

Beyond Centers, Fabrics, and Cultures of Congestion: Urban Design as a Metropolitan Enterprise

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Isn't the value of a professional or academic discipline—and urban design can be no exception—that it advances and curates a critical body of ideas and distills them into an array of methods and techniques that challenges entrenched assumptions and transform practices? Urban design should be more than what it so often now is: a stale advertising campaign for an already well-commoditized idea of the city.¹ For urban design to endure as a serious practice, it must claim, critically reassess, and renew a discreet set of concepts that have evolved since the field first emerged as a discipline in the mid-twentieth century. These tasks are important, because, as John Kaliski points out in “Democracy Takes Command: New Community Planning and the Challenge to Urban Design” (this volume), many of the procedures most commonly associated with urban design—retrofitting contemporary environments with nineteenth-century-style perimeter block morphologies, matching the scale and appearance of new construction to existing, or imagined, historical building stock (however banal), the ubiquitous deployment of a street section with ground-floor retail, banners, and leafy street trees that is the default expression of “mixed-use,” reinserting the pedestrian into automobile infrastructures, Olmsted-on-a-budget green networks—have been appropriated by a broad range of actors in the urban development scene. When well applied, these