

WINTER 2009 ISSUE 109

# URBAN DESIGN

TOPIC: RE-IMAGINING  
THE CITY

FRANCIS TIBBALDS  
AWARD PROJECTS  
SHORTLIST:  
TEMPLE QUAY 2  
BRISTOL  
EAST STREET FARNHAM



URBAN  
DESIGN  
GROUP

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# UDG UPDATE

## Chairman's Thoughts

'There is nothing in the world that some man cannot make a little worse and sell a little cheaper, and he who considers price only is that man's lawful prey'  
John Ruskin

We appear to be in a bit of a fiscal fix. With the current financial turmoil that looks as though it may become a full blown crisis, the design and engineering professions, that have all a part to play in urban design and the shaping of the way we live in towns and cities, are going to be affected in some way; but will it be good, bad or catastrophic? During the last recession (at the time that urban design was becoming a more common term) many companies went bust and individuals had to rise to the challenge of redundancies and retraining. Is it going to be any different this time round?

Over the past decade housing has been one of the main drivers for regeneration, often at the neglect of creating truly mixed-use and liveable places with the social and economic infrastructure that are a necessity of communities. But this market now faces the paradox of falling prices, yet high demand. Tough targets for the delivery of new homes

have been set by central government but the market is seeing value slip away at a significant rate, and house builders are experiencing poor results, as reflected on the stock market. Within the financial turmoil is there a glimmer of hope, a silver lining to the cloud? The announcement by the government that they (read the tax paying public - you and I!) will be investing in significant infrastructure projects could be it. Schools and health services, parks and streets are the core elements of the neighbourhoods we live in. The professionals involved should be drawing on their core urban design skills to ensure that they respond to the neighbourhoods they serve and improve the physical connectivity and permeability that can help to build community cohesion. As work dwindles in other sectors, more professionals will compete to maintain their workloads. The danger is that fees will be undercut by companies with little experience or the skills required, and with a negative effect on quality. Those able to add value to development should succeed in winning work and I see urban design skills as being central to this. By understanding the broader requirements

of the community, new facilities can be provided with a powerful effect on a neighbourhood, enabling it to develop in a positive way and strengthening the community.

The UDG - the executive and the members - need to continue to promote urban design skills and a commitment to quality to the commissioners of such work. I trust that the Recognised Practitioner membership will be one way that we can do this and promote our involvement in place-making both as client (you know who you are!) and participants.

It is imperative that the group opposes any development that allows the creation of a built legacy that echoes the mistakes of the 60s and 70s that blighted cities and towns, were subject of many revisions and ultimately were demolished. We must promote urban design skills and take these opportunities to provide facilities that are truly responsive to the neighbourhood and community they serve.

'When we build let us think we build for ever'.  
John Ruskin (again!)

**Duncan Ecob**

## An invitation to get involved

'Why, Sir, you find no man, at all intellectual, who is willing to leave London. No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.'

So confided Dr Samuel Johnson to his companion Boswell on September 20, 1777. The eighteenth century: what a marvellous time; when, apparently, one could enter any London inn or coffee house and, sinking into a chair by a roaring fire, and on being presented with a pint of porter, and a goodly portion of roast beef enter into a furious debate on the latest fashions and architectural styles, the rights of man, or the revolution in France, shortly before expiring from the combined assaults of gout, ague, bloody flux and a myriad of other sundry waterborne and social diseases endemic at the time. What a life!

Where is such intellectual fervour and energy to be found today? A quick survey of the coffee houses around the UDG's offices in Cowcross Street, in London, has revealed the talk to be of celebrity chefs, celebrity big brother, and I'm a celebrity, get me out of here. Something of a disappointment. But you can still come to the meetings of the Urban Design Group at Cowcross Street and enter debates on the ubiquity of the perimeter block, the debasing of sustainability as a concept, permeability as a practice or the use of chromium yellow paint in the public realm as a means of crowd control. It is by such discourse that we advance and there is not enough of it. Not in London nor anywhere else. And this is where we appeal to the readers of Urban Design to stir themselves. The UDG is a network of people at a local level who are keen to share their enthusiasm and energy

for improving life in cities, towns and villages. And the opportunity is there to get involved.

If you are interested here's what to do

- keep a look out for events in the UDG's email newsletter (if you don't already receive this, send an email through to [admin@udg.org.uk](mailto:admin@udg.org.uk)).
- check the UDG website for details about people who may be working locally
- contact the UDG office if you would like to become a focus for activity where you live or work.

We look forward to hearing from you.

**Robert Huxford**

**URBAN  
DESIGN  
GROUP**

## DIARY OF EVENTS

Unless otherwise indicated, all LONDON events are held at The Gallery, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ at 6.30 pm. All tickets can be purchased at the door from 6.00pm: £5.00 non-members, £2.00 members, £1.00 students

### TUESDAY 20TH JANUARY 2009 (AFTERNOON EVENT)

#### MANUAL FOR MAIN STREETS

The publication of *Manual for Streets* in 2007 left the question of main streets unanswered. Many highway authorities still adhere to the use of the movement focused *Design Manual for Roads and Bridges* and adopt an approach best described as defensive design. At this afternoon event, held in partnership with the Institution of Highway Incorporated Engineers, leading authorities will outline their ideas about how to design and manage main streets.

### WEDNESDAY 21ST JANUARY 2009

#### DESIGNING FOR EDUCATION AND PLAY

Research into the impact of physical environment on the development of children has led to a growing appreciation of how considered design can aid the education process and the importance of creating stimulating spaces for play. Our speakers, Peter Owens from Colour: Urban Design Ltd and Walter Jack, of Walter Jack Studio will discuss their experiences in this area.

### WEDNESDAY 18TH FEBRUARY 2009

#### RE-IMAGINING THE CITY

An evening addressing some of the themes covered in issue 109 of Urban Design. For full details of this event, please see the UDG website.

### WEDNESDAY 18TH MARCH 2009

#### ASSESSING RESIDENTIAL DESIGN QUALITY

'If you can't measure it, you can't manage it' was the mantra of the 1980s MBA graduate. This movement went on to launch an avalanche of performance measures attempting to resolve the richness and diversity of human life into objective, abstract mathematical measures. Did they succeed, or were we beguiled by pseudoscience and false precision? Alan Stones, currently involved in the housing design quality assessment for Essex County Council, will look at the lessons which have been learned and those which are yet to be mastered.

### WEDNESDAY 22ND APRIL 2009

#### RETHINKING MASTERPLANNING – A WORKSHOP

April's evening event will provide an opportunity to go back to basics. What does it take to produce a successful masterplan? How can one ensure that the focus is not merely on completing the masterplan but actually completing the project? Workshop leaders include John Deffenbaugh and Rob Cowan.

### URBAN DESIGN GROUP STUDY TOUR 16-24 MAY 2009

#### MOSCOW AND THE GOLDEN RING

Moscow has undergone an enormous wave of development giving rise to conservation concerns. The Golden Ring is composed of some of Russia's oldest cities.

We shall be flying from London to Moscow and travelling around the Golden Ring towns by train and coach. The fee of £925 (£885 for UDG members) includes eight nights accommodation in tourist class hotels. Further details from Alan Stones, Fullerthorne, Church Street, Kelvedon, Essex CO5 9AH, phone 01376 571351; alanstones@fullerthorne.fsnet.co.uk

The last booking date is Friday 6th February 2009

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**COVER** Sketch of mega-structure by Jonathan Schwinge  
[www.schwinge.co.uk](http://www.schwinge.co.uk)

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**CURRENT SUBSCRIPTIONS** *Urban Design* is free to Urban Design Group members who also receive newsletters and the *Directory*

**ANNUAL RATES** Individuals £40 Students £20

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**LIBRARIES** £40

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**OVERSEAS MEMBERS** Pay a supplement of £3 for Europe and £8 for other locations

**INDIVIDUAL ISSUES** Of *Urban Design* cost £5

Neither the Urban Design Group nor the editors are responsible for views expressed or statements made by individuals writing in *Urban Design*.

# THE READERS' SURVEY

Thanks to all of you who replied to our readers survey. We had a good response and your comments are interesting and helpful. Most of all they show that we have a committed readership and that overall you are satisfied with what we produce. However we cannot be complacent and one of the reasons for having the survey was to help us improve on what we have.

On the visual aspects of the journal, there seems to be agreement on one issue: a number of you don't like the font or at least the size of the font. We are definitely going to address this in our re-design which will take place this year.

It is more difficult to satisfy all of you in terms of content: some want longer articles, other shorter ones; some find us too academic, others too pedestrian; some love the interviews, others hate them. In a way this should mean that we are doing OK even though we irritate some of our readers. But here is also where we need your help; a number of readers want more articles dealing with local authorities issues, more critical debate and in particular readers letters, more regional and international articles, a wider coverage of issues, some of which are mentioned specifically, and so on. We absolutely agree with you but we are not getting articles that cover those issues. *Urban Design* relies entirely on contributions from our members and we can only publish what we get from you.

We would love to have a letters page with your reactions and criticisms to previous articles, but we won't make them up! They must come from you, the readers. This issue and the last are packed with controversial ideas and undoubtedly some of you will not agree with them. One reaction to the last issue is published hereafter. We welcome more of them.

A number of you also have great ambitions for us; this is flattering and encouraging but not always realistic. We cannot increase the number of pages or the frequency of the publication without incurring costs; the UDG budget does not allow us to be more ambitious but if we manage to double the membership, maybe we will be able to do so. Similarly you suggest we interview or ask for articles from 'celebrities' (from Boris Johnson to Alex Sayle); it would be great to be able to do so but we may be too small for them to take notice of us but we can try.

Some of those respondents who have made suggestions have given us their names and we will approach them personally to ask them to contribute. Others have responded anonymously but if they feel like writing, editing a topic or helping in any other way, please let us know by emailing either Louise or myself. If you want to make the commitment and have ideas, you may wish to join the editorial board. The journal is yours and will only achieve what you want if you help us. We will try our best and in the meantime promise to improve the font!

SEBASTIAN LOEW

## Letter to the Editor, Urban Design

I enjoyed the Autumn 2008 Issue of *Urban Design*, all of the articles were interesting. Reading the Topic section, though, I had a marked sense of déjà vu. The Topic Leader seems to think he has made a set of discoveries on urban space, hitherto unnoticed or unremarked. For example, 'leftover space'; Jane Jacobs used this very phrase back in 1961 and earlier. Some of us were actually doing this sort of work – making use of forgotten space – in the early 1990s.

As for spaces between the public and private realms, John Punter, Franco Bianchini and myself were making exactly these points in 1986 in the very first issue of *Planning Practice and Research*. Spaces between tenancies and across different time slots have also been written about at length, not least in Comedia's 1991 study *Out of Hours*. But also in projects by people like Eric Reynolds, Bernie Gray, Matthew Conduit and Iain Tuckett, or my own work on Spitalfields Art Space in 1992 or with the Spike Community Group in 1989.

The articles are hailed as a combination of 'observation... theoretically informed critiques.... and recommendations for policy and practice'. As if this is something new. Jan Gehl has been doing this for 40 years, and he has never resorted to ludicrous and pretentious jargon.

The case studies were mostly a good read, and often inspiring. I like the Granville Cube for example. I have always admired Sophie Watson's work, and am intrigued to see that Ridley Road market has not changed much since I was working on Hackney's Cultural Strategy in 1992 – is the Writer's Centre still there? I also agree with David Bell on the smoking ban. I have taken up smoking cigars outside of pubs in Oxford Street, Sydney, as that is where the most interesting people are to be found. I think policy on liquor licensing has swung too far, and it may interest your readers to know that lockdowns, curfews, pub closures and earlier closing times are now being proposed in Melbourne, Sydney and Newcastle (NSW). I am advising the City of Sydney on this and other matters in Darlinghurst and Surry Hills.

There are lots of other great examples of small spaces being used, many of which I have worked on such as the Melbourne laneways, the re-use of arcades in Belfast, café culture in Manchester and secondary permeability in Dublin and Parramatta. None of this is remotely new, despite the arrogant call to 'challenge.. the objectives and methods of urban design practice'. What might these new objectives be, one wonders?

I do detect a worrying sign in most of these pieces, that urban design is being colonised by the urban far left. The clues are there in the use of words such as 'contested', 'solidarity' 'appropriation', the 'commodification' of spaces, 'social practices' and creative 'reinterpretation of the bench' by an anti-social cyclist. I see nothing wrong with residents seeking to move uncontrolled groups of noisy young people on, while the cyclist is selfishly 'appropriating' the bench and preventing old people from having a seat. Urban design is surely not intended to encourage anti-social behaviour. It is as if the use of these little spaces should be seen as part of the class struggle, a follow-up to the storming of the Winter Palace or the Paris Commune or the Cultural Revolution.

Divisive and extreme Marxism should be kept out of urban design. It would be good if it were removed from the planning and urban design schools too, and the arts and humanities in general. For Marxism, in the words of the American academic Jonathan Gottschall, is an obsolete theory that combines inadequate methods with an unbridled ideological bias, and as such it is the antithesis of knowledge.

John Montgomery, New South Wales

## Urban Design Group Study Tour 16-24 May 2009

Moscow has undergone an enormous wave of development over the last ten years, giving rise to urban conservation concerns. What plans are there for forthcoming development, and are measures being taken to safeguard the built heritage? We shall be meeting planning and urban design professionals to find out.

The Golden Ring is composed of some of Russia's oldest cities and was the cradle of medieval Russian civilisation. We shall be spending several days exploring the likes of Vladimir, Suzdal, Yaroslavl and Rostov-Veliky.

We shall be flying from London to Moscow and travelling around the Golden Ring towns by train and coach.

The fee of £925 (£885 for UDG members) includes eight nights' accommodation in tourist class hotels. Further details from Alan Stones, Fullerton, Church Street, Kelvedon, Essex CO5 9AH, phone 01376 571351 or e-mail

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The last booking date is Friday 6th February 2009.



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## Urban Connectivity

URBAN DESIGN GROUP CONFERENCE LIVERPOOL 10-11 OCTOBER 2008



Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 – what better place to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the UDG! This was marked by a dinner held in the Anglican Cathedral on the first evening of the conference, when six of the founder members of the UDG were present. Urban Connectivity, the conference subject is the key to the success or otherwise of regions, cities and smaller communities and highly evident in the recent developments in the city.

### POLITICAL CONNECTIVITY

Andrew Clarke of Taylor Young presented the context for the Liverpool city region set against The Northern Way and the North West region. He made an interesting comparison between the land area within the M25 and a similar area embracing Manchester and Liverpool. The Regional Strategy only included the value of design as objective 120, low down on priorities. This seemed a low setting considering the optimistic scale of the Peel Developments proposals for their Ocean Gateway area which would have a radical effect on the city's future prospects.

### CONNECTED PENNINE LANCASHIRE

Chris Standish looked at the opportunities for Elevate East Lancashire. His key words were quality and delivery, and the need to connect growth points in the area. It seemed

that East Lancashire was moving out of the Housing Market Renewal Area programme and into a development company mode for which he underlined the need for a clear masterplan. He showed some demonstration projects and the benefits of relating renewal schemes to a canal corridor.

### CULTURE AND CONNECTIVITY

Franco Bianchini provided an international perspective on this topic and bemoaned the erosion of local distinctiveness through the use of standardised metropolitan models such as 'The Guggenheim Effect'. He believed we needed a new approach to cultural planning that was intercultural rather than multicultural, and more interdisciplinary and holistic. Critical questions needed to be asked, often challenging the past and raising uncomfortable issues such as the Mafia connections in Italy. Undoubtedly this means that our often narrow viewpoint of uses, employment and physical form needs to include a wider awareness of the cultural background, its sources and how these can be used positively in an intercultural way.

### CONNECTIVITY OF DEVELOPMENTS

The work of Jake de Syllas is related to connectivity at the neighbourhood and site level; with increasing numbers living in large cities, more sense is needed about how people move on the ground.

Through proposals for Oxford Circus, he demonstrated how the pedestrian experience could be changed by allowing a pedestrian phase and diagonal movement across the junction, along with simplification of street furniture. At Euston Station a visibility study was used, and the proposals would provide a civic space outside the station with buses located on adjacent streets.

### WORKSHOPS

In the early afternoon, Jon Stonard introduced the workshops which focused on five areas; unfortunately the time was not really sufficient to enable conclusions to be communicated more widely around the conference. The participants gained from seeing parts of the city in better depth and understanding the benefits of greater connectivity between development opportunities. I saw what had happened in the Ropewalks where the area was the subject of a dedicated programme including maintenance, although this aspect had been prematurely withdrawn.

### THE FUTURE FOR URBAN DESIGN

Colin Haylock chaired a discussion about the next thirty years for urban design. He looked back at the situation thirty years ago - without the web or mobile phones, far fewer students in universities and more leisure time being predicted. Today we are faced with high energy prices, global urbanisation and economic problems, and no real sign of increasing leisure time. The panel added to those items denser cities, restrictions on car use, greater use of public transport, need for intercity transport, climate change, food production, people living longer. The point was made that only about 10% of the conference delegates were from the public sector. Thirty years ago that would have been very different – you could argue that the UDG has become more involved with private practice; is this just societal changes or more far reaching? One thing that was common to the past and today, was the continuing need to break down the barriers with traffic engineers. The role of design champions had been introduced although it was perhaps difficult to see the actual effect this had made.

### LIVERPOOL PLUS 30

Rob Burns of Liverpool City Council looked at the next 30 years for his

city, which he stressed was work in progress. The waterfront panorama has been recognised as part of a World Heritage Site and any new proposals need to maintain that quality or endanger its heritage status. The large scale Peel Developments proposals, Ocean Gateway, not only involved sites in Liverpool but also the south side of the Mersey; smaller grain studies were needed for both areas. He felt the challenge was to retain the edginess of the city, an essential quality of a port city. The European Capital of Culture had succeeded in bringing many more visitors to the city and this needed to be maintained in future years.

### SATURDAY WALK

From my point of view, getting to know Liverpool better was fundamental; the Friday workshop and the Saturday walks enabled that to happen. I went on the central Liverpool walk led by Trevor Skempton on the Saturday and the main impression gained was of the way the Liverpool One development was grafted onto the existing city centre. Whatever

one's opinion of the overall form of the new development and the high level open space, it connected seamlessly at ground level with the existing streets and shopping areas; additionally, where CPOs had been involved the replacement facilities added to the urban experience. The Albert Dock has always seemed too separated from the city centre and though Liverpool One improves that route and connection, it doesn't yet seem to be the ultimate answer. The extension of the canal system and the Liverpool Experience building will change the dynamics and this may generate other possibilities. No one can deny the importance of achieving connectivity at all scales from the region down to the city and individual parts and there is no better place than Liverpool to see this aspect at first hand. If you haven't been to Liverpool recently it is worth a visit if only to see the Liverpool One development and to reach your own conclusions about how it has enriched the urban experience in the city.

John Billingham



## Design and Access Statements Explained

THE GALLERY, LONDON 14 OCTOBER 2008

As the author of the latest UDG sponsored publication, *Design and Access Statements Explained* (see review page 40) Rob Cowan, in his talk, presented a commentary and guidance on the best and worst practice.

