

Each paradigm addresses some issues and not others. Brasília, La Défense and Pruitt-Igoe turned their backs on street-life; Battery Park City and Canary Wharf are street oriented. Clearly the two sets of designs are predicated on different assumptions about the nature and potential quality of streets. The concern in urban design in the western world is today increasingly focused on the quality of streets as seams for life and not simply as channels for vehicular movement. Access to sunlight remains fundamental to the quality of design in temperate and cold climates but the concern for sunshine needs to be tempered by the need to meet other requirements in order to provide people with fulfilling environments. Not every city has to be a Portland, Oregon, but much can be learnt from the richness of the urban design efforts in that city over the past 30 years, as expressed in the design of Pioneer Place (see Chapter 6).

The designs that receive attention in the architectural press and those favoured by architectural juries are bold in character. Bold designs are those in which geometric novelty and a single-minded focus on a few highly visible dimensions of design outweigh others. The history of recent architecture is littered with award-winning, highly publicized designs that have failed on many dimensions when they have been inhabited for a while. It is unfair to single out the much-maligned Pruitt-Igoe as an example as, indeed, has been done in this book, but it is one (see Chapter 7). Discrete, well-crafted, well-sited buildings and urban spaces may provide good living and working environments, but they attract neither the attention of politicians nor writers on architecture. They are not exotic enough.

Much recent design has focused on the imagery of the built environment. The aesthetic function of the environment as a statement of self-worth and for ‘uplifting the spirit’ is perceived to be important. Much recent landscaping of the squares and streets had focused on these issues with considerable, generally accepted success as in the design of La Place des Terreaux (see Chapter 5). Euralille and Lujiazui present different faces to the world. What should the focus of attention be? The case studies included here vary considerably in the problems and opportunities they address and in the importance paid to different variables.

Implicit in these observations is the question: ‘For whom is one designing?’ This question leads to many, many others. Who uses the public realm of cities? Who would use it more if it were designed in a different way? How does one deal with the often frowned on behaviours such as the hanging-out or skateboarding of teenagers? How does one make cities today as negotiable independently by 10-year-old boys and girls as many were 50 years ago? Does the physical design make any difference? The debate will continue but what is clear is that much urban design focuses on the values of the middle-aged elite. Should it? We need to consider the needs of the diverse sets of people who constitute a city – the young, the retirees, the able-bodied and the handicapped. Each project described in this book focuses, often by default, on particular groups of people. What is the model of people that we should have in mind?