delaminating the urbanized landscape by documenting its layers of competing and synergistic biomorphic flows, including watersheds, geologic and mineral substrates, flora, and human settlements. Ultimately humanistic, McHarg went so far as to equate a lack of access to organic, open space with antisocial behavior and human disease, and thereby put the problems of the "manmade" world in relief against an endangered natural environment.

In contrast to Lynch's and McHarg's approaches, which assiduously avoided property and market interests, Venturi and Scott Brown's taxonomies of the popular city made the commercially produced landscape an object of semiotic analysis and design speculation. Their theory of the "decorated shed"—the utilitarian container with a communicative surface—attempted a modern revival of the baroque city's capacity to negotiate and figure the differing architectures of private accommodation and public performance.

Lynch's, McHarg's, and Venturi and Scott Brown's seminal contributions stem from their ability to marry ideas emerging in other fields—in their cases cognitive science, ecology, and sociocultural anthropology, respectively—to representation devices more particular to the disciplines of architecture and planning, such as the site survey, contour map, and iconographic study. While I would bet on the enduring capacity of this work to inspire new modes of urban design, in practice their ideas have been taken up uncritically, if not lifelessly. For example, posing the city as a semiotic system of communication was Venturi and Scott Brown's great theoretical achievement, but today, when corporate branding, among other forms of media saturation, creates a consciousness that precedes and thus qualifies many urban encounters, the shed's decoration no longer needs to be advertising (since one knows the genius loci of Starbucks, it need not communicate too loudly) and is free to tell other stories.[7]

One school of urban design had an undeniably tractable influence on practice, at least in the United States. For almost twenty years, from the 1960s to the 1980s, the formal research that took place at Cornell University's Department of Architecture was constitutive of the way many people thought about and practiced urban design. A "contextualist" school of philosophy had emerged at Cornell University during this period, reflecting a new wave of philosophy bent on refuting the positivist philosophies that dominated European intellectual discourse in the early twentieth century. The contextualists argued that all phenomena must be understood as historic events,