

FRONT : KRIEGER, ALEX + SAUNDERS, WILLIAM. EDS.

URBAN DESIGN

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Where and How Does Urban Design Happen?

Alex Krieger

In 1956, José Luis Sert convened an international conference at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design with a determination to assemble evidence on behalf of a desired discipline he called *urban design*. An impressive number of people then engaged in thinking about the future of cities participated. Among them were a not-yet-famous Jane Jacobs, an already prominent Edmund Bacon, the Olympian figure of Lewis Mumford, several leaders of the soon-to-be-formed Team 10, prominent landscape architects such as Hideo Sasaki and Garrett Eckbo, urban renewal-empowered mayors such as David Lawrence of Pittsburgh, and innovators such as Victor Gruen, “the creator of the shopping mall.”

The participants seemed to concur that the widening midcentury intellectual split between the “art of building” and the “systemic nature of planning” was not helpful to city building or the rebuilding that the post-World War II era still demanded. Hopes and ideas for a new discipline dedicated to city design were in the air, both in the United States and in Europe, with CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne), since the early 1940s, focusing more attention on urbanization. Conference participants were determined to share and further such thinking, hopeful that a new discipline could stem this perceived split between design and planning. Indeed, within

several years Harvard would begin one of the first formal degree-granting curricula focused on urban design, and, through that institution's prestige, lend weight to the idea that educating a design professional to become an urban designer was essential for a rapidly urbanizing world.

The proceedings of the 1956 conference reveal two working definitions for urban design, both articulated by Sert, who organized and presided over the conference. Urban design, he stated at one point, "is that part of city planning which deals with the physical form of the city." Here is the idea of urban design as a subset of planning, a specialization that he described as "the most creative phase of city planning, in which imagination and artistic capacities play the important part." At the beginning of the conference he identified a yet more ambitious goal: "to find the common basis for the joint work of the Architect, the Landscape Architect, and the City Planner . . . Urban Design [being] wider than the scope of these three professions." Here is the notion of a new overarching design discipline to be practiced by all those who were, in Sert's phrase, "urban-minded."

Half a century later, these two conceptualizations are still very much in play, and a precise definition for *urban design* has not been broadly accepted. Whether urban design has become a distinct professional specialization or a general outlook that can be embodied in the work of several of the design disciplines dedicated to city making remains unsettled. Nevertheless, few argue about the need for something called urban design.

In a world producing unprecedented kinds, numbers, and sizes of settlements, urban design is an increasingly sought-after (though not always well-recognized) expertise. Expectations are many and myriad for those presuming to know how to design cities, yet there is skepticism about how much such know-how exists. At the same time, it seems presumptuous for any one person to claim overarching knowledge of something as immensely complex as urbanism. It therefore seems prudent to track several territories—spatial and conceptual—in and through which urban designers operate. Indeed, scanning the definitions of the word *territory* in a dictionary eventually gets you past geography to "sphere of action." This I find a particularly useful way of thinking about urban design—as *spheres of urbanistic action* to promote the vitality, livability, and physical character of cities. There are several such spheres of action rather than a singular, overarching way to describe what constitutes the urban design enterprise.

While *urban design* is a phrase first popularized during the twentieth century, cities have, of course, been the subject of design theory and action for centuries. It is the notion of urban design as an activity distinct from architecture, planning, or even military and civil engineering that is relatively new—as is the label *urban designer*.

Though Pope Sixtus V's impact on the physicality of sixteenth-century Rome was profound, contemporaries would not have thought of him as an urban designer. Spain's Philip II, who promulgated one of the most precise codes for laying out cities—the Laws of the Indies—was, well, king. Baron Haussmann was Napoleon III's Prefect of the Seine, an administrator, closer in point of view and responsibilities to Robert Moses, an engineer and civil servant, than to Raymond Unwin or Daniel Burnham, both architects acting as city planners. Ebenezer Howard, who truly had a new theory for urbanism, was an economist. Camillo Sitte was an art historian. Frederick Law Olmsted, who influenced American cities more than anyone in the nineteenth century, was a landscape architect and earlier still a social activist. Lewis Mumford was an urban historian and social critic. The foremost Renaissance urban theorists were architects and artists, as was Le Corbusier. During much of the history of city making, an architect's expertise was assumed to extend to matters of town layout, and popes, prefects, and utopian economists quite naturally turned to architects to realize their urban visions. Many of the 1956 conference participants were also architects, and an architectural point of view has tended to prevail in most efforts to describe what urban design is—prevail but not encapsulate.

