Editorial

In many parts of Europe and North America, urban design still shuffles townscape and car-parking like an antiquarian conservator in the back of the museum. Odd groups and individuals do tussle with the corporate big-spenders, to try to keep some humanity in the business districts or some business in the human settlements. But on the whole we fiddle whilst the global conflagration consumes and corrupts.

For some commentators the characterising nexus of the global/local space/place continuum is the international airport. The international business traveller is able to disconnect her lap-top from the supply in the club-class seat of the plane to disembark at the airport city. Here she will relax in the work and comfort suites where facial massage, aromatherapy, video-conferencing, desk-top publishing and even face-to-face meetings can take place. Beyond the airport city is the swamp of the underclass: a global *barriada*, with a different pace of movement and quality of human interaction.

In recent years, new urbanism has brought together those interested in creating something of the quality of successful old urbanisms, mostly in small suburban developments. Much of this new urbanism picks up the formative threads of the practical visionaries of the immediate pre-'modern' past. More recently, new urbanists have started to tackle bigger settlements and genuinely urban mixed-use developments.

There is no doubt, as far as we are concerned, that urban designers must take on the large-scale design, reconstruction and extension of cities. For who else will do it? The failures of past attempts at planned urban expansion have resulted from disjunctures between planning and the design of form, a lack of understanding of the imperatives of economic free enterprise and a lack of understanding and vision for the rich bouillabaisse which makes a successful human urban environment. An understanding and practical ability in these three things is, or should be, the defining

characteristic of the urban designer. Yet as we write, not only in Europe and North America but in the Indian sub-continent, in Asia, and in Africa, piecemeal 'development' without design, and vast zoned urban extensions are taking place. Embedded in these extensions are all the problems experienced in earlier European and North American development and redevelopment, but on a scale that is staggering, and could become irredeemable as it slips into the inter-airport, inter-continental swamp.

We would, however, do well to heed the warning given on following 'visionaries' by Peter Hall at the beginning of his *Cities of Tomorrow* (1988):

Their primitive disciples, all too anxious to undertake the task, may create a gospel at variance with the original texts. The ideas may derive from those of others and in turn feed back into their sources, creating a tangled skein that is difficult to disentangle. (Hall, 1988, p. 4)

This is a picture explicitly and repeatedly familiar to anyone in built-environment education, but often a less conscious issue for the developing practitioner. Hall goes on to say:

The cultural and social world they inhabited, which provided the essential material for their perceptions, has long since vanished and is difficult to reconstruct: the past is a foreign country, with a different language, different social mores, and a different view of the human condition. (ibid)

His array of visionaries spans from Ebenezer Howard to Melvin Webber, Alexander to Harvey, so we may choose to believe that the essence of our humanity and the value of human exchange has 'evolved' little over the past century.

In the final issue of the first volume of the journal we present four papers which critically

review and question some contemporary approaches to the design of new places. We would welcome papers that review alternatives to these approaches to urbanisation, including those which may be perceived as unplanned.

Michelle Thompson-Fawcett reviews the Urban Villages movement in the UK and the work of the New Urbanists in the USA. Her critique highlights the intentions of those advocating the urbanist revision of development, which tries to salvage opportunities for urbanity, community, diversity, and place within the global urban continuum, and outlines some of the dissension that the different approaches raise. She concludes with a summary of considerations for the evaluation of intentions and outcomes of these urbanist projects.

One such example of a new urbanist project is Platinum City at Twin Lakes, Bangalore, India. This development is for a new mixed-use neighbourhood designed by the Thadani Hetzel Partnership with consultants Andres Duany and Elizabeth Peter-Zyberk. The paper by Dhru Thandani and Peter Hetzel explores the rationale behind the masterplan for this 90 acre site, which is already under construction. The plan uses an interconnected and legible street system together with the juxtaposition of diverse land uses to promote walking and social encounter.

In his paper, Christopher Williamson looks back to the original Masterplan for Central Milton Keynes, written in 1970. He observes that the original plan intended a greater variety of urban spaces and mix of uses than has been realised so far. The plan implemented by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation was designed primarily to suit the demands of the car rather than to produce the intended diversity of formal and informal relationships between buildings and spaces. In conclusion he calls for a reappraisal of the Masterplan and examines whether the existing built form of Central Milton Keynes could be adapted to include more of the original design principles.

The final paper in this issue is a reflective essay on the significance of sustainability concerns for urban planning and design. Peter Brand argues that environmental issues have become an inescapable and important framework for urban interventions. He proposes that the long tradition

of romanticist attitudes towards nature in urban design is no longer viable. Brand is critical of an environmental debate that has been used to re-legitimise urban planning and design, yet disregards urban social processes and problems.

In *Streetsweeper* Andres Duany concludes this issue with an appropriately controversial defence of Poundbury in Dorset. The piece is itself edited from a response to an American critique and we look forward to it generating further debate.

The Garden City conferences in the first decades of this century were certainly obsessed with many of the same issues that we try to tackle now: cheap, efficient public transportation; promoting mixed-use; achieving places attractive to the widest socio-economic classes; achieving social infrastructure; and so on. Almost fifty years ago, Lewis Keble described town and country planning as:

... the art and science of ordering the use of land and the character and siting of buildings and communication routes so as to secure the maximum practicable degree of economy, convenience and beauty. (Keble, 1952, p. 1)

Well, yes, all things being equal ... but all things are not equal. Towns, cities and countries have to compete in the global market for investment, so how is the maximum degree of 'economy, convenience and beauty' to be secured, by whom, and for which groups in society? Fortunately capital is not only efficiency driven, but susceptible to hedonism as well: good places to live and visit, shop and putt and not too far from the airport. But what of the 'swamps', the ordinary places? *These* are the everyday challenges of urban design.

References

- Hall, P. (1988) *Cities of tomorrow: an intellectual history of urban planning and design in the twentieth century*. Blackwell, Oxford.
- Keble, L. (1952) *Principles and Practice of Town and Country Planning*, Estates Gazette, London.

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