THE FORM OF CITIES

Political Economy
and
Urban
Design

Alexander R. Cuthbert

Blackwell
Publishing

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For Jean

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Contents

List of Figures viii
List of Tables x
Preface xi
Acknowledgements xiv

Introduction 1

1 Theory 9
Introduction: The Problem 9
Urban Design: Definitions 9
Urban Design: 'Theory' 11
Spatial Political Economy and Urban Design 15

2 History 22
Introduction: What is History? 22
History and Urban Design 25
Chronologies 27
Typologies 29
Utopias 32
Fragments 37
Materialist Theory 43
Overview 51

3 Philosophy 52
Introduction: Implications from Philosophy 52
Philosophy and Urbanism 54
Paradigms 55
Philosophy and Urban Design 65

4	**Politics**	79
	Introduction: Politics and Ideology	79
	Power: Rights and Laws	82
	Law as Ideology	85
	Politics and Urban Planning	86
	The Public Realm	89
5	**Culture**	101
	Introduction: Culture and Urban Design	101
	The Culture of Modernism	104
	Postmodern Culture	107
	Globalisation, Culture, Economy	110
	Authenticity and Symbolic Representation	113
	The New Ruralism/Urbanism	122
6	**Gender**	127
	Introduction: Gender, the Missing Component	127
	Gender and Society	128
	Gender and Patriarchy	130
	Gender and Capital	132
	Gender and Space	136
	Gender and Urban Design	139
7	**Environment**	150
	Introduction: Nature and the City	150
	Origins and Development	152
	People–Nature	154
	Sustainability and Development	159
	Sustainable Cities	162
	Sustainable Urban Design	168
8	**Aesthetics**	171
	Introduction: Aesthetics – Objects and Experiences	171
	The Aesthetics of Urban Form	173
	Mathematics and the Divine Order	175
	Contextualism	179
	Rationalism	184
	Symbolic Capital	186
	Regulation	192
	Theming	194
9	**Typologies**	201
	Introduction: Taxonomy, Typology, Morphology, System	201
	Typologies Derived from Associated Disciplines	206

Typologies Derived from Traditional Urban Design Perspectives 216
Implications from Spatial Political Economy 226

10 Pragmatics 235
Introduction: Cultural Capital 235
Professional Intervention 236
Professions and Knowledge Systems 241
Professions and Space 243
Urban Design Education 245

Postscript 258

References 265

Index 291

Figures

1	Three urban design theories.	15
2	Diagram showing the spatial logic of encounters.	16
3	William Robinson Leigh: utopian visionary city (1908).	34
4	Fritz Lang's vision of the future: from the film *Metropolis* (1926).	37
5	Le Corbusier: La Ville Contemporaine.	38
6	Bernard Tschumi: Parc de la Villette, aerial view (1985).	41
7	Bernard Tschumi: Parc de la Villette, programmatic deconstruction (1983).	41
8	Example of Dadaist collage: Hanna Hoch's *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany* (1919).	42
9	Aldo Rossi: Gallaretese Quarter, loggia.	48
10	Aldo Rossi: Gallaretese Quarter, elevation.	49
11	Peter Dickens: huts, machines and organic analogies.	50
12	Speer and Hitler's Grand Plaza and Domed Hall.	57
13	Hitler's grand plan for the centre of Berlin.	57
14	Ludwig Hilberseimer: Hochhausstadt Project (1924).	62
15	Example of the symbolic use of the eagle in fascist architecture.	91
16	Symbolic use of the eagle for spectacles by the Third Reich.	92
17	Monument to the Holocaust victims (*Mahnmal*), Berlin.	93
18	Sebastiano Serlio: the triumphal arch of Castel Vecchio in Verona.	95
19	The Gateway Arch, St Louis, Missouri, designed by Eero Saarinen.	96
20	La Grande Arche at La Défense.	96
21	*Tilted Arc*: sculpture by Richard Serra for Federal Plaza, New York.	98
22	Landscape project by Martha Schwartz to replace the sculpture by Richard Serra: plan view.	99
23	Landscape project by Martha Schwartz: perspective view.	99
24	New village design adapted from Tengangan Bali Aga.	119

