Editorial

It is conventional for the editors of a new journal to make claims about its timeliness, or the discovery of a previously unacknowledged gap in the market, or the inadequacy of existing publications to do justice to the primary subject matter. But it seems to us that these claims – timeliness, the hiatus between the professions and the absence of focus – are ones that we can make not only to justify the publication of this journal but also for the very activity of urban design.

It is timely, in that there is evidence of a resurgence of interest in urban design, urban form and management which is unparalleled since the early part of this century. This interest is manifested in the political rhetoric which followed the Rio summit in 1992* as each government attempted to review its national policies against newly emerging international and global ecological criteria. However, it is important that the debate does not remain at the level of political rhetoric. We need to explore fully what it is that urban design and urban designers can contribute to this debate and elucidate the implications of resource efficiency, energy consumption and pollution for physical form at both global and local scales. Urban designers will have to embrace whole new areas of specialized technology relating to ecology and environmental management, and make connections to their more common concerns of urban form and growth. Urban design is now in a rather uncomfortable phase of recognizing the importance of ecology and the environmental sciences whilst being unsure about how to interpret their frequently aspatial and contradictory concerns. Even more problematic is the transfer of these concerns into the urban design process and on into physical forms which can deliver the required performance through time. There seem to us, therefore, to be good

arguments for exploring the principles which underlie settlements generated or developed during periods of low technology in terms of movement and spatial structure, building construction and climate modification. These same settlements appear also to be more resilient to the other great preoccupations of modern urbanism: crime, violence and personal safety. What is more, in his paper in this issue, Bill Hillier demonstrates how such forms of development may provide the setting for economically successful and sustainable cities. Through such study the criticism of urban design as a nostalgic and retrogressive discipline must be rebutted.

Moving to the second customary claim, that there is a gap in the market, or the third claim that existing journals do not do justice to the ambit of urban design, we come to the emergence of the discipline itself, positioned as it is between the professions of architecture, landscape architecture and planning. Traditionally, architecture has represented the 'individual' in the working method based on personal creativity and the product: the single building or single project intervention. Planning has represented the 'collective' with its representatives acting in the public interest and dealing with whole town, city or regional policy and plan-making and the control of individual interventions within this broader context. Characterized rather crudely in this way, neither position has much to do with the way in which the city or other urban places are experienced or used, and existing journals which reflect these positions examine only peripherally the issues which are central to urban design. Both in terms of its ideology and its everyday practices and concerns, urban design has set itself up to mediate between these two positions bringing together the individual and the collective by working with public, private and community stakeholders. Since its establishment as a recognizable but not wholly independent discipline, urban design has focused on the spaces

*United Nations Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June 1992.

between buildings which spatially and socially define our experience of the city.

In the first issue many of the papers address this central focus of urban design by examining in their different ways the configuration, use and activity of the spaces between buildings. Abigail Goldberg and Steve Thorne set the scene in post-apartheid South Africa and describe recent work which addresses some of the issues of divided cities. In his case study of Alexandria, Egypt, Hassan Abdel-Salam examines, in the context of pedestrianization of central streets, the issues of qualitative change in public spaces and the actors involved.

Bill Hillier, in his keynote paper, conceptualizes the city as a movement economy. In a powerful extension of his well-known research, he argues that the structuring of movement by the urban grid leads to dense patterns of mixed use encounter that characterize the spatially successful city. Alan Reeve provides a critique of attempts to privatize public space in the contemporary British town centre. He concludes that to treat the town centre as if it were a shopping mall is to transform it into a banal and risk-free place. The contention that public art must address social, rather than simply aesthetic needs is the substance of Malcolm Miles' paper. He asks what artists and craftspeople are able to contribute to urban design and examines strategies which can be observed in the location of art in public spaces.

Three short papers conclude this issue. Elizabeth Liddle examines the way in which urban development, perception and coding intersect with language. In her paper she analyses the way people talk about their urban activities and, using a pilot study, she proposes a model which brings together their perceptions of place. Hong Kong is commonly acknowledged as having one of the world's highest development densities. In his paper Kingsley Hughes addresses the conflict of high levels of pedestrian and vehicular activity. Lindsay Smales and Howard Green focus on the potential of design guidance to overcome the problems of the degradation of the natural and built environments that may result from intensive and insensitive tourist development.

In the next issue of the journal, the keynote paper by John Punter will trace the pattern of

development of urban design in the context of the United Kingdom. He will be examining the developing common principles for interventions and the power structures within which urban designers must work. We look forward to contributions from other parts of the world that extend this picture of principles and practices internationally.

Looking to the future, we are planning a number of themed issues to explore topics in more depth and with further views from many different countries. Sustainability and the compact versus the dispersed city continue to be at the centre of the urban design debate. The rediscovery of the urban grid is gaining acceptance within both of these models as the fundamental way of achieving ecological sustainability, through reducing car-borne traffic, and achieving economic sustainability through supporting mixed uses. However, there are still enormous implications for traffic management and safety which remain unresolved within current urban layouts and with current vehicle speeds and volumes. A themed issue on 'Movement, Traffic and the Urban Grid' will report current research and good practice from around the world and we welcome your contributions. Sustainable lifestyles for the new millennium will depend on more than economics and the limitations of fossil fuel use; we will be exploring these issues under the banner of 'Healthy Cities'. Design guidance, briefing and coding are increasingly evident as mainstays of urban design practice. The derivation of these far from regularized instruments and the means by which they are communicated and enforced is a subject of importance and interest for practitioners and academics alike. Reflections and examples of good and not-so-good practice in these areas will be welcomed for inclusion in the forthcoming issues.

We hope that you enjoy the first issue of **URBAN DESIGN International** and that you find it both stimulating and useful. In order to develop a network and a forum for debate and discussion we would like you to write with criticism, encouragement and contributions for publication.

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