

This typology is developed from: (1) theories in the disciplines of architecture, landscape architecture and planning and (2) an analysis of a series of what have been deemed to be urban design projects. The typology is then used to classify a number of case studies that illustrate specific points in specific cultural and political contexts. The classification system may not be as sharp as purists might like but the borderlines amongst urban design processes are often blurred and so difficult to draw with precision. If this is so why should we bother?

An Observation

In his essay, 'Politics and the English Language,' written in 1946, George Orwell observed that words such as democracy, socialism, freedom, patriotic, realistic and justice have several different meanings that 'cannot be reconciled with each other'. In the case of democracy, he noted, 'not only is there no agreed on definition, but the attempt to make one is resisted from all sides'. The consequence is that 'the defenders of every kind of régime claim it is a democracy' (Orwell, 1961). The art world also finds high utility in the ambiguity of words.

Words such as 'romantic, plastic, values, human, dead, sentimental, natural, vitality', Orwell claimed, are meaningless. Moreover, those who use them do not expect them to have a meaning. Consequently, critics can discuss a topic without knowing what each other is talking about and can agree or, if they prefer, disagree with each other. Orwell could have made much the same remarks about the field of architecture. The terms human scale, organic, dynamic and context are equally loosely used by architects. It is advantageous in all three worlds (politics, art and architecture) for the words to be ambiguous or multivalent and thus largely meaningless. It allows the discourse to flow freely, albeit without clarity.

The same comment can be made about the use of the rubric 'urban design' today. Certainly the majority of the design professionals and others involved in what they call urban design avoid having to define the term. The advantage is that each can claim to have expertise as an urban designer and, if Orwell is correct, talk about it with others without having a common understanding. This confusion is both unnecessary and unhelpful if architects, landscape architects and city planners are to make a positive contribution to the development of cities and other human settlements. We really need to know what we are talking about when we use the term. Are we, however, capable of clarifying what we mean?

An analysis of the building projects completed during the past five decades that have been regarded as 'urban design' presents us with an opportunity to understand what the domain of urban design has become. A set of systematic case studies focusing on these projects as products and on how they were generated