25 Beirut: Martyr's Square Corridor Project. Master of Urban Development and Design Programme, University of New South Wales. 120
26 Beirut: Martyr's Square (formerly La Place des Canons). 121
27 Beirut: dynamiting of the Rivoli Cinema, opening up the Martyr's Square axis to the sea. 122
28 The town of Kentlands. 124
29 Clinton Community Masterplan. 125
30 Master plan for Topolobampo. 141
31 Herman Jessor: workers' cooperative colony of 750 units of housing with collective services, New York (1926): (a) site plan; (b) detail. 142
32 Rome: Monument to Vittorio Emmanuel II. 147
33 Dublin: statue of Anna Livia Plurabelle, 'the Floozie in the Jacuzzi'. 148
34 David Harvey's primary, secondary and tertiary circuits of capital. 165
35 Ways of thinking animals in the city. 168
36 Le Corbusier: use of Fibonacci series as a proportional system for architecture. 178
37 Nolli's plan for Rome, sector 5, amended by Paolo Portoghese. 180
38 Examples of contextual urban space as promoted by Camillo Sitte: (A) Rome; (B) London; (C) Copenhagen; (D) Kyoto. 181
39 Otto Wagner: site plan of the projected twenty-second district of Vienna. 185
40 Cover from Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*. 189
41 Former baths at Coogee Beach, Sydney: conservation of doorway and original site. 195
42 The copy of the original Repulse Bay Hotel in Hong Kong. 196
43 The original Murray Building in Hong Kong. 197
44 The Murray Building rebuilt and moved to Stanley Village. 197
45 The Court of Honour, World's Fair, Chicago (1893), planned by Daniel Burnham. 198
46 Hollywood and Highland Project, Los Angeles: perspective of project. 199
47 Babylon Court, Hollywood, and Highland Project, Los Angeles. 200
48 Peter Eisenman: Aronoff Centre, conceptual grid. 204
49 Peter Eisenman: Wexner Centre, conceptual grid. 205
50 Patrick Geddes: 'Notation of Life'. 207
51 Constantinos Doxiadis: plan of Islamabad (1960). 209
52 Constantinos Doxiadis: plan of Islamabad (1978). 210
53 Constantinos Doxiadis: ekistic grid. 211
54 Three typologies of urban planning theories. 220
55 Leon Krier: Luxembourg Project. 222
56 Rob Krier: morphological analysis of urban spatial types. 224

Tables

1	Forty classic texts in urban design.	12
2	A systems view of professional boundaries.	13
3	Properties of industrial and cultural forms and practices.	19
4	Thirty classic urban design histories.	26
5	Basic structural components of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*.	36
6	Bernard Tschumi: extracts from 'Questions of Space'.	46
7	State control (housing authority) over the reproduction of labour and private sector development. Functional and signifying properties of urban space.	116
8	State control (town planning authority) over the reproduction of labour and private sector development. Functional and signifying properties of non-urban space.	117
9	Major international and European-level policies and initiatives on sustainable development.	155
10	E.T. Hall's matrix of culture.	214
11	Sociological conceptualisation of urbanism.	227
12	Manuel Castells' relationship between social reproduction and land-use function.	228
13	Relationship between professional service and the capitalist system of production.	237
14	Ontology, ways of knowing and ways of teaching as exemplified by architectural academics.	251
15	Anne Vernez Moudon's epistemological map for urban design.	253

Preface

This book concludes four years of research into the theoretical basis for urban design, a project conceived in two stages, namely the publication of a reader, followed by a text that elaborated on the same basic structure. The first two years of the research process therefore resulted in *Designing Cities* (Cuthbert 2003), which accomplished four basic tasks: first, to assemble critical readings in the field that I felt had been largely ignored by urban designers in general; second, to suggest that mainstream 'urban design theory' be redirected towards critical theory and spatial political economy; third, that the adopted form of both books would suggest a structure and organisation of material that would reflect this ideological shift and, at the same time, make it accessible to individuals in a variety of fields – professionals, postgraduate students and an educated lay audience; and fourth, the adopted form for the articles contained in the reader would be the same one used in the planned text, so that anyone reading the first volume would already be familiar with the principles guiding the second volume, as well as its structure and organisation.

This current volume, *The Form of Cities*, is the text that completes another two years of research. It uses the same structure as *Designing Cities* to elucidate in significantly greater detail the parameters for an appropriate knowledge in urban design. Both volumes were conceived as part of the same project and are meant to be used together. When articles in Volume 1 are referenced, I have used the prefix *DC* to indicate that the article can be sourced from *Designing Cities*, so the first volume acts as a generic information base for Volume 2.

In writing this text (Volume 2), it was not my intention to propose any new *theory* of urban design. As we shall see, several writers have fallen into this trap and all have failed. While some may have generated quite admirable and credible models of various aspects of urban design, each has done so at the cost of vastly oversimplifying essential interactions between social relationships and design processes. In addition, any author writing on theory today has to walk a tightrope between two antagonisms. On the one hand, postmodernist criticism rejects any attempt to promote an integrated theory, one that will automatically

be labelled structuralist, totalising and therefore unacceptable. On the other hand, postmodernism, in rejecting the idea of structure, easily falls into an intellectual anarchy composed of myriads of separate and competing discourses, voices and nebulous 'others'.

Using the intellectual grid of spatial political economy, I hope to demonstrate a fabric of interconnected principles that will guide the evolution of theoretical knowledge in urban design. As I discovered in researching *Designing Cities*, knowledge, like national economies, is subject to uneven development. In certain areas, for example history, the concept of political economy is widely utilised, while in others, such as aesthetics, it is weakly developed. So each chapter unfolds based upon an overall evaluation of available discourses within each subject area, the extent to which spatial political economy is used and useful, and an assessment of how the uneven development of urban design knowledge may be rectified.

Since the first draft of this book was 32,000 words over the limit set by the publisher, I was faced with the problem of how to retain the integrity of the work while having to eliminate every fourth word. I decided to drastically reduce chapter 1, which formed an extended and detailed critique of the central texts and actors in traditional urban design, with an in-depth explanation of the philosophical basis for spatial political economy, my chosen method of approach throughout this book.