He described design and access statements since their introduction in 2004, as generally of poor quality, with many developer teams failing to understand their potential as a key design explanation device. The inclusion of 'access' within the umbrella term of a design statement was seen as probably the result of zealous lobbying, as information about access is just one of the layers that should be presented to the reader. The use of the DAS to explain the design process has not yet been grasped: many use them to post-rationalise masterplans, sometimes designed by others and with the author not visiting the site (and this included the audience's sheepish confessions). The homework mantra of 'show your workings out' are what the statements are ideal for, enabling the reader to understand and be convinced that the best design has been achieved,

through the peeling back of design layers. Throughout, Rob's wonderful cartoon characters conveyed his ideas with ironic humour and charm. Rob recommended that the size of *Design and access statements* should be no more than 10g per hectare of development proposed, to avoid lengthy and repetitive statements.

To demonstrate how a DAS can help the planning process, he used two examples, one Lacey Hickie Caley's designs for Gun Wharf in Plymouth, and the other in Shirecliffe in Sheffield. The LHC scheme could be seen to have evolved from a series of design analyses and decisions, so that the built scheme was as expected and exemplary. The scheme in Sheffield showed far less site-awareness and logic by the design team, and the final scheme did not persuade the audience that it fitted its context. Using the Quality categories in *By Design* should have enabled both schemes to be correctly explained and anticipated by the local community and the planning authority. Moreover a DAS has the potential to form part of the conditions for a planning consent.



Questions raised issues of the slowness of the design community to adopt DAS, and many in the audience admitted that submitted design statements were often barely worth reading, with overcomplicated language or involving too many technical appendices. This emphasised the need for developer teams to see the positive role for DAS and, where there is a development brief in place, to respond directly to the objectives set out.

Louise Thomas

## Francis Tibbalds Project Awards THE GALLERY

Guitarist Mike Georgiades welcomed with music the numerous UDG members arriving at the Gallery to find out who would be the winner of the first FTPA and celebrate the outcome. This award was instituted by *Urban Design* under the leadership of John Billingham to encourage and promote quality urban design and the articles in the magazine. The success of this first year of awards has encouraged us to continue and expand the awards scheme.

UDG chairman Duncan Ecob introduced the evening and John Billingham outlined the proceedings. George Ferguson gave the flavour of the event with an illustrated tour of his ideas about urbanism. Sebastian Loew who had chaired last year's selection jury referred to the procedure and introduced the eight shortlisted teams whose projects had been published in *UD* during the last twelve months; they had

an opportunity to present the essence of their scheme in five minutes, a difficult task which they all accomplished brilliantly. The UD membership had voted for their preferred scheme but only two people in the room knew who the winner was. Following the presentations Janet Tibbalds who chairs the Francis Tibbalds Trust, opened the envelope to announce that Urban Initiatives with their Masterplan for Scotswood Expo, Newcastle-upon-Tyne had won the 2008 Francis Tibbalds Project Award. Kelvin Campbell and his team received the commemorative plaque from Janet Tibbalds and John Billingham.

The event, generously sponsored by publisher John Wiley, continued informally around drinks and nibbles. We hope that next year's ceremony will be even bigger and better and will attract the highest standards of our profession.



## People Shaping Places, King's Cross Central BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL 20 OCTOBER 2008, TALKING CITIES LECTURE SERIES



Community engagement was the theme of the fourth in the lecture series sponsored by Atkins and organised by Birmingham City University and MADE. Bob West, Head of Urban Design and Renewal at Camden Council, reflected on the mind-bendingly complex King's Cross community engagement process.

The aim of these lectures is to help inform the development of Birmingham's ambitious *Big City Plan* for 1000ha of the town centre and learn from pioneering work on major projects elsewhere. Bob West gave an entertainingly laconic account of the ten year community consultation process carried out by the developer Argent up to planning application stage, then continued by Camden Council up to the present. The

statistics for this process were as gob-smackingly impressive as commensurate for such a huge project on 26 hectares of derelict Central London land. 200 community groups were formed into Development Forums covering business, access, design and the elderly with the help of 32 different language group facilitators trained on site. Bob was particularly pleased with their training programmes and the extent to which local young people got involved from sitting on the judging panel of the design charrette for the 18 architects who came up with design concepts for the new civic square in front of King's Cross station, to their organisation and manning of public exhibitions in the station. On reflection he would have liked to have mixed the younger people more into the adult forums, as they are the ones who can carry on the process over the 25 year build out period. He summarised the engagement challenges as: making sure people understand complex proposals, value of CGI images of proposals but community needs certainty that WYSIWYG, empowerment to achieve local needs and the usual risk

of consultation fatigue over such a long process.

Put on the spot by a questioner to list the changes made in response to pressure from residents he listed the community fund for local small businesses, changes to routing patterns and the large number of heritage buildings and structures retained. Many designers can be ambivalent about consultation. While glad that the bad old days of the infallible designer have gone, the prospect of long evenings and weekends defending work can be a trying experience. But we all know that it improves plans and encourages community ownership and is time well spent. Birmingham can now learn from King's Cross to get worthwhile engagement with its own culturally diverse population to deliver its *Big City Plan*. The next lecture is on 26 November but those not able to get to the Town Hall can watch in the comfort of their computers by downloading films of the lectures from [www.bcu.ac.uk/urbandesign](http://www.bcu.ac.uk/urbandesign)

Malcolm Moor



## The 'Eco-Towns' Story

'Eco-Towns' have certainly gone the rounds as the nation's favourite punchbag, and that is before they have left the drawing board.

Even their impeccable environmental credentials have only served to make them more detestable, with people protesting that protecting the planet is the last thing on the minds of those intent on building over the countryside.

So you might not have guessed that they have their secret admirers. But just when plans for the 12 remaining 'eco-towns' are reeling from the combination of the credit crunch, a struggling construction industry and fierce local opposition, a Friends group has emerged.

This autumn, two dozen groups from Shelter and Help the Aged to the NUS and the Trades Union Congress threw their weight behind 'eco-towns', arguing that they are essential to providing more social rented and low cost housing as well as setting new standards for energy efficiency.

The new coalition argues that objectors have gained the limelight unfairly. Whether that is true or not, what the opposition probably reflects is a commonly held low opinion of the quality of new housing schemes. Most residents fear – too often, with some justification – that new schemes will bring nothing to the party except more local traffic.

'Eco-Towns' could be first-rate test beds for making whole places sustainable. Although half of emissions causing climate change relate to the built environment, and urbanisation is accelerating, we do not even have a route map towards making our towns and cities environmentally sustainable.

But what do you actually test? Entrepreneurial charity BioRegional and CABE explored this in their new joint report to advise government, *What makes an eco-town?*. It draws on CABE's understanding of what it takes to create workable and sustainable places and BioRegional's work in creating sustainable settlements. BioRegional originated the idea of 'one planet living', in response to the fact that if everyone in the world consumed as much as we do in the UK, we would need three planets to support us.

It argues that to be worthy of the name, an eco-town should be designed to make it easy for residents to reduce their ecological footprint by two thirds (to 1.8 global hectares), and their

carbon dioxide emissions by 80 per cent below 1990 levels.

*What makes an 'eco-town'?* describes the ambitious targets this entails, for construction, home energy, transport, food, consumer goods and waste; and some of the steps to try, like generous space to grow food, ample tree canopy cover, attractive alternatives to shopping as the default leisure activity, and less car dependency.

We triggered some outraged blogging when we began describing the ways in which you need to assess whether those steps are working. We argue for methodical monitoring, such as using thermographic cameras to assess the heat loss from homes, and that sounds uncomfortably close to intrusive regulation of personal lives.

Residents in BioRegional's eco-village, BedZed, in south London, however, have routinely shared this information with the site managers for years. The purpose is to learn what works and what doesn't.

Most residents of new developments, for instance, generally have poor access to fresh, healthy local food. You can argue that some new measures will more than halve the ecological footprint and carbon dioxide emissions associated with diet - making space for food growing, for instance, and improving links with local farms. But to prove that they work, you need to ask people about their diet.

The report points out that 'eco-towns' should be designed to encourage people to buy less stuff, with a target of halving the ecological impact of consumer goods bought in them. Measures to achieve this might include greater repair and re-use activity, swap shops and encouraging local sustainable goods and services, all of which will maintain a vibrant local economy.

Places designed to offer sociable and healthy alternatives to shopping will look distinctive, with priority given to recreation including great parks and play spaces, spaces suitable for teenagers; and a full range of high quality sports facilities.

The report describes how 'eco-towns' can reduce carbon dioxide from driving by 80 per cent. This means providing good, frequent and reliable low carbon public transport, and supporting walking and cycling with a density of 50-100 dwellings per hectare. 'Eco-Towns' should be as much about creating local employment as they are about building homes.



It is interesting to reflect on what else is on the drawing board. CABE design reviews the most significant schemes being built out over the next five years. It is true that we are seeing a growing interest in reducing energy demand and CO2 emissions within buildings. But there's nothing like the same evidence of those critical urban design interventions which support people in low carbon lifestyles, such as functional green infrastructure to help adaptation, reducing travel demand by creating attractive, walkable places, or creating local networks sharing energy and heat beyond site boundaries.

Although urban sustainability is clearly a design issue, architects, landscape architects and urban designers are not in the vanguard. This is partly because they need evidence on which to base their designs. 'Eco-Towns' provide a chance to advance and prove the value of different patterns of living and working.

The important thing is to build towards a big coherent plan of campaign for measurable emission reductions. If 'eco-towns' are to have a fundamental purpose, it must be to show how we can all live and work in well-designed, low-carbon neighbourhoods.

**Stella Bland, Head of Communications**  
 What makes an 'Eco-Town'? [www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentid=2762](http://www.cabe.org.uk/default.aspx?contentid=2762)

The Great Bow Yard  
 ©Richard Mullane/  
 Design for Homes

## The Urban Design Interview

### Peter Davis



#### What is your current job and how long have you been there?

I'm an Associate Director at Bennett Urban Planning, part of tp bennett LLP. I've been here since February 2008. It is my first taste of the private sector and I'm having a ball so far.

#### Can you describe the path that you followed to become an urban designer and what motivated you?

I guess I was always interested in the design of places and how people would use them. As a child I loved exploring London and any new place I'd visit. I would photograph them and, when I could, I'd sit and draw.

I thought it might be buildings that interested me most and I had ambitions to be an architect at one stage, but I wanted to shape towns. I decided to be a town planner. I pretty quickly realised that this only partly satisfied my ambitions. When I trained, planners weren't encouraged to think of themselves as designers and Urban Design as a discipline was in its infancy. Thankfully the South Bank Planning degree course had an Urban Design module in it led by a certain Sebastian Loew. My path was clear from then on. I went on to do the MA at Westminster.

#### What do you find exciting about your work?

I find mixing in multi-disciplinary

teams and meeting different people very rewarding. When I was at Kent County Council managing the Kent Design Initiative it really brought home just how important it is to work collaboratively. We all have a role to play and one of the most difficult things to work with sometimes is a failure of any one group to recognise that their actions have an impact on design quality and the success of places. It is an exciting part of the job to persuade them that they do and I have never failed to learn from the experience. It is great to see a zealous urban design convert too.

#### What do you think are the most important skills of an urban designer?

Diplomacy and a good sense of direction will get you off to a flying start. I think an ability to bring together commercial awareness with a design-led brain will keep you employed. A spell in a local authority will give you the patience and endurance you'll need to get through to the end of a long career where often you can be an isolated voice.

#### What would you like to be doing in ten years' time?

1) Still working. 2) Opening an exhibition of a life's work in urban and street photography – it'll give me a target date for finally clearing out my loft.

#### As an urban designer, do you have a role model?

I think it would have to be Francis Tibbalds. He was the man who, for me, put planners in touch with their creative side by saying it was alright for us to be concerned about the design of places when a government was busy trying to dismantle the planning system. I wish he had lived to see the impact he and a few other leading lights in the urban design world have had. I always envied him his skills with a pen – boy could he draw!

#### If you were to recommend an urban design scheme or study (past or present) for an award, what would you chose?

A place I am particularly enjoying at the moment is London's South Bank. The way it is coming together is really remarkable. As a teenager, I remember sneaking into a street sweeper's cart depot to play at weekends, which I think must be where the Globe is now. It was

an industrial wasteland then – docks in decline, riverfront industries leaving, nothing but the prospect of big grey offices to replace it. Now the walk from London Bridge through to Westminster is a joy at virtually any time of day.

#### Where is your favourite town or city and why?

I love Barcelona. The way it transformed itself from a slightly tired City in the early 1990s (pre Olympics) through its attention to public space, with some truly stunning new parks made a big impression on me.

#### Where is your most hated place and why?

Any edge-of-town-style retail 'park' in urban settings where there is a perfectly good (but failing) town centre close by. Yes, I know we all use them and apparently we don't want to go to town centres anymore to do that kind of shopping, but do they all have to be so unremittingly depressing places to shop as a pedestrian? Not only are the distances immense, but negotiating rows of cars, scrabbling over low walls or across barren beds of failed landscaping where the soil is compacted through lack of a proper path on a pedestrian desire line is just uncivilised. No-one comes out of this very well - we are all responsible: as consumers, as developers, as designers and as local planning authorities.

#### What advice would you give to UD readers?

If you don't already, draw something everyday. Doesn't matter how small or cartoony. It will keep you in touch with the simplicity and power of the pen and paper.

#### What should the Urban Design Group be doing now or in the future?

Anything you can do to foster a better understanding of the link between cost and quality would be time well spent. I don't think there's any financial excuse for poor design, but is anyone with me on this?

#### Finally, who would you like to see interviewed by UD?

Jonathan Meades would be fascinating, but you'd have to change most of the questions. Failing that, a leading practitioner in Europe would be interesting.



## Urban Design and the British Urban Renaissance, part 4: King's Cross, Central London, Docklands and the Thames Gateway

Matthew Carmona reports on the final seminar in the ESRC series

The ESRC seminar series on urban design and the British urban renaissance finally came to a close at UCL in June. The series provided a rare and welcome opportunity to dissect an important dimension of Government urban policy. By its close it had delivered four extremely stimulating seminars exploring the urban renaissance in 12 British cities (reported in the last three issues of *Urban Design*) and, latterly, four areas of London (reported here).

In London the areas chosen took us from King's Cross, just north of the Central London congestion zone, into the zone itself, then eastwards out of the city to Docklands (more specifically to the Isle of Dogs) and on to the Thames Gateway. In doing so we only scratched the surface of the diverse contexts that constitute London, but the choice enabled us to explore some of the critical opportunity areas identified in the London Plan, as well as the impact of the Plan's urban renaissance inspired drive to intensify and strengthen London's core (some would argue at the expense of its periphery).

This article draws out a selection of the key themes that emerged over the two days from the eight detailed presentations (a local authority vision and an academic critique for each area), 12 formal responses to these (from involved architects, developers, planners, community representatives, etc.) and hours of animated discussion.

### LONDON IS DIFFERENT

Despite the aspirations of many of the cities we had explored in the seminar series, London remains the only UK city with a serious international presence. It is the richest region in the EU; has been and continues to be the subject of major infrastructure investment; has a

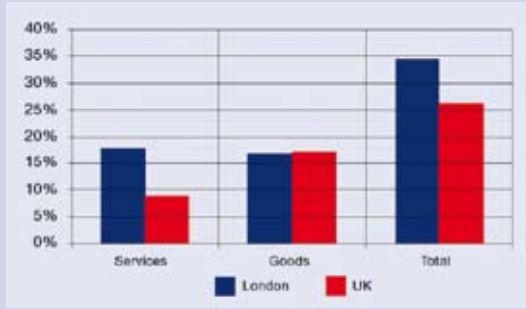
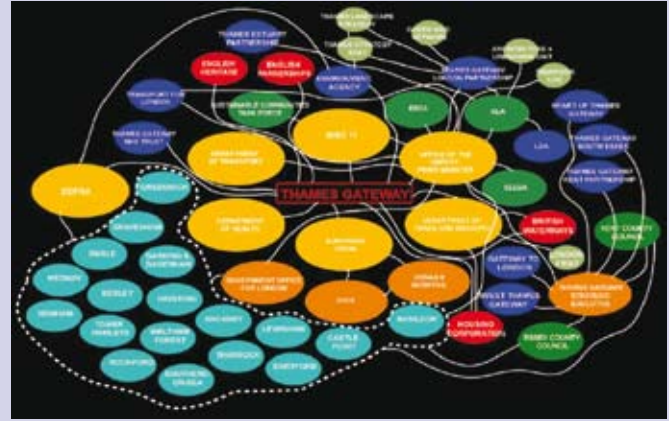
growing population, with (in its central areas) plenty of high income groups; has little unused land; and, arguably, in many areas and many respects is an exemplar of good urbanist principles.

But, side by side with its prosperity are some of the poorest communities in the UK, coping with the highest cost of living. It is a massive net exporter of wealth to the rest of the UK; there continues to be a decline of the middle classes; huge international speculation drives up asset values; it has a national and international role which often takes precedence over local concerns; and it is contending with a crisis of skills in the planning sector where the confidence to plan positively and to demand more from developers often does not exist.

For all these reasons, the influential 1999 yellow book from the Urban Task Force translated poorly to the London context. London's pressures, problems, qualities and the scale of its opportunities are just too different.

### THE DOMINANCE OF CENTRAL LONDON

Despite its differences, a theme that came through strongly in London, as it had in the other seminars, was the need for a better balance in policy and associated design and regeneration efforts between centre and periphery – urban and suburban. In this respect the urban focus of the (appropriately named) Urban Task Force had been taken up and reflected in Ken Livingstone's London Plan. Thus development such as that at King's Cross or in the Docklands continues to be judged by its contribution to the expansion of the central London activity zone. As a result central London expands ever outwards, whilst the suburbs might convincingly argue that their potential renaissance contribution has been overlooked.



Previous page Isle of Dogs in 2014  
 This page top left Thames Gateway identity Project, CABE  
 Left GDP by sector, London and the UK  
 Above Thames Gateway governance (Terry Farrell)  
 Opposite page Granary Square, King's Cross  
 Illustration: ©Anderson-Terzic

One area where this is clearly not the case is the Thames Gateway, where in one guise or another policy has emphasised a massive potential for regeneration since the early 1990s (currently the target is for 160,000 new homes and 180,000 new jobs). Despite this, it is clear that considerable argument still exists over whether such a thing as the Thames Gateway exists at all. Thus beyond its life as an intellectual and policy construct, is the Thames Gateway ever likely to operate as a functional entity or as any sort of real place? Consensus suggested that it represents a false characterisation of a complex territory which is divided rather than united by the Thames.

Again, the yellow book did not seem to relate well to this context, whilst, in the absence of significant public funding, the determination of the British investment community to look to the city and the west rather than to the east for opportunities, does not seem to bode well for a privately driven regeneration. This was a lesson that had also dogged Docklands in its early years.

