

from uncertainty. Rodwin continued to prod, asking who “the taste-makers in urban design” should be and “what evidence is there that these professions [architecture, planning, and landscape architecture] really do have much to contribute today to urban design? What are they doing now to justify the role they would like to have?”¹⁶ What I find most interesting about Rodwin’s comments is both the fact that they appear in 1956 and the reality that this same question should be asked today—then as now, illusions of power prevail over real power.

The remainder of the conference involved a series of formal lectures followed by a discussion and then a formal dinner symposium. Mayor of Pittsburgh David Lawrence presented Pittsburgh as a case study, Edmund Bacon presented Philadelphia, and Victor Gruen presented Fort Worth. Fredrick Adams, the head of the Department of City and Regional Planning at MIT, opened the discussion of “Problems of Implementation of Urban Designs.” The conference was wrapped up by a general discussion, “Is Urban Design Possible Today?”¹⁷ Looking back on these last two, one sees mainly what Sert later described as “a fog of amiable generalities.”

The Second Urban Design Conference (April 12 and 13, 1957) aimed to achieve an even greater level of definition for urban design. Interestingly, the concepts agreed on in the first conference were not discussed. In an attempt to move the discussion forward, a new set of statements was announced that was to form the agenda. The scope of the conference was reduced. It appears that Sert may have been concerned with the breadth of the discussions generated at the first conference and sought both greater focus and greater clarity. Although economics, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines were by now clearly recognized as having an impact on the contemporary form of the city, urban design was intentionally attributed to the combined professional expertise of planning, architecture, and landscape architecture alone. Prior to the conference this statement was part of the invitation: “This conference is confined to a discussion of the design section of the planning process. This does not mean this is considered more important than other essential sections—such as the establishment of relevant data or the means of implementation—which may fall more directly in the fields of sociology, economics, or government.”¹⁸

What is interesting here is the reduction of urban design’s scope. We see a narrowing of the discussion away from things that “others”