

intellectual heritage that gives the field its distinctive perspective and enriches its practitioners' design capabilities.

In a better definition of the scope of urban design, we should focus on those matters to which the field brings a distinctive perspective. As we will see shortly when we review some of the classic writings, urban design comes into its own as the field that engages the human experience of the built environment: the sense of understandability, congeniality, playfulness, security, mystery, or awe that lands and built forms evoke.

Put in this way, urban design still has to be distinguished from architecture. Perhaps an urban designer, as compared to an architect, is concerned with objects of a larger scale. But *scale* is ambiguous in this context, since an urban designer might quite reasonably focus on a small item, say a curb cut or a street lamp, while an architect, even one unconcerned about urban design, might well deal with a larger object, such as a building complex. Urban design is better understood to have as its focus not large scale per se, but rather those features of the built environment that—for reasons into which this article will inquire—transcend the individual parcel or property or take place in the public realm. In brief, urban design inquires into *the human experience that the built environment evokes across private properties or in the public realm*.

In doing so, the urban designer confronts issues that are quite different from those of an architect working for a single client; the urban designer engages a physical world driven by the dynamics of private commerce and public affairs. After all, the openings or closings of business establishments, occupation and abandonment of houses, and juxtapositions of buildings are driven far more by the market process than by any designer's creative imagination. This is a world in which price mechanisms, power relations, and interest-group conflicts bring about urban form. The urban designer must contend with the multiple forces that generate the built environment, primarily those of the private real estate market and secondarily government regulations aimed at policy objectives that encompass not just urban form, but such additional matters as transportation efficiency and disaster mitigation. He or she must seek to affect the built environment through complex interactions with private investors, landowners, community members, interest groups, legislators, and funding agencies (see Barnett, 1974).

In light of these concerns, a theory of urban design faces a number of challenges. First, it should

not simply advocate one set of design approaches but should rather reveal the principles that underlie several of them. Second, it should be a substantive (not just procedural) theory. Third, it should make us aware of the constituents of the human experience of built form. Fourth, it should recognize the sources of urban form in both markets and plans; it should answer to both the economic and architectural streams of planning thought. Fifth, and not least, the theory should be able to do what any good theory does: to direct our attention to pertinent features of reality—in this case, experiential features of space and built form—and thereby to help guide practice.

Commodification in the environment

Drawing on the work of Karl Polanyi and on the organic tradition in planning (Polanyi, 1957 [1944]; Sternberg, 1993), this article holds that such a theory is indeed possible. This theory is founded on the concept that the market economy cannot effectively extend to realms of human experience that are *noncommodifiable*.

To "commodify" an object is to make it tradeable and commensurable on markets (see Radin, 1996). Polanyi (1957) holds that for the market system to function, it must commodify the objects that people value. His view of commodification should be contrasted with that of Karl Marx, whose *Das Kapital* holds that market exchange "fetishizes" commodities, distorting their true use values. Polanyi believes that ordinary goods and services are quite properly understood as commodities and traded on markets; he explicitly divorces his idea of commodification from that of Marx. It is consistent with Polanyi's thought that market exchange in most ordinary commodities is highly desirable, since markets are efficient mechanisms for bridging supply and demand.

It is in his next step that Polanyi breaks with orthodox economic thinking and makes his critical contribution to planning thought: He makes clear that nature (or the natural and built environment in general) and humanity are resistant to commodification. They are, nonetheless, often commodified: The environment is turned into the land and building commodities, and the human being into the labor commodity. Doing so can falsify and degrade them, causing human suffering and environmental deterioration. For example, a forest encompasses