and aesthetic matters with discussions of those who posed and resolved the issues.

The decade of planning (1955–65) began in favor of a rail transit system to move primarily commuters into and around central Washington from its outlying residential neighborhoods and the Maryland and Virginia suburbs. The Metro’s planning phase coincided with the growth of multiple federal, regional, and local agencies, associations, task forces, committees, and citizens’ groups, each represented by professionals in a variety of urban development fields. Schrag tames an enormous body of manuscript and printed documentation, weighing the contributions of each within the evolving political context to reach cogent conclusions, a feat he repeats throughout the book. Particularly notable is his handling of differing areas of expertise accompanied by a changing cast of characters as the chapters move through Harry Weese’s monumental station designs (1965–67); coordination with the region’s other transportation modes (1966–67); the fierce battle to replace inner-city freeways with rail lines (1966–71); building 106 miles of rail and eighty-six stations under and above ground (1972–76); and, juggling the financing of what was estimated in 1969 to cost 2.5 billion dollars but escalated to 6.2 billion dollars in less than a decade.

The collaboration of Weese with the Commission of Fine Arts to achieve the Metro’s strong architectural identity will be of interest to many JSAH readers. Schrag rescues from oblivion major but little-known players in the long, complex campaign to bring such a usable transit system to the greater Washington area. Metro stations continue to be magnets for sustainable development; many readers will appreciate learning about the successful mix of factors that achieved this goal. The Metro’s triumphs include its architectural qualities above and below ground, as well as greater connectivity to the center and throughout the region, and therefore enhanced livability for metropolitan Washington’s neighborhoods.

In assessing the value of these three books, we might ask more generally about measures of scholarly validity. Success depends variously on the cogent marshaling of reliable factual data and deeper delving into previously mined historical documentation, which revises accepted beliefs. Scholarly value also can rest on expanding the range of issues relevant to the history of a place, through compiling and analyzing scattered information to elucidate an interrelated topic or by judging history through contemporary lenses. All these approaches seem to be valid as long as they respect the basic historic record or prove it invalid.

The fundamental fact of Washington, D.C., is that politics has always intersected every aspect of public endeavor and many aspects of private life, a situation presenting both opportunities and pitfalls for historians. Reports commissioned or produced by government agencies were generally biased because they promoted the partisan points of view held by the administrations that sponsored them. Yet, these reports form the basis of much of Washington’s historiography, and accepting them as definitive primary documentation is problematic. As the interests and approaches of these three authors to Washington’s politics differ, so does their susceptibility to trusting its historical documentation. All three books here reviewed have the common virtue of pushing the boundaries of Washington’s historiography.

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Joan Busquets
Barcelona: The Urban Evolution of a Compact City
Rovereto, Italy, and Cambridge, Mass.: Nicolodi and Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2005. 468 pp., 100 color illus. $38, ISBN 88-8447-204-0

Peter Rowe
Building Barcelona: A Second Renaixença

In ranking the capitals of the modernist imaginary, Barcelona deserves a place not far below Paris or Vienna. The city can, after all, claim Joan Miró and Josep Lluís Sert as native sons; Pablo Picasso resided there at the beginning of his career, and Salvador Dalí always remained tied to his Catalan homeland. In a longer historical valuation, the novel urbanism that Ildefons Cerdá conceived in the mid-nineteenth century, the modernisme of Antoni Gaudí and Lluís Domènech i Montaner, and the postwar residencies of Gabriel García Márquez and other boom novelists of Latin America all would certify the city’s affiliation with the artistic avant-garde. Beyond that, Barcelona’s service during the Spanish Civil War as a redoubt of the Spanish Republic aligned the city with the prevailing politics of modernism. The distinctive weave of art, culture, and politics represented by this ancient Mediterranean city has recently been the subject of general as well as scholarly studies.1 Barcelona: The Urban Evolution of a Compact City and Building Barcelona: A Second Renaixença take up this topic from the perspective of architecture and urbanism. The authors examine the many forces and intentions that shaped the relation between architecture and the city in the historical periods before, during, and after modernism, supplementing existing monographs on individual artists and movements with studies of the city as a political space. As Joan Busquets suggests, legislative decrees, political strategies, and cultural ideas are “the main characters” in these accounts.

