Urban Design as Social Benefit: Thinking Beyond Formality and Physicality

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Abstract

While the term 'urban design' is ubiquitous within the realms of planning, architecture, government, and commercial development, it remains a term without a universally-agreed referent, and, perhaps more contentiously, an enterprise *without an explicit commitment to societal betterment*. In respect of end products, urban design may manifest itself via both concrete and strategic outcomes, may be directed at both public and semi-public spaces, and may operate over a range of scales. In respect of specific determinants, urban design responses may be motivated and driven by formal and/or aesthetic issues, by economics, by statutory or regulatory requirements, by political ideologies, by the dictates and incentives of speculative development, or by a range of specific community requirements. Yet notwithstanding the reasonableness and inevitability of such differences, this paper postulates that *all* of the above should be construed within a wider social frame, and suggests that the outcomes of the urban design process should confer significant social benefit. And while it is usually taken as read that urban design *always* has both the intention and the potential to make positive contributions, it is nevertheless the case that, from a social perspective, the determination and fulfilment of specific and contingent outcomes inescapably suggests the likelihood of discrimination against, and thus *dis*benefit for, some, and the possibility of under-valuing, selectively deforming, or simply ignoring 'big picture' considerations pertaining to infrastructure and transportation, land use, sustainability, social cohesion and inclusivism, place identity, and so forth. Moreover, from a *design* perspective, the seduction of an over-riding commitment to *physicality*, to the architectonics of *form*, and thus to *aesthetic and methodological determinism*, is an ever-present issue worthy of closer consideration. It is this last feature of contemporary urban design that is explored in this paper.

Introduction

From the outset it should be made clear that this paper is a polemic. It seeks to raise a number of significant issues pertaining to the nature of urban design but does not attempt to examine such issues in an empirical manner nor to present them in detail in an academic manner. Rather, it explores the dual propositions (i) that urban design has both an ethical and a professional obligation to address itself to social needs, and (ii) that much contemporary practice overlooks or actively marginalizes provision for social needs in favour of a commitment to formal outcomes driven by increasingly esoteric design- and decision-making means. While the latter may – or may *not* – be self-evident within the professional world of pragmatic accomplishment, it is increasingly the case within the realm of academic theorisation. Drawing attention to and highlighting a number of questions in relation to these, and a range of closely intertwined, issues, even in such a brief manner, thus seeks to generate necessary debate about relations between social needs, formal outcomes, and the decision-making mechanisms that link – or increasingly separate – the two.

On the nature of urban design – some assumptions

As with many people trained in architecture – and, it might be speculated, with many people involved in cognate disciplines such as planning, as well as with many members of the general public – mention of the term 'urban design' immediately calls to mind notions of what might be called *the determination and/or the implementation of specific and physical objects within urban or quasi-urban environments*. In other words (and to be both more specific and more prosaic) our minds inevitably turn to the provision of new buildings; to the external spaces that such

buildings both 'create' and are located in relation to; and to the interrelations with other and pre-existing buildings and infrastructure, including major transportation provisions, that constitute the contexts of such interventions.

While urban design is thus understood to be the design of something *more* than individual buildings in themselves, it is nevertheless often taken to be about *designs for the arrangement and location of multiple buildings within a specific context*. And if it is understood that urban design may operate over a range of scales, from the determination of land subdivisions to the design of individual urban places; that it may be directed at both major public spaces and, via its links with housing provision, at quasi-private ones; and that urban design remains properly-so-called even if its outcomes exist at the level of strategic planning and intentionality rather than physical production and implementation; then it is also most usually the case that our thinking about – and thus our assumptions about – urban design is predominantly directed at the *formal*, i.e. literally at *the form of the physical infrastructure proposed and/or executed*.

Now this is not unexpected. Urban design *is* about the physical and thus the formal. But it does raise a number of generic issues that are worthy of consideration and questioning. In so short a paper only three can briefly be introduced:
• first, to what extent are the formal and aesthetic aspects of urban design construed to be *an end in themselves* – and why and by whom?
• second, and acknowledging the differences between individual urban design briefs, what are the overarching aims that *initiate and drive* urban design proposals, the aims that such proposals
• presumably *respond to and attempt to meet*, and thus that transcend the merely physical, such that the physical is itself the *vehicle for the accomplishment* of such aims? and
• third, how do design-related decisions affect not only the accomplishment of such aims but their very determination; and how and by whom are such aims formulated?