**IN FOR THE LONG HAUL**

A series of process-related lessons were apparent from the case studies, first amongst which was that renaissance is a long-term project. The story of Docklands regeneration, for example, dates back 35 years and a renaissance (as understood by the Urban Task Force) is only now being achieved in some parts of this massive territory, whilst in others – the Royals – it still seems a long way off. Elsewhere, King's Cross is finally being delivered after a litany of failure dating back to the 1980s, whilst the Thames Gateway still has to build up a head of steam.

But this should not be seen as wasted time. In Docklands, the period has seen a maturing of the design and planning approach, whilst the 6 years that Argent took to negotiate their planning permission and development contribution package at King's Cross was a period of gradual convergence of opinion between public and private partners. During this period the Mayor and English Heritage were also locked in to the proposals which for Camden helped avoid the uncertainties of a public enquiry.

**PUBLIC OR PRIVATE VISION?**

A startling conclusion from the seminar was that the design and planning vision in London is largely coming from the private sector, or not at all. Perhaps this is inevitable in a context where, unlike Paris

or Barcelona, the public sector in London does not have the freedom necessary to make the sort of investment that is required to transform areas. Instead it seeks private sector solutions, as was the case at King's Cross.

Despite this, where no market exists, huge amounts of public money have been required to kick start one, as was the experience in the Docklands, although this was only made available grudgingly, after-the-fact and when private sector disaster promised to derail the whole project. Today, in a context where public funds are increasingly limited, the success of Thames Gateway will be dependent on working with the private sector to attract resources (and preferably some large catalytic projects), but in the absence of a clear public sector vision or infrastructure investment, the danger is that the area will be turned over to the default short-term option – sprawl.

Lora Nicolaou commented that the only real spatial vision for the Gateway has come from Terry Farrell who envisaged 90% of the development occurring in the London Gateway and 10% elsewhere, but argued that this has yet to feed into policy. The question was asked, is this a gateway to London, its backyard, or a sustainable place in its own right. No clear view seems forthcoming whilst even CABE's *Thames Gateway Identity* project, an attempt to intelligently characterise the area, has been sidelined.

Elsewhere, the ability of local authorities to set the agenda seems to be weak, not helped by the huge distraction of moving from UDPs to LDFs. Thus lots of policies exist, some (eg Westminster) highly refined and very robust, but there remains a general lack of clear spatial vision. Moreover, where such a vision does exist, typically it is commissioned from, or led by, the private sector (eg Bankside's Urban Forest concept). This leads to an over-concentration on reactionary development control and ad hoc regeneration initiatives to ensure that the benefits of development are shared and do not pass the community by.

It also leads to big contrasts between highly planned private estates – such as Canary Wharf – and surrounding areas with little or no planning and too much faith placed on market opportunism, exemplified by the recent overheating of the buy-to-let market. It seems that in the absence of a coherent public sector vision, the market will decide. Unfortunately, as the Docklands case study demonstrated, market forces acting alone will not drive out urban poverty.



### CERTAINTY VS. FLEXIBILITY

Another important lesson from the Isle of Dogs was that investor-developers abhor a vacuum; instead they seek the certainty provided by a clear vision that guarantees their investment and the quality of the environment into which it will sit. At the same time they seek the flexibility necessary to adapt to changing market circumstances. At King's Cross a hybrid approach is being used to achieve this, namely an outline permission citing a flexible range of uses, but with detailed design parameters expressed through a spatial masterplan and a form of design coding.

Here lies a challenge for local authorities who remain concerned to deliver decisions that are legally robust with policies that are not open to appeal, whilst in fact often being willing to negotiate on almost anything (except it seems views of St Paul's). To secure quality outcomes in such circumstances requires a highly skilled planning service (not always available) and a willingness to go to the wire. In central London, high quality street design guidance is helping to fill some of the gaps.

### THE GOOSE THAT LAYS THE GOLDEN EGGS

The area where negotiation is often longest and most complex concerns the agreement of the planning gain package that sits alongside the planning permission. Increasingly it seems that Section 106 agreements are being relied upon to deliver a whole set of 'public' goodies, from energy commitments to affordable housing and social infrastructure. As such this topic provoked some of the most heated discussion with general agreement that this is an inadequate mechanism to fund such features, particularly where ownership is fragmented, or where planning gain is simply being used to fund elements that anyway add value to a development. Nevertheless the case studies revealed mind-blowing packages of planning gain funded by correspondingly huge increases in commercial space.

Yet whilst one major developer argued that planning authorities should be confident enough to ask for more, others felt that when the pot is limited there has to be a trade-off, for example between public realm or affordable housing. In so doing, many argued we are missing the point which is that both need to be funded and that there is a public liability here. In this respect the experience at Bankside was useful where public SRB funding has been used strategically

to gradually ratchet up market contributions to the public realm, eventually leading to deals for exclusively private funded public space.

### A FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE

A further predominantly process-related concern related to questions of governance and responsibility. The impact of the Mayor had been extremely tangible in sanctioning the renaissance inspired drive towards an intensified central city (often in the face of opposition from local authorities). It had also been tangible in supporting the delivery of higher urban design standards in relation to many major developments such as those planned for the Isle of Dogs. Yet elsewhere the Mayor's presence has been hardly felt, for example at King's Cross (perhaps an indirect vote of confidence in the team in charge). Moreover no one seems to be in the driving seat when dealing with some of London's most intractable problems, such as what to do with Oxford Street or London's infamous gyratory systems.

As Terry Farrell demonstrated, such spaces have the potential to be reclaimed as some of the Capital's most problematic landscapes emerged for no good reason (eg the Euston Road underpass). Despite this, convincing Transport for London and putting together the necessary funding packages to make things happen is a major challenge. In the Thames Gateway, an infinitely more fragmented governance structure is clearly contributing to the failure to secure a coherent vision, despite efforts by CABE to establish standards through a Design Pact; Design for London to drive up quality through better briefing and a series of design frameworks; and a new role for Terry Farrell as Design Champion for the proposed Thames Gateway Park. It seems that the area has become a political football, and a gravy train for consultants, whilst there remains a lack of political commitment to address questions of quality.

### ADDING VALUE THROUGH DESIGN

But outside of the Gateway, general agreement existed that there had been an urban renaissance (of sorts) in much of central London; that the Isle of Dogs is maturing well, although still a work in progress; and that King's Cross offers great potential as a future exemplar. So despite on-going pessimism about the state of public realm in London, good things have been happening, both big (eg the redesigned Trafalgar Square or South Bank emerging as a real place) and small



(eg the Seven Dials shared street space). We have also seen better cross river connectivity; the congestion zone success (traffic reduced by 21% and congestion by 30%); bus use and cycling increases (40% and 83% respectively since 2000); and to the east, the regeneration impact of the Jubilee Line. Moreover, new schemes in the pipeline are much more outward looking and traditionally urban in nature than their recent counterparts, including King's Cross and Wood Wharf on the Isle of Dogs, both of which are rejecting an introspective commercial model.

In these latter cases, Argent and the Canary Wharf Group respectively are both developers and estate managers, and hence are interested in the long-term quality and profitability of their developments. For them the real profitability lies in the 3rd, 4th and 5th rent reviews, rather than in the initial capital values. These developers also feel a responsibility to contribute to raising skills in their surrounding marginalised communities in order to give access to the new markets being created. In part this is aimed at preserving long-term investment returns by raising local prosperity. But, as the seminar series demonstrated, the experiences of these companies and a few others have portended the return of a design-led commercial model across the UK that emulates the successful private management model of London's great estates which are still generating handsome returns from areas such as Marylebone High Street and Bloomsbury many generations after their original development.

#### BUT AT WHAT COST?

Yet despite the positive achievements, a range of critiques of London's urban renaissance were apparent. These ranged from the specific such as the canyon effect to be created by concentrating commercial development in the southern end of the King's Cross masterplan, to the general and often repeated such as the need to return to internal space standards and to external play space standards to ensure more liveable residential developments. Other reoccurring critiques included:

**Increasing privatisation of public space** – with the reduced public freedoms this implies, often driven by occupier expectations that

security risks should be reduced. Thus major developments such as More London on the South Bank, or Canary Wharf are taking significant parts of the city into private ownership, and instigating highly managed and controlled regimes. The notable exception here was King's Cross, where Camden has negotiated hard to ensure that the streets will be adopted as normal London Streets

**Increasing privatisation of the skyline** – with some commentators (including Price Charles) increasingly critical of the 'pimples' (as he describes them) planned to appear across the London Skyline. Criticism here revolved around the strategic views policies of Ken Livingstone that can be seen as a policy of omission rather than as a positive policy to decide which areas are appropriate for building high. Arguably this is leading to a messy skyline and to the gradual erosion of important historic views across the Capital.

**The marginalisation of conservation** – reflecting a basic conflict between the preservation of built heritage and establishing a developable solution. Thus across London, it was argued, heritage is being insensitively adapted or dwarfed by inevitable intensification pressures, with more sensitive approaches such as Islington's Regents Quarter few and far between (despite reports that such schemes deliver a better return on investment).

**An emphasis on landscape at the expense of built form** – represented a particularly trenchant critique reserved for the Thames Gateway. There, early evidence suggests that very poor quality development is being achieved and that the Thames is virtually being ignored in the hope that a new parkland will deliver regeneration. Thus aspirations that the area can capitalise on its natural, historic and cultural assets are not – so far – bearing fruit, whilst a new suburban renaissance model seems to be required.

**The elephant in the room, sustainability** – which was largely being ignored across the case studies, despite the fact that London possesses the highest carbon footprint per head in the country. In this case the Thames Gateway represented the positive exception. There an eco-region has been mooted, although a lack of infrastructure and a drive for quantity over quality seems to threaten its delivery.



**Opposite page** Two new urban spaces, Canary Wharf  
**Above and right** Proposed urban spaces, King's Cross



**The problems of diversity** – featured in two senses. First, reflecting the difficulties associated with delivering a mix of uses when occupiers are resistant to the incorporation of ground floor active uses under their buildings because of perceived security problems (or, in the case of Canary Wharf, even to boats on the water surrounding their buildings). Second, relating to the problems of management when London's 24 hour economy conflicts with the rights of residents to some peace and quiet. The latter problem seems unresolvable in the context of new permissive licensing laws, whilst Westminster exemplifies the benefits of robust planning policy to overcome the former.

### GENTRIFICATION IS RIFE

But perhaps the greatest concern was raised over the question of gentrification, and how this particularly acute problem in the Capital could be addressed. Today, much of London passes the much vaunted cappuccino test, but the benefits of regeneration have not been shared equally; communities remain starkly divided, both socially and physically; the second home and investment markets have grossly inflated prices in some areas (now being re-balanced); and those on middle incomes find it increasingly hard to secure housing of any sort close to work. The danger is that renaissance may itself lead to greater displacement and gentrification as areas of the city with viable low rent economies that cater for the non-corporate and non-profit sectors are swept away in the name of regeneration. King's Cross represents a case-in-point.

Thus Mike Edwards argued that regeneration is viewed in old and new narratives where old equates to decay and new to vitality and progress. For him, citizens have little direct power to influence outcomes and therefore areas are poorly inoculated against the inevitable pressures of gentrification. In London this has been accelerated by blatant profiteering following the right to buy, exacerbated by a shortage of new affordable homes being built. On the positive side, arguments were made that gentrification is not always a bad thing, and that in some areas a more mixed community is to be desired. Moreover, the current downturn means that affordable housing may be more deliverable over the short term.

### AND FINALLY, THE QUESTION OF LAND

Whilst being aware of the diversity of often conflicting views, I have tried to draw out above where consensus lay as well as some of the issues that were raised but which remained unanswered. Underpinning each of these are tensions over land ownership and control that quickly come to the fore in any development process. On this front three final conclusions can be drawn out.

First, when land is unified under a single private ownership the value of 'public goods' such as public space can be identified and internalised within development schemes (although at the risk of privatisation). However, when relying on developers to establish a vision and to deliver in such circumstances, local authorities need to stand firm in order to ensure that clear public design aspirations are being met. This is particularly so where developers feel there is nothing in it for them, for example connectivity to surrounding estates.

Second, when land ownership is divided, where major infrastructure is divisive, or where the scale of thinking required is strategic in nature, processes of visioning and the robust control of what the market subsequently brings forward will nearly always be dependent on a strong public sector to lead to achieve quality. In this respect, London is being failed.

Finally, despite the huge potential power wielded by the public sector as major landowner and infrastructure provider, this power is not being used as a positive tool in regeneration. As such, land prices and the market dividend from infrastructure upgrades are not being captured as a means to fund something better than the market standard. As elsewhere, but perhaps more so in London given the value of these investments, the public sector is operating with one hand tied behind its back.

**Matthew Carmona, Professor of Planning and Urban Design, Head of the Bartlett School of Planning, UCL**



## Achieving Place Quality

Lee Pugalis attempts to demonstrate that cultural vitality and economic competitiveness can reinforce each other

A whole raft of studies have recently promulgated that pervasive commercial forces are eroding the publicness and cultural plurality of urban public spaces. Town Centre Management Companies, Public-Private Partnerships, Joint Ventures, City Development Companies and Business Improvement Districts, to name just a clutch of mechanisms, are being utilised throughout the UK to improve neglected urban landscapes. As their names suggest, they provide the platform for the private sector to take a greater responsibility for the design, management, ownership and governance of urban public space.

The paradox, however, is how in a business world, dominated by global flows of capital, can place-quality improvements best cater for the needs of local people and diverse communities of interest? This article identifies the links between cultural activity and economic vitality, making the case that the relationship between each of these objectives is not necessarily dichotomous but can be mutually reinforcing. The arguments contained here are based on a larger research project, *Public Space Vitality*, jointly commissioned by Culture North East and One NorthEast Regional Development Agency.

### FIVE CASE STUDIES

The research, recently undertaken by the Global Urban Research Unit at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, sought to identify the links between cultural activity and economic vitality through an analysis of five case studies in the North East of England. The spaces studied, reflecting a cross section of prominent urban public spaces, were Alnwick Market Place, Durham Millennium Square, Newcastle-upon-Tyne Monument-Old Eldon Square, Redcar Esplanade and Stockton High Street.

The empirical investigation is largely based on information gathered from face-to-face interviews with different actors and agencies with a stake in the selected urban spaces, including town centre managers, management contractors, planners, designers, policy officers, and business representatives. In addition, findings are based on engagement

with everyday users and 'walking the streets'.

Opinions were strong and varied about 'what makes a place work' and what is the role of culture in this process. The research revealed many contradictions and different ideological positions, but a recurrent strand emerging from users and those with a stake in the case study spaces was that actions detrimental to cultural vitality would have negative impacts on the economic performance at a variety of spatial scales. Put another way, respondents considered a thriving public life in urban spaces to be crucial to the economic competitiveness of locales. However, the way to go about designing, delivering and managing this was less unanimous and straightforward.

### IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY

Investment in aesthetic improvements or cultural activities is not a guarantee for success and automatic process. Multiple factors affect the nature of impacts and so it is important that policy responses are tailored to places. This would suggest a detailed understanding of the needs and motivations of key stakeholders such as property owners, residents and businesses, everyday users, tourists and non-users so that problems being represented in policy spaces are commensurate with the spatial practices of lived space on the ground.

The research argues that 'Quality is the watchword for all public space intervention', drawing attention to the fact that public spaces are long-term investments and recommending that investing in place quality should not be considered an add-on or bonus. This means emphasising quality in the design, implementation and on-going maintenance of places. An implication of this may be more focused public sector intervention, what One NorthEast refers to as 'fewer, bigger, better' projects.

This obviously has considerable benefits for the spatially demarcated areas that are considered strategic sites or prominent locations surrounded by leisure, retail and business uses such as the five case studies. But such trade-offs may unintentionally marginalise peripheral





**Opposite page** Busy Old Eldon Square, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
**Left** Successful renovation of Monument, Old Eldon Square, Newcastle-upon-Tyne  
**Right** Millennium Square, Durham

public spaces, those not deemed economically competitive. Therefore the everyday cultural value (public life) should not be derailed by opportunist economic strategies. The danger of a purely market driven philosophy needs to be scrutinised through a holistic lens which considers the long-term economic, social and environmental impacts in a balanced fashion before decisions are taken. Short-term wins can often result in long-term costs.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SPACE

Although conclusions remain tentative, time-space specific and by no means comprehensive, key findings to date suggest that:

- Urban public spaces that promote everyday cultural activity are undoubtedly economically vibrant also
- Place quality enhancements to urban public space increase business confidence and lever in private sector finance
- Public space improvements rarely happen in isolation; therefore calculating economic benefits with certainty is extremely difficult which poses difficulties in securing resources
- Investments, activities and interventions should be part of wider programmes, not standalone showpieces
- A clear management strategy and cultural programming is a prerequisite for successful spaces
- The role of professionals such as urban designers should harness and reflect diverse community aspirations and cultural values
- Increasing usage and popularity of places and events is a key cultural benefit from place quality improvements
- Benefits radiate out from beyond the immediate focus of any intervention works and can lead to a general raising of standards across an administrative or functional urban area
- Improved public spaces can be used to host events and programmes that in turn act as a catalyst for greater engagement with the surrounding locality and add to the areas unique character
- Quality public spaces can enhance the image of cities, sub-regions and even regions

The potential of public spaces is huge: the glue that binds the sustainable communities championed by all levels of government. Yet, much of this potential remains unrealised as much of this public infrastructure remains under-valued by policy-makers and

some business interests. This research has dispelled some of the myths broadcast by the doom mongers, that large-scale corporate interests are undermining the fabric of communities and will derail the cultural renaissance of towns and cities. Private interests are beginning to recognise that a homogenised public landscape is not a valuable asset. This is particularly so in the retail sector, where consumers value urban space that facilitates meaningful experiences that they can identify with and perhaps forge a sense of attachment.

A plethora of intangible factors are inextricably bound within the social production of space that tends to undervalue the role of culture in the successful functioning of places and spaces. Whilst the impacts of cultural vitality on economic activity and vice versa are not easily quantifiable, research findings suggest that cultural vitality and economic competitiveness are not and therefore should not be viewed as competing objectives. Rather they can reinforce one another. This however requires collaborative action supported by an inclusive spatial vision that different communities of interest are brought into.

It is the challenge of contemporary development practice to embrace local specificities and simultaneously project a transnational vision. Through such action, cultural vitality can remain resonant in urban public space. A considered approach is the mantra put forward that accommodates progressive change based on the heterogeneous spatial representations, narratives and repertoires of a diverse community of interests from school children to pensioners and from market traders to multinational retailers.

This still leaves the issue of securing capital and revenue resources vital to the successful functioning of urban public spaces culturally and economically. It is not as simple as securing a public sector grant to upgrade the street scene environment and then automatically assume that more people will use the space with the knock-on effect of improved business performance and other economic benefits. The latent potential of high quality and aesthetically pleasing public spaces can be realised through an events and activities programme. By animating these places the cultural and economic potential of urban public space may be realised.

Lee Pugalis is at the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and is the Regeneration Specialist at One NorthEast Regional Development Agency



## A Franco-British Workshop

### Sebastian Loew contrasts regeneration efforts in the Paris and London regions

Some thirty built-environment professionals from the Paris and the London regions met on June 9th and 10th to try and understand how difficult brownfield sites were being regenerated on either side of the Channel, and to learn from each other's practices. The Royal Arsenal in Woolwich and Rochester Riverside in Medway were chosen as examples in the Thames Gateway, the Plaine Saint-Denis and Paris Nord-Est in the Ile de France region.