Neither book is, or aims to be, a historical text, despite their accumulation of
historical information, and it would be misleading to assess them as such. Both are written by design practitioners who attempt to discern the shape of urban processes in Barcelona that have, over longer or shorter temporal spans, structured the role of architecture in the city. Their concern for what will come next in Barcelona is at least as strong as their concern for what has already happened. Such examinations are necessarily unwieldy and require the evaluation of the dissimilar practices and motivations of politics, finance, religion, art, and commerce. They depend on the interpretive frameworks of several disciplines at scales ranging from the single urban block to the geography of Europe. As a result, both books have consequent shortcomings.

Busquets surveys the history of Barcelona’s urban form from its Roman foundation to the present; he does not offer complex accounts of the causal relations between specific agendas and projects. The notational style of the text (or perhaps its competent translation) does not mitigate this superficial aspect. Extremely brief paragraphs are clustered under headings and subheadings that produce a staccato of facts only sporadically juxtaposed to blunt claims about ideology, capitalism, or nationalism.

Peter Rowe, on the other hand, faces the opposite difficulty of portraying the broad context of connections he is interested in revealing. He focuses on a narrow slice of Barcelona’s history, roughly the period from the 1970s to the present, and does so in considerable detail, identifying the persons and events involved in transformative moments with fluid, descriptive passages. The more general cultural motivations and intentions are left vague, though, and remain relatively unexamined beneath his recounting of agendas and programs.

*Barcelona: The Urban Evolution of a Compact City* begins with Busquets’s frank acknowledgment that he does not intend a history of the city but rather an examination of its “morphological logic.” He employs the term “compact city” as a specific category of urban form, one with particularities and possibilities that can be traced within the changing physical and social contours of Barcelona. It is these discernible morphologies that Busquets attempts to describe by analyzing the effects of new architectural projects and urban forms alongside the persistence or revival of existing ones. The book proceeds chronologically, with four chapters covering the city from its origins in the first century BC to the end of the nineteenth century, followed by six more that cover its development over the course of the twentieth century. Each chapter assembles facts and ideas from varied sources—visual and textual, academic and popular—to summarize the social and political context. This collation of perspectives is the central value of the book, and it should be emphasized that Busquets’s fluent knowledge of his city and the accumulation of interpretive data are impressive indeed. The bibliography is cursory, and there is no index, but the footnotes provide hundreds of references to primary and secondary accounts in Catalan, Spanish, and English; and the more than six hundred illustrations are invaluable.

Some of Busquets’s contentions about the morphology of Barcelona are familiar tropes that have better-known parallels in the histories of other European cities. The palimpsest of periodic enlargement of the fortified walls is visible in the city’s patterns. Religious or civic institutions punctuate the smaller grain of urban fabric and establish the nodes of the city, which anchor the later accommodation of industrialization and its newly composed “public” that arose in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But Busquets contends that a discernible logic runs through and binds together these individual instances, and this interpretation produces what is most intriguing in his text. Busquets views the city as a constellation of minor, rational decisions, linked together by an urban logic that is neither teleological nor hap hazard. One need not, with such a view, characterize any single decision either as the inevitable product of some comprehensive, rational agency (such as that of church, state, or capitalism) or as the result of innumerable organic, everyday actions. Busquets’s analyses point to a middle ground, one where architectural or urban projects are understood in terms of their discrete, rational intentions and their extensive, organic ramifications.

Three prominent examples can be selected from the many that appear in the book: the Rambla, the Eixample, and the urban parks of the 1980s. Together these elements shape the contemporary image of Barcelona. Busquets demonstrates that the realization of each should be assessed with regard to both intention and contingency. The Rambla began as a strip of land outside the old city walls left empty as a runoff for the torrents of rainy seasons. After the construction of a wider circumference of fortifications in the fourteenth century, the Rambla became a central axis through the city. Its linear space was gradually built up, but it was still maintained as a location for the myriad activities of public life. The Eixample, Cerda’s nineteenth-century plan for the expansion of Barcelona into a grid of blocks with chamfered corners, would seem to be exclusively a product of state action as it was commissioned and sponsored by the city government. Busquets describes its implementation as a process of the private, speculative market, which resulted in the compromise, adaptation, and neglect of some of the comprehensive intentions of Cerda’s plan. More recently, the construction of dozens of small urban parks during the 1980s triggered a period of redevelopment. Though sponsored and constructed by the government and its agencies, these parks were each conceived with an intentionally narrow focus in collaboration with individual neighborhoods. One park had little in common with another apart from a general design sensibility and a common source of funding. When these instances are considered alongside dozens of others that Busquets presents—the Barceloneta area, the Citadel, the introduction of railways, the International Exhibitions in 1888 and 1929, the Parc Güell, the Olympic Village, and so on—his larger argument for a morphological logic takes shape.