On the assumption of social betterment
Before trying to unpack these questions, however, it is important to consider why they might be worth asking, and to locate them not merely at a personal but at a community and *societal* level. And the answer relies on a particular proposition.

If it may be asserted that, despite its ubiquity within the realms of planning, architecture, government and policy-making, and commercial development, the term 'urban design' lacks a transparent and a universally-agreed referent, such that we all might know immediately and unequivocally what urban design 'is'; and if it may also be asserted that this absence is hardly surprising given that the term covers such a wide variety of activities across these different realms; then it is *more* significant to propose that it is also a term that lacks *an explicit commitment to social betterment*.

Now this, of course, may be regarded as being both potentially controversial and self-evidently counter-intuitive. Why? Because it is usually simply taken for granted that urban design *does* provide social betterment, *and cannot fail to do so*, on the dual basis that its proposals provide that which was previously absent (by the addition of the new and/or by the removal and/or remediation of the extant) and that such interventions *inevitably constitute improvements to the pre-existing situation*.

In any given example it might well be argued – indeed demonstrated – that this is the case.

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Yet this begs the question of what were the *aims* of the particular proposal upon which this affirmation of success is based, and, more importantly, the closely-intertwined albeit frequently ignored questions of how and by whom these aims were determined?; whose betterment they represent?; which parties were ignored in or excluded from such decision- or brief-making?; and thus how and in what ways certain segments of society may be disbenefitted by the proposals enacted?

This is not to suggest that urban design should aim to, or can, please all of the people all of the time, but it does point to a range of significant observations, including:

• that decision-making is a complex matter involving multiple inputs and potentially conflicting aims and interests;
• that a commitment to inclusivity nevertheless inevitably suggests exclusion of some;
• that in offering urban design proposals intentionality – even demonstrably *good* intention – is not enough in the absence of wide-ranging and dispassionate analysis; and
• that while such proposals may well be manifest most clearly and directly via physical offerings in the form of buildings and infrastructure, urban design is, by its very nature and by its differentiation from both architecture and social commentary, also pre-eminently about the nature, condition and consequences of the urban fabric, and is not separable from social issues pertaining to the users of such.

To these we can add, of course, that, in some cases, inclusivity is not an aim; that in some particular instances power interests take precedence over other (and potentially more relevant?) needs of society; and that urban design is often perceived as being pre-eminently a matter of formal decision-making without due consideration of non-physical consequences. This is not to suggest a wilful disregard of consequences, but rather a touchingly naïve belief that good consequences automatically follow from good design decisions.

While specific urban design responses may be driven by formal and/or aesthetic issues, as well as by an ongoing diversity of academic theorisation offering radical reconceptualisations of what urban design should be, it is important to realize that, to greater or lesser extent, they are equally well driven by political ideologies, by power relations, by statutory or regulatory requirements, by economics, by the dictates and incentives of speculative development, and by a plethora of social requirements, whether assumed, mandated or predicted. Notwithstanding the presence of the latter, and the tacit assumptions

(i) that this is a matter for social planners, not urban designers, and

(ii) (ii) that meeting defined social requirements is synonymous with providing social amenity, it is nevertheless suggested that *all* of the above must be construed within a social frame, and that the outcomes of the urban design process and of design decision-making should offer – and should be demonstrated to provide – significant social benefit beyond the provision of a supposedly 'good environment' and/or 'a meeting of physical needs as specified'.

In thrall to the physical?
To what extent, then, might it be suggested that the formal and aesthetic aspects of urban design constitute an end in themselves? Or, perhaps to put it less confrontationally, to what

extent are the *outcomes* of urban design *essentially and inescapably physical*, regardless of whether they are:

- *abstract-documentary*, in the sense of comprising strategic planning and/or policies of intention;
- *concrete-formal*, in that they offer architectonic proposals (and/or infrastructural-transportation proposals, which cannot be dealt with here) for actual production and implementation within the urban environment;
- or what might be dubbed *intellectual-critical* in the manner of many essentially esoteric and algorithmically-driven schematics emanating from universities and aimed, supposedly, at 'thinking differently' about and subjecting to critical scrutiny contemporary urban practices?

The obvious answer to this question is, of course, 'to a high degree', i.e. it is in the very nature of urban design, as it is in the nature of many other of the design disciplines, to address the physical. This is its prime intention; this is its focus of engagement; this is, we trust, its area of expertise; and it is through proposals suggestive of physical responses or solutions to issues or problems identified as both emanating from and actively associated with, not merely the *urban*, but more precisely the urban *fabric*, that urban design – as opposed, say, to either individual buildings on the one hand or to social planning on the other – makes its principal contribution.