There were three basic reasons for this choice. *Designing Cities* already contains a significant overview of urban design theory in the extended introduction to that work. I am assuming that many readers will either have purchased or will have access to this companion text, and will be familiar with the important debates. Next, chapter 1 still contains the substance of my argument. Political economy is explained in some detail in chapters 2 and 3, and is deployed in all of the remaining chapters. Finally, the 30,000-word original chapter 1 is available to anyone who wishes to access it on my website at http://www.fbe.unsw.edu.au/staff/Alexander.Cuthbert/. This allows me to explore the nine remaining essential elements of urban design knowledge in significantly greater depth than would otherwise have been possible.

In greater detail, *The Form of Cities* offers everyone involved in the built environment a framework for study. The book is structured so it will have wide application to tertiary education, professional practice and for the educated layperson who might wish to delve deeper into the design process. Since urban design is taught universally at Master's level to graduates in a variety of disciplines, it assumes a pre-existing level of critical thinking. It is written for graduate students, particularly those studying architecture, landscape architecture, cultural studies, urban planning, urban geography, urban sociology and other disciplines (engineering, real estate, etc.), and offers a multidisciplinary theoretical approach to the art of designing cities.

While the intellectual scaffolding derives from spatial political economy, the text is not blind to other paradigms. I am very aware in adopting this position that most of the material written to date about designing cities has avoided this

perspective. Why this is so forms a large part of chapter 1. Some other considerations also need to be made clear at the outset. Probably the most important point is that this book is deliberately 'Western' in focus, dealing principally with Europe and North America as prime sites.

The central reason for distinguishing between East and West is because the whole development paradigm has been different. The Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Western world spawned the economic basis for capitalist imperialism and the ensuing process of urbanisation. The expansionism which resulted saw vast tracts of Asia come under colonial rule in one form or another. The planet was carved up by the great powers of the time, resulting in the first great imperialist war of 1914–19. Prime among these were the British in India, Malaysia and China, the French in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, the Dutch in Indonesia, and the Japanese also in China. Imperialism and colonisation were predicated on the basis of Western development strategies, not Asian.

Whereas the Western system of development was built on a vast industrial surplus, colonisation and imperialist practices, Asia was on the receiving end of this process as a fundamentally agrarian society, to be plundered by Western nations for raw materials and markets. This is not to say that economic imperialism did not occur in the East – the 'stealth imperialism' of the Chinese in southeast Asia is legendary, and China still exerts enormous influence throughout the region today. Nonetheless it is difficult if not impossible to encompass the production of urban form as a process common to both East and West, based on dissimilar developmental histories. Having lived and worked in Asia and Australasia for the last twenty years, I accept the limitation that both regions cannot be encompassed in the same text, and I have another project on the drawing board to deal with this omission.

Acknowledgements

In completing this work I must express a great debt to two institutions and to the many individuals who have made this book possible. The London School of Economics and Political Science offered me the opportunity to transform my thinking about society and space over the course of my doctoral studies, and the University of New South Wales, Faculty of the Built Environment, supported me financially with two grants over the course of this project. Four friends and colleagues in particular deserve special mention, all of whom encouraged me to push the boundaries of my own abilities and interests. In this regard I wish to honour the debt I owe to Professor Manuel Castells for the many conversations we had in Hong Kong, and to my friends Professor Allen Scott of UCLA, Professor Jeffrey Henderson of Manchester University and Professor Harry Dimitriou of University College London for twenty years of banter, intellectual stimulation and friendship.

Many others have supported me, with camaraderie, recognition and sometimes just 'being there'. Those that come immediately to mind are Keith McKinnell of the University of Hong Kong, and one tragic but wonderful human being, the late, great Brian McLoughlin, formerly Professor of Planning at Melbourne University. My friend and colleague Peter Murphy at the University of New South Wales has always provided much-needed support and encouragement. Dr Bruce Judd and Professor Jon Lang have also been there for me on countless occasions, helping to create a sterling urban design programme. My other good friends Chris Abel, Rob Samuels, and John Zerby reviewed several chapters in the course of writing, and Deepak George offered his valuable computing skills to me when it really mattered. Andrew Covell arrived at precisely the right time to assist me with editing the text. The staff of Blackwell Publishing have carried out all the difficult tasks of production with their usual professionalism, and I wish to thank everyone involved in this process, particularly Kelvin Matthews, Joanne Cartwright and Valery Rose who kept me on track at different times over the last two years. But special thanks must go to Jolyon Phillips for the exceedingly difficult and rigorous task of copy-editing the entire text. Needless to say,

all imperfections in the text are mine and I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions.

I also wish to thank Ayu for her affection, fortitude and grace, and to honour my dearest and oldest friend, Dr Jean Cavendish, who saved my life on more than one occasion with her insight and compassion. For a lifetime of selfless sacrifice and dedication to the welfare of her fellow travellers, it is to her that I dedicate this work.

