

objects themselves. It deals with long time-spans, incremental growth over time, decision-making that is complex and fractionated, and relations between different levels and types of decision-making. Urban design is the subtle organization of complexity, the orchestration of sometimes inharmonious instruments, the awareness that discord at a certain level can be resolved as harmony at another.”²⁹

Consider, for example, an old city main street. Most design guidelines set out rules regarding inter alia views and vistas, materials, preservation, storefronts, signage, setbacks, and height lines. These usually apply across the board to the whole street. But true urban design guidelines, I believe, should offer different guidance for private and public buildings, for traditional and modern buildings, and for honky-tonk. And within this example, set-back requirements to preserve view corridors that apply to private buildings could conceivably be ignored by public buildings that, arguably, could form part of the view. But this type of urban design requires patience.

My definition is not purely Harvard’s. It has dashes of Crane and Gans and a little of Team 10; the part about discord is pure Venturi. The rest, and the combination, is mine. From it follows my explanation of the differences between architecture, urban design, and planning: “Put a group of architects, urban designers, and planners in a sightseeing bus, and their actions will define the limits of their concerns. The architects will take photographs of buildings or highways or bridges. The urban designers will wait for that moment when the three are juxtaposed. The planners will be too busy talking to look out of the window.”³⁰

Fifty Years Later: The Present State of Urban Design

With the retreat of support for social planning and the removal of city planning agencies from positions of power in urban government, the role of the urban designer in the public sector seems to have been reduced to dealing with questions of aesthetics and the formulation of design guidelines. If purveyed by architects and lawyers without planning training, these may lack sophistication and fail to orchestrate the thousand designers. After many experiences of working as an architect within the guidelines of other urban designers, I wrote:

Lack of clarity in defining and allocating roles in the overlapping design tasks of the city leads to confusion. The architect of a civic