However, three specific and deeply interwoven contentions are offered here:

- first, that the above notwithstanding, urban design proposals are frequently *too much* about the physical, even when they are not couched in terms of specific ready-to-make construction schemes but rather in the form of general strategic principles;
- second, that simultaneously both the cause and the effect of this overly-narrow concentration on the physical is that urban design schemes too often seriously *neglect key social issues* in terms of their briefing inputs, their actual design proposals, the aims and intentions of such proposals, and their predicted and/or demonstrated social consequences; and
- third, that this emphasis on the physical, and thus essentially on the *architectonics* of urban design, can all too easily lead to a focus on *the individual or iconic building* as central to such proposals, at the expense of a more profound analysis and understanding of the specific urban fabric and its particular social and environmental issues, as if producing the former indubitably 'solves' the latter.

The other thing that can be said about all three categories, of course, is that they are all inescapably *political*. And while much has been written about this – from Mayo's proposal of 'Political Avoidance in Architecture' (1985), through McGlynn and Murrain's discussion on the politics of urban design (1994) and Gandelsonas' views on 'The Master Plan as a Political Site' (1995), and thus to much recent literature – this political dimension nonetheless remains either somewhat 'tangential' to designers' thinking (how on earth *is* space political? (Lefebvre 1976; Jameson 1997)) or is simply taken literally (what do council or government require?). Despite its importance, however, this aspect of urban design thinking cannot be explored here, and we must return to the centrality of the physical.

Formalism and the aesthetics of urban design, or benefit, follows form?

Before committing ourselves unreservedly to the physical, however, it is first necessary to indicate, if perhaps to set aside here, the views of those who would, for sound reasons given their particular focus, locate urban design within a different framework of thinking. Thus, while acknowledging that "the task of designing urban places – where the designer is primarily concerned with the sensual, but particuarly visual, qualities of these places – has traditionally been termed *urban design*", Varkki George, for example, is at pains to establish "that urban design is a *second-order design endeavour*" (1997, p.143). By this he means that "designers are only indirectly responsible for producing built forms and the spaces in between them; they design the decision environment within which others make decisions to add to or alter the built environment" (1997, p.143).

Now, this is not without substance at the level of strategic planning – at the level of Gandelsonas' claim that "the master plan's role is to *fill a void*, to mask the absence of architecture" (1995, p.20) – which does indeed constitute a significant sector of the urban design field. Yet at the same time it is quite clear that for many urban designers or, at least, for many practitioners who execute urban design proposals, and for the institutions or professional bodies that recognise and reward such proposals, the overtly physical – the actuality of the design that has been or will be brought into existence – is of paramount importance. And to the extent that urban design is thus, to large degree, *inevitably* physical in respect of its proposals, then it is likewise inevitably connected to the formal, and thus to the aesthetics of architectonic form.

While we cannot deal here with the various ways in which aesthetics has been dealt with in the urban design literature over the last thirty years, from the historical (Rubin 1979) to the more prospective (Taylor 2008), three issues triggered by the phrase "the aesthetics of architectonic form" are worthy of brief mention here.

The first of these relates to the contention, noted above, that, for many practitioners, urban design is inescapably physical in respect of its proposals, and thus inescapably linked to the formal and to the aesthetic. This suggests two questions:

• to what extent is this engagement with and commitment to aesthetics and formal development perceived as being a (or the) primary aim or intention or purpose of urban design?; and,

• if it *is*, what role in the generation of urban design propsals is played by other potential briefing requirements, and by other criteria of successful outcomes, associated with *social benefit divorced from either visual stimulation or the mere provision of functional needs*?

Aseem Inam's provocative criticism of urban design, viz, that "it is superficial because it is obsessed with impressions and aesthetics of physical form; and it is practised as an extension of architecture, which often implies an exaggerated emphasis on end product" (2002, p.35), supports this view. In similar manner a brief survey of the jury citations for the (Royal) Australian Institute of Architects *Walter Burley Griffin Award for Urban Design* over the last decade ([Jury citation] 1998-2008) goes some way to reinforcing it, suggesting a (perhaps not surprising) fascination with the formal qualities of the objects designed and their provision of functional excellence for a particular purpose rather than with any deeper analysis of the

benefits bestowed on the community by their execution.

