Stephen Marshall's
Cities, Design and Evolution
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In 'Cities, Design and Evolution' by Stephen Marshall the evolutionary theoretical concept is applied to the appraisal of how planning and urban design theory and practice have changed over time from the classical period through to modernism, post-modernism and new urbanism and how we can understand cities as 'evolutionary entities'. This book most closely aligns to the work published in 2005 entitled 'Streets and Patterns' that has a very similar visual style and structure in which Marshall deals with approaches to analysing and understanding the street layouts of cities. Stephen Marshall is an academic at the Bartlett School of Planning at University College London.

The book is structured around eight core chapters excluding the introduction and conclusion 2. Cities, Planning and Modernism; 3. Articulating Urban Order; 4. The social logic of urban order; 5. The kind of thing a city is; 6. Emergence and evolution; 7. Emergent urban order; 8. Cities in Evolution; 9. Planning, design and evolution. Through chapters two to seven Marshall examines the way in which the city has been conceptualised, in itself and through philosophical ideas about what the city should be utilising evolutionary thinking, to understand why and how the changes occur over time. In chapters eight and nine the idea of evolution is used in itself to unpack ideas about urban design and planning.

The reader is led on a discussion that demonstrates the persistence of certain aspects of city planning through time in contrast to the disappearance of others. This being the principle of evolution: where advantageous aspects of form and function remain and are refined, whilst those that are disadvantageous fade and are replaced. This discussion is neatly framed within the over-arching theme of the evolutionary process that permeates each chapter. Marshall also clearly makes the point that 'evolution can be non-biological', and that the city is an artefact arising from the combination of 'design and evolution' and this argument underpins the application of evolutionary ideas in this context.
This genealogy of ideas works very well as a structure as the linkages between the periods modernism, postmodernism and new urbanism and the linkages between theories of urban form organism, parts and whole and emergent complexity are made clear by elucidating their similarities rather than their differences. Special attention is given to modernism throughout the book as a reference point of a distinct change in evolutionary direction for urban planning and architecture. The visual references to the written text are laid out in an informative manner that flows clearly with the text, creating a sense of progression that is both visually pleasing and necessary for following the line of the argument.

From the perspective of those involved in space syntax the book deals with material that will be familiar, especially in chapters three (Hillier and Hanson are referenced extensively), four and seven where Marshall deals with the ideas of syntax in urban structure and how the form reflects the social functioning of the city; ‘the reason cities exist and have the structure they do are significantly to do with the social structure’. The value that this book will particularly bring to those concerned with space syntax is the manner in which the book links these ideas to the vast topic of urban theory, planning and design. One drawback of the book is that it discusses the syntax of the city in the broadest sense, and does not explicitly look at how space syntax theories have been applied to analysing urban form or indeed how the syntax of the city can be analysed. This is probably beyond the scope of the book that primarily acts as a primer for thinking about a wide range of ideas relating to urban design and planning from the evolutionary perspective.

For those with extensive and developed knowledge of space syntax it will not be a vital book, but for those who do not have this knowledge it will clearly articulate and illustrate how valuable thinking about the syntax of the city is to understanding urban form, and the relationship of the syntactic conception of the city to the discipline as a whole.

Overall 'Cities, Design and Evolution' is a good book that presents a new way to think about the progression of the theory and practice of urban planning and design. Furthermore, it concisely illuminates the reasons for the evolution of the city into what we see today, in both physical and theoretical senses.