

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Guttenberg, Albert Z. *The Language of Planning: Essays on the Origins and Ends of American Planning Thought*. Urbana and Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993, Pp. xviii, 266, Index. \$42.50 (US) (cloth), \$16.95 (US) (paper)

Fowler, Edmund P. *Building Cities that Work*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. Pp. xv, 315. Illustrations, index. \$44.95 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper)

Pierre Filion

Volume 25, Number 1, October 1996

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016100ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016100ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Filion, P. (1996). Review of [Guttenberg, Albert Z. *The Language of Planning: Essays on the Origins and Ends of American Planning Thought*. Urbana and Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993, Pp. xviii, 266, Index. \$42.50 (US) (cloth), \$16.95 (US) (paper) / Fowler, Edmund P. *Building Cities that Work*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. Pp. xv, 315. Illustrations, index. \$44.95 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 25(1), 62–63. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016100ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1996

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Guttenberg, Albert Z. *The Language of Planning: Essays on the Origins and Ends of American Planning Thought*. Urbana and Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993, Pp. xviii, 266, Index. \$42.50 (US) (cloth), \$16.95 (US) (paper).

Fowler, Edmund P. *Building cities that Work*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992. Pp. xv, 315. Illustrations, index. \$44.95 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper).

The juxtaposition of these two books is fortuitous in that they consider the evolution of post-war planning from contrasting perspectives. One comprises a scholar's lifelong writing, which is associated with the development of planning as an academic discipline over three decades, The other relies on observations of the contemporary city to criticize the orientation of planning over the last fifty years.

Albert Z. Guttenberg, the author of *The Language of Planning*, belongs to a generation of planning educators who practiced in the 1950s under masters responsible for major urban planning accomplishments and went on to develop planning as an academic field. Guttenberg's career took him from urban planning practice, including a period under Edmund Bacon at the celebrated Philadelphia City Planning Commission, to the University of Illinois where he is now emeritus.

The book is a collection of essays written over the course of his career. The issues they raise include: the language of planning, the definition of regional boundaries, the classification of different aspects of planning, neighbourhood and metropolitan planning, and the history of planning (in particular over New Deal years).

The theme of planning language is shared by a number of chapters originally written in the 1960s. One of these early contributions calls for stable definitions of planning terms in order to reduce ambiguity of meaning in a fledgling field. Another chapter highlights power relations surrounding these definitions. As stated; "If our interpretation is correct, planning terms reflect mainly attempts by contending groups to present their programs in the guise of disinterested social thought" (13). Deconstruction theory has recently given broad currency to this concern.

Planning history is another important topic presented in the book. Chapter 11, which deals with cycles in planning history, proposes an appealing framework. The chapter distinguishes three historical phases and relates them to the overall economic and cultural environment in US society. It identifies similarities in planning thinking over the period preceding the Great Depression and the one that followed World War Two, and attributes this situation to shared features between the economic climate and ideological context of the two periods, that is, prosperity and optimism. Were this framework extended to the current era, we could perhaps detect analogies with the Great Depression. Other historical chapters explore the origins of US planning by concentrating on the role played by social reformism (in Chapter 10) and Taylorism (in Chapter 17) in fashioning planning

over the progressive and New Deal years, The book's historical flavour extends to chapters dealing with metropolitan form. They show how, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a scholar approached the emerging car-oriented urban structure.

Less stimulating are chapters offering a taxonomy of planning language, regions and types of land use. Such contributions may have been seen as necessary when planning was in its infancy as an academic field, but now it makes for tedious reading.

Typically, over their careers, scholars cover a variety of areas of interest. This is a reflection of changes in issues dominating their fields, in their own concerns and in research opportunities. Rarely is it the case that a scholar's life-long writing demonstrates a sufficiently strong focus to warrant its inclusion within a single book. Unfortunately, Albert Z. Guttenberg's work does not exhibit this degree of cohesion. The remarkable breadth of interest that has characterized his career makes for a disjointed book.

The selection of material included in *The Language of Planning* is also at issue. Some chapters have not aged well and are clearly out of touch with present planning reality. Minimally, the author should have included a comment on the circumstances that led to writing the essay and why they were important at the time of writing. He could have also pointed to the perspective provided by the essays on the evolution of planning. Other chapters probably never had much of an impact at the time. This is the case for short contributions such as Chapters 3 and 14. Since very few writings generated during a period deserve to outlive it, the author should have given more attention to justifying his selection of essays reproduced in the book.

Building Cities that Work is written by Edmund Fowler, an Associate Professor of Political Science at Glendon College, York University in Toronto. The book is part of a mounting movement critical of dominant forms of urban development and targeting of intensifying efforts to evolve alternative models of urbanization. Literature on the city and planning documents give growing importance to the positions on post-war urbanization voiced in the 1950s and 1960s by Lewis Mumford and Jane Jacobs. This is evidenced by the stand taken by numerous recent books and articles as well as virtually all recent planning documents originating from the City of Toronto, Metro Toronto and the Office of the Greater Toronto Area. In fact *Building Cities that Work* purports to test empirically Jane Jacobs's thesis that urban vitality and wellbeing is associated with physical diversity.