Given, then, that urban design is 'naturally' associated with changes to the physical environment, and thus inevitably results in physical responses to specified requirements, the second issue relates to the question of what generalized ideologies – aesthetic, formal, theoretical, social, political, and so on – might inform, drive, and effectively circumscribe, specific responses? While this cannot be explored here it is worth drawing attention to Kelbaugh's discussions of the 'three urbanisms' (2005; 2007; 2008), Eisenman's quasi equivalents (quoted in Baird 2005), and Fraker's six "current modes of urban design thinking" (2007, p.61). Of these it is Kelbaugh's taxonomy of *New* Urbanism (Fishman 2005; c.f. also Bressi 2002; Haas 2008), *Everyday* Urbanism (Mehrotra, 2005) and *Post*-Urbanism (Strickland 2005; c.f. also Moor & Rowland 2006) that has now become a standard for discussing urban design, at least from a U.S. perspective. And while it is worth noting Eisenman's quasi-parallel terminology of the Arcadian, the Utopian, and Koolhausian "junk space" – "Junk space is not a project because it isn't critical, it's cynical…" (Eisenman, in Baird 2005, p.3) – and acknowledging Fraker's supplementation of new and everyday urbanism with the additional categories of generic urbanism and hyper-modernity, hybrid urbanism, transformative urban morphology, and urban ecological reconstruction (2007, pp.6263), it is only Kelbaugh's 'big three' that can be summarised briefly here.

Describing New Urbanism as being "both idealistic and pragmatic" Kelbaugh notes that "It represents a peculiarly American mix of noble objectives and commercial means, high-striving and lofty in its communitarian objectives but practical in its methods" (2008, p.42). A longer description recognises several issues or incentives that, while being manifest *through* physical results, go beyond the merely physical in their *aspirations*:

> …to equitably mix people of different income, ethnicity, race, and age; to build public architecture and public space that make citizens feel they are part of, and proud of, a culture and community that adds up to more than the sum of its private worlds; to be a responsible ecological force; to weave a tighter urban fabric that mixes land of different uses and buildings of different architectural types within a well-connected network of streets and green spaces; to utilize regional public transit, revenue sharing, planning, and governance to better tie together the metropolitan area (Kelbaugh 2008, p.42).

While he acknowledges that the above aims are "more than its proponents have been able to achieve on the ground" he points out that in its aims and its thinking "… it attempts to better integrate physical and social environments. It maintains that there is a structural relationship between special behaviour and physical form… [and] It posits that good design can have a measurably positive effect on one's sense of place and community" (Kelbaugh 2008, p.42).

In contrast, Everyday Urbanism is characterised as being "not as utopian as New Urbanism, nor is it as tidy and doctrinaire" (2008, p.42). As Kelbaugh opines, it "celebrates and builds on the richness and vitality of daily life and ordinary reality. It has little pretence about the perfectibiity of the built environment. Nor is it about utopian form. But it is realistic about social equity and citizen participation, especially for disadvantaged populations. It is grass roots and populist" (2005, p.8). This, he suggests, makes Everyday Urbanism "more conversational and bottom-up than inspirational and top-down" (2008, p.42). Interestingly, given the earlier presumption of urban design proposals emanating from urban design

professionals, Kelbaugh adds that Everyday Urbanism "admires and tries to help people adapt and improvise *in spite of* available physical design and planning" (2008, p.42), and that it "tends to work…to empower disadvantaged and disenfranchised people and communities by working in the gaps and on the margins" (2008, pp.42-43).

As yet further contrast Kelbaugh perceives the vaguely named Post-Urbanism as being "heterotopian, provocative, and sensational" (2008, p.43). "Difficult to characterize physically," he says, it favours disconnected, broken, fractal, or flowing forms. It often accepts an automobile and consumer-based urbanism. It argues that shared values or meta-narratives are no longer possible in a world that is increasingly fragmented and composed of ghettoes of the "other" (e.g., the homeless, the poor, minorities) and mainstream zones of consumers, internet surfers, and free-range tourists. These liminal and exciting zones of taboo and fantasy, and these commercial zones of unfettered consumption, are viewed as liberating… (Kelbaugh 2008, p.43).

