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Florence Bourillon and Corinne Jaquand, eds., *La parcelle dans tous ses états*. Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2022. viii + 260 pp. € 24.00 (pb). ISBN 9-78-2753582477; €11.99 (eb). ISBN 9-78-2753587243.

Review by Sun-Young Park, George Mason University.

The city reduced to its fundamentals yields a plan—a composition of circulation networks and plot boundaries that define and limit the possibilities of building. It was this historic palimpsest that early twentieth-century modernists and postwar-era planners aimed to efface with their large-scale operations of urban renewal, and which historians in the second half of the century recovered as the basis of urban transformation. In the works of geographer M.R.G. Conzen and urban scholar Saverio Muratori in the 1960s, and art and architectural historians of urban form in the seventies and eighties—such as the collaboration of André Chastel, Françoise Boudon, and Françoise Hamon, and the research team of Jean Castex, Jean-Charles Depaule, and Philippe Panerai—the plot was identified as the “original morphological unit” of the city (p. 9), its “smallest possible unit of exploitation and investment” (p. 7). Paying homage to these intellectual roots, Florence Bourillon and Corinne Jaquand’s edited volume, *La parcelle dans tous ses états*, revisits the *parcelle*, or plot, as the central element of urban analysis. It brings new research to bear on this discourse on urban morphology with the aim of identifying recurring properties of the plot through diachronic comparisons.

The volume comprises three sections, under the headings of “Plasticité,” “Verticalité,” and “Effacement et recomposition.” The five essays on plasticity explore the role of individuals and local communities in shaping plot structures during times of modernization. This section is the most chronologically diverse, offering case studies from the Old Regime to the late nineteenth century. In a study of Aix and Marseille’s urban extension plans of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, Julien Puget analyzes the plot as an interface between private actors and public administration. Even as local authorities established measures to control the overarching city plan, property holders could determine the subdivision of their lots in the case of Aix, while preexisting plot systems informed the design of urbanizing faubourgs in Marseille. Paul Lecat similarly highlights local actors and spatial continuities in the creation of the quartier de la Réunion out of agricultural land on the outskirts of nineteenth-century Paris. Observing that the opening of new roads by public authorities generally left the process of plot recomposition to private landowners, Lecat uncovers enduring traces of former agricultural parcels in the urban district that ensued. In another study of the Parisian *banlieues*, Michèle Lambert-Bresson compares the development of la Prairie Saint-Jean in Corbeil and the village of Garenne in the commune of Colombes during the late nineteenth century. Detailing their processes of

subdivision, Lambert-Bresson emphasizes the legacy of classical modes of *découpage*, such as monumental royal routes, even as these two areas eventually accommodated different building typologies in the age of industry.

These essays for the most part reaffirm the importance of the plot as the fundamental material and legal unit of urban morphology, yet two contributions complicate this premise by foregrounding the inextricability of plot and ensemble. In an analysis of ecclesiastical communities in eighteenth-century Paris, Preston Perluss examines the complexities of plot configurations in consolidated landholdings. Especially in the fringes of these communities, parcels could be purchased, combined, and recomposed to generate complicated leasing agreements and façade divisions that were out of synch with the plot structure. In another intriguing contribution, Jean-Luc Laffont investigates a lesser-known form of urban community organization in Old Regime Toulouse—the *moulon*, an assemblage of approximately ten homes, the collective actions of which often prevailed over individual property interests. In examining their activities toward poor relief and local celebrations, Laffont suggests the *moulon* as a precursor to the *parcelle*, though with a stronger emphasis on neighborliness and sociability.

Laffont's contribution is a timely reminder that the plot was ultimately lived and experienced in space, not in plan. While site plans (employed rather sparingly) illustrate the developments analyzed in the essays above, their neglect of the third dimension is regrettable, especially in those cases where plot system and building structure did not neatly align. The reader needs to reach the second section on verticality to more closely consider the ways in which the relationship between a plot and its building(s) could be imagined, but the first essay here is mostly a continuation of the previous section. Sylvain Schoonbaert and Paul-Édouard Errard have gathered data from cadastral maps of Bordeaux from 1835 to 1855 to present fine-grained analyses of urban density, property owners' social profile, and real estate value. Maps evoke the dense fabric of residences in this period preceding large-scale modernization, but a discussion of the spatial experience of this environment remains limited.

The other three essays in this section more clearly interrogate the urban plot as volume. Focusing on the reconstruction of the two *places flamandes* in Arras after the First World War, Camille Bidaud addresses the tension between façade preservation around these historic squares and an urban development plan (the loi Cornudet of 1919) that called for widening streets. To balance these demands, the architect Pierre Paquet converted the ground level of surrounding structures into public galleries, complicating plots' legal structures in the interest of historic preservation. Meanwhile, Anne-Laure Jourdheuil studies the complexities of recent housing projects created under the Véfa-HLM (*Vente en État futur d'achèvement aux organismes d'habitation à loyers modérés*) framework that mix private and social housing in the same parcel. These constructions are divided volumetrically in terms of management and maintenance, and Jourdheuil demonstrates how the ownership structure is made legible through design differences, thereby displaying social segregation at the microlevel of the plot. Philippe Thiard shifts in scale to consider the relationship between plot and block in an ongoing project to redevelop a district around the rue de la Loi in Brussels. The design team, led by Atelier Christian de Portzamparc, envisioned a macrolot strategy of diverse forms and functions interspersed with open spaces, but existing laws on building envelopes and a lack of coordinated administration and financing have hampered the initial conception. These essays highlight the multivalent ways in which *parcelle*, *îlot*, and *quartier* intersect and inform each other, but what is perhaps missing is a zoomed-out

lens that might allow the authors to consequently retheorize the plot as a category of urban analysis and transformation.

