Lecture series on the subject of urban design are structured along very different lines at different universities and are shaped by different objectives for conveying knowledge. Broadly speaking, such structures can be said to fall into three categories (historical, phenomenological and conceptual); it these that I shall briefly describe here.

The classic teaching method of establishing relationships to ‘the city as material for design work’ is based on acquiring knowledge of the built heritage, in respect of its origins and thus of its continued existence. This generally involves directly linking architectural history and urban design history in historical succession from Antiquity to the present day, with an inherently canonical understanding of the architectural sequence. It is not always possible to derive a ‘narrative of progress’ from this and, moreover, very different developments are taking place simultaneously at any given time. The line of development that has led to a particular present state of affairs is therefore not in itself inevitable, while any ‘diagnosis’ of today’s city contains material that supports a variety of interpretations, even an interpretation of the state of society.

Special mention should be made at this point of the form in which Wolfgang Braunfels brings together urban design and architectural history as a ‘theory’ of ‘occidental urban design’. The subtitle of his book, *Herrschaftsform und Baugestalt* [Regime and architecture], alludes to the consideration of urban typology and form in connection with one another; it soon becomes clear to the reader that these ideas relate not just to
the symbolic aspect of monumental buildings, but are – indeed, must be – equally applicable to the profane sphere.

Implicit in the historical approach is not only the possibility of ‘filtering history’ and thus conveying knowledge of the design heritage from various eras, but also the readily expressed misconception that a kind of historicism can be derived from it. This conclusion may perhaps seem absurd today, but in ‘a modern attitude’ towards design there nevertheless lies (almost as a direct reaction to the historicism or eclecticism of the nineteenth century) the desire to create a position of one’s own that is justifiable on this basis; without having to consider the dead weight of a history of building.

From a phenomenological point of view, quite different aspects of urban design can be identified alongside one another. An academically differentiated approach to the various guises of the city makes it possible to describe the Garden City in terms of its importance, creation and development, and to highlight its similarities with the aims of a movement such as New Urbanism. It allows sometimes contradictory models to be examined without preconceptions and due consideration can be given, somewhat in the manner of a card index, to the complexity of ongoing urban development torn between growth and shrinkage, to village planning goals and to global megacities. Overall, a survey of fundamentally different ways of looking at the city could be taken as having its roots in the Age of Enlightenment (reciprocal relationships with culture, the ideal of Nature, individualism, and forms of perception) and therefore as perpetuating that same epoch. This approach puts the focus firmly on the connection between the manifestation of society and the form of settlement and develops finely differentiated analytical disciplines (urban sociology, engineering sciences), in the course of which urban planning evolves into a powerful set of instruments. A certain perspective on the value of a particular use, whether economic, technical or political, is turned into a generally applicable criterion for evaluating the city’s phenomena and their development. The goals of planning the new and managing the old, in such a system, are to ensure that things can be regulated and controlled. This discourse-oriented doctrine centres on matters of service provision and levels of decision-making.

Whereas the two aforementioned methods place importance on communicating a certain doctrine of urban design through the way in which they look at things, the third to be considered here constitutes a design strategy in its own right.

In order to take a conceptual approach to a design theory for urban design, a common basis first needs to be defined, which should serve as a prelude to an understanding of ‘spatial thinking’. In it, space is considered to have a physical form and effect, which to start with is characterised by its two-dimensional coverage and is augmented with a third dimension, this being the description of space and its objects that we find in the theory of ‘The Dynamics of Architectural Form’ by Rudolf Arnheim: the illustrative powers of architecture are seen as a game of gravity and compensation, enhanced by the effect and the depth of significance of a Gestalt. There is a further prerequisite to understanding this concrete urbanism theory and its relation to the design process: the differentiation between public and private, to be understood as two spheres of a conceptual dichotomy. Both prerequisites can be considered as components of a decided approach to the city, which will be immanent in all of the methods discussed, namely, a commitment to density, compactness, mixed use and enclosure. The questions of form thus raised can nevertheless be considered separately and independently from one another. The aim in these twelve lectures is to show which strategies are of use to architects in designing urban schemes. To start with, we shall examine the fundamentals, but personal motivation is at least as important, beside a knowledge of basic facts, in drawing up the goals for a design. The method proposed relates to the morphology of the city, its existing substance, transformation and continuation. Imagery and the interplay between space and individual architectural designs will be discussed. A variety of perspectives can be described alongside each other as approaches to a concept, although a personal repertoire should be developed for the design project with the help of this series of lectures.

Of course, the three positions outlined here cannot be separated from one another; they inform each other in terms of their knowledge and insights. A theory that employs historical examples always also tells us about social relationships and poses the question of where regulatory authority resides. Any clear summary of urban design topics will informed, moreover, by a commitment to Gestalt, while any theory that is consciously guided by questions of form may not leave the social relationships of a city unconsidered.