

## Unforeseen Urban Worlds: Post-1956 Phenomena

**Peter G. Rowe**

To say that the framers and participants involved in Harvard's 1956 urban design conference had no premonition about the rates, venues, circumstances, directions, and underlying logics of urbanization that have since transpired around the world is probably an understatement. In all fairness, however, their broad aim was inclined toward finding "a common basis for the joint work of the architect, landscape architect and city planner in the field of urban design," as they put it, particularly in response to what they identified as "the frequent absence of beauty and delight in the contemporary city" and "the need for better knowledge of the coming physical form of the city."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, they probably would have been surprised, even shocked, by the rate and muscularity of modernization and urbanization that have recently taken place in East Asia, by the size and economic reach of many of today's metropolises, and even by the substantial changes that have occurred in the spatial distribution of urban functions and forms in more familiar American and European urban circumstances. For the 1956 participants, the American city was the focus of attention. As José Luis Sert stated, "Our American cities, after a period of rapid growth and urban sprawl, have come of age and acquired responsibilities that the boom towns of the past never knew."<sup>2</sup> Also, their American city had a particular form: a central core and inner-city zones surrounded