Introduction

> Thinking people search for truth in matter because they are aware that there is nowhere else for them to search
>
> Tariq Ali

Urban Design Origins

Urban design is the study of how cities have achieved their physical form and the processes that go into renewing them. Urban design is not merely the art of designing cities, but the knowledge of how cities grow and change. It is the study of how civilisations have chosen to represent themselves in spatial form, and the processes through which specific urban forms come about. Cities are not simply physical containers of social processes any more than languages are solely a functional method of transmitting information. Languages are symbolic representations of the world we inhabit, evolving gradually over historical time. They embody entire philosophies, ideologies, conceptual systems, and many ways of seeing. The same is true of cities. Since all human action is infused with meaning, so the spaces we inhabit are also replete with symbolic values, collective memory, association, celebration and conflict. Ultimately, urban design is about the transmission of urban meaning in specific urban forms. For this reason we must go beyond abstract social science into the realm of human experience and the creative process in order to fully understand why cities are how they are. As Andrew Sayer (1984: 148) comments, 'social processes do not occur on the head of a pin', meaning that people by definition live and breathe *in* and *through* space.

The design of cities has been going on as long as civilised life, and to a certain extent is a measure of it. Many ancient civilisations had various kits of component parts that were used in organising social space. The Greeks for example had the agora, the theatre, the polis and the stadium, and many cities, particularly in Asia Minor, used the organising framework of the gridiron. Usually architects designed the buildings and spaces, and in Greece, as in other cultures over the centuries, there was no need for a separate concept of 'urban design'. In most regions of the world, urban form had to pay some respect to nature, both in the organisation of social space and in domestic architecture. Cities evolved in accordance with

certain natural laws in regard to location, climate, defence and other considerations. Beyond that point, functional, economic, political and religious factors generated enormous complexity in the way cities worked and how they developed.

While cities continued to grow physically, real knowledge of their social organisation had to wait until the development of modern social science in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the full consequences of capitalist development was exposed in such epic writing as Marx's three volumes of *Capital* (1894), George Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), Freud's *Civilisation and its Discontents* (1930) and Max Weber's *Economy and Society* (1968). Taken together, the penetrating analysis of society that emerged categorically demonstrated that urban life in its full complexity could only be explained through the invisible web of economic and social processes. With such immense intellectual activity taking place in the social sciences, it became undeniable that the physical world was an ephemeral product of much deeper and enduring forces. It was also true that none of these great thinkers were concerned with space or cities, let alone urban form. Nonetheless, many considerations inherent to these treatises were symbolically represented at the *fin de siècle* when Vienna became the intellectual epicentre of European thought.

The conflict between two great Viennese architects, Camillo Sitte and Otto Wagner, over the design of the city centre enclosed by Vienna's Ringstrasse, symbolically represented two alternative visions of the twentieth century. Almost exactly one century ago, the concept of the public realm expressed in urban design became directly linked with emergent concepts of the modern world. The inception of urban design as social process therefore became condensed as praxis, something different from architecture, but also something different from the profession of town planning which did not become institutionalised until 1914 as the Royal Town Planning Institute in London. From the *fin de siècle*, architecture and urban planning progressed as independent professions, and urban design was born as a process of major social consequence. In addition, the seminal textbook on urban design was brought into existence by Camillo Sitte in 1889, namely *The Art of Building Cities: City Building According to its Artistic Fundamentals*. Although Marcus Pollio Vitruvius had written his ten books on architecture (*De Architectura*) in Rome in the first century BC (first published in 1471), it had taken some 2000 years for a text of overwhelming consequence to emerge regarding the built form of the city.

Despite this new awareness of urban form as social process, the organisation of cities was still conceived as the sole domain of architects well into the twentieth century. Indeed Otto Wagner's classic textbook *Modern Architecture* written in 1898 was the original stimulus for much of this, whereby 'the architect would have to liberate himself from the enslavement to history, to the tradition of "Stilarchitecture" ' (Schorske 1981: 83). Over the next century, architects did not prove very successful at doing this, and cities continued to be seen as an extension of building design, with little or no recognition of the added complexities involved in urban structure. The dynamiting of the

Pruitt-Igoe housing estate in St Louis, USA, on 15 July 1972 inspired Charles Jencks to announce the symbolic death of modernism and the rise of a new ethos – postmodernism. By that time it had become obvious that the physical determinism of modern architecture could not be relied upon to resolve complex social issues. Many disasters had followed from this approach in other countries, for example the entire system of 'new towns' in Britain, abandoned as government policy after three-quarters of a century, and the failure of high-rise, high-density residential development in social housing from the late 1950s (Dunleavy 1981). Other great planning disasters (which in most cases were actually architectural disasters) have been documented in a book by the same name by Peter Hall (1982). At that point it became abundantly clear that cities, the public realm and projects beyond the level of a few related buildings lay well beyond the reach of an architectural education, and that a different kind of knowledge was required in order to accommodate the design of cities.

Synopsis of the book

In trying to obviate the inherent physical determinism of architectural and urban design, I have adopted a particular approach outlined in the preface. In order to make my aims explicit, I also need to be clear about the content of this book and its particular orientation. This can be done by locating it in relation to four levels of knowledge that are required by urban designers.