So I will describe ten spheres of *urbanistic action* that people calling themselves "urban designers" have assumed to be their professional domain, though obviously not all at once nor even with unanimity about the list overall. The list begins with a foundational idea of urban design, at least as identified at the 1956 Harvard conference: urban design occupies a hypothetical intersection between planning and architecture and thus fills any perceived gaps between them. Urban design, many continue to believe, is necessarily and unavoidably:

The Bridge Connecting Planning and Architecture

The most frequent answer to "What do urban designers do?" is that they mediate between plans and projects. Their role is to somehow translate the objectives of planning for space, settlement patterns,

and even the allocation of resources into (mostly) physical strategies to guide the work of architects, developers, and other implementers. For example, many public planning agencies now incorporate one or more staffers titled urban designers, whose role is to establish design criteria for development projects beyond basic zoning and then help review, evaluate, and approve the work of project proponents as they advance their projects through design and into construction. Such a design review process is an increasingly common component of regulatory frameworks especially in larger cities and facilitates discussion of traditionally controversial issues like aesthetics. It is the urban designer's presumed insights about good or appropriate urban form that are seen as crucial to translate public policy or programmatic objectives into architectural concepts, or to recognize the urban potential in an emerging architectural design and advocate for its realization.

However, a subtlety within this process is often misunderstood. The translation of general or framework plans into designs is not meant to be a sequential process—always emanating from planning to affect design—but instead an interactive one. The urban designer's own expertise in architectural thinking should inform the formulation of planning concepts so that these are not fixed prior to consideration of physical implications. This design version of shuttle diplomacy between planner-formulators and design-translators is important, to be sure, but it cannot rely only on mediation or persuasion to be effective. Urban designers must help others see the desired effects of planning. This requires various visualization and programmatic narrative techniques by which goals and policies are converted into useful design guidelines and sometimes specific design ideas. It leads to the idea of urban design as a special category of public policy, an improvement on traditional land-use regulations that shy away from qualitative assessments of form. So urban design should then be considered:

A Form-Based Category of Public Policy

Jonathan Barnett's 1974 *Urban Design as Public Policy* argued this very point and became highly influential. If one could agree on specific attributes of good urbanism (at least in a particular setting, as Barnett tried to with New York City), then one should be able to mandate or encourage these through regulatory requirements. The radicalism embedded in this self-described pragmatic approach was to incorporate many more formal and aesthetic judgments—indeed

much more judgment, period—into a standard zoning ordinance, and especially into the permitting and evaluative process. Restrictions on height or massing that in pioneering zoning codes (such as New York's own landmark 1916 code) were ostensibly determined through measurable criteria, such as access to sunlight, could now be introduced as commonly held good form-based values. The mandating of continuous block-length cornice heights, for example, gained the status of a lot-coverage restriction, though the former could not as easily be considered a matter of "health, safety and public welfare" as the latter.

But why shouldn't public policy as it pertains to the settled environment not aspire to quality and even beauty? More recently, a New York disciple of Barnett, Michael Kwartler, expressed this via the poetic notion of "regulating the good that you can't think of," or, one may infer, seeking to achieve through regulation *what is not* normally provided by conventional real estate practices. Since American planning is often accused of being reactive to real estate interests, interests that do not always prioritize public benefit, here would be a way to push developer-initiated projects to higher qualitative standards. So again, given the presumption that what constitutes good urban form (or desirable uses, or amenities such as ground-level retail, or open space) can be agreed upon by a community, these should be legislated. And the natural champions for this are those individuals identified as urban designers. The appeal behind this interpretation of urban design is twofold. It maintains lofty ideals by arguing on behalf of codifiable design qualities, while operating at the pragmatic level of the real estate industry, facilitating better development. New York's Battery Park project is generally acknowledged as a successful example.