The idea for this workshop originated at a conference held in Paris in November 2007 which looked at large regeneration projects in Europe. Paul Lecroart of the Institut d'Aménagement et Urbanisme de la Région Ile-de-France (IAURIF) and Sebastian Loew conceived the idea of bilateral exchanges to study in much greater detail the how and the why of a limited number of cases. No institutional funding was behind this event and all invited participants were asked to give up their time and pay for themselves. As a result a number of potential contributors declined (mostly on this side of the Channel) but some ten professionals from Britain and twenty from France, agreed to participate.

During two packed and very productive days, we visited the sites, heard presentations from those involved in the projects at different levels of responsibility, debated and questioned, and managed to deepen everybody's understanding of how a major project fraught with difficulties evolves from conception to different levels of completion. In England the two regional development agencies involved (LDA and SEEDA), the local authorities (GLA through Design for London and Medway through Medway Renaissance), English Heritage, a consultant (EDAW) and a developer (Crest Nicholson) explained their roles in the schemes visited. In Paris, the Ile de France region, the city of Paris, Plaine Commune (a partnership of local authorities), a provider of social housing, a mixed economy organisation were represented by their chief executives and their consultants. In addition, a couple of French elected representatives joined them on the first day in England.

Taking well documented projects, we analysed them under four headings:

- Who decided and carried the project through (governance, decision making, consultation)?
- How did the project evolve and how is it being implemented (masterplanning, partnerships)?
- Who paid for what (land, decontamination, development, infrastructure, amenities,...)?
- What are the results (urban quality, sustainability, wider impact,...)?

All the schemes considered were difficult to start with as they weren't in areas where the market was interested. The public sector therefore needed to create the conditions to attract a market by reducing risks, addressing in particular issues of decontamination and accessibility.

All the projects were on brownfields but whilst in the Thames Gateway they were on the edge of the urban area, on a river front and had strong historic connections (and in the case of the Royal Arsenal, listed buildings on the site), the Parisian sites were urban and had in most cases little historic interest. There were great similarities in that all the projects had a long time span, they involved several tiers of governance and needed partnerships for their implementation. Physically they all represented a gap in the urban fabric and their regeneration involved the creation of something new, different from what had been there before, and with greater intensity of activities.

There were also important differences, mainly in the role and attitudes of the public sector vs the private. The French seem to be able to have a longer vision over a wider territory and to invest upfront in the infrastructure (particularly in public transport) and a public realm of quality. This is mostly undertaken by a Société d'économie mixte, a public sector developer with the right to borrow on the money market, which then recovers its investment by selling land for development with a specific brief. These organisations are under the control of the



**Opposite page** LDA's Tom Keady explaining the Woolwich Arsenal scheme  
**Above** Visiting a new neighbourhood in the Plaine St. Denis  
**Above right** presentation around the model of Paris Nord-Est  
**Right** Medway Renaissance's Sarah Beck at Rochester Riverside  
 All pictures courtesy of Paul Lecroart



elected Mayor of the area, and the role of this character as leader is essential for the success of the projects. A Mayor with a vision will push for the project to succeed and will negotiate with public and private developers to achieve this goal. The Mayor also negotiates with other levels of government to get investments. So for example, when the football Stadium was located in the Plaine Saint Denis, the local Mayor negotiated and obtained a number of benefits for his area: the decking of the nearby motorway in order to link two adjacent districts, the relocation of a RER station, and the creation of a new square adjacent to the Stadium. The subsequent regeneration of surrounding areas was triggered by these investments.

On the other hand it appears that the French system is slower than the British in involving and understanding the needs of the market. The two Thames Gateway schemes are carried out by the private developers as much as by the local authorities, even when these initiate them. This was particularly clear in the case of Rochester Riverside where at two occasions the project had to be abandoned because of lack of financial viability; it was only when the public authorities understood that they needed to remove part of the risk that they managed to get private investment. In France some schemes never got off the ground because of unrealistic expectations.

Some concerns seem to be common to both areas: quality is important to make the scheme successful; sustainability plays a growing role in the design of schemes. Mixed-uses are also becoming more common though the approach is different, as is the mix. The English schemes are dominated by housing; the French attempt at least to create neighbourhood centres with activities, often made possible because of higher densities. Schools and other social amenities are almost always included in the French schemes, but not in the English ones. This difference is startling and seems to be rooted in the different cultures of the developers, the English specialisation making it more difficult for housing developers to think of anything but housing (or shopping, or employment,...)

Both sides of the Channel are developing partnerships and attempt to be creative in the form and type of partnerships but England seems to be ahead of the game in that the private sector has a stronger presence in them. In France partnerships are frequently between public and public organisations and there tends to be more bottom up procedures: pressure for action starts at the most local level where consensus is achieved, and then ascends towards central government. The private sector is then invited to participate in the project. Collaboration between private and public sectors, though coming from different directions, is increasing in both countries and the know-how to help this collaboration increasing as well.

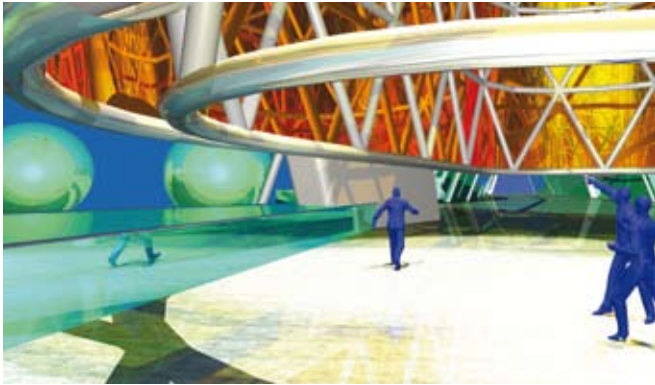
The results? Although we weren't comparing like with like, the French examples seemed more alive; they felt like neighbourhoods; streets had mature trees, public transport was noticeable, local shops were open and there was some sense of civic presence (though this is admittedly difficult to gauge). In the British examples – and of course Rochester Riverside has not been built yet – the project was mainly one of housing with decent public realm and some other uses; the objective was to increase the latter, but to a large extent this was wishful thinking.

A few months after the event, the economic context has completely changed and the position of the market is a very different one. A series of new questions can be raised such as will the English schemes survive the credit crunch or will they have to be rescued by the public sector? Issues such as this should be discussed at a further meeting.

The experience of the workshop was invaluable for all those that participated. There was sufficient time for interaction and for learning from each other. It is hoped to continue this kind of exchanges involving other countries.

Sebastian Loew

# RE-IMAGINING THE CITY



Airlander Tower hovering over Charing Cross Station. Photograph: Jonathan Schwinge

With half the world's population living in cities, where is the sense of exhilaration in the creative urbanisation of a planet for 7, 8 or 9+ billion? From Spain comes news of plans to slash speed limits, restrict air conditioning and heating in all public buildings, and cut streetlights by half. Back in the UK, the growing *Transition Towns* movement emits an apocalyptic millenarianism. The survivalist outlook which motivates plans for an 'energy descent' also drives proposals to re-localise production in order to build community resilience. Once upon a time, 'bright lights, big city' captured the lure of the city as an opportunity to do more;

now we seem to fantasise about turning the lights out, and celebrate doing less.

Given the Transition claim to be conducting 'a social experiment on a massive scale', clearly a significant narrowing of horizons has taken place. Exactly 100 years ago, the Futurists claimed the essential elements of their poetry to be courage, audacity and revolt. Their manifesto marked the onset of a remarkable period in which freethinking and experimentation were embraced as the means to liberate society from the dead weight holding it back. The fertile imaginations of architects, urbanists, artists and filmmakers appeared to thrive as much on tension and conflict as collaboration and alliance.

Today, life feels distinctly more prosaic and conformist. Perhaps Rem Koolhaas was onto something when he argued that the absence of a utopian drive is as serious as an overdose. He suggests that we no longer develop theories of what to do with cities, but merely write portraits in the hope of understanding them. Portraits often mean writing 'data-scapes', an activity Koolhaas himself has embraced. Fittingly he turns up in *The Endless City*, the latest 500-page doorstep to employ endless graphs and statistics to paint portraits of world cities. In an article promoting the book, lead author Deyan Sudjic wrote 'it is chastening, but valuable for a critic to be confronted with how little you really know'. This sort of data-based urbanism makes for a somewhat numbing read, and perhaps Sudjic genuinely became lost in the forest of density charts and governance diagrams. But is the problem here not a bigger one? Do we really know less? Or have we lost our nerve?

Where once we might have acted with imagination and daring, today we look to statistics to reveal what we are allowed to do. Consequently, tomes such as *The Endless City* are dominated by messages - reduce car use, build at higher densities, etc. Such an outlook contrasts markedly with times when conviction in our capacity for reasoned exploration fuelled a desire not just to overcome existing obstacles, but to create an entirely new world.

While there's little point in hankering after a return to the past, a shot of confidence in the future wouldn't go amiss. Of course some of Marinetti's futurists died in the war; and some (but by no means all) of the urban design experiments were less than successful. Such is the nature of taking a risk, and pursuing dreams. Today the lessons are said to be the need to avoid risks; powerful conservative forces caution against experimentation unless within tightly controlled (eco) limits. Daring to imagine and realising those to impose ideas is seen as an act of arrogance and hubris.

Yet throughout human history, people have always been motivated to discover new dimensions to life which they believed could move society forward. A useful project would be to recover the ability to imagine what the city could be. To do so requires not only engaging the imagination but confronting some of the imposed and self imposed limits that hold us back. On this basis the articles which follow represent something of a departure from recent issues of *Urban Design*. We rely less on examining specific projects or masterplans and instead set out to explore some of the thinking and ideas behind the contemporary city, and, to uncover some possibilities for the future.

**ALASTAIR DONALD**

Martin Centre for Architectural and Urban Studies, University of Cambridge, and a member of MANTOWNHUMAN

# BUILDING THE FUTURE: WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?

Austin Williams argues for less sustainability and more ambition

Dare-devil rocket man, Yves Rossy recently completed his fantastic ten-minute jet-pack flight across the channel in his carbon-fibre wings and heat-resistant underpants. It is a development on James Bond's 30-year old *Thunderball* jet pack but that aside, inventive transport technologies are few and far between. Ask yourself: whatever happened to the monorail, the personalised Lear jet, Maglev public transit, automated highways, long-haul flights by space shuttle? All of these strange and wonderful transport ideas were commonplace Utopian ambitions for the future as seen by the Sixties' generation. Most of them were even technologically possible back then. Today, if there is ever mention of anything so fanciful, it would be dismissed as, at best, unsustainable, at worst, irresponsible. Nowadays, by comparison, aviation policy demands restraint, transport gurus cycle to work, and space travel is deemed to be too risky.

## CULTURAL MALAISE

But it is not just fantastical visions of transport that have disappeared off the agenda. Pop into any university architecture department and ask yourself, whatever happened to the Walking City, intelligent homes, climatic domes, Plug-in cities, New Towns, underwater houses? Today, you are more likely to find students designing paranoid survivalist stilt houses (to escape the forthcoming sea level rises) than advocating audacious submersible architecture.

And it is not just students who are victims of this depressingly isolationist cultural malaise, although it is tragic that at the very time when young people are meant to be at their most creative, they are lumbered with such prosaic concerns. Nowadays, it seems that our futures are driven by dystopian nightmares rather than utopian dreams. Across the globe, from Bangladesh to the Netherlands, New Orleans to the Thames Gateway, instead of attempting to overcome natural barriers (a mindset which seems to have exemplified previous generations of architects and sums up the social role of architecture), we now have the concept of 'managed retreat' in the face of weather predictions. But if we accept the principle that 'nature knows best' then we may as well give up.

With such an existential crisis in modern architecture and urbanism, it is hardly surprising that there is a lack of clarity on the role of the city. Hardly anyone argues cogently for urban growth (negatively labelled 'sprawl') when urban density (positively labelled 'the compact city') is the new big idea. Cities will still grow, but increasingly it is seen as a problem rather than a social good. The futuristic fantasies for a cosmopolitan megalopolis have metamorphosed, it seems, into the parochial drone of an eco-town.

For 'carbonistas', the belief that changing the world will, in all likelihood, make things better, is anachronistic. In the West, there seems to be a collective loss of ambition; an ambition that is so graphically, confidently displayed in China and India. The fact that China wants to continue using coal at an ever increasing rate, or that India will build five aeroplanes a month for the next five years, fills the Western arbiters of sustainability with dread.

## LACK OF AMBITION, LACK OF VISION

When India launched its cheap 'People's Car' at the 2008 Delhi Auto Expo, company chairman Ratan Tata said: 'I hope this



Poster for Chicago World's Fair 1933 – A Century of Progress

changes the way people travel in rural India. We are a country of a billion and most are denied connectivity.' Costing around £1300 it should transform personal mobility in India, but the UK's *Independent* newspaper headlined the story 'Global warming: Just what overcrowded, polluted India didn't need ... the \$3,000 car'. This attitude is summed up by leading UK eco-cynic, George Monbiot, who hopes that his book *Heat* will 'make people so depressed about the state of the planet that they stay in bed all day, thereby reducing their consumption of fossil fuels'. Unfortunately, his miserable mantra of restraint is all too common in the West.

Gradually, this sort of low aspirationalism is becoming embodied in the West's attitude to development per se and to China's development in particular. Instead of generosity of spirit in seeing a peasant economy rise out of the dark ages, environmentalists tremble at the prospect of 1.5 billion Chinese wanting to get off

## It seems that our futures are driven by dystopian nightmares rather than utopian dreams



Chicago World's Fair 1933 – A Century of Progress - Special Collections Research Centre, University of Chicago Library



their bicycles and jump in a car. Jonathan Porritt, establishment eco-guru, extends the carbon dioxide reduction logic in his shameless advocacy of a one-child policy. He says that the 'fewer there are of us, the greater our personal carbon budgets.' For him it is a simple equation: more people, more consumption, more energy use, more problems. The concept of people as problem solvers hasn't occurred to him. But once we start to see humans as a problem instead of a source of creativity, sociability, innovation and hope, then every problem becomes interpreted through a misanthropic prism. As such, undemocratic China is actually sounding more liberal than Western environmentalists advocating one-child policies!

What does ambition mean if we allow humanity to be represented as the biggest problem on the planet, rather than as the creators of a better future? It is hardly surprising that the ubiquitous household robots that were supposed to alleviate domestic drudgery have failed to materialise in the West when the central policy agenda seems simply to turn off unnecessary electrical appliances. After all, there's little place for labour-saving devices when saving resources is being prioritised over saving time. Even those environmentalists who purportedly want a better future, actually want that future dictated by our response to nature. Unfortunately, logically, if we put nature first, humans come second.

Environmentalists quote Kennedy's 1960's Space Age speech in order to pretend that they are the best protectors of the future (whatever that means). But I don't think Kennedy would be pleased at their selective use of quotes to serve a population reduction or reduced resources argument. In his 2007 *Reith Lecture*, for example, economist Jeffrey Sachs quoted JFK merely to show that humans had reached a point of 'literal unsustainability'. This and other examples of misanthropic, neo-Malthusian miserabilism have now reached the status of unquestionable respectability in the anti-human lexicon of sustainability.

It seems that it is not just the extraordinary activities (like supersonic flight and space stations) where we have ceased to look to the future with anticipation and ambition. Everyday ambitions are being undermined. Nowadays visionary ideas are only those, as Professor Marty Hoffert suggests, that are 'consilient with natural ecosystems.' Unfortunately, with this humble mindset, space travel is a non-starter. If we want parochial, resource-lite solutions, cities aren't the best answer. If we want a genuine debate, we have to stop this nonsensical, reactionary, defeatist mindset and put things like human achievement, social experimentation and scientific risk-taking – above mere carbon counting, sustainability spreadsheets and the culture of limits. If we are to create imaginative, exciting, experimental futures then this is the mindset for our transport and urban visionaries.

Whether in space or on *terra firma*, regaining a belief in the risky business of human progress will enable humanity to have the confidence to experiment a little, and live a lot. To do that, we need to eradicate the mantra of sustainability – a pernicious and corrosive environmental doctrine that masks misanthropy, low aspirations and restraint. By removing its unthinking status as orthodoxy, we should reinstate the notions of development, progress, experimentation and ambition in its place. Unless and until we do, any future ambitions will be mired in a dystopian present.

Austin Williams is the author of *Enemies of Progress* (Societas, 2008)

# MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA: VISUALISING THE SOCIALIST CITY

Stavros Alifragkis relates images of the city to their representation on the silver screen



The foregrounding of the city today is often to suggest the inevitability of urban decay, and frequently encapsulates an outlook which sees protagonists as estranged from exerting influence over their destiny. By looking back at the genre of films known as *City Symphonies*, we can see how the interaction of celluloid, city and citizens has altered considerably from an era in which a burning sense of the future fired the imagination.

## THE CITY SYMPHONY

As early as the 1920s, avant-garde film-makers started to compose visual cinematic poems that encapsulated the dynamics of modernity. In works such as *Berlin: die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (Ruttman, 1927), elaborate editing techniques and expressionistic framing were employed to capture the emerging urban terrain and bombard the senses with the rhythms and patterns of contemporary everyday life, emphasising the futurist aesthetics of machinery and infrastructure.

Apart from this special interest in the depiction of the urban form, city symphonies share certain stylistic features. Often employing a 'dawn to dusk', 'day in the life' structure, the filmmakers experimented with the visual vocabulary and the narrative grammar and syntax that one comes across in neighbouring film-genres such as avant-garde experimental moving image works, travelogues and documentaries. Yet while set designs were sacrificed for on site locations, and leading roles

and professional actors dispensed with altogether, city symphonies were less about documenting reality as reality is, and more about producing alternative realities. These movies construct imaginary, artificial celluloid urban landscapes, freed from the restrictions of space and time.

## MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA

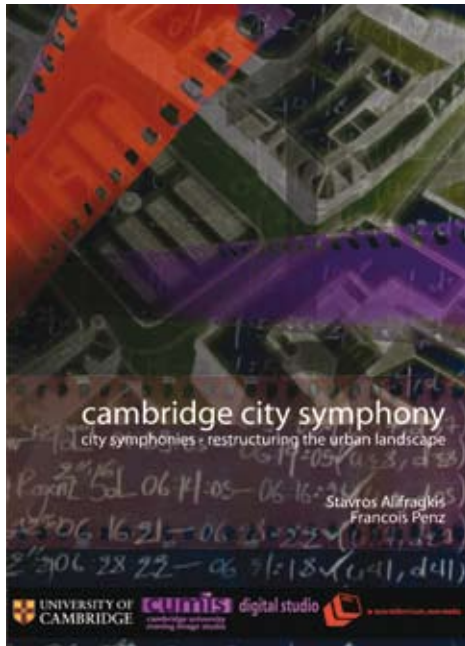
Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (USSR 1929) epitomises and extends the main characteristics of the genre. The film draws on elements of everyday urban life in the former Soviet Union and creatively reproduces them on the cinematic canvass of the screen by experimenting with a montage of 'higher mathematics' in a way that emphasises the dissimilarities of the 3D terrain of the city and its filmic reconstruction

Certainly, five years into Stalin's reign, the movie is not immune from the idealisation of everyday life. The workplace is no longer the

Still from *Man with a Movie Camera* used with permission of the British Film Institute



Cambridge City Symphony



pre-Revolutionary space of capitalist oppression, but a positive space where the building of Socialism primarily takes place. Workers Clubs forge the collective consciousness of the newly urbanised masses of peasants. Sports facilities emphasise the modernist healthy body culture, and communal spaces are favoured over private quarters (apartment interiors are featured in less than a dozen clips – perhaps not unrelated to the fact that housing had already been identified as an area of under performance).

