William Whyte and Jane Jacobs.[5] This is not to doubt the important contributions that these latter figures (or, more recently, Saskia Sassen and Marc Augé, for example) have made to the conceptualization of the city but only to point out that their work lacks comparable capacity for translation into design procedure.

To go forward, urban design must go back and acknowledge that it is a latecomer to the professional disciplines that evolved from architecture and civil engineering—first landscape architecture, then city planning—to discipline and refortify, albeit with new ingredients, the modern wall-less city. Although urban design was not distinct from architecture and city planning until the mid-twentieth century, as a sensibility it makes its initial appearance in the work of Camillo Sitte. Sitte was first to look critically at modern forms of city planning that gave priority to the efficient, geometric layout of parcels and to straight flows of traffic. Against this seemingly rational form of city, he promoted the shape and incrementally built-up character of specific places in north-central Europe, primarily networks of streets, churches, and their attending squares and statuary. If the modern city was and is about increasing mobility, Sitte saw the need for "place-making" within its hectic flow. To do this, he devised a taxonomy of urban forms from the carbuncled conurbations of the medieval northern European city. These displayed an urbanism that had been considered inferior by the Italian, French, and English architects (e.g., Francesco di Giorgio, André Le Nôtre, and John Nash) who had, in succession, dominated approaches to the design of cities since the Renaissance.

Sitte could easily be confused for a Pugin-like, moralizing figure, yet he was not interested in churches and their squares as vessels of religion. He formulated a secular reading of the historical European city to glean logics from its most important spaces. That most of these spaces were produced by religious, oligarchic societies was irrelevant: he followed the nineteenth-century trend of repositioning architecture and the city as an abstract system of monuments, adding the city's historical fabric to its list of important artifacts.

In Sitte's work we can recognize ideas that still hold promise for urban design practice but also some of the philosophical underpinnings that have led to its current malaise. For example, Sitte made a counterproposal to a rote academic plan for Hanover, Germany, in which he drew on existing topography and property lines and carved out a few discreet, eccentrically shaped public squares at important