This may all be well and good, but such mediating and regulating are not sufficiently rewarding for those who believe that less creativity is involved in establishing guidelines for others to interpret than to design oneself. It seems too administrative and passive a role for urban design. Is not urban design about giving shape to urbanism? Is it not about:

The Architecture of the City

This conception of urban design is at once more ambitious yet narrower than the idea of urban design as public policy. The roots of this view may be traced earlier in the twentieth century to the American City Beautiful movement, and further into the nineteenth century to

the European Beaux Arts tradition. Its proponents seek above all to control the shaping of those areas of the city that are public and, therefore, of common concern. It is a sphere populated by mainly architect-urbanists, but it makes kindred spirits of diverse figures such as Colin Rowe, Camillo Sitte, and William H. Whyte.

Shaping public space is considered the first order of urbanism by the architect/urbanist. Thus, the primary role of urban design is to develop methods and mechanisms for doing this. Done with authority and artistry (and proper programming and furnishings—Whyte's contribution), it allows the rest of the city, all that is private, to distribute itself logically and properly in relationship to this public realm. During the 1970s and 1980s, particularly in Europe, a related theory of the "Urban Project" emerged. This entailed the programming, financing, and design of a catalytic development, often a joint public/private venture, that would stimulate or revive an urban district. This notion of urban design is best embodied by a stable and stabilizing form, one that anchors its part of the city with unique characteristics that are expected to endure and influence future neighbors. The 1980s "Grand Projects" of Paris are generally regarded as such valuable catalysts for urban reinvestment.

The idea of urban design as the architecture of the city is often conceptualized in terms of the ideality of Rome as portrayed in the Nolli map, or in Piranesi's more fantastical description of imperial Rome in his *Compo Marzio* engraving. Or it is simply absorbed via our touristic encounters with the preindustrial portions of the European city in which the emphasis on the public realm—at least in the places we regularly visit—seems so clear. It is a small conceptual leap from this formulation of urban design to the idea of:

Urban Design as Restorative Urbanism

The form of the preindustrial western city—compact, dense, layered, and slow-changing—holds immense power over city dreaming among both urbanists and the public. The traditional city seems at once clearly organized, humanely sized, manageable, and beautiful. Such virtues seem absent in the modern metropolis. Why not mobilize to regain these? At present the New Urbanists are most closely associated with this effort but are part of a long tradition of those guarding or extolling the advantages of traditional urban typologies. As did



Pudong, Shanghai, China. A clash among epochs: intruding skyscrapers and disappearing bicycles. Shanghai, but characteristic of most Chinese cities today. Courtesy of Alex Krieger.

the polemicists of the City Beautiful movement in America a century earlier and Christopher Alexander in his 1977 *A Pattern Language*, the New Urbanists advocate a return to what they consider time-tested principles of urbanism, now as appealing to a disillusioned suburban culture as to those still facing the onslaught of urban modernization.

Americans today seem particularly sympathetic to restorative urbanism for two reasons. They hunger for a “taste” of urbanity, pre-assembled and sanitized perhaps—“lite urbanism” in Rem Koolhaas’s wry phrase—having for several generations disengaged from (and still unsure about) the real thing. Assaulted by the new, they seek comfort in the familiar. Traditionally, homes and neighborhoods have offered respite from the anxieties of change. Thus, it is understandable how an era of seemingly unending innovation in business, technology, and lifestyle marketing engenders sentimental nostalgia for the places we used to (or think we used to) live in. Though we may demand the conveniences of modern kitchens and attached garages, many prefer to package these in shapes and facades reminiscent of earlier (assumed to be) slower and pleasanter paces of life. Many a New Urbanist endeavor from Seaside to Kentlands to Crocker Park, Ohio, exhibit such a hybridization of modern lifestyles in traditional building forms.

