Editorial

One of the bedrock principles of the cultural and economic exchange of goods and services for money and prestige is some defined core of knowledge and skills which provides an open and transparent context for transactions between consumers and producers in any sphere, not least the built environment. Michael Shoul, in his masterly critique of a collection of essays on the teaching of architecture (Shoul, 1995), raises issues even more critical for urban design practice and education. The theoretical underpinning of architectural aspirations may well be a rich and varied yet often miasmatic soup, but at least most people can give a basic description of what they expect from an architect and most architects know with some clarity the scope of their various services, even when they have forgotten the academic foundation of their practice. Architecture has always had a propensity for the ineffable and esoteric in terms of cultural understanding and design flair. Bureaucratic and even democratic planning has sought to serve government and the community in simple, transparent ways and usually only becomes logically impenetrable when it comes up against the products of architecture in terms of design and its 'control'.

What differentiates the urban designer from architects, planners, landscape architects and other development professionals? We may be happy to accept that there are different sorts of urban designer with different academic and experiential backgrounds. This avoids old notions of narrow professionalism and is rather like more contemporary notions of specialism within professions: transport planner, development control planner, site architect and so on.

Urban design has not yet achieved the years of professional life experience to excuse the relaxed and promiscuous profligacy of the old flaneur architecture. Nor has urban design made up its mind about what is, and is not, core to the theoretical and practical approaches to be offered

by the sprightly practitioners of this young discipline. If architecture lacks discipline, urban design has scarcely begun to consider it, being on the whole, game for anything.

Bill Hillier has described architecture as a profession without memory. As urban design comes of age it has yet to decide, in more than a fleeting post-modern way, the things it needs to remember by way of knowledge, understanding and skills and their sources. As the natural world became more systematically explored by science in the nineteenth century, scientists of all colours started to elaborate and clarify new taxonomies of both the material – from molluscs to acers – and the patterns and content of the theories and knowledge which enabled them to manipulate hypotheses and order research to extend all the aspects of their work and understanding.

We assert that the time is pressing now for urban design to define and structure its knowledge base and practices – not to limit the operations and flexibility of the discipline – but to promote and extend them in a way that is clearly open to dialogue with all stakeholders.

Some years ago we tried to profile the match between the education of urban designers and the demands of practice from the perspective of both the practitioner and the employer. The results were interesting and in detail useful in the review of curriculum, but they were inconclusive concerning the general scope of urban design. There was, however, a powerful sense that urban design and the abilities required for its practice were circumscribed by a prevailing and not very progressive stereotype of the urban designer formed by others in the absence of a role definition made by education and practice leaders. Urban design is, it seems, destined to be about floorscape, street furniture and hints on façades and the 'massing' of buildings. In the face of the established practices of architecture

planning and even landscape architecture, this definition of a residual role by the majority of associated practitioners is hardly surprising.

If we deal with and aspire to continue to deal with matters more effective in the better shaping of the built environment, as most of us do, we not only need to stake our claim, but we also need to identify the theoretical and practical underpinning of those things that we claim to be able to do. The papers in this issue all contribute in various ways to the discussion of this task: John Punter and Matthew Carmona, and Michael Biddulph focus on the area of devising frameworks for design guidance and control. Michael Timpson and Susan Manley, and Marion Roberts and Bill Erickson explore ways of using historical and cultural elements in design and Thomas Campanella demonstrates a notable case of the physical outcomes of cultural transfer. Paul Murrain, in his paper, defines the principles of urbanism.

Future papers in the journal will address the issues of appropriate curriculum for urban design education. Education has to serve the student, the core activities of a discipline, its possible futures and the aspirations of practitioners and other stakeholders. So tell us what you believe these elements to be. Is the urban designer really a designer, first and foremost; or a development economist; a writer of development and design briefs; a community facilitator; an effective influencer of all the actors in urban development; or some combination of all of these? In any case, what is the core of knowledge, understanding and skills and how are they underpinned in such a way that they are more than short termist – being firmly rooted in an understanding of our urban pasts and flexible enough to make sensible judgements about our urban futures? We look forward to your papers long and short as well as your letters and email.

This second issue of *URBAN DESIGN International* starts with an account of a piece of public open space regeneration by Michael Timpson and Susan Manley. Their brief was to redesign the Cutty Sark Gardens area of Greenwich and to emphasise the locational importance of the riverside place as a gateway to the Borough. Their project has gained even greater significance with the decision to locate the UK's Millennium Exhibition in Greenwich. A design method is

described which seeks to anchor design solutions in the particular history of the place.

In the first of two papers, John Punter and Matthew Carmona seek to establish a clear conception of urban design which can provide a practical framework for the development of design policies. The new generation of English development plans require district wide design policies and they strongly make the case for the need to develop urban design principles to guide policy writing. Conceptualisations of different modes of perception and approaches to environmental aesthetics are briefly reviewed. The principal areas of design writing in England are evaluated to produce some key recommendations in two areas: substantive principles for design policy; and the development of procedural principles that can also be usefully included in policy writing. The second paper in the next issue of the journal will explore the application of these ideas in current English local plans.

Michael Biddulph's paper shares Punter and Carmona's concern with the effectiveness of current design policy, but from the perspective of a private sector residential layout guide. This paper compares the guide to public sector guidance and evaluates the former in terms of meeting its objectives by an analysis of 52 developments undertaken by a housing development company. Four examples are considered in more detail in the paper to determine specifically why the schemes took the form that they did. He concludes that estate layouts accorded with the guidance where land ownership and planning powers coincide or where motivation for good design exists, and identifies similarities and differences between public and private sector guidance.

Marion Roberts and Bill Erickson's paper continues the discussion of the role of public art which was introduced by Malcolm Miles in the first issue of the journal. Their piece concentrates on the use of public art in city regeneration schemes and presents a strong argument about the problems of interpretation of public art through the use of case studies from Birmingham and Swansea. After outlining the problems they go on to propose the use of genre as a useful tool for the analysis of public art in an urban context and to provide a set of rules to govern meanings.

Two short papers conclude this issue, both of which confront the products of 'free market' urbanism. Thomas Campanella outlines the dramatic changes which have taken place in the landscape of South China in the past fifteen years. The new economic order of 'socialist capitalism' and the return of the free market has meant that land has become available for development, a process expedited by a programme of highway construction. This has facilitated the development of a full range of western artefacts of suburbia – expressways, golf courses and shopping malls – and tracts of single family housing, which are predominantly North American, Japanese and European in style and influence. We close with Paul Murrain's report on the Fourth Congress for New Urbanism held in May of this year. The CNU was formed in the USA in 1993 by a group of leading urban design practitioners and educators (including Peter Calthorpe, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Andres Duany). The group were motivated by a commitment to reform the very kind of

urbanism described by Campanella as invading China. The CNU seek to counter car-dominated forms of development with a model based on mixed-use towns accessible by pedestrians and public mass transport as well as the private car.

Paul Murrain's paper describes the origins of the CNU and explains how the principles of new urbanism have been developed through intensive debate in successive Congresses. The paper concludes with the Charter adopted at the Fourth Congress.

Review by Shoul, M. of Pearce, M. and Toy, M. (eds) (1995) *Educating Architects*, Academy Editions. In *Environments BY DESIGN*, vol 1, No 1, January 1996.

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