Using sources including online forums, interviews with professionals, newspapers, historic ordinances and close ethnographic observation, Mack illustrates the drama that material changes have inspired. For example, she outlines how Swedish planning ordinances sought to create a tightly regulated and homogeneous built environment. Planners and politicians working within these norms have claimed that Lina “is not Sweden” (219). From their point of view, standards produce “neighborhood harmony.” From the Syriac point of view, however, these standards are a “disciplinary imposition on creative freedom” (176). If Lina “is not Sweden,” then what is it?

This ambitious book tackles the rich complexity of Swedish urban planning and Syriac spatial practices, showing the impacts they have had on each other and tracing diasporic, minority-led, urban change. Were a follow-up volume to be written, some exploration of Wedens’ reactions to Syriac transformations and uses of the built environment (beyond those opinions expressed in online forums and newspapers, or those of planners or politicians) would be in order. Beyond anti-immigrant sentiment or critiques of Syriac’s “maximalist” ways, are some of the Swedes who make up the other 74 percent of Södertälje’s population rethinking their own practices and traditions in light of the Syriac approach to life? How does Syriac “urban design from below” compare with, for example, Arijit Sen’s ethnographic–architectural–historical analysis of Indians and Pakistanis in Chicago?1

As a reader, I am particularly curious about Syriac definitions of equality. Mack shows how the idea that Sweden is building a just and economically equitable society has become “reified,” and she notes that there are “rifts between the idealized models that majority Swedish architects and planners often still pursue and the new social realities that such professionals must increasingly contend with and accept” (212). Syriacs, thus, design their own “spaces and definitions of equality” (262). Throughout their fifty-some years of settlement in one of the world’s most distinctive sociospatial environments, how have Syriacs’ ideas of equality changed, and what is their conception of spatial equality? How do the views of equality among Syriacs currently living in Sweden differ from those of their counterparts thirty or forty years ago?

Mack brings Södertälje to life, showing it as the Syriac capital of the world. Difference is tolerated there so long as it remains marginal. However, increased visibility often leads to public and professional antag- o nism. The Construction of Equality lays the groundwork not only for a rethinking of planning practices that are no longer linked to social realities but also for a new focus on migrant populations’ own ideas of how, and for whom, the built environment should function. For those interested in how diasporic spaces are made, especially from the perspective of immigrants, Mack’s book is a must-read.

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Note

Florian Urban
The New Tenement: Residences in the Inner City since 1970
Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2018, 310 pp., 329 color illus. $59.95 (paper), ISBN 9781138224469

During the mid-twentieth century, a strong tendency toward state intervention in the urban built environment prevailed across northwestern Europe. This was channeled chiefly through the two linked mechanisms of city planning and social housing production. During the first three decades following World War II, dubbed les Trente Glorieuses in France, a modernist consensus favoring the opening out of congested cities, and the separating out of their different functions, was established. The most ubiquitous of these functions was mass housing, which in those decades was generally built according to modernist principles and mass-produced along “Fordist” lines. Individual nation-states and large cities drove these programs forward. Thus, far from being crushingly homogeneous, as later claimed by critics, postwar mass housing was bewilderingly diverse, both in its organization and in its built form. In Britain, for example, urban planning often took a radical, surgical approach, and mass housing was overwhelmingly built by municipalities; in Denmark, meanwhile, there was virtually no slum-clearance demolition, and social housing was decentralized by housing associations and cooperatives and built mainly on cities’ outskirts.

Beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, any general consensus regarding social housing began to dissolve, as citizens and professionals became increasingly discontented with what they viewed as mass housing’s paternalism and disrespect of the once-despised nineteenth-century urban fabric, and architectural revulsion against its alienating sameness became widespread. New formulas of urban development now arose, claiming to be more variegated and place sensitive, more evocative of tradition. Architecturally, such developments usually appeared under the banner of postmodernism. Across northwestern Europe, this modern-traditional approach in planning and housing was encapsulated in a particular motif—the “new tenement,” an update of the traditional nineteenth-century apartment block for contemporary neoliberal purposes. For nearly half a century, this new tenement movement has proceeded apace, with the expansion of neoliberalism gradually sharpening through successive building cycles and the prevalent architectural styles evolving from decorative postmodernism to image-led neomodernism. The movement’s claims of place specificity and integral links to effective economic regeneration, however, have gone largely unchallenged, and extensive areas of redevelopment are assumed simply to have happened, ad hoc and without connection to broader programs.