Calling to mind much recent 'speculative' and 'process-driven' urban design proposed within many university architecture schools, Kelbaugh's suggestions are that Post-Urbanism "attempts to impress an increasingly sophisticated consumer of the built environment with ever-wilder and more provocative architecture and urbanism" (2008, p.43). Perhaps more significant from our current perspective are his views that "its architectural language is usually abstract, with little reference to surrounding physical or historical context" and that both its intentions and its outcomes are centred around shock tactics, "no matter how modest the building or program" (2008, p.43). In many cases it is difficult to know, he suggests, "whether it employs shock for its own sake or whether the principal motive is to inspire genuine belief in the possibility of changing the status quo and resisting conventions and limits that are thought to be too predictable and restrictive" (Kelbaugh 2008, p.43).

Now this last description neatly introduces the third of the key issues alluded to earlier in respect of aesthetics, architectonic form, and the seduction of formalism, viz: *what of the future*? While any response here must necessarily be skeletal, three interconnected questions might serve to sketch our concerns:

- first, to what extent has the contemporary fascination with the urban become so elided with architecture that the production of the individual iconic building – Gehry's *Guggenheim Museum* in Bilbao, for example – is now *synonymous with urban design*? And if so, what of the provision of social and community needs that *exceed or lie outside* both sculptural formality and economic regeneration?
- second, if, as Moor suggests, "Experience tells us that every new generation of designers rejects the views of the previous generation and seeks to make their own mark on the built environment" (2006, p.13), where will this lead urban design over the next thirty years, and, more importantly, *on what intellectual, theoretical, ideological and/or formalist basis*?
- and thus, third, what is the – often conjoined – role of education and of criticality in thinking about both the future of urban design and, again perhaps more importantly, *future urban conditions*?

On the basis that it ought simply to be taken for granted that tertiary education necessarily and deliberately exceeds training and provides its graduates with high levels of analytic and

critcal skills in respect both of 'their' disciplines and professions, it is perhaps pertinent to ask *what form(s) does this criticality take, where does it lead, and what is its benefit*? Now, it is somethung of a truism at the moment that, if urban design is currently fascinated with architecture, then architecture is no less fascinated with urban design. At the same time it is reasonable to assume that any such critical engagement is, quite properly, carried out under the aegis of 'thinking differently' or 'thinking anew', thus offering a potentially valuable critical perspective on current urban practices. Yet there is nevertheless a seductive tendency for urban design work produced within architecture studios to mistake *thinking* anew for *generating* the new, and thus to lapse into a kind of esoteric and quasi-futuristic engagement wth the urban, quite divorced from the real world and from any idea of social benefit beyond the intention to produce visually and aesthetically stimulating formal – and often essentially formal*ist* – outcomes based on digital repetition, generative algorithms, abstract procedural methodologies, patterning, diagramming, and a variety of other aleatory techniques.

And while it is obvious that the above is not always the case, it is perhaps instructive to introduce here a number of key themes, both positive and negative, that bear on the urban, the contemplation of which might well assist in avoiding both the seduction of formalism and the temptation of the 'merely physical', without negating the intellectual-critical possibilities inherent in radical studio proposals. Appropriate consideration of such issues – and appropriate consideration of such issues in respect of their social consequences rather than the mere enumerating of their overtly physical contributions – should inform urban design proposals such that, while inescapably formal and physical, responses to and attempts to meet such requirements render the physical the *vehicle for the accomplishment* of such aims.

Benefit follows consideration: An antidote to formalism?
Given the nature of this presentation it is possible here only to enumerate briefly a range of issues pertinent to these concerns. From a relatively small-scale and location-specific perspective might be noted continuing speculation over the *loss of public space* (c.f., for example, Avermaete & Teerds 2007) and the *deterioration of streets* (Macdonald 2007). In parallel with this are issues pertaining to urban design's role in establishing *safety in general*, as well as more specialized concerns such as those addressing child-friendly cities (Bridgman 2002) and, more recently, positive (and negative) relations between *urban design and health* (Handy 2002; Jackson 2003).

At both a larger-scale and a less 'physical only' level lie the issues of the loss of, and the critical significance of, *place identity* (Gospodini 2004), and the role of sensitive urban design in *cultural regeneration*: "restoring and improving the quality of urban life through the enhancement and development of the unique characteristics of a place and its people" (Wansborough & Mageean 2000, p.181). Congruent with this, and dynamically interrelated with it, is the major issue of the urban as an established or a potential site of *tourism* (Gospodini 2001), and thus urban design as a contributor to the *economic development of cities* (Gospodini 2002; Madanipour 2006). In respect of this, of course, the iconic building, and thus the architecture-urban design elision, has played – and continues to play – a major role. As Hubbard notes, "the construction of spectacular urban landscapes has become a requisite strategy for making the city attractive as a site for investment" (1996, p.1441).

