ings and a transcript of a discussion on urban design held at Harvard in 2006, are organized into six parts. While each essay touches on many themes and is not easily categorized, the purpose of the loose grouping is to highlight key issues about the nature of urban design. Among the themes that recur across the essays, I would highlight the following three as central to current debates around urban design practice.

Changing Disciplinary Allegiances

The modern concept of urban design grew out of still familiar mid-twentieth-century concerns: urban sprawl at city peripheries and decay in aging central areas. A goal was to find "common ground" among the design disciplines (namely architecture and urban planning) for dealing with the kinds of exasperating problems that are beyond the mastery of any single design discipline. However, most agree—some enthusiastically and others with reservations—that urban design has largely been the domain of urban-minded architects.

The proponents of this view argue that since giving shape to urban space and settlement is an essential task of urban design, it requires an architect's training.[3] Still, as the planning profession increasingly reengages physical planning, which it more or less abandoned for a generation, its claims on urban design grow. And physical planning, planners say, involves many issues that, while carrying spatial implications, are not at heart architectural, so an architecture-dominated approach to urban design is limiting. Meanwhile the public at large, with their everyday concerns like housing affordability, traffic calming, neighborhood enhancement, and containment of development, sees urban design as a friendlier, less abstract concept than planning (which has never fully shed its urban renewal–era reputation as a top-down approach to problem solving) and so demands good urban design from its public planners.

But, as several of the essayists write, the most recent and radical (in view of the prior half century) relationship being forged is with landscape architecture. Urban and landscape design have generally been viewed as separate, if not conflicting, activities. The initial cadre of self-described urban designers, primarily architects, viewed urban design as at the intersection of planning and architecture, where it would mediate and overcome the perceived gaps between the two.