

Globetrotting urbanism

Lee Mallett reviews the new edition of *Shaping the City*

Urbanism academics Rodolphe El-Khoury and Edward Robbins have revamped the 2003 Routledge collection of city studies in urbanism – *Shaping the City* – revising several chapters of the original for this new second edition which looks at 14 cities and features a new chapter by Robbins on the subject of New Urbanism. Its only a slight tweak after 10 years.

Rem Koolhaas' chapter on Atlanta (from 1995) is a classic, and well worth a read for its bitchy and witty take on local architect-turned-developer John Portman. In Atlanta's laissez-faire non-plan: "Portman started with one block, made money, and developed the next block, a cycle that triggered Atlanta's rebirth."

But sadly it wasn't enough "for Portman to fill block after block with his own architecture (usually without very interesting programs), but as further consolidation, he connected each of his buildings to each of his other buildings with bridges, forming an elaborate spiderweb of skywalks with himself at the center."

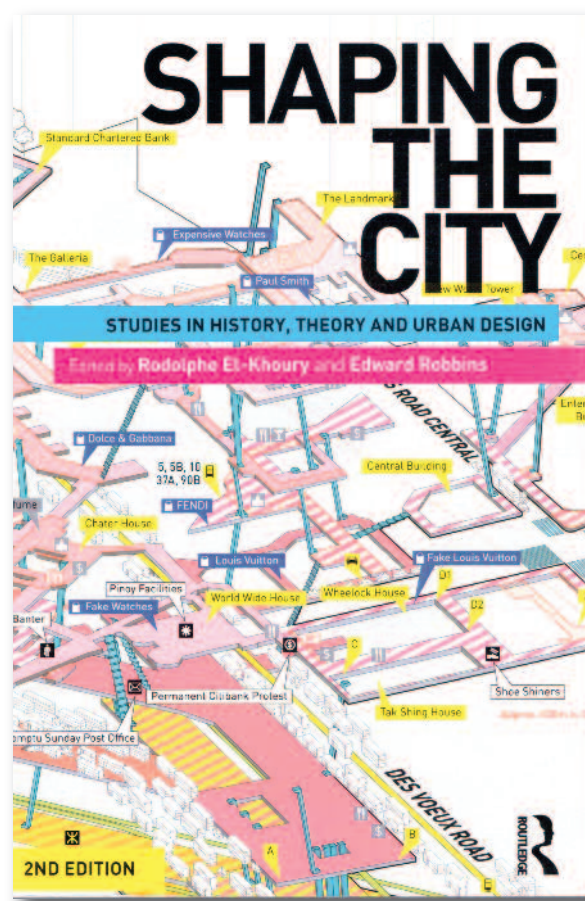
Koolhaas also attributes Portman's "Faustian bargain" with Atlanta as "single-handedly perfecting a device that spread from Atlanta to the rest of America, and from America to the rest of the world: he (re)invented the atrium."

It is a good read. Koolhaas' critique is that most modern cities now have something of Atlanta about them – "what is the Louvre now, if not the ultimate atrium?" he asks. It is an extension of the basic storey structure in Rem's masterpiece, *Delirious New York*, that Manhattan was born out of Coney Island fantasies. So all our cities have been infected with American influences that first appeared in cities like Atlanta. Think Birmingham's Bull Ring, or Westfield in Stratford. He might be right.

At the other end of the spectrum, co-editor Edward Robbins has also written a new final chapter for this staple book on contemporary urbanism, which tackles the thorny subject of "New Urbanism". New Urbanism smacks of the pseudo-sinister "urban village", Seaside, back-to-the-future approach.

At the core of new urbanism is the desire for the dictatorial masterplan, for order, neighbourhoods and "villages", so that the city can contain and foster smaller units of civilization, with codes and for control things just bust wide open, or the game simply moves elsewhere. This is the problem of cities like Detroit or Manchester. What to do when you have to manage decline? New Urbanism has not been of much use to either city.

