
Although **arq** is dubious about the swelling tide of practice-brochures masquerading as books, this account of the work of Richard MacCormac and his partners demands to be taken seriously. The projects are presented thematically rather than as a catalogue, and each section is introduced by essays by the likes of Bryan Lawson, Peter Davey and Richard Cork. Ranging from his early and then seminal thoughts on Wright's use of overlaid grids, lifelong fascination with the work of Soane, and passion for the European City, nearly all reflect on issues addressed through his practice. The formal syntheses of these disparate concerns may not sometimes be as persuasive as his lucid prose, but MacCormac's manifold contributions to British architecture over five decades are substantial.
RW



Atlas of the Conflict: Israel-Palestine
Malkit Shoshan
010 Publishers
Rotterdam, 2010
480 pp.
ISBN: 978-90-6450-688-8
€34.50 (hb)

This curious work is styled in a way that easily identifies it as the output of 010 publishing. It is artful, poised and stark. Abstract diagrams and beautifully minimal maps are presented alongside stripped documentary-style topographical photography; portraits are presented in bland catalogue sequence. The work is organised along the lines of a guide book, with easily identifiable sections and integral tape place keeper. One of the last of these sections is 'lexicon'. Here definitions of terms such as 'Judaisation'; 'Living Wall'; 'Wall and Tower'; 'Zionisation'; and 'zoo' are provided in the form of quotations taken from journal articles, Ph.D. theses, jewishvirtuallibrary.org and so on. Wikipedia features prominently. There are mapping sections on 'Borders; the Wall; Patterns of settlement [...] Landscaping; Water' to name a few. The 'data' is extracted from hundreds of sources and is re-presented in an even and minimal graphic, page after page – one map showing 'Palestinian Presence 1970'; the facing page 'Israeli Presence 1970s', and overleaf 'Palestinian and Israeli Presence 1970s'. The author states: 'I don't see this book (or my work in general) as intentionally political. I wanted only to make a straightforward analysis of the territorial features of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict'. There is, therefore, not much of a helping hand in making sense of the 'data' presented. Indeed retreat into 'data' and abstraction seems to be the primary support for the claim that the book is apolitical. The maps and diagrams, in their abstraction, are curiously scaleless and difficult to read. This is in marked contrast to the Israel Land Administration map that was used to plan confiscations that is included in one section. Some of the data, such as water consumption (Palestinian water consumption and then Israeli water consumption), is very well presented in a simple graphic. It is a thought-provoking compilation on many levels.
JAO

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135511000388 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Architecture's Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern
Jorge Otero-Pailos
University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis, 2010
320 pp.
ISBN: 978-081666-604-1
£18.50 (pb)

This book seeks to document how phenomenology has influenced the academic discipline of architecture. Phenomenology involves studying the world outwards from individuals' experiences of it. And architects have long been interested in the ways that phenomenological thinking can help us to appreciate material qualities and appreciate how buildings and their details can embody cultural and historical values. The book has four principal chapters – of which the first is the most interesting and surprising – each focused on four architect-writers: Jean Labatut, Charles W. Moore, Christian Norberg-Schulz and Kenneth Frampton. This narrow selection results from narrow definitions of both architecture and phenomenology, and a narrow idea of architectural culture. The book tries to be both intellectual history: relating together texts in their context, and cultural history: recounting the milieu of a particular academic community. But, despite some interesting insights, it is not particularly satisfying on either count.
AS

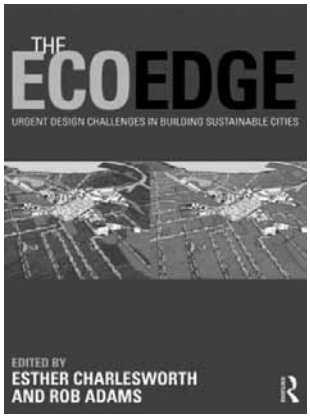


Robin Hood Gardens: Re-Visions
Edited by Alan Powers
The Twentieth Century Society
London, 2010
175pp.
ISBN: 978-0-9556687-1-5
£20.00 (pb)

More than 'ordinary' and therefore worthy of listing? This finely illustrated book uncovers the history of Robin Hood Gardens, Tower Hamlets, East London, completed by Alison and Peter Smithson in 1972; especially the recent history of the campaign by The Twentieth Century Society for listing this seminal public housing project, following its threatened demolition in 2008.

As a manifesto, the book lays out the cases for the project's extra-ordinariness. To take just two: it is the only realised public housing project by the Smithsons, and a vivid example of the 'streets-in-the-air' idea, whose dark horizontals slice the vertical fins of the facade – modulations freighted with the Englishness of the Classical orders of Bath or Regent's Park. Furthermore, Alison Smithson is without doubt one of the leading women figures in British twentieth-century architecture – in the case of Elisabeth Whitworth Scott (architect of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon) gender alone was a salient cause for the recent retention of that building.

In describing the apparently arbitrary and ad-hoc character of more recent UK decisions to list, not list, or de-list, Alan Powers tells of the evolution, up to the millennium, of a reasonably considered framework of survey and selection – a system since largely fractured owing to inadequate resource.
SK



The EcoEdge: Urgent Design Challenges in Building Sustainable Cities
Edited by Esther Charlesworth and Rob Adams
Routledge, Abingdon, 2011
195 pp.
ISBN 978-0-415-57248-4
£29.99 (pb)

This book is joining an ever burgeoning collection of publications aiming to bring something new to the debate on how politicians, planners, architectural and urban designers might respond to the call for sustainable solutions to city development in the coming decades. Indeed, emerging from two conferences, of the same name, hosted by Melbourne city, this book aims to bring something particularly useful and familiar to practitioners, international design case studies, critiques of how others have undertaken or propose appropriate movement towards sustainability in relation to urban, infrastructure and building scale design solutions. The breadth of ideas and the rigour with which these studies are presented represent the unique aspects of this publication, providing both academic and practitioner perspectives on the success and failures of solutions designed for implementation across the globe; developed and developing nations, North and South. In particular the challenges associated with population growth, the low to zero carbon agenda and retrofit are addressed here. Designers are challenged to push beyond the privilege of the pure aesthetic to respond directly to the urgent needs of holistic sustainability; social, economic and environmental justice.
JG

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1359135511000388 Published online by Cambridge University Press