Editorial

Educating people to *urban design* is not an easy task – even setting aside the problems of working with the majority of students' prior education in architecture, landscape, planning, engineering or whatever.... The combination of knowledge of theories, models and practical skills required of any worldly discipline remain heavily contested – in academe, at least. The growing popularity of the notion of a 'virtual human condition', amongst those who may have designed much, but realised little or nothing, continues despite the evidence that human beings still struggle to meet 'face-to-face' for business and pleasure – or just to escape the isolation of virtual pursuits. Those messy imperfect, relatively democratic and certainly pluralistic places that are our cities and suburbs are less and less of interest.

Yet the facilitation of human exchange remains the root function of urban design. Arriving at forms that provide the potential for the widest variety of human exchange, whilst recognising the need for both a public and private realm, and clearly defining boundaries between the two, remain key design functions. Hannah Arendt's timeless brief for the public realm is ever worth quoting:

'The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.' (Arendt, 1958).

One of the problems of Arendt's vivid passage is illustrated by Colin Rowe's description of the table remarked by Le Corbusier in a little 'casse-croute'. According to Rowe 'Corbu's table is infinitely more cluttered...than the pristine horizontal surface which is Arendt's image of the *respublica*.' (Rowe, 1984). Yet Corbu's table, with

its clutter of objects, has, as one might expect '...l'ordre fatal qui met tous ces objets en rapport les uns avec les autres...' and from the diner's and Corbu's vantage point 'les distances qui les séparent sont la mesure de la vie.' (Le Corbusier, 1930). Yet, in reality, neither Arendt's nor Corbu's tables are sufficiently defined, nor discussed adequately for us to feel confident that they will serve the purposes of a spiritual gathering or a good meal. A narrow refectory table will bring unwanted physical contact and be uncomfortable for a *séance* whilst serving adequately for the enjoyment of a meal, whilst many a bistro table scarcely provides space for plates and glasses, let alone the other paraphernalia of convivial dining.

The two authors provide, if we are indulgent, a theoretical position on the basic needs of the public realm. In urban design education, we need to couple such theories, test and enrich them with empirical study of every aspect of existing environments from the social/political/economic, to the locational/dimensional/aesthetic.

In his paper Hee Limin describes the outcome of a mapping exercise by first year architecture students in three streets in Kuala Lumpur and two in Malacca, Malaysia. Graphically competent but theoretically inexperienced, the students were encouraged to develop their own methodologies for the exercise. Although different approaches were adopted many of the exercises reflected the students' interests in experiential mapping of sound, smell, movement, time cultural associations. The author concludes that the study highlights the need to refine existing or devise new methods in studying urban spaces.

Michael Martin revisits the residential alley as a structuring device in the layout of North American settlements and suburbs. He presents a historical review of the decline and reinterpretation of the alley contrasting the critique of early twentieth century authors with the promotion of the form by the New Urbanists. He highlights the problem of resurrecting past forms without due concern for changing lifestyles and patterns of use.

In the final paper of this issue, Salheen and

Forsyth review models for pedestrian movement provided by the Space Syntax theory and the literature of transport planning. They give an account of the development of a graphic model based on the concept of axial lines, but modified to account for distance using an axial map of Cairo. Although in a preliminary stage of development, their research offers an empirical method of measuring the variable of 'universal distance'.

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Executive Editors

References

- Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*, Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, pp. 52–53.
- Le Corbusier (1930) *Precisions*, Paris (quoted from Rowe, above)
- Rowe, C. (1984) IBA: Rowe Reflects in *The Architectural Review*, Vol CLXXVI, No 1051, September, pp. 92–93.