Can we say that architecture and comics have something in common? At first sight, they don't: architecture may be art (but it is definitely part of "high art"), but it is certainly not entertainment (even if some architecture can be very funny); and comics, which are still not being taken very seriously in culture, are not meant to live beyond the 2-D space of a printed page (even if certain theoreticians such as Jean-Christophe Menu have recently made a strong plea for new forms of comics in the expanded, 3-D environment, see his PhD thesis La bande dessinée et son double, published with L'Association in 2011). Nevertheless, the link between comics and architecture has been very strong since the very beginning of mass media comics in the late 19th Century: the modern city and its new ways of communication and transportation was the logical biotope of the new comics medium, which reflects and represents modern building, modern architecture, modern urbanism in many ways. The comparison between the grid lay-out of a comics page and the internal structure of a building divided in uniform stories and rooms, for instance, has become a stereotype of the new medium, as demonstrated by a steadily growing amount of scholarly and non scholarly publications in the field.

*Bricks & Balloons* is not just another publication on this kind of relationships between comics and architecture. Available in both Dutch and English, this wonderfully designed and illustrated book is highly innovative in at least two perspectives.

First of all, it does not take as its starting point the sole idea that comics can represent buildings and cities (after all, any visual medium can do this as well and as efficiently as comics). It is based instead on the much stronger hypothesis that architecture needs comics and that comics can play a dramatic role in the conceptualization, the elaboration, the communication, and even the realization of architecture. True, *Bricks & Balloons* contains a wealth of examples displaying the often very creative and inventive way of showing architecture through comics, but the thesis defended by Mélanie van der Hoorn goes beyond these issues of representation. On the one hand,
the book clearly demonstrates that comics are a privileged medium when an artist or symbol creator (a comics artist, an architect, both of them...) wants to pinpoint and highlight a certain number of problems in architecture and urbanism. Since each architectural stance involves also the critique of a certain state of affairs, comics prove to be a marvelous medium to display what goes wrong in certain ways of building and city-planning. This architectural critique can take the form of an utopia as well as of an anti-utopia, and the corpus gathered by Mélanie van der Hoorn is extremely illuminating in this regard. On the other hand, and this aspect is of course the specific field of the architect, the language of comics appears to be a useful and in certain cases even an indispensable tool when one wants to communicate certain aspects of building and city planning. For comics are more capable than other tools and techniques of visualization to make us "feel" a building or a built environment, to give us the experience of a place, to suggest what may happen once one starts making an intervention in a given environment.

Second, Bricks and Balloons is also very innovative as far as the choice and the treatment of the studied material is concerned. The book does not limit itself to present (very convincingly by the way) some classics of the "comics and architecture" field, such as in the very first place François Schuiten, whose Dark Cities series have become a model in the genre. It also foregrounds the less known comics production of contemporary architects such as Jean Nouvel, Rem Koolhaas, Willem Jan Neutelings and many others, who have all been relying on the imaginary and visual powers of the unconventional and still often despised comics medium to shape their own architecture. The material brought together by Mélanie van der Hoorn is not only very rich (and as far as I can judge very complete, covering various linguistic and cultural traditions), but extremely well documented through the clever use of in-depth interviews with the major creators in the field. Bricks & Balloons does not only offer an inspiring catalogue of examples of visual-architectural experiments, all beautifully reproduced, it offers also the necessary context to understand why architects turn to comics and how they define the added value of this unconventional way of displaying and imagining both the building and the experience of those who live there.

The book by Mélanie van der Hoorn is a seminal publication, which will be of great interest to various types of readers: architects, of course, who will find here a wide range of practices that will help them invent new ways of designing and communicating; comics scholars, who will find here a stimulating model of real interdisciplinary research; and readers interested in cultural history and cultural critique in general, for whom Bricks & Balloons will be a lasting source of new discoveries.