In the final section on erasure and recomposition, five essays analyze historical moments when existing plot structures were either elided as obstacles or rediscovered as key components of the urban fabric. Isabelle Grudet and Claudio Secci provide a historiographical frame for this section by situating Conzen and Muratori's groundbreaking scholarship of the 1960s and 70s against mid-century modernist discourses. They argue that the postwar focus on *îlots insalubres* and CIAM's interest in large-scale zoning led to a temporary denigration of historic plot structures as outmoded artifacts. This legacy of modernism hovers over succeeding essays on social housing. While the *grands ensembles* of the Soviet era seem like the ultimate examples of tabula rasa urbanism, Eric Le Bourhis shows through the case of Riga that these projects in fact relied on existing plot divisions as their basic framework. From a period of slow building to accelerated prefab construction after 1959, Riga managed to achieve a balance between demolition and construction, with attention paid to private property claims, costs of indemnities, and rehousing the displaced. As presented by Denis Bocquet, Berlin's modern history presents an interesting case of the plot's shifting fortunes due to politics and ideology. While the key element of urban organization in the nineteenth century, the plot was partly effaced in social housing projects of the Weimar Republic, Nazi-era efforts to demolish *îlots insalubres*, and postwar rebuilding. Then from the 1970s, squatting movements and postmodern sensibilities rediscovered the historic fabric of the city, thereby restoring the plot's centrality in urban restoration work after unification.

Philippe Gresset's closing essay in this section, which serves as the "Postface" to this volume, covers similar ground to the preceding contributions, outlining the historiographical significance of Conzen and other urban scholars' recovery of the plot in the second half of the twentieth century, and the corresponding return of the parcel in city planning discourses. Yet his final comment, that we might perhaps conceive a different urban future by recognizing what we have learned about the plasticity of the plot and the benefit of public over private space, points to Charline Sowa's essay as the more evocative endpoint for this collection. Countering the trend of urbanization explored throughout this volume, Sowa addresses the current issue of shrinking cities to question how the plot could be used to reimagine urban form and experience in these circumstances. Beginning with the perforated fabric of deurbanizing Detroit as the ur-example, she presents creative uses of vacant plots in two shrinking French localities: Saint-Étienne and areas around the regional natural park of Livradois-Forez. In both cases, historically overbuilt town centers were opened up and new uses of public space put into action, with flexible property management arrangements between the municipality and residents for cost sharing.

The plot as instrument of urban formation, re-formation, and now, possibly de-formation: *La parcelle dans tous ses états* is a valuable collection that, through its range of fine-grained case studies, allows us to interrogate the varied paths of urban morphology through its smallest common denominator. Yet the reader might wish for a conclusion that reframes the theoretical stakes of the debate initially established by Conzen, Muratori, et al. As many of the essays indicate, the plot's relationship to its buildings, open spaces, streets, block, and neighborhood is complex and has evolved with planning practices over time. The introduction by Bourillon and Jaquand lists specific urban situations today where a reconsideration of the plot is critical, such as macrolot strategies and informal urbanism. These examples suggest that a broader geographical scope, including eastern contexts and the global South, would greatly enhance the

conversation and perhaps lead the way to retheorizing the plot in urban analysis—for example, by taking into account the intersection of scales evoked in contemporary cases, or the layering of social space onto the legal, fiscal, and morphological parcel framework. This will be a task for urban scholars to work through in the years ahead, as the investigations introduced in this volume and others on diverse contexts are brought to bear on each other.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Florence Bourillon and Corinne Jaquand, “Introduction”

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Julien Puget, “De la parcelle à la ville, une relecture des extensions urbaines des villes d’Aix et de Marseille au XVIIe siècle”

Preston Perluss, “Structures parcellaires limitrophes des institutions ecclésiastiques parisiennes au XVIIIe siècle”

Jean-Luc Laffont, “L’assemblée de dizaine ... au coeur de la parcelle toulousaine sous l’Ancien Régime”

Michèle Lambert-Bresson, “Les intentions du parcellaire, deux lotissements dessinés au XIXe siècle. La prairie Saint-Jean à Corbeil et le nouveau village de la Garenne de Colombes”

Paul Lecat, “Le rôle du parcellaire agricole dans la fabrique de la ville. L’exemple du quartier de la Réunion entre Charonne et Paris (1848-1880)”

Deuxième partie. Verticalité

Sylvain Schoonbaert and Paul-Édouard Errard, “Associer la matrice au plan. Parcelles et revenus fonciers de Bordeaux (1835-1855)”

Camille Bidaud, “Plan d’alignement et reconstruction du patrimoine urbain après la Première Guerre mondiale. Les places d’Arras”

Anne-Laure Jourdheuil, “Parcelles en volume”

Philippe Thiard, “La trame parcellaire, frein ou levier du projet urbain? L’exemple du projet urbain Loi à Bruxelles”

Troisième partie. Effacement et recomposition

Isabelle Grudet and Claudio Secci, “La ville sans parcelles. La construction d’une représentation collective de la forme de la ville dans l’entre-deux-guerres”

Eric Le Bourhis, “Faire table rase? Remembrement et grands ensembles de logements à Riga en Union soviétique vers 1960”

Denis Bocquet, “Entre effacement et redécouverte. La notion de parcelle dans la trame urbaine berlinoise”

Charline Sowa, “Remodeler la ville en décroissance. Des expériences à observer pour réinterroger le système parcellaire actuel et son devenir”

Philippe Gresset, “Postface. Heurs et malheurs de la parcelle. Une brève histoire de la disparition du parcellaire”

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