

**Howard Davis (2012),
*Living Over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life***

Published by: Routledge, Abingdon and New York
ISBN: 978-0-415-78316-3 (hardcover)

Reviewed by:
Pheereeya Boonchaiyapruerk



Pages: 246-247

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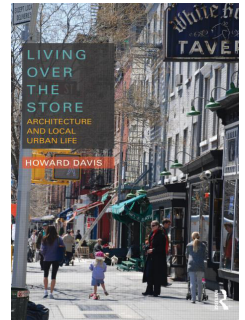
Living Over the Store: Architecture and Local Urban Life by Howard Davis was first published in 2012. The book is a collective investigation of the shop/house or the work/live building, which is a type of mixed-use building widely found across different cultures and places. Davis emphasises the main characteristic of the shop/house as consisting of the workspace, usually at the ground level, and dwelling, set above in a single structure. The shop/house is a global phenomenon: a common urban building found in the background of cities around the world; from New York apartment buildings, London terraced houses, Amsterdam canal houses, Venetian houses and the Italian palazzo, through to Chinese and South-East Asian shop/houses. The striking inquiry of this book is, however, not the historic study of these buildings as a single archetype but in the way it raises the question of how these mixed-use buildings support neighbourhood diversity through their adaptable and flexible architectural features. Thus, *Living Over the Store* aims to investigate the extent to which the hybrid form of the shop/house initiates resilient urbanism through time, maintaining a central role in the local urban economy whilst adapting to the contemporary situation.

The book is divided into three parts: the first describes the global phenomenon of the shop/house. It provides an overview of the various kinds of shop/house that have appeared during the past three hundred years. The four chapters included here offer a rich array of architectural drawings: plans and elevations as well as an overview of the socio-economic aspects of the shop/house, encompassing the significance of hybrid uses and

the spatial organisation of the buildings.

While the first section of the book focuses on architectural characteristics, the second part extends to the relationship between the social aspects of the building itself; whether amongst family members, or between the building's inhabitants and the surrounding neighbourhood. The domestic scenarios of semi-public space in the shop/house are repeatedly emphasised throughout the book. As a shop/house resident myself, the rich explanation of life in the shop/house strikes a chord with me as it revives a nostalgic memory of my childhood and the way in which living in such a building shaped my life experience within the family and neighbourhood. The arguments contained in this section focus on the strong connection this building type makes with the street and its attributes of location within the city. In addition to its architectural flexibility, the author argues that the shop/house consistently supports both the physical continuity and the social stability of the neighbourhood. The second section is supported by a large number of handsome illustrations and diagrammatic maps of exemplar case studies. The last section is focused on a critique of how modernist urban regulation has changed the urban setting of the building and in turn, the role of shop/house itself within this context. This section ends with several case studies that show new forms of the shop/house as a hybrid archetype, created in response to the need for urban resilience.

The book is mainly influenced by the observations made by two great theorists. First is the importance of mixing primary uses of lands and buildings as laid out by Jane Jacobs in *The Death*



Living Over the Store:
Architecture and Local
Urban Life, 2012

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and Life of Great American Cities (1961), in which she conjectured that such mixing was central to creating conditions of city diversity and liveliness. The second influence is Christopher Alexander's writing: 'A city is not a tree' (1965), on the integration of ordinary physical elements and socio-economic attributes of daily life in the city. Thus, many of the arguments in the book link back to these two fundamentals - leading to the proposition that the adaptable and flexible architectural forms and uses of the shop/house exhibit the diversity of urban neighbourhoods.

The thesis of the book sheds light on how we can understand the neighbourhood through the smallest unit of society: the family set within its spatial form. The exceptional idea of the shop/house, as a private space intermingled with the public realm, relates to the essential way in which small-scale functions are embedded into the surrounding spatial structure. The book in general, and the latter point in particular, are likely to be of interest to readers of the *Journal of Space Syntax* due to the way in which the detailed descriptive account of the locational distribution of the shop/house in the urban fabric relates to the conception within space syntax theories of spatial configuration and multi-scale socio-spatial relationships. Thus, the book presents a broad range of instances of the shop/house in different cultures which collectively corroborate the space syntax proposition that the liveliness of the neighbourhood is linked to the probability of movement and encounters created by the network of streets themselves (Hillier and Hanson, 1984). Accordingly, the book integrates detailed observations and maps of shop/houses in an effort to understand how the urban morphology, its location and/or density, together influence its distribution and location. According to Davis, it is the way in which these two spatial conditions, of residence and commerce, complement each other. 'The shop/house emerges when residential and

commercial uses compete for the same real estate. The architectural result is not one use winning out over the other, but a building in which both can co-exist' (p.104). As a consequence, Davis suggests, it optimises its location between dwelling and business, thus putting strangers and locals together in the same place. This could be said to relate to the discussions on urban social *correspondence* and *non-correspondence* solidarities discussed in the seminal space syntax literature (Hillier and Hanson, 1984; Hanson, 2000). As such, this book leads to a better understanding of the socio-economic life of the *community*.

Living Over the Store leaves an open question regarding the implications for everyday urban life today. It is evidently essential to seek a balance between the local and the global and how to accommodate one within the other.

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