Yet to dismiss the movie as propaganda would be to miss the point. Vertov's socialist city promotes a lifestyle that favours the pursuit of collective happiness in the public and communal spaces of the city over the individualism of private interiors of former bourgeois apartments. The creative juxtaposition of streets bursting with life, busy factories and major infrastructure such as the Dnieper Hydroelectric Station and coal mines in the Ukraine are indicative of the manner in which the city was portrayed as a place of intensified effects and juxtaposing analogies.

## City symphonies were less about documenting reality as reality is, and more about producing alternative realities

### VERTOV'S CELLULOID CITY

While many city symphonies tell the story of a day in the life of a particular city, *Man with the Movie Camera* inhabits a fictional terrain comprising footage shot in five different cities (Moscow, Kiev, Donbas, Yalta and Odessa) to create a motif for new Soviet urban life in general. Vertov's experimentation with the physique of the city results in a cinematic landscape that is carefully constructed with raw material from diverse physical locations. The filmic terrain is derived by juxtaposing the details of urban architecture that are disparate in place and often time. In the modernist city, dynamic new infrastructure ensured that the segregation of urban functions did not impede citizens experiencing the wider metropolis. This is echoed in celluloid with the fragmentation of urban space counterbalanced thematically by the dawn to dusk narrative structure that provides for temporal continuity.

While the late 1920s were marked by a raging debate between urbanists and dis-urbanists over the future of the Soviet city, Vertov chose to construct his cinematic utopia utilising predominantly the inherited bourgeois city of eclectic facades and modified mansions rather than the newly developed paradigm of Constructivist architecture. The only noticeable projects that appear on the screen are K. Melnikov's Bakhmetevskii Bus Garage (1926), G. Barkhin's Izvestia Headquarters (1925-7) and Vesnin brothers' Mostorg Department Store (1927). The emphasis could be interpreted as an attempt to render Vertov's cinematic city less localisable – and more in keeping with the manner in which modernity and modernisation often produced a notion of the metropolitan as the site of ongoing change. By retaining the 19th-century pre-Revolutionary city and contrapuntally juxtaposing imagery that has been identified with Stalin's First Five-Year Plan (rapid industrialisation, electrification, etc.) Vertov succeeds in communicating the essence of the Socialist metropolis rather than its physical manifestation.

### CONCLUSIONS

Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera*, besides reconstructing the form of the ideal Socialist city of the future, volunteers some cinematic tools for re-imagining the urban landscape today. The shot-by-shot formalist analysis of the 1695 clips of the movie conducted under the supervision of Dr. François Penz at the Digital Studio in the Department of Architecture of the University of Cambridge aimed at isolating and closely studying a number of these tools. Vertov's urban micro-narratives within themed episodes that contrapuntally interweave locations and activities that are disparate in space and time have been employed for the creative re-construction of Market Place, Cambridge. Cambridge City Symphony (Alifragkis & Penz, 2006) – a digital, non-linear, interactive moving image work that utilises existing and novel software (namely an early version of the NM2 toolkit) – demonstrates how effective Vertov's narratological devices still remain in re-imagining the complexity, fluidity and multiplicity of contemporary urban landscapes.

Stavros Alifragkis, Post Graduate Student at the Digital Studio, Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge  
*Man with the Movie Camera* is available from the British Film Institute  
 Additional information on NM2 can be found at [www.ist-nm2.org](http://www.ist-nm2.org)



# THE EROSION OF CITIES AND THE ATTRITION OF DESIGNERS

Alastair Donald argues that everyone who values cities should be disturbed by current attempts to design communities

As summer turned to autumn, and credit crunch jitters to full blown panic over a depression, a leaked document from Home Office Minister Jacqui Smith predicted communities devastated by increases in crime, racism, and extremism. The opposition – never slow to chant ‘broken society’ – muttered darkly of many safety and security issues.

The ease with which problems in financial services came to be interpreted through the prism of individual and community behaviour suggests how much politics has changed in the past decade, and highlights the central position that community now occupies. From energy to education, and health to transport, policies are said to have huge significance for developing community.

In line with the shift, in 2006, the former Department of Environment completed its metamorphosis into Communities and Local Government and confirmed community building as the central aim of planning and urban design. Arguably the name change merely caught up with established practice. Yet can better urban design really create community? And given the space of cities has traditionally been associated with freedom to evolve our own relationships, should we even be trying?

## THE CHANGING CULTURE OF CITIES

For community building urbanists, the main reference point is Jane Jacobs who famously argued that social capital emerges from small scale interactions, and that communities are born through these rhythms of everyday life. Whether progressive Richard Rogers or his New Urbanist opponents, the compact scale and permeable nature of Jacobs’ Greenwich Village neighbourhood is now seen as a model with community generating powers.

*Death and Life* captures something of the essence that many designers consider appealing about urban space. Ease of movement allied to ever shifting but concentrated patterns of activity make for interesting possibilities, offering the chance of unpredictable, energised social opportunities – often with people never before encountered. Such free, fluid and intense environments demand active negotiation that can make the most of the possibility of productive interaction with other citizens, while revelling in the anonymity that urban space provides. City life is open and requires vigorous engagement.

Yet read the above paragraph again, and consider carefully whether the spirit of these ideas about the metropolitan life are reflected in current urban and planning policies, and in the urban design solutions that we set out to create. Policies and guides directing urban designers are full of words such as localism, limits, community, safety, health and respect. Bearing in mind that as individuals we negotiate the complexities of city life on a daily basis, the language seems strangely parochial. Indeed, these concepts, which collectively amount to the idea of a sustainable community, are actually fundamentally anti-metropolitan. The whole point of a metropolis has traditionally been to break free of localised, more conservative ties. Where today every activity must contribute to health and wellbeing, historically the city was for living life. As for respect, it needed to be earned from your fellow citizens in the cut and thrust of encounters in public life.

Consider other familiar words - crime, antisocial behaviour, nuisance, congested, racist – and we start to understand how the



Cameras over Chatham,  
Photograph: Alastair  
Donald

contemporary demand for community differs fundamentally from what we required of cities in the past. Cities are written today as big, bad and dangerous places that we cannot cope with; the people that live there are to be feared and controlled.

When the public can no longer be conceived of both as strangers and potential allies, city life takes on an anxious form and confidence wanes that people will ‘do the right thing’. The demand for policies and spaces to moderate the imagined threat from others leaves little room for Jacobs’ urban anonymity, which Richard Sennett and others have pointed out is a cornerstone of the vibrant metropolis.

The upshot is that the meaning of Jacobs’ ‘eyes on the street’ has evolved. Starting with Oscar Newman, design has gradually become the means to satisfy a more defensive and voyeuristic outlook which demands surveillance out of fear, and of the necessity of knowing what others are up to. A changing social context means that a particular urban form which in the past was valued for creating the opportunity for strangers to engage as equals is today desirable as a way of asserting control and keeping watch over those we don’t trust. We are left with the urban form, but there’s little desire for the social dynamic it previously offered.

## SMALL CHANGE, BIGGER PROBLEMS

Some argue that Jacobs’ ideas of ‘small change’ and social networks remain valid,



Greenwich Millennium Village designed with surveillance in mind, offers limited privacy, Photograph: Alastair Donald

and that urban design can encourage community by bringing people into contact and generating a sense of communality. It is certainly true that environments that generate meeting opportunities are to be welcomed. But there are two problems here.

Firstly Jacobs and her successors over-emphasise the value of 'small change' compared to the broader social and political context. Small networks and social capital have become attractive ideas at a time when society lacks a big idea that motivates people more broadly. For some people this is a good thing, allowing small scale, neighbourhood actions to take precedence. Yet in the absence of a wider framework in society, communities have little to give real shape, purpose and meaning to local interactions. In such circumstances, the continual emphasis on the shared local bonds of the neighbourhood serves to increase mistrust of those outside the local community.

Secondly, when the local becomes a refuge from the dangers of the wider world, urban design often becomes the means of creating a sense of local order. Unfortunately design can actually end up reinforcing the sense of vulnerability felt by communities. Take public space which is now often designed to overcome our sense of being at risk and a perceived absence of trust. Lighting and street furniture fill awkward gaps, warning signs tell us what and where is safe, how to use space, and who is entitled to be there. Urban space effectively becomes a safety blanket and like other official interventions in community affairs, inevitably downgrades the notion of the active, and responsible citizen who can negotiate the space of the city.

The effect is to reinforce the corrosion of adult character – a distinctly modern problem which leaves us no longer believing ourselves sufficiently robust to act, whether to control children's errant behaviour or to negotiate a space where buskers or magazine sellers hold fort. The spaces we design may produce a spectacle of community life and a pleasing

appearance of order, but they cannot work as a genuine basis for community. This requires active citizens to sometimes engage in a messy negotiation process to decide how they want their community to function. To seek to use design to short-circuit this process risks leaving an underlying fractiousness in place.

#### METROPOLITAN SPACE AND COMMUNITY

Jacobs' fundamental disagreement with the idea that urban form could determine social behaviour is often conveniently overlooked. As Penny Lewis points out in the *Future of Community*, Jacobs quoted Reinhold Niebuhr to suggest this particular self-deception was 'the doctrine of salvation by brick'.

Although Jacobs obviously favoured compact, permeable layouts, it is worth recalling that, in line with the optimistic outlook of the postwar era, architects and urbanists were far more open to imagining a variety of urban forms that could prove satisfactory environments for community life. For example, at the opposite end of the scale from Jacobs' dense urban neighbourhoods, Melvin Webber talked of 'community without propinquity'. His ideas proved influential in the planning of Milton Keynes, which has proved one of the most popular places to live in England over recent times.

So why does the urbanist Jacobs provide the spatial model for community today rather than the more spatially dispersed forms envisaged by Webber? Here again we need to look outside dynamics of specific communities and view the bigger picture. For much of the 20th century, modernity and the impetus it provided for societal and urban renewal provided a dynamic framework for metropolitan life. But over the past 30 years or so, the process of modernisation has been widely encountered as society veering out of control. Spatially this is experienced as the sprawl and suburbanisation of cities.

Therefore, while in the 1970s concern for order tended to focus on inner cities, today a more diffuse, generalised anxiety about society alights on suburbia – a sometimes amorphous territory, and in most cities, home to the majority of people. The suburbs today are commonly perceived as environmental and social disasters, the space of selfishness, excess consumption, obesity, depravity. So perturbed were the think-tank Demos, they offered to host carwash clubs and revive tupperware parties. This degraded view of suburbanites not only exaggerates the problems, but takes the loss of direction and leadership within society, and illegitimately projects it onto suburbia.

At the end of the day some people will favour suburbia, and some a more urban setting. Either can support successful communities, and to my mind, designers should experiment with both. Much more important for successful community are the broader ideas and collective institutions which bestow meaning to people's lives, and provide a framework through which individuals can confidently engage with each other and with life as active citizens.

It is wide-ranging social rather than physical changes that mean such a framework is largely absent today, and which presents a need for new ideas and new collective arrangements. But for this to happen successfully people need the free space of the metropolis (urban or suburban) to let them develop, test and then judge their relationships with whomever they wish to interact. Ironically, policies that compel us to design in community, and engineer social diversity, or respect, or any other approved types of behaviour are an attempt to manufacture community that ends up undermining the voluntaristic processes that successful city life relies upon.

Urban design cannot make community. But the attrition of trying to do so will erode individual autonomy and the necessary freedoms of metropolitan life.

Alastair Donald is co-editor of *The Future of Community: Reports of a Death Greatly Exaggerated* (Pluto Press, 2008)

# FROM FEAR TO FREEDOM

Dolan Cummings challenges the hyper-regulation of public space



Public space is often the stage on which the ambiguities of the idea of the public itself are played out. Ostensibly available to be used by anyone, in practice there are often strict rules about what kinds of behaviour are acceptable. This needs not be a problem to the extent that these rules reflect the wishes of the public, but that's where things get complicated. Who is the public, and how does it make its wishes known?

Practically, public space is generally the responsibility of local authorities, which – though formally democratic – hardly embody the spirit of the public today. In fact, it is increasingly hard to identify such a spirit either in the form of organic communities or a more sophisticated civil society. This is a wider problem, with its roots in national politics rather than particular neighbourhoods. Nonetheless, the atomisation of the public in recent decades is starkly revealed in debates about public space, and in particular the anxiety they exhibit.

## ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

This is clearest in the debate about antisocial behaviour, especially that of young people. 'The public' is said to be intimidated by young people hanging around, and despite their propensity to gather and associate with one another in public spaces, said young people are rarely considered to be members of 'the public'. The lack of public feeling and basic trust means even the mildest of rowdy behaviour is interpreted as threatening.

The rules governing behaviour in public spaces thus tend to reflect a dim view of the public itself. We have all seen urban spaces, often well-maintained, green and pleasant, but littered with safety notices and signs warning, 'No ball games', 'No loitering', 'Alcohol-control zone' etc. Typically these spaces are also deserted.

Such rules reflect the absence of a public rather than anyone's genuine wishes, and thus even public spaces that are well-used come to look like those controlled by private firms or development agencies, with city centres resembling outdoor shopping malls, for example. Recognising this, some planners have tried to use urban design to foster a sense of publicness, with attractive continental-style plazas and squares and so on. But such strategies start from planners' ideas about how the public should behave, rather than the

wishes of a genuine public, and are often couched explicitly in terms of crime reduction, which only reinforces the police mentality that plagues so many public spaces.

It would be wrong to paint an overly bleak picture of public space, however. While British society has become more atomised in the past generation, and public spirit is at a low ebb, people do at least continue to assemble sometimes in public places and enjoy one another's company.

On Bank Holiday Monday in August, the Manifesto Club organised a picnic in London's Hyde Park to launch a campaign report, *Against the booze bans and the hyper-regulation of public space*. Like many others in the park and no doubt in other public spaces across the country, we enjoyed a few drinks and managed not to descend into anarchy. Sadly, the report reveals that there are now more than 600 'No alcohol zones' in England and Wales alone, arguing that far from protecting the public, such measures only erode what conviviality remains in public spaces.

Booze bans and other efforts to police public space tend to institutionalise atomisation and mutual suspicion rather than fostering public spirit. We would do better to err on the side of tolerance and give the public space to be public, rather than replacing the public with empty space.

Dolan Cummings is a founder member of the Manifesto Club, and co-ordinates the Campaign Against the Booze Bans [www.manifestoclub.com/boozebancampaign](http://www.manifestoclub.com/boozebancampaign)

**Left** Anti-Booze ban action  
**Right** The Manifesto Club react against this kind of regulation

# B FOR BRANDING: RE-IMAGING BELFAST

Pauline Hadaway worries that branding Belfast for external consumption is masking the reality



Sailor Town mural,  
Belfast 2006,  
Photograph:  
R. Watson

'B here now', 'B vibrant' and 'B dynamic': following a 12-month market research exercise, Belfast City Council has unveiled a new brand identity for the city, designed to challenge existing negative perceptions, and promote a unified vision of Belfast's transformation from fractured city locked within a troubled past to modern European capital. More than a logo, says Lord Mayor, Tom Hartley, the city's new identity provides 'an opportunity for us to embrace a new, vibrant and forward-looking identity and ethos which says: Belfast has come of age'. Designed to reflect 'wit, sociability, warmth, boldness and inspiration' the heart-shaped letter B is pitched towards visitors, conference organizers and investors, and highlights the importance attached to tourism as a driver of economic growth. Yet the branding exercise sits less comfortably alongside regeneration policy for Belfast's economically deprived and predominantly segregated 'urban villages'. Clustered at the edges of the city's self consciously cosmopolitan centre, here notions of localism, community and tradition still hamper development of a shared civic identity.

## REGENERATION IN BELFAST

Like many cities in post industrial decline across the western world, Belfast has lived through its fair share of politically driven, urban renewal and re-imagining initiatives. Beginning in the late 1980s as a strategy to win nationalist hearts and minds, Britain's economic and social war against the IRA soon merged with more familiar UK models of urban regeneration, focused on managing market failure, mitigating social deprivation and tackling sectarianism as motivators for social cohesion and stability. From counter insurgency to community safety and targeting social need, the city has come a long way, but key political priorities remain constant: to reinvent post conflict Belfast as normal, if not placeless, and to make it economically viable.

Pre-ceasefire, the odds looked stacked against achieving prosperity, let alone normality, yet few could deny Belfast's striking transformation, from the war torn 70s and 80s, where 'barbed wire spread like ivy', to the allure of boutique hotels, restaurants and glossy shopping malls. Though still remarkable to those who recall the old Belfast, incongruities between past and present resonate in the growing gulf between Belfast's new hip and happening city centre and the worn look of its inner city neighbourhoods, a reflection of wider contradictions of poverty and prosperity across the region.

In 1985 Sir Kenneth Bloomfield commissioned a study on the extent of poverty in Belfast, identifying massive levels of unemployment, low pay and job insecurity. Twenty years later, across most indicators, from earned income to numbers receiving benefits, Northern Ireland still compares unfavourably with England, Scotland and Wales, and Belfast remains the most

deprived of the region's 26 Local Government Districts. As the cost of living spirals and public spending is reigned-in, the poverty gap, seems likely to widen.

**STILL A DIVIDED CITY**

Visiting the city in summer 2005, Stuart Emmrich, travel editor for the *New York Times*, describes a bus tour, which brought him face to face with the alternative Belfast, situated just round the corner from the 'must see' destination of the *Lonely Planet* guide:

'At one point the guide casually pointed out a 70-foot-high fence that she said ran the length of the Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods and kept each side from crossing into each other's territory. Called the Peace Wall - a name that perhaps only George Orwell could fully appreciate - it was open for just a few hours each day from Monday through Friday, when traffic could be carefully monitored. Seeing it now, on a Sunday morning, shut tight and heavily barricaded, it stood as stark a symbol as the Berlin Wall, now fallen. It was a chilling moment, one whose force caught me by surprise.'

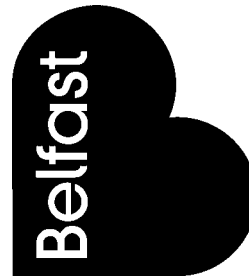
Post-conflict, as fractured city transforms into visitor attraction, a number of local initiatives have incorporated aspects of 'Troubles tourism' into neighbourhood renewal strategies. However official regeneration policy remains focused on normalisation. This means tackling visible signs of sectarianism by gentrifying the peace walls and other more permanent signs of conflict. Paramilitary murals are replaced with mosaics, hanging baskets or historical memorabilia of mills and shipyards, World War II and the Titanic.

