The archetype describes the primal form of an object, to which those that appear subsequently, or their common traits, can be traced back, analogously to the overlap of various definitions over an idea, the elemental image of an ideal.

Urban design deals with the architecture of a city and its ongoing construction, whereby as far as public space is concerned, the continuum offers more of a starting point for assessment than does the form of individual buildings. If town planning stands for the social organisation of space, then urban design is its objectified expression. The creation of urban design schemes – that is, developing the architecture of (urban) space for a project on a larger scale – for new areas or remodelling existing substance, mostly takes place using deductive methods: general experience is applied to a particular site, the analysis of the surrounding area is examined in order to find rules basically valid for that site, tried and tested approaches are considered in relation to a concrete issue and their applicability. Design experience plays a major part in this investigative process. In the context of urban design and city space, experience means not only design ability, but also encounters with
many different places, each with its own specifically ‘urban’ character – an initially ambiguous term. The theoretical part of the working methods presented here is intended to posit concrete hypotheses in contrast to a generalised conception of the ‘urban’: hypotheses which go beyond the formal and historical observations of a stylistic approach. The ability to deal sensitively with many different situations encompasses more than just questions of measurable space, its three-dimensional structure, a theory of proportion and historical attribution. The study of classically influenced spatial parameters is the source of a repertoire for the practice of urban design. In these five hypotheses, five major characteristics are discussed as those ‘archetypical’ of the city: continuum, physicality, radicality, sociability and membrane. They denote qualities that each reflect a unique conception of urbanity: the continuum as a distinctive characteristic of the whole, as of its parts and its inherent history; an essence of the city that is experienced as corporeal, a physical unity that defines Inside and Outside; an urban radicalness characterised by clearly defined public space, boundaries and by the self-contained nature and combined effect of its architecture; the city as a place of human encounter\(^1\) is the result of design, tradition, culture and politics; urbanity describes a sense of what is urban and is difficult to analyse; the threshold, the membrane and the boundary between public and private is a matter for architecture and influences the mood of the urban fabric, thus for example a use of transparency that is considered positive in theory can turn out to be an embarrassing flaw in a building – human modesty should not be de-constructed by architecture.

Accordingly, selected archetypical cities are studied and discussed in terms of their significant characteristics. It should be emphasised that an archetype need not be historical, but is rather shaped by an identity specific to a particular group. The illustration of the ‘archetypes of urban design’ represents an attempt to reconcile the benefits of personal experience of an urban spatial situation with the main parameters of an analytical assessment of significant urban design locations by an ‘impartial observer’.