Sometimes more radical, exciting solutions are called for, which have little to do with order or calm. Koolhaas' *Delirious New York*, like the city itself, is a swaggering, fantastic read. If the New Urbanists were in charge, fantastical manifestations of human ambition like Manhattan would be forbidden, ban-



ished to suppressed imagination.

Humanity has a way of avoiding the rational and orderly in making cities (fortunately), and as Robbins points out, the New Urbanists too can be just as guilty of hubris as the Modernists in assuming they have the final solution.

The rest of the book's essays (which run the gamut from Oslo to Brasilia, via Shenzhen and Dubai) appeal either more or less depending on the relatively light editing of sometimes obscurantist academic language that seems to be such a feature of urbanism.

They are mostly, however, a demonstration of just how fascinating a subject it is. It's a shame it isn't more popular and taught in schools, considering its importance. Maybe Routledge's next book should be *Urbanism for Kids*? ■

Shaping the City: Studies in History, Theory and Urban Design, 2nd Edition, edited by Rodolphe El-Khoury and Edward Robbins, paperback, 376pp, £29.99, published by Routledge (Taylor & Francis) ISBN number: 978-0-415-58462-3

MORE BOOKS >>>

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Lee Mallett is joint publishing editor of *Planning in London*

Olympic Housing

A critical review of London's 2012 legacy by Penny Bernstock

Duncan Bowie likes the book but not its price

This is a comprehensive study of the housing aspects of the 2012 London Olympic project. Bernstock is a sociologist at the University of East London and has been studying housing in East London for nearly a decade. She has previously published research on housing in Docklands for Shelter.

The book is in five sections – a study of the Olympic legacy of previous Olympic games and the development of the concept of 'legacy'; the decanting of residents from the area – the Clays Lane Coop and two groups of gypsies and travellers to make way for the Olympic development; a study of the housing context in the London boroughs and how this shaped the development of the legacy housing programme; the transition of the athletes village to the mixed tenure East Village development and an analysis of changes in the Stratford housing market during the Olympic and post Olympic periods including the use of planning gain to achieve affordable housing outputs and the nature of the new population moving into the area.

Bernstock's research is thorough, based on interviews with both decanted households and new arrivals as well as documentation on plans and developments and an analysis of the available data.

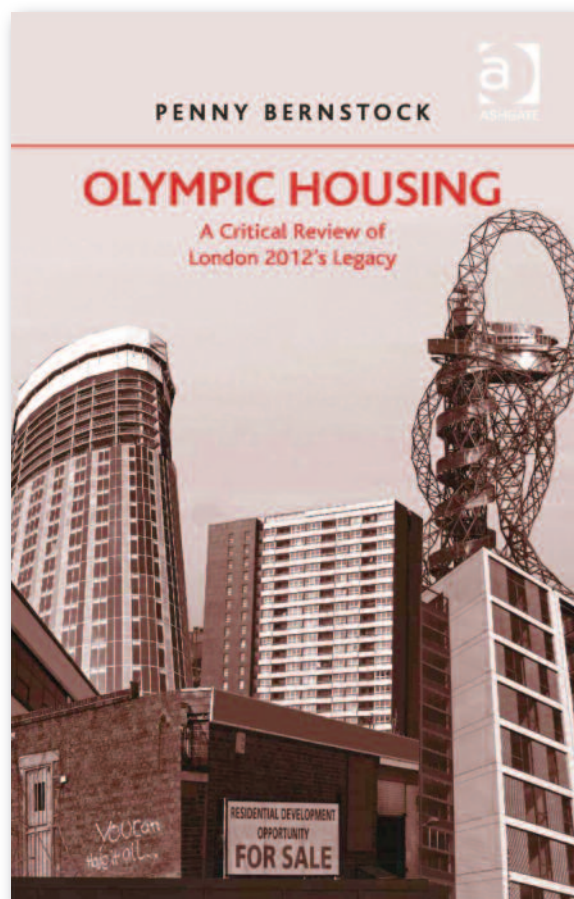
The debate over the impact of the Olympics has been somewhat polarised, with the Mayor, Legacy Corporation and developers claiming success and focusing on the East Village scheme is an exemplary development (for example Denise Chevins' report for the John Smith Institute is more advocacy than analysis) while others, notably the Games Monitor group and Counter Olympics Network led by Julian Cheyne, have focused on the enforced dispersal of pre-existing residents. Bernstock has undertaken a balanced and nuanced analysis.