Recent research identifies increasingly low patterns of interaction between working-class Catholics and Protestants, and challenges comfortable notions of the city emerging into a new era of peace and tolerance. Indeed local attitudes towards bonfires, murals and all the other paraphernalia of culture and conflict remain ambiguous and far from unified. While new political structures shift sectarian conflict into formal patterns of competition over resources, the strategy of creating a city of Quarters, dressed up in recycled, nostalgic motifs that celebrate notions of locality, community and place, has arguably reinforced division.

However, while many working class people continue to live in segregated neighbourhoods, one of the success stories of the city centre's economic turn around has been the creation of shared space for shopping, dining out and other forms of cross community consumerism, suggesting that Belfast's sectarian divisions are far from inevitable. Likewise, surveys of social attitudes consistently reflect pronounced preferences for cross community living arrangements among a substantial majority across all classes and age groups, suggesting that the experience of segregation may be less a product of mutual dislike or an over developed attachment to place, than a consequence of social and economic barriers to mobility.

**NEW APPROACH NEEDED**

A recent report from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister tentatively acknowledges the need for a policy rethink, which goes beyond addressing local needs within deprived areas, to find ways of connecting local people to outside job opportunities safely and efficiently. Affordable housing and a cheap and effective transport system for the city would be possible outcomes of such a policy shift, 'not only connect(ing) deprived areas to places of employment growth but also to other services such as shopping and leisure facilities'. Yet once again urban regeneration policies appear to be short changing Belfast communities. For as long as the proposed rapid transport system remains limited to visitor links between the planned Titanic Quarter Business Park, George Best Airport and the Harbour Estate, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport plan seems unlikely to deliver a system



- Belfast** confident
- Belfast** determined
- Belfast** dynamic
- Belfast** sociable



that is fit for purpose for a city that 'has come of age.' The prioritizing of cycling and walking are of little consequence for communities that require the type of rail and road links that deliver Metropolitan scale mobility for all.

The increasing polarisation between those, visitors and citizens, with the means to mobility and the increasingly ghettoised poor may well be an unforeseen outcome of an over bearing, twin track approach to urban planning. While at the centre, market driven approaches have focused on support for retail spending, leisure and lifestyle consumption, at neighbourhood level, where people still struggle with the legacy of conflict and decades of economic decline, the focus has been on cultural recognition over and above socio-economic redistribution. By failing to address the structural conditions of social deprivation and exclusion, while downgrading the metropolitan ambitions of local people to small-scale community regeneration, might urban renewal policy be prolonging and even extending division in Belfast through creating a city with two parallel realities?

**Top B** for Belfast logos, Belfast City Council  
**Above** Tigers Bay mural, Belfast 2008, replaced Loyalist Paramilitary mural, Photograph: Belfast Exposed

Pauline Hadaway is Director of Belfast Exposed Photography, a gallery of contemporary photography, archive and community photography

# SEXUALITY AND URBAN DESIGN

Richard Williams suggests that urban design can help reconnect our bodies with the urban environment



Sexuality has arguably been the defining discourse of western cultures since the Enlightenment. Debates about hygiene, policing, and personal freedom have been motivated, more often than not, out of a desire to understand, control and frequently, restrict sexual behaviour. Sexuality can also have important effects on the outward form of cities. The purchasing power and design consciousness of gay cultures has led to dramatic changes to the appearance of London's Soho, or Manchester's Canal Street from the early 1990s onwards, replicating well-documented earlier processes in New York and San Francisco. Even the rash of 1 and 2-bedroom developer-built flats that has so changed the skylines of British cities in recent years can be partially attributed to changes in the organisation of sexual lives: the nuclear family unit, imaged so powerfully and ubiquitously by the single-family home, represents a small, and declining share of overall living patterns. Those flats were not just erected as capital investments, but as representations – however crude – of changing social mores.

## THE PROBLEM

In historical terms, the relationship

between sexuality and urban design is well known. If we think in terms of great European urban spaces, then we know, for example, that certain spaces were imagined as spaces of flirtation or more from the outset. We know, for example, about Vauxhall Gardens in eighteenth century London as a highly sexualised space which was immensely popular as a space in many ways designed around sex: spaces to eat and drink and promenade, and plenty of greenery in which to retreat afterwards. We know that Baron Haussman's Parisian boulevards, intended as an expression of political authority, were almost immediately appropriated for the business of prostitution, a form for which they turned out to have been magnificently designed. And thanks to the burgeoning queer literature, we know a lot about impromptu sex on Hampstead Heath or in San Francisco bathhouses. We might add some anecdotal evidence from recent British experiments in public space. Since the early 1990s there have been repeated attempts to model spaces on continental European lines, in the hope that the image of bourgeois civility might in turn produce civilised behaviour – a hope most clearly expressed in the conclusions of the government's Urban Task Force that reported in 1999. The results of those experiments have largely been failures on those terms. Yet the spaces themselves – such as Liverpool's Concert Square, redeveloped by Urban Splash in 1993 – often have a crackling libidinal energy fuelled by cheap booze.

All these accounts speak of urban space after it has been designed. The libidinal character of the Rue de Rivoli, or Hampstead Heath becomes apparent through adaptation and use; it is pragmatism, not design that gives these spaces their essential character. That observation would not be of much consequence were it not for the fact that the history of sexuality itself is also a history of spaces, most of them urban. Freud's accounts of the sexual lives of his patients are also accounts

of the Vienna in which they lived, a city (like Paris) structured around the contradictions of an exaggerated sexual propriety, and the astonishing prevalence of prostitution. More recently, Michel Foucault's celebrated history of sexuality (*La Volonté de Savoir*, 1976) is most strongly a history of space, arguing – in an unexpectedly deterministic fashion – that it is the character of space (the street, the school, the prison, the home, the confessional box) that informs the expression of sexuality. Foucault, like the sociologist of sexuality Jeffrey Weeks later on, believed sexuality to be in part at least socially constructed, and that it is the interplay between biology and the social that in effect produces it. And it is precisely the fact of this interplay that makes urban design important. To put it another way, if sexuality is in part produced by the social, then it is in part produced by urban spaces.

**THE DESIGN PROJECT**

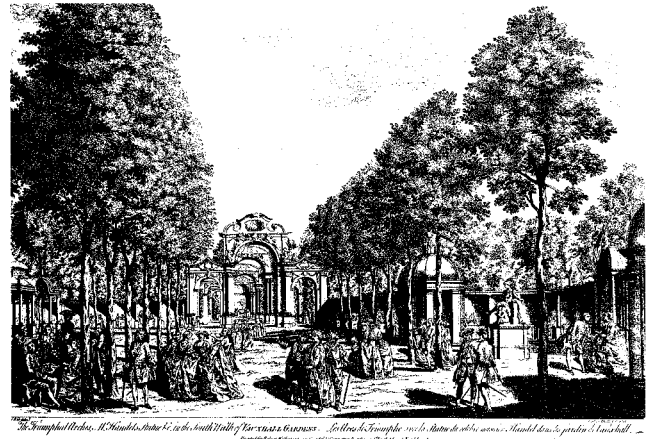
Given the central place of sexuality in contemporary thought, and the close connection between discourses of sexuality and discourses of urban space, the apparent absence of sexuality from urban design is curious. To clarify: sexuality and the urban are most intimately connected, but sexuality and urban design would seem to be at first sight mutually antipathetic, at least in standard developed world practice. In Britain, for example, urban design has been principally about discipline; the key principle has been the production of good public behaviour. This model has informed such projects as the remodelling of Trafalgar Square, probably the most highly regulated public space in Britain, in which all human behaviour is subject to clearly defined limits.

But it is the imagery of the space as design project that is perhaps most striking, describing the public world more or less exclusively in terms of the urban promenade. Here mature adults move in a slow ritual, almost exactly as if they had accidentally spilled out of the National Gallery and had not noticed they were outside. It could be said that the place is designed to restrain the libido. It is a space that appears to limit human behaviour to an acceptably polite; it is seemingly a reiteration of the nineteenth century spaces that were the backdrop for Freud. Here it is architecture in the service of repression, as it were. It is as if Freud had never existed. Whether or not you buy into the repressive hypothesis, it is hard not to see the mayhem of the British public spaces on a weekend as essentially libidinal in character, albeit exaggerated by alcohol: this unruly expression of sexuality takes on its character, it could be said, because it is repressed elsewhere.

**INCLUSIVE SPACE**

So could sexuality inform urban design, and if so, what effect would it have? Le Corbusier and other modernists alluded to sex, but in private, rather than public works – you have to stretch to make an argument about sexuality and Corb's urbanism. For a more explicit example, let me cite the 1971 renovation of the Avenida Atlântica in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil by Roberto Burle Marx. This great boulevard, one of the defining images of the city, exists in a culture and climate in which people are peculiarly at home in their bodies: there are few other metropolitan cities in which it is acceptable to walk into a good restaurant in a bathing suit, still wet from the ocean. Yet the Avenida Atlântica is not merely an expression of a local culture, but a representation of a mature, heterogeneous and inclusive approach to sexuality and urban space.

How does it do this? It is a space that sublimates the cultures of the body, but it does so by including rather than excluding possibilities. It frames a remarkable range of activities. There is not just the beach, but tracks for strolling, running and cycling, football pitches, volleyball pitches, abundant trees and benches to lie down on, showers for cooling off afterwards, then little bars and restaurants in which to refresh oneself: in short 10km



**Opposite page** Avenida Atlântica, Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro (1971) designed by Roberto Burle Marx

**Top** Vauxhall Gardens, London, engraving (1795)

**Above** Redesigned Trafalgar Square, London, World Squares for all, Photograph: image courtesy of Foster and Partners

**If sexuality is in part produced by the social, then it is in part produced by urban spaces**

of dense and varied infrastructure celebrating the culture of the body. This is far from a utopia – for the sex-workers, or tourists, it can be a cruel and frankly dangerous place. But equally it allows a huge range of expression and body types, and sexualities, all, most of the time in more or less harmonious co-existence – and as a result it conspicuously lacks the sudden shifts in character found in (say) British urban spaces where one group, at a particular time, will suddenly take over. It is this inclusiveness, and this openness to sexuality that makes this an interesting space, and what makes it conspicuously different from urban spaces in the developed world. The climate and culture may not be exportable, but the design philosophy might be – and a more mature approach to sexuality in urban design might result.

Richard J Williams is director of the Graduate School of Arts, Culture and Environment at the University of Edinburgh, and Programme Director for MSc in the City

# NEW LIVES, NEW CITY, NEW ELIZABETHANS

Ian Abley makes an audacious case for doubling the size of London



**Above and opposite page** London 2030 – Doubling the size of the Thames Gateway. Photograph: Image courtesy Audacity.org

Once a collection of small islands in the marsh and mudflats of the tidal Thames, Southwark had to be created. As London Bridge became an ever more important point of entry into an increasingly mercantile City of London, the land was drained and filled in. London Bridge was inhabited in Elizabethan times, with prefabricated timber framed shops and houses craned off barges onto this continually upgraded infrastructure. Four centuries ago too, London got its first Green Belt around a medieval city that was already too small and antiquated for the forward thinking population being drawn to it.

Elizabethans had no access to satellite photography on the Internet. Today we can easily derive a sense of Greater London as a conurbation at the centre of the wider megalopolis that extends from Felixstowe to Ipswich, round Cambridge and Oxford, down to Salisbury, and across to Weymouth with the island of Portland. We can view the historic cores of Westminster and The City of London, and the concentrations of economic activity that pepper the capital city. But we also realise that Greater London is mostly a low density place, housing a majority who favour gardens, tree-lined streets, parks.

## THE THAMES GATEWAY

As a means to avoid pressures for the expansion of London to the north, south and west, officials identified one area of the megalopolis, the Thames Gateway as a designated Growth Area, even though in some senses it is less than appealing. Industrial and logistical business parks, shopping centres, de-industrialised estates, run-down post-war housing developments like Thamesmead, numerous historic towns and villages, semi-rural suburbia, sit alongside neglected and undeveloped areas of estuarine landscape and floodplain. Since its designation countless planning consultants and regeneration quangos have talked the Thames Gateway to death.

What holds us back from making something of the Gateway? We have prospects, health, longevity, mobility, resources and forms of communication that an Elizabethan could not have imagined. Yet when faced with the necessity and chance to turn the eastern reaches of the tidal Thames into a new city for many new lives, we seem to have none of the adventure of Elizabethan society.

Sir Terry Farrell and Lord Richard Rogers would have at least been sent to the Tower of London for a while, if not lost their heads, if 400 years ago they had said the Thames estuary landscape should be preserved. Any Elizabethan courtier worth his salt would have realised that London needed defending from a tidal Thames from Teddington to Tilbury. They would have seized the technologies and organisations we have at our disposal today, and set about building a tidal barrage at the mouth of the estuary, from Sheppey to Shoeburyness. They would have realised the need to set about it in their lifetime, to replace the Thames Barrier at Greenwich by the end of its planned service life in 2030.



## Such major engineering is decidedly out of fashion amongst environmentalists, who prefer the muddy Thames estuary to stay as it is

### A NEW THAMES BARRAGE

Elizabeth might have thought of a better name for it, but our government calls the barrage the Thames Estuary 2100 Project (TE2100). A single 10 mile barrage from Sheerness to Shoeburyness could easily be funded by levying the development value of new homes for an additional 7 million Londoners in a much larger conurbation. However such major engineering is decidedly out of fashion amongst environmentalists, who prefer the muddy Thames estuary to stay as it is. Since the first phase of public consultation by the Environment Agency closed in 2006, what have our decidedly non-Elizabethan nobles done to support the idea? They sit in their sumptuous old London apartments, surrounded by their various architectural entourages, only to venture out to sit on committees to comment on about how marvellous the Thames Gateway is as an estuarine landscape.

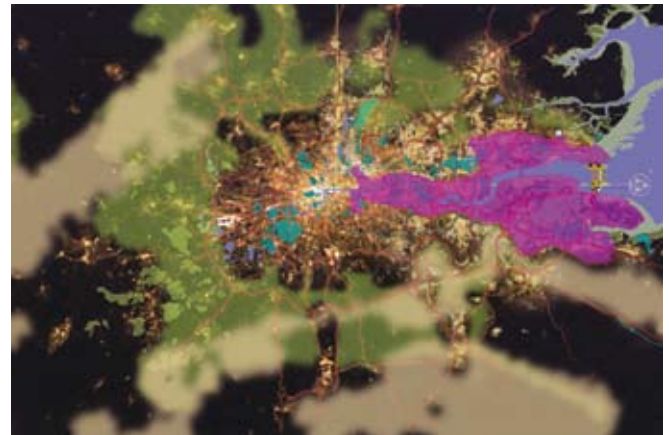
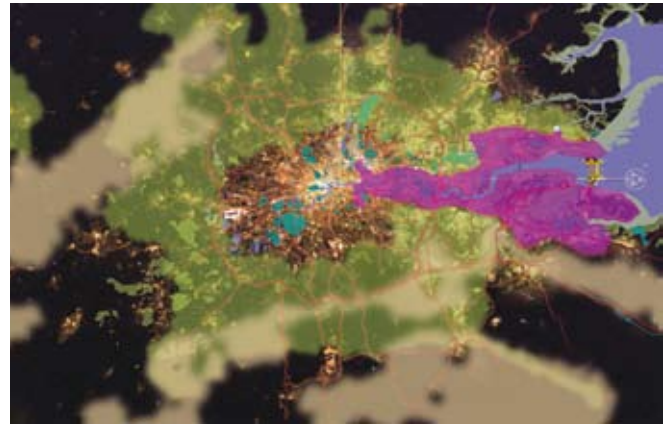
Meanwhile, doubling London to a city of 14 million could break out of the bloated Green Belt that has contained a decrepit and over-valued city, and bring about a social and economic regeneration of north Kent and south Essex. More than simply protecting 14 million inhabitants from effects of flooding, a permanent barrage would transform mud flats into a habitable landscape. The barrage that would make that possible and desirable would be a tidal power station, and a road and rail bridge at the east coast. Some Elizabethan privateer familiar with the Medway and Thames ports, marvelling at containerisation, would think of improvements to make the new city work.

An Elizabethan would have set off on an expedition to find a German Magnetic Levitation train, trialled in China, capable of shuttling through Thamesmead, and linking mile high towers off the coast, and Liverpool Street, to reduce the 40 mile trip to ten minutes, and make it ordinary. Dreams of high speed trains would certainly not have curtailed ambitions to add an additional airport in the estuary, making ease of global travel a reality. A managed tidal Thames might bristle with new tunnel and bridges, some of them like old London Bridge - inhabited.

An Elizabethan Treasury would not only have recognised this doubling and speeding of London as an engineering expense, but as a revenue opportunity. It would have recommended removing the green belt and establishing a division of the 60,000 hectares to be sold in lots, while keeping 20,000 hectares as park. It would have scoffed at those who suggested it couldn't be done, and marginalised the courtiers who counselled caution. It would have licensed anyone willing to build inhabited river crossings all the way along the Thames.

### LACK OF AMBITION

But we have none of that Elizabethan immediacy. Instead our Treasury pays Kate Barker at the Bank of England to tell them that 55.2% of Ye Olde England is variously Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and National Parks. Barker insisted that 7,203,188 hectares set aside for nature can't be built on. Worse, this report tells a people straining to find decent housing in the 1,100,000 hectares of urban England that is built on, that they are going to have to crowd together some more. Realising that more people shouldn't be forced into 8.3% of the country, particularly with plenty of rubbish farmland not designated as the best



landscape, Elizabethans would have had none of Barker. There would be angry mobs outside her office. When Sir Terry or Lord Riverside appeared on a balcony to tell them that a mere 80,000 hectares, now with a flood defence, shouldn't be lived in either, they would have been pelted with rotten food. Keep it all as National Park. What rot!

