

shared perspective for most of the world's population. This will call for rigorous reflection about the role and definition of urban design. The questions for us are, Will this be a time of greater responsibility for urban design? Will this situation elevate or diminish urban design's territorial claims?

Unheroic Meliorists

To appreciate the 1956 proceedings, we should understand how Sert imagined the workings of urban design and the roles of the urban designer. It is clear from Sert's writings prior to the 1956 conference that he did not think the urban designer was or should be heroic or God-like (even as he did believe that urban design could and should have some power). In fact, quite the contrary. Sert was concerned with the ordinary elements of urban situations and not singular monuments created through personal genius. Sert understood that cities are not made through individual acts and that it was the ordinary environments that made a city what it was. In *Can Our Cities Survive?* he writes that "without a reorganization of our *everyday life*, which depends on the proper functioning of dwellings, recreation centers, work-places, and the streets and highways that are the connecting links, life in the city cannot produce benefits for the individual or for the community as a whole."³ This interest in *everyday life* would set Sert's idea for urban design in a very different trajectory from those of some of his more Napoleonic urban design contemporaries (like Le Corbusier). Sert's interests also departed from the "civic design" tradition that emerged in America from the 1930s, a strong and established tradition of town planning derived from City Beautiful principles. Sert regarded this tradition as being concerned only with monumental civic centers, ignoring the living conditions of people in the neighborhoods around those centers.⁴ Sert's conception of urban design, rather, offered a holistic view of urbanization, even at the time of *Can Our Cities Survive?* Also clear, however, is that Sert was interested in a "reorganization of our everyday life," and in this sense we see again this duality of critique of the current situation and the questionable, inflated idea that designers should "reorganize" living environments.

Exactly who Sert saw doing this reorganizing is interesting. It may come as a surprise that the phrase *urban design* was not used until about 1953. *Can Our Cities Survive?* does not use it. In the book, the