Fowler first draws upon secondary sources to repeat the economic and environmental case for the compact and mix-use city. In his words, "we are squandering billions of dollars in North America because our built environment lacks judicious amounts of concentrated land use, small-scale land-use mix and mixtures of old and new buildings — in short, it lacks physical diversity." (68)

The remainder of the book is largely devoted to a survey of thirteen neighbourhoods, which, apart from one, are all located within the city of Toronto. The exception is Don Mills, a nearby

suburb. The neighbourhoods are classified according to measures of diversity: degree of mixed land use and the age of buildings, length of blocks and density. They are rated according to their ability to "create a constant dialogue between our public and private lives." (88) The survey is based on observation of the activity patterns and physical features of the neighbourhoods. It also involved some 300 interviews. The author concludes that not only do mixed, high-density neighbourhoods perform better environmentally, they are also superior from a social point of view. The survey suggests that by comparison with other areas, such neighbourhoods are characterized by more interaction between residents, higher satisfaction, a more conducive environment for political activity, and less crime. This conclusion is in total agreement with that reached by Jane Jacobs thirty years ago.

A problem with the book is its casual approach to methodology. The distinction between statements that are tied to primary or to secondary sources could be clearer, more importantly the association between resident satisfaction and the features of the surveyed neighbourhoods rests entirely on interview segments quoted in the text. The reader has no way of evaluating how representative these segments are of all the interviews because nowhere are their results tabulated. Accordingly, no hypothesis is truly tested in this book. Another difficulty is a nearly exclusive focus on government and big business as agents of sprawl and standardized development. Undeniably these are important factors, but the author gives insufficient consideration to consumer preference which also fuels current forms of urban development. A final comment concerns the title. McGill-Queen's University Press seem to be in the habit of giving titles that suggest a broad field of interest to works whose object is in reality more focused. *Housing the North American City* published in 1991 relates the history of housing in Hamilton, Ontario and, as seen, *Building Cities that Work* is a study of resident satisfaction in Toronto neighbourhoods.

Despite these shortcomings, the book remains a valuable source of information on emerging urban planning perspectives and living conditions in Toronto neighbourhoods. It distils guidelines for urban planning in the future from a careful observation of these neighbourhoods.

Pierre Filion
School of Urban and Regional Planning
University of Waterloo

Adams, Annmarie. *Architecture in the Family Way: Doctors, Houses and Women, 1870–1900*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996. Pp. xxi, 227. Illustrations. \$39.95 cloth.

This investigation into the domestic architecture of late Victorian England offers a fascinating perspective on the literature of

health and sanitary reform of the period. Adams describes this age as a "time of intense turmoil and experimentation" (p.168), when sanitarians were tantalized by the apparent promise of scientific principles and systems to conquer the illness and disease that continued to plague the population. Despite mounting evidence to support the new germ theory of contagion, she explains how the older beliefs of disease transmission through foul air and "animate contagia" hung on and helped focus attention on the immediate spatial environment as a potential problem source.

Adams uses the urban middle-class house as the locus of study. She draws on a diverse literature, including technical architectural drawings, catalogues, plumbing manuals, advertisements, and books and pamphlets of "family advice", to provide the basis for an examination into the prescribed regulation of domestic space. Within the context of women's emerging political consciousness, she illuminates the gendered perspectives of doctors and women, both key players in the Domestic Sanitation Movement, and her work clearly points out that what is often considered private space was indeed very much contested public terrain.

The opening chapter of the book is devoted to the International Health Exhibition, held in London in 1884, which illustrated in a concrete fashion the relationship between health and disease in both public and domestic spaces. The lavish public display of clean water in fountains and drinking taps from the newly revamped water supply contrasted sharply with the model of the insanitary dwelling to demonstrate to the public the ever-present unhealthy dangers lurking within domestic spaces. In particular, improperly plumbed and ventilated houses, exposing middle-class Victorians to sewage and sewer gas, were implicated in transporting disease. Adams surveys the work of the 'building doctors', those physicians connected with the Domestic Sanitation Movement who actually designed and sometimes built houses on the principles of 'scientific' ventilation and drainage systems, and who diagnosed and treated unhealthy houses as they did unhealthy bodies. The perceived authority to diagnose housing ills, she suggests, derived from this comparison of the workings of the house to the physiology of the body. The physicians' public condemnation of Victorian architects, while sparking a severe defensive reaction from the architects themselves, was otherwise widely supported by others concerned about middle-class health.

Adams also examines the ambiguity in the relationship between the medical sanitarians and women's role in the domestic realm. Medical 'experts' conscripted women as their allies, not to 'cure' sick houses, but to prevent disease through the proper regulation and maintenance of many of the hidden aspects of the house. Doctors not only endeavoured to make it women's responsibility to test for drainage, air quality and other potential architectural problems that could affect the health of their families, but set down specific 'scientific' principles for the location and furnishing of the sick room and the lying-in room. Further