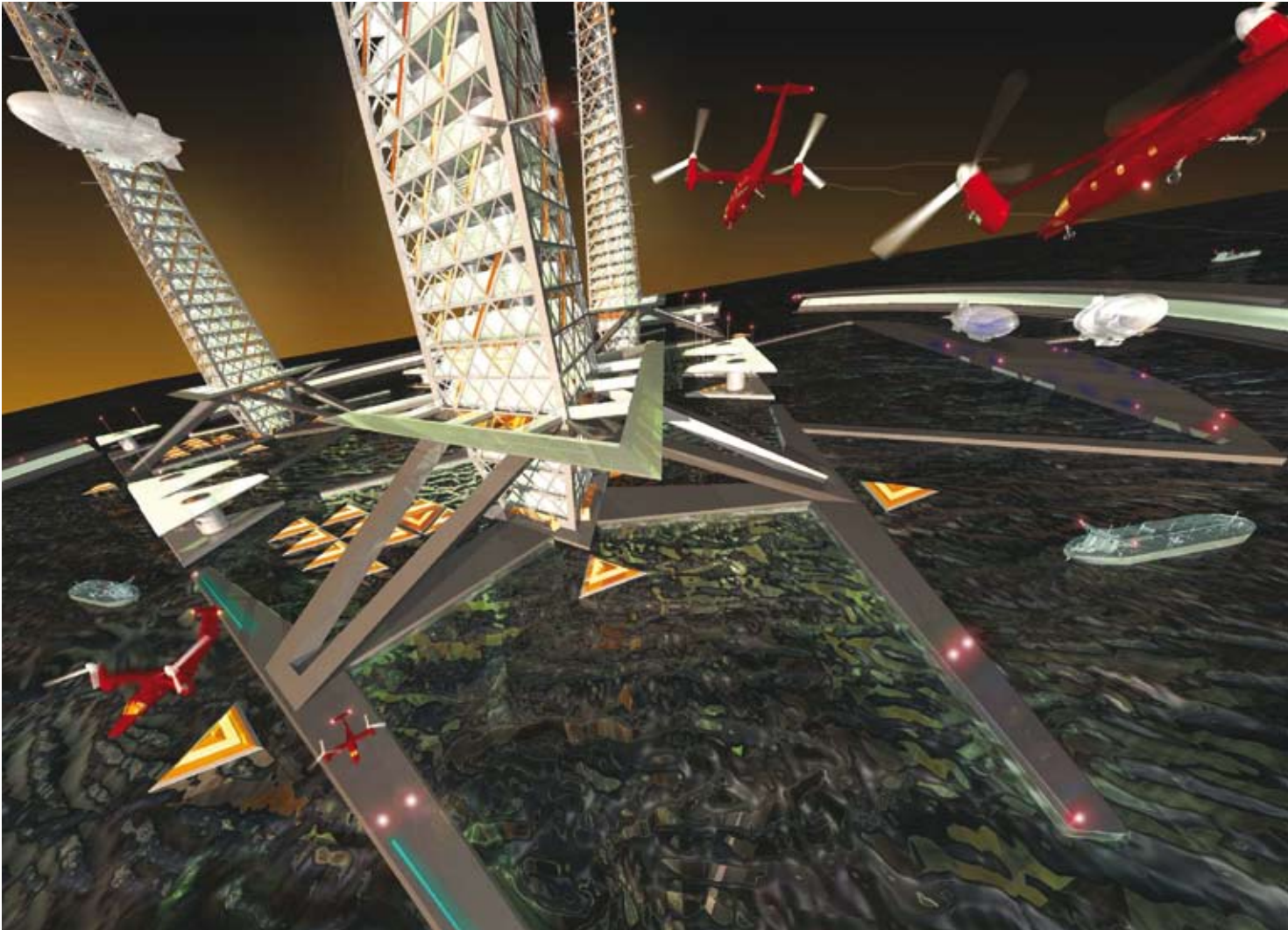
But we, the people, have none of that Elizabethan immediacy either. We seem to agree with the clerks and the Not-In-My-Thames-Estuary nobles. We don't like people either, preferring unaffordable visions of ever more landscapes devoid of population.

Elizabethans never loathed being themselves.

Ian Abley is a practising architect and runs [www.audacity.org](http://www.audacity.org)

# THE 'Z' FACTOR: EXPLOITING THE 3RD DIMENSION

Paul Reeves looks at how some emerging technologies might open new ways of developing and using urban space.



**Above** Cloud Piercer - Mile High London: an oceanic super city in the Thames Estuary. Photograph: Conceived by Jonathan Schwinge  
**Opposite page** ENVAC - Vacuum System Refuse Disposal

The potential advantages to be gained through creatively exploiting the earth's 3rd dimension are as yet relatively unexplored. Certainly hills, cliffs, caves and other naturally occurring formations have been utilised – sometimes for security, sometimes to impress. We can now add the Large Hadron Collider to the mines and sewerage systems that illustrate the advantages of digging deep. And certainly since we freed ourselves of the need for load bearing walls, the conquest of the air and space means we have increasingly been able to live and work in the skies.

## EXPLOITING TECHNOLOGIES

Yet given that it is not so long since we excitedly anticipated mobile architecture, jet pack travel and holidays in space, the interests of urban designers today seem altogether more pedestrian – literally. At a time when emerging technologies are opening up some

interesting possibilities we could do with rediscovering some enthusiasm for expanding the possibilities of the city. When supposed resource and energy shortages result in a constant refrain to reign in aspirations for more ambitious urban design projects, NASA's space elevator concept offers the potential for long term energy supplies in the form of mega solar panels. Alternatively, the Japanese dedicated drilling ship 'Chikyu' is now able to bore 11.6 km into the earth's crust -bringing nearer the day when nuclear waste can be buried at a depth where natural levels of radiation are already at the levels produced in manmade power stations.

Back in the city, how can the 'Z' dimension be directly utilised to benefit urban space? We could start by developing urban infrastructure comparable to the sub-surface services such as sewerage systems, gas and water supplies which have allowed us to socialise the supply of energy and water so that they are literally on tap. Unfortunately convenience is now viewed as a luxury which, in today's hairshirt atmosphere, we seem keen to relinquish. While in the UK discussion of rubbish disposal has been reduced to the moralistic quest for individuals to recycle, Swedish innovators Envac have developed an automated waste collection system using a vacuum technology and sub-surface tubes and pipes. By eliminating the need for wheeled bins and large refuse trucks, such systems increase the possibilities for



utilising space and improve the lives of those who wish to live in the more intensively built parts of cities. The widely lauded Hammarby Sjöstad is an example of one of 214 installations in northern Europe. With one UK installation being integrated into a London development this technology is just starting to be used in the UK.

Unfortunately convenience is now viewed as a luxury which, in today's hairshirt atmosphere, we seem keen to relinquish

#### TUNNELLING

Even more ambitiously, at a time when discussion on relieving congestion leads inevitably to prescriptions for reducing travel, tunnelling for large scale traffic projects can relieve congestion and increase or maintain the flow of traffic into and out of cities. While miserabilists the world over point out that one such project - the Big Dig in Boston - overran on cost and has sprung some leaks since it opened, the project remains an inspiring one, freeing city space for parks while creating faster flows underground. At a time when building new cities is considered off limits, automated drilling and tunnelling techniques that include detection of existing services and building foundations could be used to create ambitious programmes of subterranean motorways and car parks – the type of infrastructure that could help transform mobility and public space of existing cities.

#### FLYING

Let us return to the skies where exploiting our airspace has almost literally stalled. Last year Yves Rossy revived memories of *Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines* when he crossed the English Channel powered by a jet-propelled wing. His contraption might not prove much use for running around town, but small gas turbine engines developed for cruise missiles and other unmanned aerial vehicles suggest that Personalised Flying Vehicles are tantalisingly within our grasp. When the BBC's James May took a look at Paul Mollor's Skycar he found that prototype navigation systems complete with GPS, radars and lasers are already under development offering solutions to the most problematic element of the trip – joining the flow, or departing from it upon reaching a destination. Yet the urban imagination remains bounded, unable to conceive of an escape from surface channels.

#### CONCLUSION

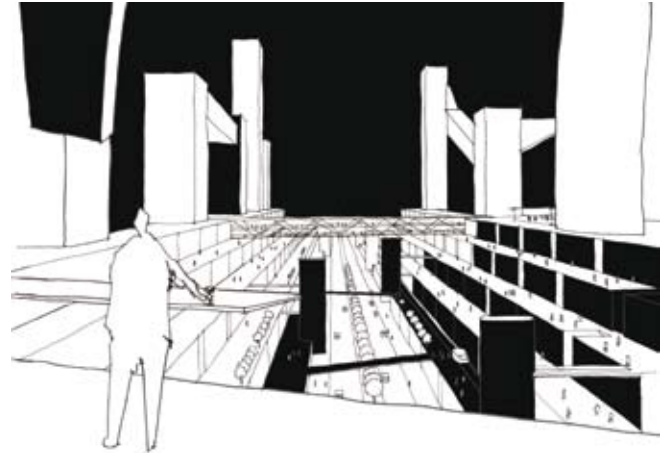
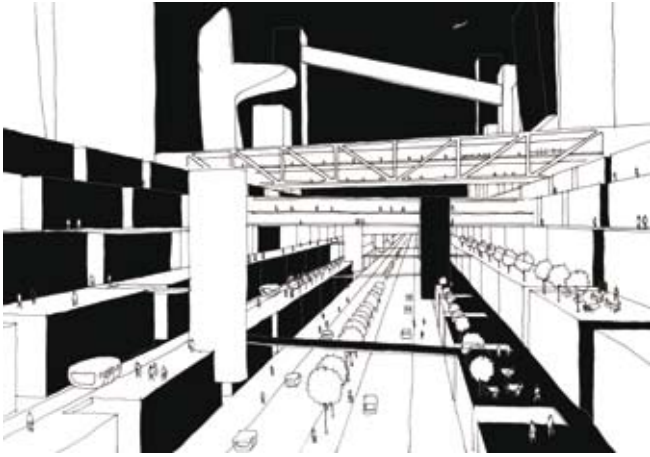
The scenarios and technologies I have pointed to may appear to only be remotely related to urban topology. The point however is that by overcoming the restriction of being relatively constrained to the immediate surface of the earth, we introduce new freedoms. We can create more dense pedestrian areas without the need for service or personal vehicles, while connecting the broader metropolis. And why not free up space for larger parks, private gardens or perhaps light industrial uses?

While the challenges to achieving these projects and other as yet undreamed of projects remain significant, there are hundreds of thousands of engineers worldwide who I am confident are up to the challenge. The potential benefits are enormous. What is a desperate shame is that the forces holding us back are not so much practicalities and costs, but a lack of boldness and imagination.

**Paul Reeves is an expert in Industrial Aerodynamics who has worked in the Aeronautics and Car Industries**

# RE-IMAGINING THE CITY

Karl Sharro dares to imagine a break with the conventional and outdated approaches to building cities



Re-imagining London,  
Sketches by K. Sharro

The urban age is upon us! This year marked the transition: for the first time in history more than half of the world's population will be living in towns and cities. But the significance of this moment is purely symbolic: there is such an extreme variation in the living standards of urban dwellers around the world to undermine the claim that we are living in an urban age. The UNFPA estimates that about 1 billion people live in urban slums. Many of the fastest growing cities are suffering from the worst problems: congestion, pollution, crime and joblessness. There is no doubt that we are witnessing a phenomenal level of movement towards cities, but the way in which we think about and build those cities is still out of synch with the scale of the demographic change. However, rather than presenting migration to cities itself as a problem, as most Western commentators seem to be doing today, we ought to rethink how the cities of the 21st century could be designed and built to accommodate the large influx of people arriving in them and provide them with a decent standard of living and mobility. In other words, we have to re-imagine the city. In what follows I will argue how this could be done.

## ANXIETY ABOUT THE CITY

First, a word about the contemporary attitude to cities. This is nowhere better expressed than through Urban Age, the London-based cabal that has almost monopolised discourse on the city and given it credibility through its partnerships with various cities around the world. Through publications like *The Endless City*, Urban Age expresses the themes that characterise contemporary urbanism: sustainability, localism, density and various other concepts that

are taken for granted. But what this discourse also illustrates is the deep anxiety that professionals and politicians feel today when they attempt to deal with cities. The Urban Age mission statement expresses this anxiety and the fear of attempting to control the city: '...in this rapidly changing context, we need to understand the after-effects of this unprecedented urban shift. We need to come to grips with the social hangover that will result from a sustained investment in the physical restructuring of cities worldwide to avoid the disastrous human consequences of so much planning over the last 50 years'.

So much planning? The problems facing cities today are certainly not the result of too much planning, but the exact opposite. Yet policy makers and planners in the West no longer have the appetite for grand schemes and experiments, and their counterparts in the developing world lack the resources and skills, for the time being, to engage in such ventures. There are glaring exceptions of course, such as cities in China, the Arabian Gulf and to a lesser extent, in India. The magnitude of urban growth in some of those cities is phenomenal and, where the political will and financial investment are available, so is the scale of infrastructure works and development. One thing seems to be lacking however, even in the most daring examples such as Shanghai and Dubai: a radical new vision of what the city could be like.

## MODERNIST RATIONALE

What we observe in such cities today is a phenomenally intensified form of urban development, but one that still relies on the model of the modernist city and the assumptions it was based on. The difference is primarily one of scale, but in essence transportation, housing, zoning and urban codes still follow a modernist rationale. There have been many critiques of modernist planning, particularly when it comes to strict functional zoning and the separation of pedestrians from vehicles for example, leading to a tendency towards mixed-uses and better pedestrian spaces. At the core however, the modernist city still survives and is being reproduced the world over - albeit in different architectural styles. So in emerging cities such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Doha for example, the ideological aspirations of modernism have disappeared, but its principles of conceptualising the city survive through technical and legal frameworks.

When Le Corbusier drew up his vision for a contemporary city for three million inhabitants he envisaged a new city unlike anything that had ever been built before. Yet, his vision was not pure fantasy. Le Corbusier understood the potential of technology to transform the city, and predicted the impact that

the automobile could have on individual mobility. His designs built on those possibilities and produced an entirely new vision of the city. Several decades on, it could be observed that his vision was realised with minor exceptions. Yet we shouldn't overestimate the role of architects in this process; the modern city has been shaped even more by figures like Haussmann and Robert Moses. Le Corbusier's vision gave the modern city a concrete form because it was in synch with the aspirations of the political classes at the time. This did not prevent this vision from being abused by politicians, some of whom reduced the transformative potential of modernism to strictly economic processes of repetition and rationalisation, producing dreary living environments.

### VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Rather than denouncing modernism for those failures, we should produce a radical vision of the city for our own age. The power of Le Corbusier's ideas is not necessarily embodied in specific design ideas – after all some of them have been proven to be unworkable and today seem ludicrous. Rather it is in the extent to which he dared to imagine a break with the past and the conventional and outdated approaches to building cities. Many planners and architects today seem as if they want to turn back time and revert the city to an earlier model that is essentially pre-modern. This is a cowardly retreat, what we need is a new vision for the city that takes to the future.

How could that be achieved and what form would the city take? Le Corbusier's drawings provide a hint. What was distinctive about Corbusier's images is the bold utilisation of space: taller buildings, elevated walkways and airplanes that could travel from one skyscraper to another. For much of the 20th century, skyscrapers have been built predominantly as vertical extrusions from within a defined plot. This has begun to be challenged in recent years, predominantly in theoretical works but there have been a few built examples as well. The possibilities of utilising three-dimensional space to create buildings that expand in space and connect at various levels are infinite. We are constantly told by environmentalists that land is a limited resource, but there are no limits to space. We are only limited by the way in which we can utilise space, and this takes the form of technological and legal restrictions at the moment, both of which can be challenged.

### NEW URBAN FORMS

The first daring example of how a building can challenge the traditional extruded form of the skyscraper was Spreckelsen's Grande Arche at La Défense. This opened immense possibilities in how buildings could be shaped in space that are yet to be explored fully. OMA's CCTV building in Beijing is an even more daring example because of the large cantilever at the top which stretches the limits of engineering and construction methods. However, those two projects are self-contained buildings that aim for a sculptural effect, reinforced by the large free space around that is reminiscent of the modernist tendency towards seeing buildings as monuments. There is an unexplored potential to experiment with how such gestures could be produced at an urban scale, allowing buildings to be connected at various levels and allowing various uses at different heights.

Of all Le Corbusier's ideas, probably the most despised is his notion of 'streets in the sky'. However, this is predominantly because most examples of such streets were elevated walkways that were generally inanimated and very infrequently utilised. Wherever those were designed properly, they were very useful. In the Barbican centre for example, the residents have resisted several attempts to demolish some of those connections because they are very useful to them. Proper 'streets in the sky' that are inhabited by activity have a big role to play in the way we utilise space in a city.

This is not a fantasy or a sci-fi notion; one of the limitations that every city suffers from is that most of its circulation occurs at the ground plane, inevitably leading to congestion. Aside from underground trains and few examples of elevated railways, most cities are restricted to ground plane circulation or, if they are located next to a waterway, some form of commuting by boat. This is a limitation that is yet to be challenged on a larger scale; the possibilities in relieving congestion and allowing for more individual mobility are enormous.

### AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY

Working prototypes of magnetic-levitation devices that could move three-dimensionally, instead of over a track, have been produced in Japan. Although not yet implemented anywhere, the potential for this technology to revolutionise transport is immense. Capsules around the size of a lift car could be whizzing around, moving both vertically and horizontally allowing movement across space without being restricted to the ground plane. Such technologies, together with recent experiments in dynamic buildings that have movable parts, for example to maximise exposure to the sun, present radical possibilities for how we build cities in the future. Combined with buildings that are freed from the extruded shape of the plot and animated streets in the sky, they can liberate the city from the rigid structures that it has so far relied on and could allow us to utilise space in ways never experienced before.

Sadly, it appears that today our ideas about the city are being pulled in the exact opposite direction. To start with, a new form of agrarianism is on the ascendant. In America this year, Work AC won the Young Architects' competition organised by the Museum of Modern Art and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center for their proposal for a public urban farm: 'a magical plot of rural delights inserted within the city grid that resonates with our generations' preoccupations and hopes for a better and different future.' This is a high profile example of a much wider trend towards such proposals in architecture schools and among young architects that is becoming prevalent both in Europe and in America. Rather than radically re-imagining the city as a vision for how we want to live in the future, architects in the West seem to be drawn more towards the familiarity of a mythical agrarian past. This betrays a hostility towards modernity and progress that the rest of the world cannot afford to adopt.

**Karl Sharro is an architect, urbanist and writer. He taught in the University of Beirut for 5 years and currently practises in London**



## Temple Quay 2, Bristol

URBED and Jon Rowland Urban Design explain the evolution of a Masterplan from conception to near completion

URBED and Jon Rowland Urban Design were appointed as masterplanners for the Temple Quay 2 site in Bristol in 2000 following an international design competition promoted by Castlemore Securities, South West Regional Development Agency and Bristol City Council. The scheme covered 7.4ha of land and included just over 53,000m<sup>2</sup> of commercial space, 1,200m<sup>2</sup> of retail uses, 6,000m<sup>2</sup> of leisure space and 500 homes. Eight years later the masterplan is nearing completion. In that time it has been buffeted by commercial pressures, the demands of the planning department, the sale of sites to third parties and the involvement of a series of individual architect practices. The story of the masterplan is one of negotiation and debate allowing the plan to flex and evolve while retaining the power of the original concept.

### THE COMPETITION MASTERPLAN

The winning masterplan drew on the history of the area and in particular the three glass chimneys which had once stood on the site. In the plan these were transformed into three residential towers that punctuated vistas running back into the site. The initial competition scheme was based around five radiating vistas converging on the Floating Harbour. On the waterfront the three towers leant out over the water. Behind the towers, a curving commercial frontage with ground floor cafés and bars enclosed a south facing arc of waterfront space. To the rear of this were two

further arcs carrying Avon Street and Anvil Street. The blocks on Avon Street were commercial while the area to the north was developed as a residential community. This residential area was focused on a new park that included new playing fields for the school. The team produced an overarching masterplan that extended the plan into the surrounding commercial and housing areas. This was in stark contrast to the inward looking schemes that had previously been proposed for the site.