Bernstock acknowledges that the plans to regenerate the Stratford railway lands, and in fact the Stratford City planning consent, predate the Olympic bid, and further consideration of this 'prehistory' would have been useful. Bernstock's section looking at the precedent of the London Docklands programme could also have been expanded, especially given her previous work on this issue.

I would have also liked to have seen more coverage of discussions on submitting the bid and a fuller analysis of the legacy commitments included in the bid documentation, which would have allowed for a fuller assessment of the extent to which these promises have been delivered, or at least included in future programmes.

There could also have been a fuller analysis of the impact on house prices and the demography of the Stratford area – seeking to identify what impacts were caused by or at least related to the Olympic project and which were the product of wider political, policy and economic factors.

A more expansive analysis of the overall nature of the



Olympic Fringe development and whether or not it was creating a sustainable community would have been useful – in my own view it did not. Bernstock does recognise some of the wider policy context and recognises policy shifts such as the move from social rents to so-called 'affordable rents' and the reform of welfare benefits.

These are however points which no doubt can be examined in further research and Bernstock's work presents a sound basis for this. The main fault with the book in my view is one that is for the publisher to consider. Images and maps are completely absent, apart from the image on the cover. The book considers in detail specific housing schemes and discusses development zones within the Legacy plan, often referring to a zone number as set out in the legacy development plan. For many readers, the descriptions and analysis are of limited value unless the site context is shown.

Charging £60 for a book, which is a case study of planning and housing development in an area, without a single map, is unacceptable. Hopefully this will be corrected in a more reasonably priced paperback edition, as this book deserves a wider readership. ■

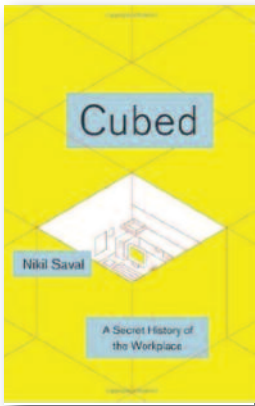
Published by Ashgate at £60



Duncan Bowie is Senior Lecturer in Spatial Planning at University of Westminster

Cubed: a secret history of the workplace

Implicit in Saval's message is that there is much more to workplace design in this time of extremely rapid technological and social change than 'off the shelf', says Frank Duffy



Nikal Saval, Doubleday, New York, 2014 £20



Frank Duffy is a founder partner of DEGW

Nikal Saval's *Cubed* is a bold attempt to relate within two covers and three hundred or so pages the history of the development of the office as both a sociological and architectural phenomenon. I salute his audacity, his energy and his insights most warmly. Not a single page is dull.

Saval's enquiring and sceptical mind has brought together an enormous amount of relevant but hitherto disconnected material, often from primary sources, in a variety of most lively and most interesting ways, all of which throw light on how the office has developed as a complex of sociological and technological phenomenon as well as a building type.

In the Fifties, when still a schoolboy, I had read Siegfried Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) and *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948). Both books brilliantly illuminate, among many other matters, the technological and social context of art and architecture, not least in North America, and specifically the origins of two social and architectural phenomena, the explosion of the clerical workforce in post Civil War America and the parallel invention of the high-rise office building as a device not just for accommodating emerging cohorts of office worker but also for multiplying the value of land. What Giedion made blindingly clear was that architectural innovation in office design should not be disentangled from social, technological and organisational change – and vice versa.