Florian Urban’s The New Tenement is the first book to challenge this complacent consensus, subjecting both the built forms and organizational frameworks of this multidecade movement to critical and historical analysis. Urban demonstrates that the new tenements manifested unexpected patterns of local and regional diversity, not so much in their architectural styles or traditional planning concepts, but in their cultural and organizational frameworks—much as had earlier phases of the modernist movement. The book reflects the complexity of its subject matter with an appropriately complex layout, combining thematic chapters...
focused on specific aspects of the new tenement movement with five in-depth case studies treating Berlin, Copenhagen, Glasgow, Rotterdam, and Vienna. The book's discipline affiliation—as a work of architectural history, not economic or social history or urban policy analysis—is emphasized by the content of its first few chapters. These begin with an overview of the main styles of the new tenements and move on to a detailed account of the 1970s-80s Berlin International Building Exposition, an immensely influential, multiphase regeneration of decayed inner-city areas, the archetypal exemplar of the new tenement type. Here, Urban introduces his iconoclastic argument that the architectural qualities of new tenement style diverge significantly from the rhetorical claims of its champions: contrary to talk of place-specific regionalism, "a striking aspect of new tenements is that they do not come in local variations" but instead look architecturally similar everywhere (35). Urban argues that any genuine place specificity stems from local legal provisions and municipal regulations. In chapter 3 he offers a systematic analysis of the wider political, social, and economic contexts of the new tenement city, following this in chapters 4 through 8 with the city case studies. These chapters integrate the architectural and organizational lines of Urban's argument. Next come two chapters synthesizing the big themes of the new tenement movement: the adaptive reuse of brownfield inner cities (chapter 9) and the building of dense new developments on the urban outskirts, or "urbanising the suburbs" (chapter 10). The book finishes with a short conclusion and a timeline.

_The New Tenement_ makes significant contributions to architectural and urban history at a number of levels. The author uses the new tenement type, broadly defined, as a vehicle for his wide-ranging analysis of a new category of urban architecture and planning. All over Europe, inner-city regeneration has replaced suburbanization as the preferred policy paradigm, and many once-decaying centers have been renovated and repopulated by the up-and-coming middle classes. Architecturally, Urban shows how the new tenements reflected a changing discourse on urbanity (invariably viewed as positive), building on the works of antimodernist critics of the 1960s and 1970s (Jane Jacobs, Aldo Rossi, Christopher Alexander, and Colin Rowe, but also the Dutch structuralists and the German theorists of the "European City") while connecting these to the concept of the city as a motor of creative innovation (from Georg Simmel to Richard Florida).

This new urban environment, Urban demonstrates, is shot through with paradoxes and contradictions. Despite voluble claims regarding its traditional or regionalist character, it is pervaded by key aspects of contemporary neoliberal modernity, including the privileging of information exchange over industrial production, individual expression over mass culture, visible history over comprehensive renewal, and conspicuous difference over egalitarianism. While these inner cities thrive as bustling and increasingly wealthy environments, they are also plagued by the well-known negative aspects of neoliberalism—soaring property prices, social polarization, the driving out of economically weaker residents, and the partial retreat of a welfare state that has come increasingly under pressure. Ironically, as Urban emphasizes, the new tenements do not constitute an architecture of neoliberalism. Rather, they emerged from a post-1968 protest culture, and from a desire to reform, not abolish, the welfare state. One of the book's many insights is that only in some contexts, and after a considerable time lag, did these patterns become entangled more comprehensively with neoliberal values and goals. In that respect, _The New Tenement_ may well be the first of a new generation of accounts of architecture in the neoliberal age, studies that might play a revisionist role comparable to that of the well-established “complexity and contradiction” literature around postwar modernism. Just as those publications questioned simplistic associations between modernism and socialist collectivism, so may this new literature profitably question assumed links between postmodernism, or contemporary iconic modernism, and laissez-faire neoliberalism.

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Eva Branscome


Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2018, 244 pp., 106 b/w illus. $140 (cloth), ISBN 9781472459947

Throughout the 1980s, one could barely open an architectural magazine without finding an article about Hans Hollein. He created two of the most memorable icons of postmodernism: the Strada Novissima at the Venice Biennale (1980) and his Haas Haus in Vienna (1987). These, along with the Pritzker Prize he received in 1985, made his name synonymous with postmodern architecture.

But stardom is fickle, and by the beginning of the 1990s, postmodernist star architects had become victims of their own success. The sensational _Decoenauctive Architecture_ show at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1988 was the final blow. For postmodernism, it was curtains. More is the pity when it comes to Hollein. As a result of postmodernism’s eclipse, his early, pre-postmodern work from the late 1950s to the late 1970s has largely slipped from view. In those years he was a celebrated artist, exhibiting at the Richard Feigen Gallery with Christo and Clae Oldenburg, at the Mönchelndrab Museum with Josef Beuys, at the Galerie St. Stefan in Vienna with Walter Pichler, and in the Austrian pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale. His output included collages, ink drawings, sculptures, installations, and performance art. Many of these works are now held at MoMA, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and various Viennese museums.

It took a decade for Hollein to resurface. The comeback came with the Centre Pompidou’s blockbuster 2001 exhibition _Les Années Pop_. Hollein’s art of the 1960s was given pride of place, along with the pop art of Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol. Subsequent publications tried to dislodge Hollein’s early work from knee-jerk associations with postmodernism and shed light on a younger, more complex and creative artist in tune with the experiments of the late 1950s through the early 1970s.³

Eva Branscome, a former student of Hollein at the University of Applied Arts Vienna (when he was at the peak of his postmodernist fame), has written a book, based on her doctoral dissertation at the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, in which she attempts to yank early Hollein back into the fold of postmodernism. She subscribes to the Charles Jencks school of postmodernism, and her book’s thesis is that Hollein was always postmodern, even _avant la lettre_ in the late 1950s. Branscome