### THE OUTLINE APPLICATION MASTERPLAN

The masterplan submitted for outline planning consent in May 2001, was approved in 2003 and retained many of the elements of the original competition scheme. This included the five radiating vistas and the towers, the curving frontages onto the waterfront as well as the overall massing of the scheme. The main changes related to the northern area where the park was dropped in favour of widening the central vista and extending the school playing fields. Demand from large office users also caused two of the waterfront blocks to be linked with a glass atrium on the line of one of the vistas. The masterplan was framed on two levels. The first was an Illustrative Plan and drawings showing how the scheme could look. The second level was a Regulatory Plan to guide future development. The Regulatory Plan created an envelope for the masterplan buildings by setting the height, massing and building line. It is this that has had the most



**Above** The masterplan that gained planning permission in 2006 and is now under construction

**Top right** Aerial perspective of the original masterplan

**Right** A perspective sketch of the revised waterfront showing the bookend towers

**Opposite page left** The original competition masterplan, was based on five radiating vistas and three towers

**Opposite page right** The completed phase 1 housing



influence on the scheme as it has been applied even on a site that was acquired by a third party.

Following the outline consent the rear section of the site was sold to Barratt Homes who have developed a scheme in three phases including the central open space. Their scheme is entirely in line with the Regulatory Plan and remarkably similar to the Illustrative Plan. The new housing has coincided with the renewal of the adjacent Dings estate where a series of homezones have been created, so that the old and new housing operate as one neighbourhood. Castlemore have also developed a series of mixed-use buildings in the central part of the site, which is now also largely complete.

### THE REVISED WATERFRONT SCHEME

Unfortunately the three towers could not be brought forward. The problem was that they stood between the waterfront and the prime office space. A number of companies who had considered taking these buildings cited the towers as their reason for not proceeding. To their credit, Castlemore Securities re-engaged URBED to develop an alternative approach to the waterfront. The revised plan retained the five radiating vistas. However rather than terminating the central vista with a residential tower, the scheme now focuses views on a major sculpture by the New York artist Vito Acconci. The two outer towers were moved onto the outer vistas. This means that, whereas in the original scheme the waterfront towers divided the waterfront

into discreet areas, the revised scheme uses two towers to bookend a single waterfront space. This together with a new footbridge will create a waterfront circuit encouraging pedestrian movement and leisure uses. The revised scheme has been coordinated by URBED with different architects working on each of the buildings. These include Glenn Howells Architects, Atkins, Stride Treglown and Fitzroy Robinson together with a new bridge by Niall McLaughlin and public realm works by Landscape Projects. The waterfront scheme was developed into a full planning application that was approved in 2007.

The scheme today is around two-thirds complete. The masterplan has been implemented pretty much as conceived in the competition scheme with the exception of the three towers. The main lesson of the scheme is that the key to a good masterplan is not its ability to resist change but to be sufficiently flexible to respond to pressures and retain its shape. Masterplans cannot be treated as fixed blueprints: if they are they will be very quickly undermined. This is why there are far more good masterplans produced in the UK than there are realised plans on the ground. The key to the success of Temple Quay 2 lies partly in the structure of the original outline planning consent which fixed the plan in a way that the planners could enforce while retaining a large amount of flexibility. The other lesson is that masterplanning is a process: Castlemore's ongoing engagement and faith in the masterplanning team allowed the plan to recover from setbacks like the loss of the towers, to evolve and come out stronger.



## East Street, Farnham - Scott Brownrigg

Scott Brownrigg demonstrate the need for perseverance and flexibility to deliver a complex project

Located on the edge of the prime retail zone, East Street and its environs have been highlighted as an area of opportunity for regeneration by the local authority, Waverley Borough Council, since the year 2000. The site currently contains a disjointed mix of surface level car parking, derelict buildings and under-utilised open space. It forms the transitional link between the historic core of the town to the west and the less-attractive, low-quality development to the east. The site suffers from poor legibility, a lack of permeability and linkages to the town centre, low quality built form and a neglected public realm.

The progress of the project towards delivery has been difficult as the consultation and planning processes became highly politicised and local interest groups promoted conflicting aspirations and expectations for the future of the area. The design of the scheme has had to evolve in order to achieve a balance between the demands of the numerous parties involved. But throughout, the key objective of Scott Brownrigg and Crest Nicholson has been to be as flexible and accommodating as possible, whilst maintaining focus on the need for high quality design-led solutions. It is this ethos which has resulted in the scheme attracting the overwhelming support of key consultees and stakeholders and which resulted in the recent resolution by the local authority to grant planning permission at a council vote of 33 to 1 in favour.

Following the confirmation of Crest Nicholson Regeneration and Sainsbury's as preferred developers in 2002, consultation with the local

community, stakeholders and other key consultees began in earnest. The overall aims were to comply with the adopted planning brief and to provide sustainable town centre living, adding to its vitality and viability whilst minimising the need to travel, thus ensuring future residents would be less reliant on the car as they would be within walking distance of all the town centre facilities and the railway station. In response to identified needs, the planning brief required a mixed-use regeneration of the area, to include residential, retail, community, and leisure uses.

### PEDESTRIAN LINKS

Detailed contextual and technical analysis of the site and surrounding area was followed by a wide ranging and extensive period of public and stakeholder consultation. During that time, the masterplan and design approach evolved significantly to take account of the requirements and aspirations of various interested groups, consultees, organisations and the wider public. However, the urban design fundamentals remained constant throughout. In this respect, it was considered essential to improve pedestrian linkages with the rest of the town centre. East Street would be pedestrianised and the majority of the site made car-free through the use of underground and multi-level car parking, and access provided on the periphery of the scheme.

A series of high quality public spaces were proposed from which linkages would help provide legibility and act as important connections





**Opposite page** Illustrative 3D sketch  
**Above left** Masterplan  
**Above** A unique character that respects the historical values of Farnham  
**Left** Urban Design Framework

to the existing urban fabric. Pedestrian alleyways (a common feature of the historic core of Farnham) were used to connect a proposed new town square to the existing centre. High quality green open space located within the heart of the scheme would also help enrich the environment and setting of the new development, a key factor in developing the masterplan.

**BUILDING CHARACTER**

In the centre of the site is a 18th Century, Grade II Listed building, Brightwell House, which was unsympathetically extended in the 1970s by the addition of the Redgrave Theatre. The scheme provides for the removal of the theatre, which was closed in 1998, and the renovation of the listed building, bringing it back into beneficial use and using it as the centrepiece of the new town square.

Much of Farnham’s street architecture comprises a mix of traditional building forms which have evolved from medieval times and the significant influence of the Georgian period. This has created a traditional market town with a variety and richness of building forms, styles and materials that give Farnham its character. The proposals specifically draw upon this character and encompass the essence of the place. Through careful study of the local vernacular, the scheme has been developed to utilise traditional forms, quality materials, a variety of heights and scales. The range of design treatments and styles, the roofscape, the differing shop fronts and

signage, all come together to create an architectural rhythm that is natural to Farnham.

The scheme provides for a new community centre and a multi-screen cinema, the facilities most requested in a comprehensive study undertaken by Farnham Town Council. 239 additional dwellings will contribute towards identified local housing needs. Apartments have been utilised to help screen the cinema and car park shells and sited to provide active frontages to main public areas. The design seeks to maximise the potential of the relationship with the River Wey, south of the site. Principles of Secure by Design have been adopted throughout.

Sustainability awareness enhances the physical and social aspects of the scheme from the outset. The design incorporates ‘Green Walls’, ‘Green Roofs’ and Combined Heat and Power (CHP) and SUDS.

**ENDORSEMENT OF THE SCHEME**

The project will be focused on the partnership going forward and the developers are committed to achieve high standards. The future East Street, Farnham will be a modern, yet sensitive, sustainable extension to the historic town, which will create a legacy that we believe will be admired. The experience of this scheme has shown over time that partnership, perseverance, patience and flexibility are keys to resolving the many complicated issues involved in regenerating a heavily constrained site, but that most of all it is important to maintain the principles of quality design throughout.

## AFTER AMNESIA

LEARNING FROM THE ISLAMIC MEDITERRANEAN URBAN FABRIC  
ATTILIO PETRUCCIOLI GRAFICA & STAMPA, ALTAMURA (BARI)-ITALY, €25



ISBN 978 88 95006 03 1

The book's unforgettable title refers to a Gunnar Asplund quote that architects forget that they must follow the style of the place rather than that of the time, which would be music to the historicist ears of a certain Prince, so let's hope that he does not read this book. The rest of us can pore over the excellent exploded views of houses and intricate plans that made me want to crayon them in and mount them on the wall for inspiration. The author eschews photos in favour of freehand drawings so the book is awash with painstakingly drawn plans in all forms: figure grounds, layered plans,

and intricate patterns of buildings, street sequences and clashes of grids. I particularly like the plan of the walled city of Jerusalem based on successive rotations of the street grids, now there is a plan generator worth trying. Petruccioli, professor at the University of Bari, certainly motivates his students to produce these beautiful drawings in their thesis projects in exotic locations like Aleppo, Algiers, Damascus and Mostar with their suks and casbahs. He believes that cities are the product of the slow sedimentation of the built environment in phases and contends that only a few hundred architects are gifted with the ability to manipulate space and form, (can you name them?), so the rest should give up trying to be original and get down to the hard graft of learning their craft through studying the grammar of built precedents, in this case the Islamic traditional courtyard house. Through the study of repetitive building typologies he builds up terraces and clusters leading through streets and neighbourhoods to the civic scale. If the sequence of study is bottom up then the philosophy

is surely top down with little wiggle room for doubt that this is the path to enlightenment. Perhaps if we pass through this current wet stage of global warming to hotter drier summers then we will need to build around shaded courtyards in the Mediterranean fashion to conserve expensive cooling energy and this book will become the must-have pattern book. Until then it is a lively illustration of the clusters and layered grid patterns that urban designers would love the chance to design without the hassle of having to cater for boring cars, supermarkets, business parks and other modern typologies that do not fit within this seamless urbanism resulting from the deformations and fractures of grids. His idea that the co-ordination of dimensional units is a rhythmic factor composed according to the laws of repetition and symmetry gives a clue to how we can produce attractive urbanism with a limited palette of standardised house plans if we learn these simple rules.

Malcolm Moor

## DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENTS EXPLAINED

ROB COWAN (ED), URBAN DESIGN GROUP/ THOMAS TELFORD, £35



ISBN 978 0 7277 3440 2

For designers the introduction of Design and Access Statements was seen as a great opportunity for the message of good design to reach a wider audience. This is reflected in the extent of sponsorship the publication has received.

This is a modest publication, only 72 pages long, clearly laid out and enlivened by Rob's cartoons. There are four parts covering the purpose of

design statements; how they can be written; their role in assessment; and a check list, which is likely to be the most used section.

The style avoids preaching but is perhaps a little too hesitant and tentative. Perhaps a little too much of the 'what statements might be' and too little of 'what they should be'. This is probably appropriate when addressing good designers who are enthusiastic about explaining their approach, but there is a danger that the designer or planning officer under pressure may find it just too much effort and not bother to make use of the sensible advice on offer.

There is extensive use of lists and some of these, although subdivided, are so long that they may exceed the attention span of those who would benefit most from them. This is of course a product of the extensive nature of design, and the use of Rob's drawings provides just the right level of light relief combined with serious messages. Is there a case for publishing these separately? Of the cartoons there

is one that strikes a questionable note and unfortunately that is the first the reader encounters. Is it really true that 'Using design statements involves a different approach to the process of design'? Surely what design statements have done is to bring a proper approach to design to the forefront, to expose poorly thought-through designs, and to make life harder for the off-the-shelf merchant.

The concluding Checklist is structured to follow those established by the Urban Design Group and BCLG/CABE. It is twelve pages long and perhaps differentiation between core/essential elements needed in any statement, and those that follow more specialised applications, would have helped the everyday user.

Overall this is an important contribution to the armoury of guidance for the struggling designer. Let us hope that the price of £35 does not put off those who need the help most.

Richard Cole

## THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF URBAN CONTAINMENT

ARTHUR C. NELSON, CASEY J. DAWKINS AND THOMAS W. SANCHEZ, ASHGATE: ALDERSHOT, £55



ISBN 978 0754670087

The lifestyles of the American middle classes are the cause of global warming opined Andrés Duany in a recent broadside against sprawl. Many concur. Before the recent retreat in oil prices took some wind from the sails, various commentators gleefully contemplated the prospect of gas hungry suburban masses forced into adopting more appropriate urban lifestyles.

In days of yore, moral revulsion to suburbanites was often aestheticised. Today, notwithstanding hostility for modern equivalents of the bungalow, hostility to suburban expansion has

evolved. Just as evidence based policy supplants political vision, discussion of the suburbs is codified scientifically. Bungalows with a garden and space for a couple of cars are not only the route to beastliness, but the suburbs are disastrous for the planet, humanity, or both. Few allude to the tenuous nature of much self serving advocacy research.

Thankfully this collection of studies of American cities largely avoids becoming yet another environmentalist sermon masquerading as research. But after 170 odd pages of dense text, the social consequences of urban containment – either positive or negative – remain largely unclear. Part of the problem derives from the assumptions underpinning the work. Four types of containment are identified, and each subjected to analysis to establish influence on the likes of racial concentration, housing affordability, gentrification and public health. Often there is no control set.

Therefore the chapter on exurbs opens with a useful introduction stressing changes in metropolitan forms require us to rethink the contemporary definitions of our settled landscapes. But this is followed by various speculations as to the negative consequences of

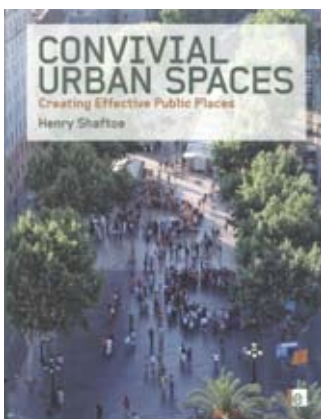
exurbs, pages of stats and hey presto, we find containment is beneficial on the basis of ensuring less exurbanised land in the regulated zones outside the boundary, and higher densities inside. Unsurprisingly, the investigations echo the contemporary concerns of social policy – in themselves often problematic. Hence the chapter on race is concerned less with equality of opportunity than the more Orwellian managing ‘diversity’. The chapter on affordable housing seeks only to measure whether containment preserves existing levels of ‘affordable housing’.

Finally, the new more interventionist social policy targeting personal behaviour comes into focus in the chapter on public health. While the authors acknowledge definitions are problematic and evidence seldom establishes cause and effect relationships between built forms and public health, it seems this is no barrier to finding support for this insidious and rapidly expanding area of environmental determinism. It is remarkable how seldom this type of research is challenged these days. Time to get more critical.

Alastair Donald

## CONVIVIAL URBAN SPACES

HENRY SHAFTOE, EARTHSCAN 2008, £39.95



ISBN 978 1 84407 388 7

This is not the first book to deal with the quality of urban spaces and how to achieve it, but it is one that collects theory and practice from a variety of sources and brings them together in a coherent and practical volume. It is as if the author had taken the *Good Place Guide* (repeatedly quoted) and tried to

show ways of creating more good places in the future.

After the introduction setting the context, the book is divided into three parts: Public spaces – why have them and who are they for?; What makes a space convivial?; and How can one create and sustain successful public spaces? In a relatively short text, Shaftoe covers a vast amount of ground dealing with a range of issues that go from public space and children and young people, to the sensual aspects of public spaces. He makes a strong argument for not over-designing – leaving scope for users to adapt a space – and for thinking the management and maintenance of spaces.

The third part of the book is mostly practical advice based on good practice; it deals with inter alia seating, shelter, colour, public art and entertainment and these are grouped under headings such as Comfort, Joy and Maintenance.

Five case studies are intermingled with the text covering spaces in Barcelona, Berlin, Bristol, Padua and York. In the conclusion the authors lists what he sees as ‘the constituents of conviviality’, again grouped under the headings Physical, Geographical, Managerial and Psychological.

The book is lavishly illustrated with mostly photographs by the author. The publishers are to be applauded for including so many illustrations as they are essential to communicate the author’s message. On the other hand the quality of the photographs is not always as good as the book deserves, nor is the layout of the pages. As it is fortunately not intended as a coffee table book, this is a minor quibble. Overall Shaftoe succeeds in contributing to the practical understanding and production of better quality urban spaces.

Sebastian Loew

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## WHAT TIME DOES THIS PLACE START?

I enjoyed UD108's topic of *The Spaces in Between*, dealing with those marginal spaces, often overlooked by planners and developers, but sustaining a wide range of vital human activities. The literature of placemaking usually concentrates instead on more formal urban locations. They have well-known names which appear on maps, and they are pretty much unchanging. If you went back there twenty years from now there might be a few details different but it would be recognisably the same place. Red Square, Times Square, Trafalgar Square..... public places, permanent places, fixed nodes in an urban landscape. The Urban Design Group's *The Good Place Guide* is an admirable collection of such places. In his foreword to the book, John Worthington does mention the importance not only of formal space and material character, but also of experiential quality in the making of a good place; "...memories of an event in a place or a feeling of well-being...". And while most of the photographs in the book are populated (several are eerily deserted like a de Chirico painting), they of course are all conventional permanent urban enclosures.

There is another kind of place, which would make a different book, in which the placemaking is temporary, created entirely by an event. The event is set up in a non-place, and for the duration of the event, its inhabitation by people, and the intense life they live there, creates a memorable place through a shared experience. Then the event ends, the people disperse, and the place ceases to be. In August I had two such memorable place-experiences. Firstly I went to Cropredy in Oxfordshire, to the annual Fairport Convention festival. For three days we sat in a field. For the rest of the year it is a totally unremarkable field among thousands. But for those three days, 20,000 of us, many bands, and a great variety of places to eat and drink, together created a distinctive place. We belonged there; it was our home, we all sang *Meet on the Ledge*. It had Lynchian paths, edges and sub-districts. But if I went back to Cropredy now, I might not even recognise the field. The place has gone.

Later in the month I went to the annual production of the wonderful Birmingham Opera Company, directed by Graham Vick. The company has a policy of not performing in theatres, but instead temporarily inhabiting a disused building, which it dresses for the occasion. This year it was doing Mozart's *Idomeneo*, in an empty rubber factory in Ladywood. The audience hung about under a Belfast-trussed loading bay by the canal until the factory doors opened, and then filed in to the gaunt, lofty space punctuated by great steel stanchions. There are no seats; the audience occupied the space with the singers, actors and chorus, and walked about following the action; an earthen hill on one side, a platform with a big mirror over here, a big sacrificial table over there. Vick, in an old jumper, walked around among us, mouthing every line of song. For three hours or so, a few hundred people, joined together by an intense experience, transformed an old industrial building into a memorable public room.

After the final night's performance, everyone walked out into the night excited and exhilarated. The next day the orchestra platform was dismantled, the lights unbolted, the big mirror removed, and driven away. Once more, just an empty, disused factory, nowhere special.

Joe Holyoak