1 The theoretical, philosophical and contextual foundation of the discipline and the meta-programmes that both inform and legitimise practice.
2 The legal, financial and administrative context within which the discipline operates.
3 Technologies of space and form.
4 Case studies of urban design practice.

This book is categorically about the first of these levels, for a variety of reasons. It adopts the position of how to understand urban design rather than how to do it. So while this volume is a text, it is one that deals with theory rather than practice in the context of 'Western' urbanisation. It does not, for example, try to suggest how we should incorporate non-sexist processes into design. Instead, it lays out the foundation for gendered practices within capitalist society, and how this has affected the spatial and symbolic structure of our cities. Thus the book suggests one possible structure for acquiring meta-theory and meta-knowledge, the substrate that relates all subsequent learning and practice into an intellectually coherent discipline. No doubt there are other ways to accomplish this task. The central reason for this position is that while the other three levels mentioned above are reasonably well covered, the first remains completely problematic. In following this framework, I will step back from the apparent substance of the discipline in levels 2 to 4, to a basic structure of concepts that

might reasonably form its deeper structures. In chapter 2, which deals with history, my concern will not be to recount (yet again) the chronological sequencing of urban design products from Miletus to the Docklands, but to show how history itself is socially constructed and to demonstrate how various histories have been assumed in order to explain essential knowledge in the field. While a dialectic exists to some degree between theory and practice, the latter will continue regardless, since it is driven in most cases by financial and administrative expediency. In order for the discipline to move forward, a new discourse needs to be set in place with ideas derived from a significantly wider compass.

It is therefore in the realm of theory that advances need to be made, and this has been my focus throughout. As I have made clear in *Designing Cities*, the actual administrative, financial, legal and formal foundations for the practice of urban design is not my concern in undertaking this project, although the formation of cultural capital is considered in depth in chapter 10. Another reason for this focus is that there are already a great many books and reports dealing with level 3, the technologies of urban design practice, namely design and development control, historic conservation, land valuation, planning law, site analysis, standards for residential development and layout, formal typologies and standards for open space, facilities provision and the rapidly shifting world of geographic information systems (GIS), and systems for computerised graphic design and representation. These are so well developed that the discipline is being undermined by its own dependence on applied technologies of all kinds, ignoring in the process the intellectual and theoretical considerations that might lend it credibility and integrity as an independent region of practice. Similary, at level 4, case studies abound, for example my colleague Jon Lang (1994) has written the definitive text on the public realm in his exhaustive *Urban Design: The American Experience*, with privatised public space extensively documented in Kayden (2000). The key factor that distinguishes a profession from other forms of practice is that its acts are based in theory. If urban design as a social process is not to be degraded into a series of displaced technologies, then it must be reoriented onto a new trajectory where substantial theoretical engagement is part of the overall process of educating (designing) urban designers. How this process might be represented is the purpose of this volume.

With regard to the organisation and categorisation of substantive material into chapters, the trade-off in any taxonomy is that one sacrifices continuity to convenience. There is no linear 'story' being told. Each chapter is to some degree independent of the others. The underlying theme of spatial political economy provides an intellectual and critical reference point throughout the text. This position is new to urban design, but it is not a new paradigm. Nor is it immune to critical self-reflection. In fact it has a long history, originating as the political economy of Adam Smith during the Scottish Enlightenment in the latter half of the eighteenth century. I also stress that spatial political economy will be used thematically, as a reference point or baseline, rather than a pragmatic position. This is the central reason why a chapter is not included on the subject of economy since an 'economic' perspective is inherent in the entire work.

Consequently, the text has been organised in basically three sections. Theory, history and philosophy are directly interconnected and are the most encompassing categories. Similarly, politics, culture and gender deal with the social dimension. The next three categories, environment, aesthetics and typologies, deal with questions of form, while chapter 10 ('praxis') addresses some of the necessary relations between education, research and practice. Therefore the book is both limited by, and benefits from, this structure. There will always be a significant degree of overlap between categories, for example between history and theory, or between culture and politics This is not a problem of the text but a problem of knowledge in general. In fact, every attempt has been made to cross-refer theories, concepts, subject matter and references. The purpose of each chapter and the interconnections between them is described in greater detail below.

Chapter 1 performs three tasks: first, it gives an overview of mainstream urban design theory; second, it traces where political economy and critical theory have been most active to date in offering a different viewpoint; and third, it suggests how we should consolidate a framework from spatial political economy that can use various components derived from the mainstream position, and at the same time, offer it a coherence that it presently lacks. The chapter addresses problems of definition and context: what exactly is it we are trying to encapsulate in the concept 'urban design'? A taxonomy of classic texts is offered, with a clear exposition of the differences between the intellectual territories claimed by architecture, urban design and urban planning. This is followed by a brief discussion of political economy as a concept, and the more recent spatial political economy of the social sciences. The chapter concludes by arguing for the use of this paradigm as a framework for urban design knowledge.