**BooKs**
Building Barcelona: A Second Renaixença has a narrower aim. Rowe takes stock of the past few decades of Barcelona’s urban transformations, assessing several phases of architectural works undertaken publicly and privately to improve Barcelona’s civic life and its economic prospects. After an introductory chapter lucidly summarizing historical events and major urban developments from the mid-nineteenth century through the postwar years under Franco’s dictatorship, Rowe scrutinizes three major programs of development, one per chapter: first, the design of disparate urban spaces, including the neighborhood parks mentioned above; second, the hosting of the 1992 Olympic Games and subsequent use of the Olympic venues; and third, the facilities constructed for and around Fòrum 2004, east of the Vila Olimpica. These unillustrated chapters and a final one speculating on future urban issues the city will confront are separated by short sections of black-and-white photographs that are an essay in themselves. Some photographs are historical, but most are contemporary images of the city at street level and supply a needed visual impression of the spaces that Rowe describes.

Rowe argues that the processes evident in the urban and architectural projects of the late twentieth century are demonstrative of a “unique cultural modus operandi” sustained in Barcelona from the period of modernization at the beginning of the century. He identifies characteristic activities such as the contrived experimental visions of the city (as in the exhibitions), the interrelation of political and architectural actors (sometimes as one person), and a capacity for producing a collective sense of urgent opportunity. Grand plans such as the Eixample or the Plan Macià of the 1930s are echoed in the urban resuscitations performed after Franco’s death or in the far-sighted preparations for the Olympics. What makes Rowe’s argument more convincing than a simple formulation of history as repetition is his grasp of the collaborative and multidisciplinary nature of most of these projects. He gives no special emphasis to the figure of the architect, and he dispassionately describes the many architectural projects not in terms of form or image but with regard to their effects and consequences.

The characters here are not the architects or the buildings but the organizational structures that finance and carry out such urban projects. Rowe evaluates societats anònimes, public or semipublic companies created by the government for the specific purpose of realizing a particular project and dissolved upon its completion, which he finds effective for the type of urban development in Barcelona. He sees them as the historical descendents of private stock companies formed to similar purpose in the preceding century. In the late 1970s, city authorities decided to pursue projects rather than plans—in other words, small realizable projects rather than comprehensive, abstract regional plans. Considering this strategy as well as the use of societats anònimes, Rowe extrapolates the influence of a general cultural attitude upon urban form. The 1992 Olympic Games, which Rowe assesses as a process of urbanism, no longer stand as a singular historical event but as one in a chain of manifestations of the modus operandi unique to Barcelona.

To support this interpretation, Rowe repeatedly refers to the local attitude known to Catalans as seny, a mix of industriousness, common sense, inventiveness, and making-do that Rowe regards as a kind of farsighted pragmatism. While cultural attitudes surely shape, and are in turn shaped by, urban form, such a general attribution prompts evidentiary challenges. It amounts to a shorthand explanation, similar to the “weight of history,” for the cumbersome and intricate processes of Barcelona’s urban evolution. Many events and actions are recounted in these two books without sufficient explanation of unsuccessful propositions. Both books, for example, refer to the potency of Catalan nationalism and describe the political oppositions—between traditionalist conservatism and international progressivism and between republicanism and fascism—that profoundly influenced Barcelona’s history. But they do not often reveal the specific points of opposition or engagement around which any particular instance of urban modernization revolved. They do not describe the motivations or the arguments that were marshaled, ineffectively but deliberately, against projects or plans. In short, there is little in these accounts of the ideas and intentions that failed to be culturally persuasive.

More broadly the two books can be positively valued as providing a concise idea of the city. Neither book delves deeply enough into events to serve the specialized historian, yet both are too detailed to serve as generalist accounts. Together, though, they provide assessments of considerable breadth and arguments of significant weight. To the extent that these accounts move past the cataloging of artistic movements as the expression of cultural forces and toward an understanding of legislation, policy, and finance as cultural modes in and of them themselves, they will reinforce Barcelona’s claim on the modern imaginary—not by rehearsing its formal contributions but by providing a glimpse of the conceptual bases behind them.

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Note

Duanfang Lu
Remaking Chinese Urban Form: Modernity, Scarcity and Space, 1949–2005
London and New York: Routledge, 2006, 204 pp., 78 b/w illus., 6 tables, $120 (hardcover), ISBN 0-415-35450-1
The study of architecture and urban planning produced in China since the founding of the People’s Republic in