

grounded in the empirical observation of urbanization and its various epiphenomena, augmented by serious historical scholarship—is particularly relevant. Other essays take as their point of departure the professional practice of urban design and the gamut of instrumentalized practices evidenced by a range of professionals from planners and policy makers through the design disciplines. This subject matter affords the normative ground for most of the material. Also present are a few contributions focused on urban design as an academic discipline or pedagogical subject.

The roundtable discussion “Urban Design Now,” moderated by *Harvard Design Magazine* editor William Saunders, provides an overview to a shorthand subset of the various positions available for urban design within architectural education and design culture but necessarily conflates discussions of urban design across a broad spectrum of issues and agendas. Perhaps this conflation (and the occasional confusion it affords) is inevitable, yet my suspicion is that it is a format inherited from the origins of the field and the 1956 conference itself.

One particularly enduring aspect of urban design’s formation evident here is the ongoing investment within its discourse to traditional definitions of well-defended disciplinary boundaries. This is particularly revealing for contemporary readers, since it contrasts markedly with recent tendencies toward a cross-disciplinarity within design education and professional practice in North America. Several design schools have recently dissolved departmental distinctions between architecture and landscape architecture, while others have launched specifically combined degree offerings or mixed enrollment course offerings.¹ This shift toward shared knowledge and collaborative educational experience has come partly in response to the increasingly complex inter- and multidisciplinary context of professional practice. And those practices have undoubtedly been shaped in response to the challenges and opportunities attendant on the contemporary metropolitan condition.

From this perspective, the essays in this volume and the recent discourse around urban design’s histories and futures read as ambivalent toward the project of disciplinary despecialization found in so many leading schools of design. Cities and the academic subjects they sponsor rarely respect traditional disciplinary boundaries. In this respect, the design disciplines should not expect to be an exception, and many leading designers have called recently for a renewed trans-