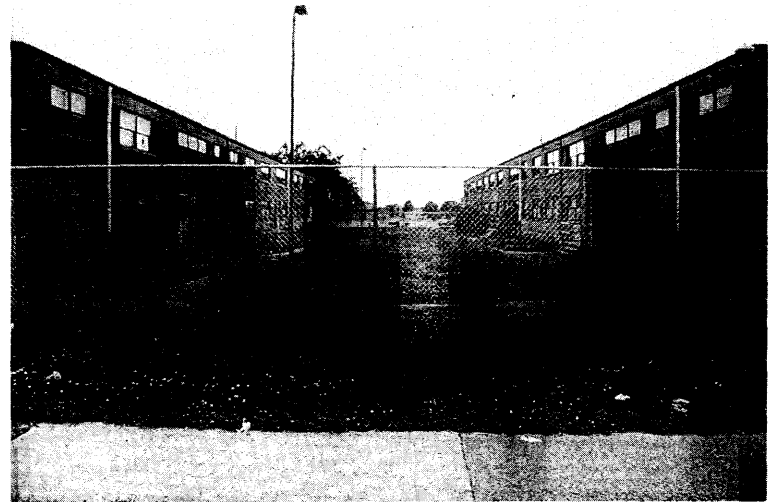
The walkable city, the city of public streets and public squares, the low-rise, high-density city, the city of defined neighborhoods gathered around valued institutions, the city of intricate layers of uses free of auto-induced congestion—of course these remain appealing. Americans are not alone in pining for such qualities. In today’s Berlin, to refer to one European example, the city planning administration’s highly conservative architectural design guidelines for the reunified center are but another manifestation of this instinct to slow the pace of change—at least as it pertains to the physical, if not the social or political, environment. Many urban designers believe that it is their discipline’s responsibility to slow excess change, resist unwarranted newness, or at least advocate for such old-fashioned notions as “human scale” and “place-making.” Then we should think of:

Urban Design as an Art of “Place-Making”

A corollary to restorative urbanism is an increasing commitment to “place-making,” the provision of distinctive, lively, appealing centers for congregation to alleviate the perceived homogeneity of many and large contemporary urban areas. There are architecture and urban design firms in the United States that advertise themselves as “place-makers,” as the ads in any issue of the *Urban Land* illustrate. It is easy to succumb to cynicism. So many ordinary developments advertise their placeless character with catchy names ending in “place”



The Community Builders, The Villages of Park DuValle revitalization, Hope VI government housing program, Louisville, Kentucky, 1999. Courtesy of Urban Design Associates, Pittsburgh.



Park DuValle before revitalization, Louisville, Kentucky, ca. 1994. Courtesy of Urban Design Associates, Pittsburgh.

(among the most common of these being “Center Place,” a moniker promising precisely what is missing in new subdivisions).

Yet, creating exceptional places to serve human purposes has always been central to the design professions. We have just never called

ourselves place-makers before or have been so self-conscious about the task. Economists often remind society that it is the *rare* commodity that gains value over time. As more contemporary urban development acquires generic qualities or is merely repetitive, the distinctive urban place, old or new, is harder to find. This alone will continue to fuel preservation movements across the urban world. But in a world that adds sixty million people to urban populations each year, preservation and restoration cannot be the answers to place-making. More urban designers should devote their attention to making new places as worthy as those made by their time-honored predecessors. Again, it is the American New Urbanists who have articulated this goal most clearly but with mixed results. Their rhetoric extols intimate scale, texture, the mixing of uses, connectivity, continuity, the privileging of what is shared, and other such characteristics of great urban places, but their designs tend to employ familiar old forms and traditional aesthetic detailing that usually seem forced and phony, out of key with how we now live.

The obvious merits of preserving venerable old urban places or the wisdom of treading lightly in the midst of historic districts aside, doubts remain about how successfully we might organize and clothe the complexities of modern life in traditional iconography. What if



Three consecutive generations of housing, Shanghai, China. Courtesy of Alex Krieger.

we place less faith in dressing up new development with emblems of urbanity and devote more effort to wiser distribution of resources or better land management? We then call for:

Urban Design as Smart Growth

While there has been a strong association of urban design with “downtowns,” demand for suburban growth management and re-investment strategies for the older rings around city centers has gathered many advocates. Indeed, to protect urbanism, not to mention minimize environmental harm and needless land consumption, it is imperative, many argue, to control sprawl and make environmental stewardship a more overt part of urban thinking. Expressed opportunistically, it is also where the action is. Since 90 percent of development takes place at the periphery of existing urbanization, the urban designer should be operating there and, if present, advocating “smarter” planning and design. Conversely, ignoring the metropolitan periphery as if it were unworthy of a true urbanist or limiting one’s efforts to urban “infill” may simply be forms of problem avoidance. As social observers have long pointed out, suburban and ex-urban areas, where most Americans live, are not nonurban, merely providing different, certainly less traditional degrees of urban experience or intensity.

