

theorists—provide insight and models about the way we *ought to* organize spatially in communities and not simply accept the ways we do. The prospect of hypothesizing about the future of urbanism surely attracts more students to urban design programs than any other lure. Being engaged in transforming urbanism is a sphere of action associated with the great figures of modern urban change, from Baron Haussmann to Daniel Burnham, Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, Le Corbusier, and maybe even Rem Koolhaas and Andres Duany. But such deliverers of bold saber strokes (to borrow a phrase from Giedion) are rarer today than they were at the turn of the twentieth century, or we act on their visions less often. A new generation of visionary designers may emerge out of China or other parts of the world rapidly urbanizing today, but they have yet to do so.

In the relative absence of contemporary visionaries, others have stepped forward to explore the nature of urban culture today. The urban sociologist/theorist—from Louis Wirth earlier in the twentieth century to Henri Lefebvre, Richard Sennett, Edward Soja, and David Harvey—is not normally considered an urban designer but in a sense has become so, having supplanted in our own time the great urban transformers of the past, not in deeds but in understandings of urban culture.

The heroic form-giving tradition may be in decline. After all, the twentieth century witnessed immense urban harm caused by those who offered a singular or universal idea of what a city is, or what urbanization should produce. But our cultural observers remind us that pragmatism and technique cannot be a sufficient substitute, nor can design professionals be mere *absorbers* of public opinion waiting for consensus to build. One must offer new ideas as well. Still, there is the perennial conundrum about how directly engaged urban design must be with the “real world.” Maybe, after all, urban design is about direct community engagement:

Urban Design as Community Advocacy (or Doing No Harm)

Mostly since 1956 and in academia largely still, “urban design” connotes large-scale thinking—either the consideration of substantial areas of settlement or theorizing at a grand scale about the nature of urbanism. But among contemporary dwellers of urban neighborhoods—the ostensive beneficiaries of this broad thinking—“urban design” is increasingly coming to be associated with local, immediate