In 1962, I was instructed, as a fourth year student at the Architectural Association School, to design an office building – never having been in, let alone worked in, an office. I found in the latest issue of the *Architectural Review* which lay upon my drawing board an account by the historian, Reyner Banham, of a new German phenomenon: *burolandschaft*, literally office landscaping.

Implicit in this was the idea that an office is best regarded as the container of multiple series of fluid, open plan interconnections between office workers that, once mapped, would justify a non-orthogonal architecture, rich in planting, break areas and meeting spaces, totally different from hierarchical and rectilinear American office layouts, let alone the much more modest and shabbier interiors of contemporary British offices.

As a graduate student at Berkeley and Princeton in the late Sixties when, continuing to be fascinated by – if increasingly sceptical of – the German phenomenon of office landscaping, I was encouraged to raid other disciplines, particularly in the social sciences, for relevant insights into the relationship between office organisations and their accommodation. Accordingly my dissertation, much influenced by the work of Eric Trist at the Tavistock Institute as well as exposure to sophisticated, contemporary space planning practice in New

York, was designed to measure in the field the complex relationships between two sociological dimensions – degrees of bureaucracy and patterns of internal interaction – and two space planning dimensions – degrees of differentiation between workplaces and of the openness (or otherwise) of layouts.

These international and interdisciplinary experiences illuminate my appreciation of Nikal Saval's book. The most interesting part for me is his account of the innovative work of Robert Propst, the designer responsible for Herman Miller's Action Office, whom I visited in 1968 in Ann Arbor. A little later in New York I saw early prototypes of this screen based, open plan office furniture.

What I did not fully appreciate, until now, was the fraught relationship between Herman Miller and Propst that Saval documents so well, the tragically rapid deterioration of a brilliant, originally open-ended, user-friendly design concept into the dreaded "cube" that now imprisons, from sea to shining sea, Dilbert and tens of millions of his luckless colleagues. Choice is exactly what most office workers in most corporations in the USA quite simply do not have.

So far Saval's account is spot on. However, the later chapters of his fascinating book have two major weaknesses:

1. far too much second hand reliance on contemporary North American television and film rather than digging out, as an anthropologist should, primary data on office work and office cultures. Popular culture, even the fate of the hapless Dilbert, may provide many laughs and some insights but is not necessarily the whole story.
2. a parallel failure to grasp the very different context of Northern European office design over the same period. Complex political reasons, not least a continuing post Second World war reaction against totalitarianism, has resulted, specifically in Germany, Holland and Scandinavia, in Workers Councils being granted the statutory right to be consulted before their employers determine what their new office accommodation should be like.

Hence not only a very different social contract but processes and negotiations that have created very different office cultures and consequently many more options in both office architecture and interior design.

This is an important book for architects involved in the design of office buildings and office interiors as well as for developers and corporate clients. Implicit in Saval's message is that there is much more to workplace design in this time of extremely rapid technological and social change than off the shelf solutions, however attractive and ingenious they may seem. Never before has the old IBM exhortation "Think" been more appropriate. ■

MORE BOOKS >>>

A gripping yarn of intrigue and litigation in the Garden

The Other Side Of EDEN by Jonathan Ball is reviewed by Brian Waters

Jonathan Ball is more Cornish than parody. He more than anyone made the fabulously successful Eden project happen. He cooked up the idea with Tim Smit and went on to develop the concept, to drive the design team, to lobby for the Lottery funding and even to select the trustees.

After more than four years he pulled it off: a master-coup for his beloved county only to be elbowed out by those whom he had brought into the project and trusted to do (as he would say) 'the right thing'.

This is the ultimate lesson for those (many architects) who foolishly indulge in 'spec work'.

While he lost his architectural practice, his home was on the line with his, fortunately understanding, bank manager he had to endure three high court proceedings. The first found that his registration of the name 'Eden' was rightfully his and Tim's and had to be paid for by the now funded project and that his expenses over the years reimbursed.