That the twenty-first century will be more conservation-minded is not in doubt. That the world overall must be smarter about managing resources and land is also clear. Therefore, the traditional close allegiance of urban design to an architectural and development perspective must be broadened. Exposure to the natural sciences, to ecology, to energy management, to systems analysis, to the economics of land development, to land-use law, and to issues of public health has not been but should become fundamental to an urbanist’s training. Urban designers advocating a “smart growth” agenda today generally do so out of an ideological conviction that sprawl abatement or open-space conservation are necessary. But as they enter this territory, they quickly realize that acquiring additional skills and partners in planning is equally necessary.

To actually manage metropolitan growth requires dealing with needs—like land conservation, water management, and transportation—that cut across jurisdictional boundaries. Therefore, and increasingly for many, urban design must be about:



Frank Gehry, Millennium Park, pedestrian bridge, Chicago, Illinois. Infrastructure for the pleasure of movement, not an optimization of motion. Courtesy of Alex Krieger.

The Infrastructure of the City

The arrangement of streets and blocks, the distribution of open and public spaces, the alignment of transit and highway corridors, and the provision of municipal services certainly constitute essential components of city design. Indeed, to focus on just one category of urban infrastructure, few things are more important to cities or virtually any form of contemporary settlement than well-functioning transportation systems. Yet, the optimization of mobility pursued as an independent variable, separate from the complex and overlapping web of other urban systems, ultimately works against healthy communities. Engineering criteria, we have learned, are not by themselves sufficient city-producing tools.

Apart from the occasional efforts to “architecturalize” infrastructure, as in the various megastructure proposals of the 1960s (a source of fascination today), neither planners nor designers have played a significant role in transportation or other urban infrastructure planning. Thus, it has become another sphere for an urban designer to attempt to address at both the pragmatic level of calibrating demands for mobility with other social needs and in advancing new (or reviv-

ing old) ways in which city form and transportation systems may be integrated. At a fairly mundane yet significant level, this is what fuels the current fascination with Transit-Oriented Development in newer areas of urbanization, and with dense mixed-use, often joint public-private development adjacent to multimodal transportation centers in larger cities.

The twentieth-century love affair with the car—still considered the ideal personal mobility system—has diminished the range of conceptualizing about urban form and transportation. We were too mesmerized by the magic of Sant’Elia’s Italian Futurists renderings and those of Le Corbusier’s *Ville Radieuse*. An entire century later we are rediscovering that integrating urban form and mobility depends on more sophisticated umbilical cords than open roads. This is especially so since the engineering world is shifting emphasis from hardware to systems design, from adding lanes, for example, to traffic management technology. It is their acknowledgment that factors such as livability, sustainability, and economic and cultural growth—in other words good urban design—are the real goals of infrastructure optimization.

Agreeing with such a sensibility, some leaders of landscape architecture, a field that has generally pursued a humanistic perspective on planning, have recently advanced another perspective on urbanistic action that they are calling:

Urban Design as “Landscape Urbanism”

In the past few years a new school of thought about cities has emerged: “landscape urbanism.” Its proponents seek to incorporate ecology, landscape architecture, and infrastructure into the discourse of urbanism. The movement’s intellectual lineage includes Ian McHarg, Patrick Geddes, and even Frederick Law Olmsted, though its polemical point of departure seems to be that landscape space, not architecture any longer, is the generative force in the modern metropolis.

To return to the 1956 conference for a moment: it produced a good deal of rhetoric about how landscape architecture was to be an integral part of urban design. But this aspect was quickly subsumed under the architecture/planning spectrum in which urban design would occupy the mediating middle. Momentarily there was no conceptual space left for landscape architecture. Ironically, more areas

of settlement in North America have been designed by landscape architects than any other professionals. However, an accusation (sometimes accurate) has persisted that landscape architect-directed urban design favors low densities, exhibits little formal sensibility, and contains too much open space—in other words, it produces sub- or non-urban environments.

Proponents of landscape urbanism, such as James Corner, challenge such a cliché, instead insisting that the conception of the solid, “man-made” city of historic imagination perpetuates the no longer pertinent view that nature and human artifice are opposites. Landscape urbanism projects purport to overcome this opposition, holding neither a narrow ecological agenda nor mainstream (read architectural) city-making techniques as primary. Valuable urban design, landscape urbanists insist, is to be found at the intersection of ecology, engineering, design, careful programming, and social policy. Largely a set of values rather than a mature practice to date, landscape urbanism may prove its utility as endeavors such as the Fresh Kills landfill reuse project on Staten Island proceed.