In terms of housing the community the ongoing need for large-scale *public housing* looms as both a potentially negative urban design issue and an opportunity in its own right (Fishman 2004), while the ubiquitous issue of private housing, home ownership, and the *ever-expanding*

suburban network continues to generate debate, criticism, frustration and lifestyle changes (see Garde 2008; Harfield & Prior 2008). The negative connotations of suburban sprawl, and of the strip or edge city, are often unfavourably compared with "the virtues of the compact city", the model being, as Montgomery suggests, "the traditional European city which is relatively dense and fine-grained" (1998, p.93). Paralleling this is the idea of "Smart Growth" – "a movement...advocating a set of land use and design strategies...intended to direct new development toward existing urbanized areas and away from agricultural and natural landscapes" (Kiefer 2004, p.1) – while the overarching issue of *sustainability* in all its forms should inform all of the above.

Finally it is worth noting ongoing debates concerning

- the necessity and/or possibility of *controlling urban design* (c.f. for example, Carmona 1996a; 1996b; Graus 1997) and thus the idea of *design review mechanisms* (Punter 2007);
- significant and often overlooked questions concerning stakeholders, public input and *community consultation*;
- and the possibility of – and thus the potentially persuasive power of – the *'design manifesto'*, a random selection of examples of which might include Jacobs and Appleyard's "Toward an urban design manifesto" from 1987; Rowley's "Definitions of urban design" (1994); *The Charter of the New Urbanism*, presented at the Congress for New Urbanism in 1996 and Urban Design Associates *The Urban Design Handbook* from 2003; Krieger's "Territories of urban design" and Lloyd-Jones' "Globalising urban design", both from 2006; and Brown, Dixon and Gillham's recent book *Urban design for an urban century: Placemaking for people* (2009).

Conclusion: Never-ending questions
Again given the briefness of the current presentation, my conclusion here can only take the form of reiterating a set of what should be – though are often not – well-established and open-ended questions that inform our ongoing thinking about urban design.

As a starting point we should constantly ask 'what *is* urban design?', meaning not just what is the nature of or field of engagement of urban design, but rather what is the *purpose* of urban design?, what is it *intended to do*? And since, it seems reasonable to assume, it pertains to *environments prepared for use by society*, then it follows that it should consider, in both its design generation and in its implementation, how and in what ways the community in general, as well as particular interest groups, is *improved* or *better served* by urban design proposals.

Moving then to the postulation that urban design is 'naturally' associated with changes, whether actual or policy-strategic, to the *physical* environment, it is also reasonable to assume – or perhaps to demand – that all decision-making conditioning urban design proposals should be predicated on an understanding of what the *consequences* of such changes will be for society. But again we should immediately note that understanding supposed improvement or 'success' here should *not* be limited to assessing the physical outcome against *the determining requirements and/or desires that 'briefed' that physical outcome*, but must include monitoring how and in what ways this physical outcome contributes to and/or provides social benefit *beyond the mere meeting of functional requirements and the promulgation of interesting, indeed, potentially inspiring, formal propositions*.

Urban design, it must always be remembered, acts on the social fabric of the community as much as it acts on the material fabric, though with perhaps a lesser degree of visibility. Hence it might be proposed that urban design is not limited to meeting the requirements of some 'specific problem', whatever this may be construed as, but should involve

- establishing and articulating *what the 'wider' problems or issues are*;
- determining how the perceived problem or intention *fits into the bigger picture of either social need or social consequence*;
- demonstrating *how and in what ways such consequences offer social benefit* not just to the 'proposers' (developers, councils, etc) and the immediate 'users', but to the community in general; and
- • indicating *how potential disbenefits are offset*.

Such issues in turn require considerable discussion. What, we might ask, *constitutes* social benefit and for whom? Who is empowered to make urban design decisions and on what basis? How is the role of the expert balanced against the desire and/or need for community consultation? How do we criticize and evaluate urban design proposals and who is empowered to so evaluate? And what price profit? While it is not possible to answer these questions here, let me close with one final set of questions that are central to urban design: what is the role of theory, philosophy, ideology – and thus assumption – in urban design thinking and practice? To what extent is urban design *doctrinaire* according to its adherents and their contingent attitudes and beliefs? And thus how and on what basis is urban design *actually* determined? Only on the basis of serious, albeit very differently-informed, consideration of such issues can urban design assume its key role as the provider of social benefit rather than the mere delineator of formalist aesthetic values.

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