



Rethinking a Lot: The Design and Culture of Parking

Eran Ben-Joseph

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There are an estimated 600,000,000 passenger cars in the world, and that number is increasing every day. So too is Earth's supply of parking spaces. In some cities, parking lots cover more than one-third of the metropolitan footprint. It's official: we have paved paradise and put up a parking lot. In "ReThinking a Lot," Eran Ben-Joseph shares a different vision for parking's future. Parking lots, he writes, are ripe for transformation. After all, as he points out, their design and function has not been rethought since the 1950s. With this book, Ben-Joseph pushes the parking lot into the twenty-first century.

Can't parking lots be aesthetically pleasing, environmentally and architecturally responsible? Used for something other than car storage? Ben-Joseph shows us that they can. He provides a visual history of this often ignored urban space, introducing us to some of the many alternative and nonparking purposes that parking lots have served--from RV campgrounds to stages for "Shakespeare in the Parking Lot." He shows us parking lots that are not concrete wastelands but lushly planted with trees and flowers and beautifully integrated with the rest of the built environment. With purposeful design, Ben-Joseph argues, parking lots could be significant public places, contributing as much to their communities as great boulevards, parks, or plazas. For all the acreage they cover, parking lots have received scant attention. It's time to change that; it's time to rethink the lot.

Rethinking a Lot: The Design and Culture of Parking Details

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From Reader Review Rethinking a Lot: The Design and Culture of Parking for online ebook

Tim says

Nice book. I enjoyed the historical and current photos of parking lots around the world. I read all of the photo captions, and a good number of the expanded text entries. Worth taking a look at...

Austin says

For book 9, I read Rethinking a Lot, which is literally about parking lots (puns!). I am a transportation nerd and partly read this to inform a class I teach on transportation (get ready for more of this type of deep nerd stuff coming up). I tend to take a mostly negative view of how we run parking policy in this country, though this did make we rethink a bit some of the ways we could make them not so terrible. My main objections to parking involve how it is a large, hidden subsidy paid to drivers by non-drivers since we all pay indirectly for parking but all the benefits go to drivers. Having so much also negatively affects any attempts to have a walkable, bikeable, or transit-oriented community. But, there were some good examples of using lots as more of a shared public space can make it not so bad.

The book itself was a mixed bag. The organization is around a bunch of small, largely unlinked points and sadly very little quantitative analysis to add meat. It was richly designed with lots of photographs to illustrate concepts, but never felt like it dug deep enough into the topics. Definitely glad I read it but this doesn't touch on 'the high cost of free parking' for innovation or content.

52 books in 52 weeks update:
book number: 9 / 52

scorecard (see below):

W: 6/26

NW: 4/26

NA: 3/20

D: 0/5

F: 4

NF: 5

Notes: I'm trying to read 52 books this year. To make sure I'm getting a broad range, I'm tracking some metrics. Open to more if folks have suggestions. My goal is to read books that are:

at least half by women

at least half not by white people

at least 20 by non-americans

at least 5 that I don't think I'll like or agree with going in

I'll also go for about half fiction and half non-fiction

Michael says

I picked this book up because BBC ran an interesting article (<http://m.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-1727...>) about parking and the infrastructure that we interface with each day. The motivation for reading a book on such an unassuming topic was (1) BBC ran a headling, (2) the author is an MIT professor, (3) unassuming topics can often be diamonds-in-the-rough.

It turns out this book was about as exciting as a book on parking could ever be. I would say the book was more like a coffee table book than a sit-down-and-read book. Complete with illustrations and helpful captions, the book chronicles the history and development of parking as according to building codes. Quantitative information on environmental, social, and commercial impact was extremely lacking. Interest insights were also lacking.

I wished I listened to my fiance when she said "Why would you read a book about parking?!"

Emily says

Readable & well illustrated, so I'd recommend it for folks who are interested in parking design but haven't read much about it before. Unfortunately that's not me, I was hoping for something less broad & more in depth.

Tyler Simonds says

Inspirational, a great resource for anyone curious about the role of parking lots in our lives--how they came to be and what they might become. Ben-Joseph includes a plethora of pictures, old and recent, and some from outside the US. I'm excited to take this with me as I work on my master's project.

John says

Solid look at parking lot design with tons of photographic documentation, history and the inclusion of exemplary designs from around the world.

Jeramey says

If you follow urbanism blogs, you'll be familiar with most everything in this. The content is like a brain dump of all surface parking lot ideas, but lacks any depth (or strong opinion) techniques, designs, strategies. A couple paragraphs here, another few there.

It's also an incredibly fast read given how many photos are included. The photos often don't have much more detail than the location unfortunately. Also, a personal pet peeve, the caption text matches the main narrative text verbatim, which results in a disorienting reading experience.

It is neither as wonky as I would desire, nor as opinionated. Worthwhile, however, if you're new to the scene and are looking to get up to speed on what's been tried with surface parking lots.

Jared says

Really wanted to like this but it read like a 7th grade textbook. Not a lot of analysis or information. The captions annoyed me since they were often just excerpts from the main text, adding nothing new to the book. Great idea that should have been explored further.

Barrett Doherty says

Rethinking a lot is interesting and extremely relevant. Ben-Joseph argues rightly that parking lots are a long overlooked ubiquitous feature of our urban landscape. And he posits a number of better designed examples that deserve more investigation. I do wish he had pushed deeper in his investigations. The pictures are good sketches of the ideas but it would be good to see more than one or two. Partly due to the time it takes trees to mature, most of the pictures feature anemic stick trees over run by the parked cars. While there are a few plans and diagrams it would strengthen the overall efficacy of the designs if there were more of them. The book jacket states that it is for "urban planning/landscape architecture". If that is the case it would be nice to see more drawings that clearly illustrate the strategies and examples.

Katherine says

I heard a discussion of this book on public radio and wanted to find it; that it's at least the third book I've seen to have the late great "Spindle" sculpture from Berwyn, IL on its cover is a bonus.

kathryn says

I had several things to say about this...all in that I liked it, but I waited too long to do my review. There were a few locations I recognized both in Cambridge and NYC so that was fun.

here is one quote I salvaged from my quick return to the library, "Parking lots, with their intended and unintended uses are a found place. They are the unplanned urban rooms that fill physical and mental gaps in our designed environments. Places where counter-interactions and social occurrences are happening on a daily basis."

They are happening...either in your trip to the mall or your local farmers market...

Alex French says

Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center has a really nice parking lot.

Dartmouth College is disappointing, and could/should do better.

One technical detail I would have liked to see: discussion of innovative lot design ideas in relation to efficient snow removal.