Chapter 2 addresses the idea of history in relation to urban design. It begins by asking the question 'What is history?' in order to contextualise urban design practice. Next I look at the idea of history from the ideological position of professional intervention, a process that has significantly influenced how urban design has been configured as an intellectual product. The two main influences here, as one would expect, are from architecture and urban planning. In both cases, history has frequently been used as a vehicle for legitimating professional solidarity, rather than for its capacity to enlighten us about humanity. I then discuss four ways in which urban design history has been enunciated, via chronologies, typologies, utopias and fragments/collage. An alternative historical perspective is then given, based in materialist theory. In the process I discuss the work of many scholars whose writing supports a concept of urban design as the dynamic product of society's need to generate material and symbolic capital from space.

Chapter 3 (Philosophy) overlaps extensively with the previous chapter, to the extent that it is impossible to separate the content of history from some conception of the overall process. Here the implications of philosophy are discussed, prior to a detailed consideration of key philosophies of urbanism in the twentieth century. These paradigms reflect particular locations at the epicentre of intellectual debate in their time: from Vienna at the *fin de siècle*, to the Frankfurt School

of the 1920s, to Chicago and the Bauhaus in Weimar in the 1930s and 1940s, to Paris in the 1960s and 1970s, and arguably to Los Angeles today, with a significant body of contemporary urban theory emanating from that location. A detailed account of the central philosophical paradigms that have informed urban design is then suggested: semiotics (semiology), phenomenology and Marxian political economy. While all of the chapters in this text are designed to interact and overlap, the first three chapters on theory, history and philosophy have particularly strong connections.

Chapter 4 tackles the difficult subject of politics. For most urban designers, politics, like philosophy, is a topic that has no significant bearing on their education. In order to demonstrate why this should not be the case, the relationship between politics and ideology is discussed, since they are inseparable parts of the same process. Mao Tse-tung once described politics as 'war without guns', and in the theatre of the built environment, urban politics is influential at all levels of engagement in design. Also intimately connected is the idea of power, and how the built environment is the theatre where power expresses itself through the medium of political ideologies that configure, and are embedded within, spatial configurations, architectonic space and the expression of symbolic capital. Continuing from this point, the central ideological construct of capital, namely the legal system, is discussed in relation to the concept of right, which has ultimate authority over the public domain and therefore of urban design as its custodian. The state's legitimating control over urban design in the form of urban planning is then discussed. This has two aspects: theories that begin with an a priori concept of society, and those that somehow view urban planning as an independent factor in the overall process of urbanisation. The core concept defining urban design, that of the public realm, is then contextualised within this defining framework.

Chapter 5 investigates the interdependence of urban design and culture, accepting that urban design is also a physical expression of cultural processes and aspirations. I then discuss the relationship between modernism and postmodernism in the context of global culture and posthistory. Two central concepts and two emergent manifestations in the built form of cities are outlined. Authenticity and symbolic representation form key processes in the expression of urban form within first-world countries, with the New Urbanism fast becoming the dominant design paradigm. The chapter concludes by suggesting that while the New Urbanism reflects the engrained ideologies of capitalist society, a New Ruralism contains a greater capacity for resistance and change in the developing world.

Chapter 6 deals with the relationship between gender and design. Gender is almost wholly absent as a referent within all urban design programmes, despite the fact that after capital it is the largest single influence over the design and use of urban space. In order to obviate this situation, it is important to examine all related concepts, as well as the meanings and significance that the concept of gender has for the built environment. Also important is the fact that traditional political economy ignored gender entirely, as it did with ethnicity, language,

lifestyle and sexuality. The chapter therefore deals in turn with the four building blocks of gender theory, namely society, patriarchy, capital and space, before looking at the overall impact of gender on urban design.

Chapter 7 (Environment) analyses the origins, theoretical development and practical realisation of sustainability in urban design, not from a technical point of view but from the perspective of political and economic progress. The history of the environmental movement is first discussed, beginning in the middle of the twentieth century and continuing until today. Attitudes to nature are then delineated as the source of ongoing dilemmas of the fundamental unsustainability of so-called 'sustainable development practices'. These ideas then segue into a discussion of the relationship between sustainability and development, on the basis of the inherent contradictions of the capitalist world order. Within these parameters, the ideology of sustainable cities is interrogated in three aspects: first, in relation to capital accumulation; second, in terms of social justice; and third, in relation to the material problems of urban space and sustainable urban design. As in the first three chapters, chapters 4, 5, and 6, on culture, politics and the environment have significant interactions.

Chapter 8 (Aesthetics) has probably been the dominant element in the *Weltanschauung* of urban designers, since most have undergone training in architecture defined either as art or technic. Paradoxically, however, there is so little written on the subject by urban designers that their learning in this respect must have been through osmosis. The chapter begins by examining aesthetic theory and the intersection between object and experience. The aesthetics of urban form are then discussed, reviewing the three articles selected in *Designing Cities* as paradigmatic of particular approaches, namely aesthetic philosophy and cognition, the production of the aesthetic object, and the mediation of symbolic form. To these I add a fourth dimension, namely the relationship between aesthetic production and commodity production, focused on Paul Clarke's article 'The economic currency of architectural aesthetics' (*DC* 2), one which was in fact included in the first section on theory. Three dominant paradigms are then outlined, namely mathematics and the divine order, contextualism and rationalism, and three forms of aesthetic production in the realms of symbolic capital, state regulation and theming.

