



BOOK REVIEWS

**Laura VAUGHAN, John PEPONIS, Ruth Conroy DALTON (eds),
Space Syntax: Selected Papers by Bill Hillier, UCL Press, London
2025, 728 pages**

Spatial configuration plays a foundational role in shaping patterns of human interaction and social behaviour. One of the most enduring challenges in the spatial disciplines has been the development of systematic, replicable methods to analyse these relationships. *Space Syntax: Selected Papers by Bill Hillier*, edited by Vaughan, Peponis, and Dalton, offers a timely and rigorous synthesis of Bill Hillier's major contributions to spatial theory and urban morphology. More than a retrospective, this volume anchors the evolution and application of space syntax theory over the past four decades.

The book comprises twenty chapters/papers selected from Hillier's extensive body of work, ranging from early explorations into design cognition to more recent interventions in urban theory and spatial analysis. Each paper is framed by a scholarly commentary that contextualises its intellectual origins, methodological innovations, and contemporary relevance. This structure allows the book to function simultaneously as an intellectual archive, a teaching tool, and a research guide. It bridges Hillier's original formulations with ongoing debates about space, society, and urban futures.

The book's value can be articulated across three core dimensions:

First, it offers a systematic theoretical framework for understanding the social logic of spatial form. Hillier's early writings – especially those drawn from *The Social Logic of Space* (1984, with Julienne Hanson) – introduced core analytical tools such as axial maps, integration values, and syntactic measures that link spatial configuration to patterns of movement and encounter. These concepts



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are further developed in landmark chapters such as “Natural Movement” (1993) and “The City as a Socio-Technical System” (2012), which articulate how urban morphology not only reflects but actively structures social behaviour, economic flows, and collective life. Hillier’s work remains vital for understanding how spatial design can promote or hinder interaction, inclusion, and affective well-being.

Second, the volume exemplifies interdisciplinary synthesis, reflecting space syntax’s evolution as a cross-cutting research paradigm. Hillier’s engagement with such disciplines as mathematics, psychology, geography, and sociology is evident throughout the selected papers. His approach is both rigorous and generative, integrating formal spatial analysis with empirical research and theoretical reflection. The editorial commentaries deepen this interdisciplinarity by drawing connections to contemporary work in architecture, planning, and urban studies. In doing so, the book positions space syntax not just as a technical method but as a dynamic framework capable of responding to complex urban challenges.

Third, the book demonstrates the practical and policy relevance of spatial analysis. Hillier’s critiques of low-permeability and fragmented urban design – exemplified in essays such as “Against Enclosure” (1988) – highlight the consequences of spatial segregation for social cohesion, public safety, and urban conviviality. His emphasis on visibility, accessibility, and permeability anticipates current concerns with walkability, inclusivity, and the right to public space. Moreover, his methodological innovations in syntactic modelling and simulation remain instrumental for practitioners engaged in urban regeneration, spatial justice, and participatory planning.

Nonetheless, the collection invites further engagement and critique. While the focus on the configurational properties of space provides valuable insights, some readers may find the lack of sustained attention to issues of power, identity, and affect to be a limitation. Topics such as racialised spatial practices, gendered experiences of space, and emotional geographies are not explicitly addressed in the selected papers. This absence invites scholars – particularly those interested in the affective, intersectional, and political dimensions of space – to extend and adapt space syntax theory into these critical and underexplored areas. Additionally, the selection of contributors/commentators, while authoritative, leans heavily on institutions in the Global North. A more inclusive representation of voices from the Global South would have further enriched the volume’s relevance and applicability across diverse urban contexts.

The book’s editorial design enhances its pedagogical value. Diagrams are redrawn with clarity, chapter introductions are concise and informative, and Hillier’s original texts are preserved without unnecessary modification. While the absence of a concluding chapter may initially seem like a missed opportunity, it is a deliberate decision that reinforces the volume’s open-ended orientation: it invites readers to carry forward and reimagine Hillier’s ideas in light of contemporary spatial and social transformations.

In short, *Space Syntax: Selected Papers by Bill Hillier* is a landmark publication that consolidates Bill Hillier's pioneering influence in spatial theory while remaining open to future interpretation and application. It is a must-read for students and practitioners of architecture, urban planning, geography, and spatial cognition. For researchers interested in the social textures of space, it offers both a robust methodological foundation and a critical springboard. It challenges readers not just to understand cities, but to rethink how spatial form shapes the very conditions of human co-presence, care, and community.

Abdelbaseer A. MOHAMED *

University of Lodz (Poland), Al-Azhar University (Egypt)

* Abdelbaseer A. MOHAMED, University of Lodz, Faculty of Economics and Sociology, Social-Ecological Systems Analysis Lab, Polskiej Organizacji Wojskowej 3/5, 90-255 Lodz, Poland; Al-Azhar University, Faculty of Engineering, Urban Planning Department, Cairo, Egypt; e-mails: abdelbaseer.elsayed@eksoc.uni.lodz.pl, abdo121@windowslive.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7619-2166>