

Appreciation of urban morphology – that is, the layout and configuration of urban form and the processes giving rise to them – helps urban designers be aware of local patterns of development and processes of change. Morphologists have shown that settlements could be seen in terms of several key elements and, in addition, emphasised the difference in their temporal stability (e.g. Conzen, 1960). Buildings, and particularly the land uses they accommodate, are usually the least resilient elements. Although more enduring, the plot pattern also changes over time as plots are subdivided or amalgamated. The street or cadastral pattern tends to be the most enduring element. Many urban design writers have attempted to analyse and understand these changing patterns and the reasons for them.

A key tool for analysing urban form has been the figure-ground diagram – an early advocate of which was Colin Rowe. In *Collage City*, Rowe and Koetter (1979) described the ‘spatial predicament’ of the Modernist city as one of ‘objects’ and ‘texture’. Objects are sculptural buildings standing freely in space, while texture is the background matrix of built form defining space. Rather than privileging the positive space or the positive building, they recognised situations where one or the other would be appropriate and that the situation to be hoped for would be ‘... one in which both buildings and spaces exist in an equality of sustained debate. A debate in which victory consists in each component emerging undefeated’ (Rowe and Koetter, 1979: 83).

In practice, however, common observations have drawn attention both to the lack of well-defined positive space and to the important role played by more mundane and relatively anonymous buildings that define space – Kelbaugh (2002: 99), for example, defines these as ‘background’ or ‘collateral’ buildings, which ‘... gain their strength from the public space they define’. In the absence of explicit concern for the spaces between the buildings, many environments are simply random collections of individual buildings rather than synergistic combinations of buildings and spaces. In practice, the spaces between object-buildings need to be – but often are not – expressly designed; the spaces between buildings-defining-spaces have less need to be expressly designed.

This Section presents a set of three chapters. The first chapter, Chapter 7, is Roger Trancik’s ‘What is lost space?’, which forms a chapter in his 1986 book, *Finding Lost Space: Theories of Urban Design* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York) – a highly accessible, but curiously neglected book in the urban design canon. The chapter develops from the recognition

that there are essentially two types of urban space system, which can be referred to as ‘traditional’ and ‘Modernist’. Traditional urban space consists of buildings as constituent parts of urban blocks, where the blocks define and enclose positive, external space – that is, ‘figural space’. Modernist urban space conventionally consists of freestanding ‘pavilion’ (or ‘object’) buildings in landscape settings – that is, ‘figural buildings’. Trancik’s chapter explains how Modernist ideas of urban space design, combined with development practices during the twentieth century, created a phenomena he aptly describes as ‘lost’ space: ‘... individual buildings isolated in parking lots and highways’ (Trancik, 1986: 21). Trancik’s chapter both presents his concept of ‘lost space’ – a useful way of conceiving the transformation of urban space in the late part of the twentieth century – and then gives some explanation about why it came about, emphasising as causes the automobile and the highway; the Modern Movement in architecture; urban renewal and zoning; the privatisation of public space; and changing patterns of land use in urban areas.

Chapter 8 is Leslie Martin’s ‘The grid as generator’, the opening essay in his book, *Urban Space and Structures* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), co-edited with Lionel March, his fellow researcher at the then Centre for Land Use and Built Form Studies (now the Martin Centre) at the University of Cambridge. Attempting to provide a strong theoretical basis for urban space design, the book represented an extraordinary breakthrough in urban research, by demonstrating how cadastral patterns and block sizes affect the distribution of urban space and the sustainability of urban form over time. The chapter explores relationships that Raymond Unwin had begun to grasp (but had not developed) in his pioneering pamphlet *Nothing Gained By Overcrowding* (1912). From a somewhat different perspective, Le Corbusier also examined similar relationships in his Plan Voisin for Paris in the 1920s. Martin examined different configurations of built form and open space, in order to explore the desirability of the outcomes. Rather than prescribing preferred options and layouts, he stressed the importance of being aware of what options were possible. For example, small block sizes are often advocated for reasons such as urban vitality, permeability, visual interest and legibility (Jacobs, 1961: 191–99; Krier 1990: 198), while larger block structures may be more efficient in terms of the distribution of built form and open space. By examining the densities and land use intensities of different development patterns, Martin