Chapter 9 (Typologies) is concerned with the manner through which urban design understands itself and constructs models, appropriate or otherwise, to its own social formation. One way or another, the idea of typology lies at the heart of the discipline, since it allows designers to encapsulate key concepts and processes in a compressed and accessible form. As a method of introducing the concept, distinctions are made between four related ideas: typology, taxonomy, morphology and system. These concepts are explained using examples from a range of different disciplines such as science, anthropology, psychology and semiotics. I then enunciate three typological forms: those which emerge from disciplines closely related to urban design, those directly derived from urban design, and others evolving out of spatial political economy. In so doing it is possible to demonstrate influences on urban design awareness, how the existing

conceptual framework is encapsulated, and how it might be transformed with access to a more critical perspective based in urban social theory.

Chapter 10 (Pragmatics) looks at the two most significant (ideological) processes that affect the production of cultural capital: the training of urban designers and their relationship to tertiary education and to the professions. My analysis begins with the role of professional service within the capitalist system of production, and how they interact in the reproduction of surplus value and the maintenance of class barriers. I then move onto the role played by professions in the production of knowledge systems, and the nature of their authority. In greater detail, professional intervention and influence over the construction of urban space is discussed, concentrating on its ideological role in implementing planning law, and how the exacting ideologies of form so produced serve to reinforce the reproduction of capital from space. I conclude the chapter, and the book, with an extended analysis of the relationship between the two professions of architecture and planning, predicated on the absence of any independent profession of urban design, with an extended assessment of the actual content of urban design education.

Chapter One
Theory

> It is the theory that determines what can be observed.
> Albert Einstein

Introduction: The Problem

What is understood as urban design 'theory' is anarchistic and insubstantial. This is a situation which has been ongoing for the best part of fifty years and needs to be corrected. Urban design is a discipline where, almost without exception, its major 'theorists' have failed to engage with any substantial origins in the cognate disciplines of economics, social and political science, psychology, geography or the humanities. We can push this idea even further and say that it has not even embraced what today would be recognised as significant subdisciplines, such as urban geography, urban economics, urban sociology or cultural studies, the latter only recently emerging as a major force in critical theory. This effectively situates urban design as several realms removed from any substantial theory at all. At its weakest it could be seen as merely an extension of the architectural imagination or the physical consequence of state planning policies. Both of these are heavily constrained attitudes that ignore the fact that the organisation and design of our physical world cannot be so narrowly drawn. They suggest a theoretical dependency on architecture and planning, focusing narrowly on their function as social technologies. What constitutes the theoretical object of urban design remains in question, one upon which the foundation for any substantial theory is predicated. In order to do this we must begin by defining what we mean by 'urban design', its relationship within a hierarchy of practices, from architecture through urban design into urban and regional planning, and its social function within a larger and more embracing social context.

Urban Design: Definitions

The term 'urban', apart from the fact that it originates in the Latin word *urbs* meaning city, has contained significant added value since Lewis Wirth first wrote his legendary paper 'Urbanism as a way of life' in 1938. The term 'urban' also

formed the basis for one of the most meaningful interrogations of urban structure, that of Manuel Castells' now iconic book *The Urban Question*, first published in French in 1972. After its English debut in 1977, it set in motion a debate lasting the next ten years over the idea of a conceptually valid 'urban sociology', one that still resonates today, although much of the territory has now been captured by urban geography. So I will continue to deploy the term 'urban' since it remains a more relevant and conceptually challenging term than either 'civic' or 'city' when applied to design, one whose meaning will hopefully become clearer over the remainder of this chapter.

Progress towards developing some substantial theory of urban design in the form of a satisfactory hypothesis, a set of guiding constructs or principles, or a reasoned manifesto of ideological practices has been absolutely glacial. Virtually all definitions begin and end in dogma, and 'the crisis in urban design', like the endless 'crisis in urban planning' continues, fuelled by a dearth of critical and dialectical thinking, an *emballage* of anarchistic practices, an obsession with skill-based learning and a continuing belief in physical determinism. Here two papers stand out simply because of their titles: David Gosling's 1984 paper 'Definitions of urban design' and Alan Rowley's paper of the same name exactly ten years later (more recent examples are represented in Punter 1996 and Schurch 1999). In his paper, Gosling has adopted a wholly architectural perspective, as if only architects had any right to define the discipline. While it may seem unfair to criticise this paper, now twenty years old, it remains significant precisely because it represents the most powerful and enduring ideologies still dominating the field of urban design. The paper is an articulate manifestation of a wholly one-sided, ideologically biased and atheoretical example of the genre, alienating every major theorist concerned with urban development, structure and form. Similarly, potential models of urban design (e.g. as a definition of the public realm, as a spatial matrix, as inversion, revitalisation, iconography) are wrapped and made accessible only in and through the work of architects and their critics.

