Editorial

The papers in this final double issue of 2002, range across a variety of topics, linked only by their fundamental concern with improving the quality of the built environment through the application of the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding.

The concerns with who does urban design and how they achieve positive urban transformations have been the subject of heated debate for a long time. However, the intensity of the debate increased noticeably in the last decade or so of the 20th century, and continues unabated in this first decade of the 21st century.

Much of this debate focuses explicitly, or more often, inexplicitly, on how to regain or enhance broadly 'traditional' patterns of urban life. Recognition is given to evolving changes in retailing, leisure and working as well as the positive and negative developments in infrastructure from transportation to power and water supply, flood prevention and waste management. Yet our environments are substantially judged on their performance against a loosely assembled, partially shared standard of an urban past.

In the so-called developed world, probably the single most sought after characteristic of good urbanism in this new century is vitality. Vitality needs to be supported by physical permeability, mixed uses and a safe structuring system that puts fronts to the fronts of uses and backs to the backs. Vitality is a quality which is ever more craved by people who work long hours, often at a screen, and increasingly live in smaller, less stable households. Vitality is the face-to-face that makes the public realm not only safe – and when we want it to be, anonymous – but offers both the promise and the perception of human interaction.

In the 'developing' world, vitality is usually an integral part of life in all the informal and ordinary mixed-use environments of non-specialist urban quarters. It is significantly less so in many managed downtown single or limited use quarters, where 'civility' is provided by public and private security surveillance and sometimes

even limited entry. It has to be said, that some of the latter characteristics seeped into (or emanated from) North America in the last quarter of the 20th century and have subsequently infected many European towns and cities. Civility is probably the quality that is most sought in much of the developing world: an order and expectation of social behaviour in the context of clearly enabling social spaces, engendering 'civil' public behaviour which reduces urban 'no-go' areas for outsiders to the barest minimum or zero. In most places – 'undeveloped' and 'developed' – we know that this is an almost hopeless quest without the development of more economically and socially equitable societies. Yet every small, appropriate improvement we make in social and economic space may aid more fundamental social and economic development – or at least not further hinder it.

So we could say that vitality plus safety are global urban goals. I would prefer 'vitality plus civility' in part because safety is so often rendered threatening and counter-urban and counter-civil by camera or armed guard, while the notion of civility is one of the oldest and most successful in the history of society and urbanism. However, there are those who believe that humans no longer need to live within the constraints – or delights – of the traditional space/time continuum. They would channel us to and fro in true 'sci-fi' style, hermetically sealed away from any chance encounter or unmanageable hazard. The 'spam' of real life would be constantly filtered out of our experiential support systems, and so on, and so on.

This is a very old rendering of the plot of exponential progress. What makes it so dangerous, is its protagonists requirement for, or at least acceptance of huge under-classes – some compliant, and others not. They do of course exist now. Still they have always been at least partially visible, breathed the same air and challenged us on our daily round – like the hawkers and sweepers of Victorian London, or the shoe-shine boys and child beggars of almost any 'third-world' city now. Or, no worse, but often

more shocking, the people of the lost quarters of almost any 'first-world' city, living in mob-ruled public housing projects and tucked into every undesirable interstice of the urban fabric from underpass, to night-time doorway to railway archway and, far, far more.

We can go this way. But it makes the 'modernist project' a sham for all those for whom it has failed: not just incidentally or individually, but systemically. The welfare state is dead ! Long live the welfare state !

However, our contributors in this issue offer us some significant hope.

In our opening paper, Paul Murrain sets out by characterising what he calls 'The Death of Common Sense', quoting from the book of the same title by Philip K. Howard. Based primarily on his experience in the USA and the UK, Murrain argues cogently against the proliferation of 'rules' that make the following of the emerging body of sensible guidance impossible. However, he commends to us the 'rediscovery' of design codes in the USA by the New Urbanists, which bring together an open ideology and appreciation of the physical forms of traditional urbanism which is actually facilitated by a transparent set of rules: the code. In a paper that never shirks from plain speaking, he concludes that a fetish with safety – or by extension, any 'single-issue mentality' threatens the fabric and thus the life of our cities.

Ian Bentley has spent more than three decades at the forefront of urban design education in the UK. In his paper, he explores the relationships and potential positive and negative outcomes of considering urban design as an art form. He concludes that 're-imagining' urban design as a performance art might lead to new ways of bridging the user-producer gap by reclaiming a positive place for truly avant-garde urban designers.

In the following two papers, both by Bill Hillier, we are presented with clear and cogent arguments as to how 'spatial laws mediate the social construction of urban space' and then given an 'outline of a theory of society and space'. These papers build on a series of recent work by the author going back to 1993. In his first paper, 'A Theory of the City as Object', Hillier examines

a range of axial maps from a variety of cultural settings and establishes that while there are indeed cultural variations there are also 'powerful invariants'. He concludes that as settlements expand, micro-economic factors come to be more and more important and generate the 'invariants'. The second paper, 'Society Seen Through the Prism of Space' focuses on the questions of the relationship between new technologies and society and poses the question will these new technologies 'change the spatial basis of society?'. In order to meet the challenge of our apparent lack of adequate theory to relate 'society and space', the author suggests that we have been looking down the wrong end of the telescope: looking for spatial formation caused by society, rather than adequately recognising the role of spatial forms over time in the creation and sustenance of society. Using this approach key mechanisms relating space and society are defined and their potential use for defining questions for our urban futures are considered.

Bernard Otoki Moirongo considers 'Urban Public Space Patterns: Human Distribution and the Design of Sustainable City Centres with Reference to Nairobi CBD'. The author seeks to establish the urban variables and urban patterns which may create a sustainable community. Using space syntax theory he models spatial variables for Nairobi and identifies the overriding importance of 'constituted, integrating and controlled' urban spaces for the sustainability of place and city.

There follows a paper – exceptionally – by one of your editors. In this, first published elsewhere in 1996, I consider some issues that arise from the relationship between education and practice. The paper proposes that it remains vital in the education of urban designers to develop the tools for reflection-in-action that will enable thinking practitioners to make the space for positive reflection and the application of a little theory, used in part, as a touchstone for testing and refining practical approaches and applications in urban design. Thus, the paper concludes that education has to equip novice practitioners with the ability to apply 'future flexible analysis and proposition building' and enables them to 'scan across recognition, deliberation, intuition and back again'.

To conclude this double issue, Ana Claudia Cardosa considers 'Life chances and modern

poverty', in a paper based on a larger study of the subject drawing on case studies from Belem in Brazil. She reviews the development of the concept of 'life chances' as defined by Dahrendorf in the late 1970s. She concludes, as an example, that the lack of access to low-income housing led to the establishment of informal settlements by the poor in developing countries which, in turn, enabled such groups to achieve access to many

other life chances offered by urban settings. Nevertheless, the association in the paper of poverty and the concepts of life chances shows why, according to 'mainstream standards' being poor 'is understood as being prevented from having better life chances'.

Richard Hayward and Sue McGlynn

Executive Editors