In one regard the movement may be a reaction to the Nolli map view of urbanism, the binary conception of cities as made up of buildings and the absence of buildings, where the white of the map—the voids—is the result of built form, the black of the map. Maybe this was a useful interpretation of the preindustrial city—of the Italian piazza as space carved out of the solidity of built fabric. Outside the preindustrial walled city were certainly landscapes and undesignated space, but within the city, space resulted from built form. But any careful perusal of a preindustrial-era city map proves this assertion false: surely the “white” of the Nolli plan comes in many hues and nuances of meaning. Besides, the landscape urbanist asks, isn’t the landscape the glue that now holds the contemporary, low-density, sprawling metropolis together?

The radicalism inherent in thinking of the landscape as determining or organizing urban patterns, a radicalism in which Nolli’s white, today colored green, becomes the central component of urban design, brings us at last to the territory of:

Urban Design as Visionary Urbanism

I have saved, nearly for the end, this long-standing expectation of urban design: that its practitioners—or rather, in this instance, its

theorists—provide insight and models about the way we *ought* to organize spatially in communities and not simply accept the ways we do. The prospect of hypothesizing about the future of urbanism surely attracts more students to urban design programs than any other lure. Being engaged in transforming urbanism is a sphere of action associated with the great figures of modern urban change, from Baron Haussmann to Daniel Burnham, Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, Le Corbusier, and maybe even Rem Koolhaas and Andres Duany. But such deliverers of bold saber strokes (to borrow a phrase from Giedion) are rarer today than they were at the turn of the twentieth century, or we act on their visions less often. A new generation of visionary designers may emerge out of China or other parts of the world rapidly urbanizing today, but they have yet to do so.

In the relative absence of contemporary visionaries, others have stepped forward to explore the nature of urban culture today. The urban sociologist/theorist—from Louis Wirth earlier in the twentieth century to Henri Lefebvre, Richard Sennett, Edward Soja, and David Harvey—is not normally considered an urban designer but in a sense has become so, having supplanted in our own time the great urban transformers of the past, not in deeds but in understandings of urban culture.

The heroic form-giving tradition may be in decline. After all, the twentieth century witnessed immense urban harm caused by those who offered a singular or universal idea of what a city is, or what urbanization should produce. But our cultural observers remind us that pragmatism and technique cannot be a sufficient substitute, nor can design professionals be mere *absorbers* of public opinion waiting for consensus to build. One must offer new ideas as well. Still, there is the perennial conundrum about how directly engaged urban design must be with the “real world.” Maybe, after all, urban design is about direct community engagement:

Urban Design as Community Advocacy (or Doing No Harm)

Mostly since 1956 and in academia largely still, “urban design” connotes large-scale thinking—either the consideration of substantial areas of settlement or theorizing at a grand scale about the nature of urbanism. But among contemporary dwellers of urban neighborhoods—the ostensive beneficiaries of this broad thinking—“urban design” is increasingly coming to be associated with local, immediate

concerns such as improving neighborhoods, calming traffic, minimizing negative impacts of new development, expanding housing choices while keeping housing affordable, maintaining open space, improving streetscapes, and creating more humane environments in general.

In this newer, almost colloquial use of the term, urban design approximates what used to be called “community planning.” A young Jane Jacobs’s prescient comment during the 1956 conference comes to mind. “A store is also a storekeeper,” she said then, with the implication that her designer colleagues at the conference better remember that a storekeeper is also a citizen, and that citizens have a stake in decisions being made about their environment. Not much follow-up of her point was recorded in the proceedings. It would take another generation to bring this view to the foreground.

