

Introduction: An Urban Frame of Mind

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It was divine nature which gave us the country, and
human skill that built the city.

—Marcus Terentius Varro, first century BC

Two millennia following Varro, as the world's urban population surpasses three billion, city-building skills are more important than ever. We are becoming an urban species to a degree unimaginable as recently as a third of a century ago, when only one out of three people dwelled in cities. Today they—we—are the majority, growing worldwide at more than one million per week.¹ The knowledge required to address such urbanization is, of course, spread among many disciplines and areas of knowledge. This collection of essays examines the contribution of the varied enterprises that can be collected under the umbrella of “urban design.”

Far from coalescing into a singular set of activities, urban design has, over the half century that it gained autonomy from its progenitor design and planning disciplines, evolved less as a technical discipline than as a frame of mind shared by those of several disciplinary foundations committed to cities and to improving urban ways of life. This I consider its strength, though not everyone concurs with such