Still wildly out of pocket and frozen out as Eden gathered accolades and the money rolled in, he sued the original lawyers who were found to be utterly conflicted in advising both the two founders and later the project as well. The millions of pounds awarded went a little way to compensate for the injustice done, but for the rest of us the reward is this book.

Folksy, witty, human and with several divergences from the main saga, it kept me awake on consecutive nights – and I already knew much of the tale having served at the RIBA as a Vice President while Jonathan was Hon Secretary and been followed by him as Master of the architects' livery company.

The humour and drama apart, it is not surprising that the author had to retain yet another firm of lawyers to vet the text. Despite all the revelations murky goings on within the Lottery Commission following the disaster of the Millenium Dome and their refusal to this day to release their own commissioned report into alleged misfeasance at Eden, one is left with an uneasy feeling about the conflicts which can arise between honest talent and the 'establishment class' in this country.

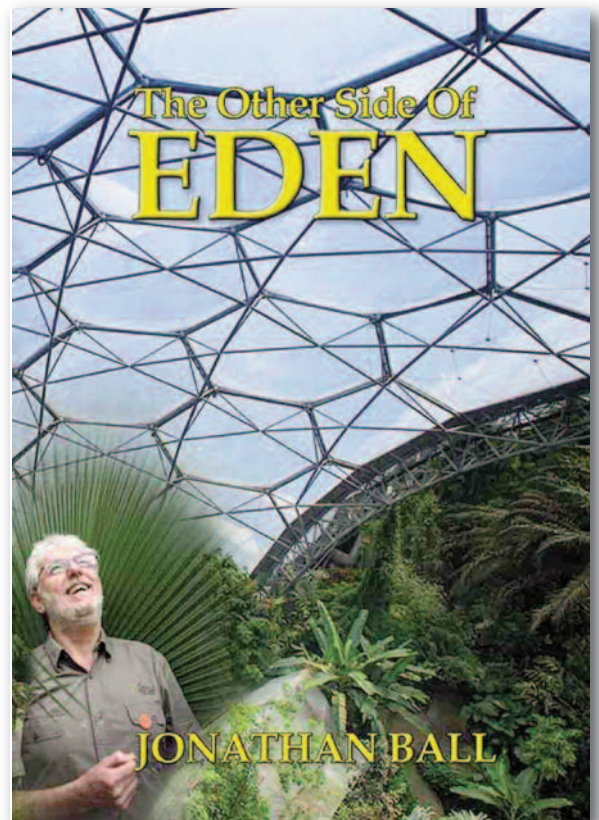
What others say:

- This story, of the extraordinary events which were part of the evolution of the Eden Project, reads like a legal thriller, and it will keep your attention to the end.

– *Sir David Brewer, Lord Lieutenant Greater London*

- Jonathan Ball recounts the important episode in environmental history that he helped to mastermind, co-founding the Eden project and bringing it to fruition. It is a moving human story and a gripping cautionary tale of the travails of an honourable visionary.

– *Felipe Fernández-Armesto, Chair in Arts and Letters University of Notre Dame, Indiana.*



On the back cover

Jonathan Ball was born in Bude, Cornwall, in June 1947. After qualifying at the architectural Association in London he set up practice in his home town in 1974. In 1992 he was appointed MBE for services to architecture. In 1994 he was approached by Tim Smit with an idea to create the largest greenhouses on planet Earth to tell the story of the great plant hunters.

Smit and Ball took huge personal risks as co-founders of the innovative architectural and environmental vision that became the internationally acclaimed Eden Project.

Ball was removed from Eden against his will. Without due recompense he lost his architectural practice. Three high profile appearances in the Royal Courts of Justice over four years followed to save his name, his family home and his professional reputation.

This is the story of one man's unflinching resolve and success in righting a public wrong, of a Cornishman looking to the glory of his nation and finding that enthusiasm, brilliant ideas and promises are not always enough. ■

Paperback £20.00. 214 Pages with index. Over 100 colour photographs. ISBN: 978-1-908867-24-7



Brian Waters is an architect-planner and edits *Planning in London*