The association of urban design and citizen participation was finally the result of the gradual bureaucratization of the planning profession itself. Sometime following the social unrest of the 1960s and a growing consensus about the failures of urban renewal, the focus of planning began to shift dramatically from physical planning to process and policy formulation. If the architect and urban designer were hell-bent on producing visions of a better tomorrow, the theory went, then the role of the planner must be to determine need and rational process, not to pursue (the often illusive and sometimes dubious) vision. Indeed, a fear of producing more top-down, failed plans before an increasingly demanding, less patient public led the planning profession to embrace broad participatory techniques and community advocacy. But ironically the concurrent disengagement from spatial concerns on the part of the planner began to distance the activities of planning from the stuff the beneficiaries of planning wish for most: nicer neighborhoods, access to better places of work and commerce, and special environments to periodically escape everyday pressures.

As the planning profession continues to operate in the broader spheres of policy formulation, the focus of planning increasingly appears to the public as abstract, even indifferent to immediate concerns or daily needs. The urban design-minded planner who addresses immediate, often spatially related concerns has come to be seen as the professional most attuned to tangible urban problem-solving, not as the agent of bold urban transformation. In citizens’ minds, those who practice urban design are not the “shapers of cities”—in large part because such shapers, if they exist, are mistrusted. They are instead custodians of the qualities valued by a community, qualities that the

urban designer is asked to protect and foster. Today, it is the urban designer, not the planner, who has emerged as the place-centered professional, with “urban design” often assuming a friendlier, more accessible popular connotation than “planning.”

Urban Design as a Frame of Mind

The above list is not intended to be exhaustive; other urban design activities could surely be added. In rapidly modernizing parts of the world, urban design has emerged as an important component of managing this modernization. An example is the BOT (Build, Operate, Transfer) transportation and related mixed-use projects common in both South American and Asian countries. (BOT is a form of project financing in which a private entity receives a franchise from the public sector to finance, design, construct, and operate a facility for a specified period, after which ownership is transferred back to the public sector.) Nor is the point of identifying—even caricaturing—the above spheres of urban design to lay claim to vast jurisdictional territory for the discipline. On the contrary, it is to strongly suggest that instead of moving toward professional specificity, urban design has come to represent—and its varied practitioners have come to be aligned with—distinct avenues for engaging and facilitating urbanity. Rodolfo Machado, my colleague at Harvard, offers an appealing (if somewhat rhetorical) definition for urban design: the process of design (or planning, I would add) that produces or enhances urbanity. Is this but an “amiable generality”?

Perhaps Sert would be disappointed that half a century after his first conference no more precise definition for urban design has emerged. Around the third or fourth of the near-annual urban design conferences that he hosted at Harvard throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, he expressed concern about the “fog of amiable generalities” that the conversations had so far produced. He hoped to move past them, but they have persisted.

Following a quarter of a century of practicing and teaching urban design, my own conclusion is the following. Urban design is less a technical discipline than a mind-set among those of varying disciplinary foundations seeking, sharing, and advocating insights about forms of community. What binds urban designers is their commitment to improving the livability of cities, to facilitating urban reinvestment and maintenance, and indeed to enhancing urbanity. The need for

a narrow definition for such a constellation of interests is not self-evident. Because of this commitment to cities, urban designers distinguish among mandates: they realize that to renew the centers of cities, build new cities, restore the parts of old cities worthy of preservation, and construct equitable growth management programs on the periphery requires vastly different strategies, theories, and design actions. Indeed, one may rejoice that there are many spheres of urbanistic action for those who are passionate lovers of cities.

Defining the Urbanistic Project: Ten Contemporary Approaches

Joan Busquets

The work documented in the exhibition *Cities: 10 Lines: Approaches to City and Open Territory Design*, at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design in fall 2005, proposed a specific taxonomy that synthesizes the most salient lines of current urbanistic design work. The exhibition, based on a research project I conducted in collaboration with Felipe Correa, captures our current distinctive reality, in which cities, after having been ostracized by their deployment of functionalist urbanism in the postwar years, are experimenting with an unprecedented level of transformation and rehabilitation. In recent decades urbanism has been able to redeem itself from the general perception that urban transformation meant spatial and environment poverty.

Urbanism has now strongly reestablished its intellectual and professional abilities. I believe that it is useful, at this particular moment, to rediscover the different lines of work that have consolidated in the built environment and to articulate their particularities. The agency of the “urbanistic project” has achieved greater traction in the general form of the city and therefore has gained greater relevance in the disciplines that shape it, primarily urban architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning and design.

The work in the catalog to *Cities: 10 Lines: Approaches to City and Open Territory Design* does not argue that all urbanism fits within