Editorial

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With this volume, URBAN DESIGN *International* enters its ninth year of publication. The years since the launch of the journal in 1996 have seen an intense and widespread renewal of interest in urban design, unprecedented since the period of physical and social reconstruction following the Second World War. This resurgence of interest in urban design is similarly motivated by the imperative of reconstruction – this time not in response to the physical and economic destruction of war but to the weapons of mass construction of late 20th century post-industrial development. The fall out has been the social and physical fragmentation of the urbanised world – producing on the one hand, the sprawling affluence of the ‘suburban nation’ so articulately described by Duany *et al.* (2000) and on the other, the spatial and social segregation of the economically disadvantaged and transport poor.

In these new conditions of post-modernity, urban design has become part of a campaign by successive governments to maintain a civil society in the face of rising crime and loss of place identity and one of the means by which more and more housing can be built without compromising commitments to sustainable development set by the Kyoto agreement. The contributions of urban design and urban designers are now being formally acknowledged – not only to policy and practice but also legally as, at last in the UK, the regulatory system itself is being re-cast to reflect a growing understanding of the spatial dimension of planning and the role of design in quality place making. Shared knowledge and understanding of the impacts and effects of different space and building types is essential if urban designers are to contribute positively to the quality of people’s lives. Each of the three papers presented in this issue inform and develop these debates, and this remains one of our main purposes in publishing the journal.

The first paper charts the emergence of one of the new spatial types of modernity in post-Second

World War Britain. Peter Larkham discusses the rise of the formal civic centre that reflected the growth of municipal responsibilities and urban administrative requirements from the Victorian period onwards. Motivated by ‘place promotion and civic boosterism’, approximately 200 reconstruction plans were produced for towns and cities across the UK. Although the vast majority were not built, Larkham reviews detailed evidence from these plans to assess the impact of comprehensive clearance and large-scale redevelopment on the fine-grained, mixed-use historic cores of British cities. These centres were conceived as being functionally, physically and visually separate from the remaining urban fabric, and Larkham concludes that their impact on historic street patterns, plots and land uses was immense. In many ways their impact was even more far reaching as the promotion and sanction of civic centres by public authorities set a precedent for the private development of the retail precincts which dominated town centres and out-of-town centres in the last quarter of the 20th century.

The second paper of this issue reflects upon another innovative spatial and building type; one that is perhaps the single most pervasive architectural and urban design icon of early 20th century modernism. Whereas the construction of new civic centres merely disturbed the old morphological order, the ‘vertical city’ intended to sweep it away completely. Wong’s paper re-examines the concept of the high-rise vertical city as a solution to providing affordable housing in the context of extreme land scarcity in Singapore. Her paper starts by reviewing the development of the vertical city concept, from Le Corbusier’s ‘contemporary city’ of the 1920s to Frank Lloyd Wright’s 1950s vision for the mile high skyscraper city of ‘Illinois’, then Soleri’s cities of ‘Arcosanti’ and ‘Babels’ in the late 1960s and 1970s and his ‘Hyper Building’ for Tokyo in the late 1990s. Singapore is one of the most densely populated cities in the world and its 2001

Concept Plan estimates that a further 800,000 homes are needed to cater for a projected population of 5.5 million. The Housing and Development Board of the city have initiated the development of Duxton Plain, a public housing scheme of over 50 storeys in height. Wong's paper investigates the perceptions, attitudes and concerns of future occupiers of these schemes, based on a questionnaire of 500 potential residents. Wong's research revealed that, despite being accustomed to decades of high-rise living, less than half of the sample would choose to live in such dwellings. Her findings indicate that the advantages of high rise, high density living were perceived to be good views and cooling breezes in a hot climate, but the disadvantages were identified as cost, safety of the building structure, insufficient provision of facilities, and the concentration of vehicles producing traffic congestion. Although acceptability was found to be higher among younger and smaller households and with men generally, her research reveals significant levels of concern among potential residents that have important implications for policy makers.

The final paper deals with an issue that concerns us all and one which is of the utmost importance in political and popular evaluations of the contribution of urban design. Hillier reviews the controversy over the relationship between property crime and spatial variables of design and tackles this complex issue head on by posing a simple question – 'Can streets be made safe?' The paper outlines the divergent views, the one that advocates open and permeable environments in which strangers as well as inhabitants pass

through an area and the second based on a model of defensible space that advocates closed and impermeable environments. Hillier highlights the hidden dangers of research into crime and its spatial distribution in cities and warns against over-simplistic assumptions, particularly at the larger scale of analysis. A number of crime-space studies carried out by The Space Syntax Laboratory have some striking results – that no correlation was found between crime and density, only a poor correlation between affluence and crime, but a very strong correlation between layout type and all kinds of crime, with traditional street patterns the best ones and the modern hierarchical layouts the worst. The results linking socio-economic as well as spatial data are preliminary but strongly indicate that rich and poor alike benefit from living in traditional streets. The paper concludes by offering some simple but highly significant design guidance: join buildings together, avoid any kinds of secondary access to dwellings, make sure that all public spaces are continuously 'constituted' by dwelling entrances, and maximise the inter-visibility of these entrances by a linear rather than a broken up layout.

Richard Hayward and Sue McGlynn
Executive Editors

Reference

- Duany, A., Plater-Zyberk, E. and Speck, J. (2000) *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*. New York: North Point Press.