Similar criticisms can be applied to Alan Rowley's paper. On the first page (twenty years after the huge debates about the term 'urban' raged within urban sociology, involving some of the best social theorists of the time) we are still presented with a definition of 'urban' as something (we know not what) in contrast to 'rural' development. Quoting Ruth Knack, we are informed that 'Trying to define urban design is like playing a frustrating version of the old parlor game, twenty questions' (Rowley 1994: 181). In 'Definitions of urban design', Rowley concludes with ten definitions, by which point it should be apparent to the intelligent reader that the discipline is in serious trouble. The last of these notes that urban design education demands literacy in the social sciences, law, economics, public policy and business administration, none of which are deployed in the paper. The problem with all of these attempts to define urban design is that they are depthless and incapable of moving us forward, except perhaps into another set of so-called basic values, functional qualities, descriptive properties, performance dimensions or other qualitative

groupings that are usually claimed to have universal significance. Such an approach is akin to running on the surface of a sphere. At some point, and on a random basis, you have to arrive back where you started. So the overall problem remains. In the absence of any substantial theoretical framework that links urban design activity to the historical process, to social development and to other professions, the same basic positions and approaches will be endlessly recycled.

Urban Design: 'Theory'

It is not my intention here to write a normative history of urban design but to selectively illustrate some of the more influential and prototypical discourses that legitimise traditional theory from forty texts. All are classics in their own right, and constitute significant markers in the journey towards an improved understanding of urban design (see table 1). Historically, each text represented a major attempt to correct what was considered a dominant problem at the time it was written. Despite what I have said above, much practical criticism contained between their covers will remain valid for years to come, for the simple reason that even basic principles remain widely ignored decades after they were presented, as in Gordon Cullen's *Townscape* for example. As we approached the end of the second millennium, however, three things became very clear.

The first was that the positions represented in the collective corpus traditionally associated with urban design had lost most of their explanatory power. Many of these marked, in a very real sense, the last significant breath of the modernist position, twenty years after postmodernism had started to flourish in urban design. Second, over the last ten years, a new era in urban design theory has surfaced, although this remains to be articulated in any significant manner. Nan Ellin's book *Postmodern Urbanism* (1996) and Ross King's *Emancipating Space* (1996) are among the few memorable texts written in the intervening period, the latter being notable due to its rare dialectical relationship to theory. Third, the upsurge in things urban in disciplines that had previously been wholly disconnected to the design of cities began to produce a significant corpus of work. Urban sociology, economics and geography, cultural studies, art history, landscape architecture and other disciplines from anthropology to philosophy were all involved. Urban sociology and human geography have been the two key players since the early 1980s.

This progression results in the inevitable observation that more significant theoretical paradigms about the shape and form of urban space are originating from outside the discipline of urban design rather than from the inside. It also offers a partial explanation as to why so few key texts on urban design have emerged. The old paradigm has withered away and the new has not yet taken hold. In *Designing Cities*, I therefore made a clear distinction between what I consider to be normative theory *in* urban design over the thirty-year period from 1960 to around 1990 and the other more significant theory *of* urban design

Table 1 Forty classic texts in urban design.

Chermayeff & Alexander (1960) *Community and Privacy: Toward a New Architecture of Humanism*
Lynch (1960) *The Image of the City*
Mumford (1961) *The City in History*
Jacobs (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*
Cullen (1961) *Townscape*
Webber (1963) *Explorations into Urban Structure*
Halprin (1963) *Cities*
Buchanan (1963) *Traffic in Towns*
Rudofsky (1964) *Architecture without Architects: An Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture*
Sprieregen (1965) *Urban Design: The Architecture of Towns and Cities*
Bacon (1967) *The Design of Cities*
McHarg (1969) *Design with Nature*
Rudofsky (1969) *Streets for People*
Sommer (1969) *Personal Space: The Behavioural Basis for Design*
Halprin (1969) *The RSVP Cycles: Creative Processes in the Human Environment*
Proshansky, Ittelson & Rivlin (1970) *Environmental Psychology*: *Man and His Physical Setting*
Lynch (1971) *Site Planning*
March & Steadman (1971) *The Geometry of Environment*
Newman (1972) *Defensible Space*
Banham (1973) *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*
Rapoport (1977) *The Human Aspects of Urban Form*
Venturi, Scott-Brown & Izenour (1977) *Learning from Las Vegas*
Alexander (1977) *A Pattern Language*
Rowe & Koetter (1978) *Collage City*
Norberg-Schulz (1979) *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*
Krier (1979) *Urban Space*
Lynch (1981) *A Theory of Good City Form*
Barnett (1982) *An Introduction to Urban Design*
Hillier & Hanson (1984) *The Social Logic of Space*
Trancik (1986) *Finding Lost Space: Theories of Urban Design*
Alexander (1987) *A New Theory of Urban Design*
Gehl (1987) *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*
Broadbent (1990) *Emerging Concepts in Urban Space Design*
Katz (1994) *The New Urbanism*
Lang (1994) *Urban Design: The American Experience*
Hillier (1996) *Space is the Machine*
Ellin (1996) *Postmodern Urbanism*
Madanipour (1996) *Design of Urban Space*
Dovey (1999) *Framing Places: Mediating Power in the Built Environment*
Gosling & Gosling (2003) *The Evolution of American Urban Design: a Chronological Anthology*