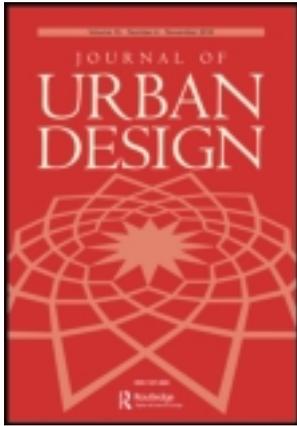


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Urban Design Plans for Downtown San Francisco: A Paradigm Shift?

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ABSTRACT *This paper aims to provide a holistic understanding of the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco, in particular, of their pioneering roles in urban design history. There is a critical discourse analysis of two urban design plans – the Urban Design Plan 1972 and the Downtown Plan 1985. A Kuhnian framework of ‘paradigm’ is applied to evaluating the innovative practices of the plans. It is argued that the innovations, reflected in the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco, represent a paradigm shift in urban design history.*

Introduction

San Francisco is a frequent name in the urban design literature, either on the best practices of urban design or on the evolution of urban design plans (Habe 1989; Southworth 1989; Southworth and Southworth 1973; Abbott 1993; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1993, 1998; Punter 1996, 1999; Linovski and Loukaitou-Sideris 2013). Indeed, San Francisco has been leading the American cities in urban design. The Urban Design Plan 1972 was the first city-wide urban design plan in an American city; the Downtown Plan 1985 was the first comprehensive downtown plan in America. They have been copied or followed by other American cities and elsewhere, but their significance is more than ‘being the first of its kind’. Much scholarly attention has focused on the contents and presentations of the plans, as a case study together with other cities. To have a holistic understanding of their professional and disciplinary contributions, a more critical approach is necessary.

This paper analyzes the innovative practices in the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco, and evaluates their professional and disciplinary contributions in urban design history. The two benchmark urban design plans – the Urban Design Plan 1972 and the Downtown Plan 1985 – are studied, using a critical discourse analysis. The analysis focuses not only on the contents and presentations of the plans, but also on the associations with broader social meanings and implications for actions. Combining a content analysis of the benchmark plans with a contemporary and historical contextualization enables a holistic understanding of the urban design practices in downtown San Francisco.

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The critical discourse analysis identifies the innovations that have contributed to the philosophical and methodological advancement of the urban design profession and discipline. Thomas Kuhn's framework of 'paradigm' is then applied to evaluating the innovations in the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco, so as to determine if they represent a 'paradigm shift' (Kuhn 1970) in urban design history.

Following this introduction, the second section is a literature review of approaches towards urban design in downtown San Francisco, preceded by a brief historical backdrop of the two benchmark plans. The third section introduces the analytical framework for the critical discourse analysis of the plans and the application of the Kuhnian 'paradigm' in urban design. The next two sections provide a thematic summary of the two urban design plans: the Urban Design Plan 1972 and the Downtown Plan 1985. The following section discusses their philosophical and methodological innovations, and their legacies. The final section evaluates the innovations of the urban design plans in downtown San Francisco, in relation to the contextualization of the urban design profession and discipline, to conclude that their innovative practices represent a paradigm shift in urban design history.

Approaches towards Urban Design in Downtown San Francisco

An historical backdrop helps to understand the urban design practices in downtown San Francisco and the scholarly attention they have attracted. San Francisco embarked upon federal urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s with many of the same goals and intentions as other cities (Brandt 2013). Meanwhile, its downtown redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s was governed by a post-war globalism and by an aspiration for a world city status (Walker 1996; Godfrey 1997). A modern downtown was believed to be necessary to shape San Francisco's future in anticipation of the rise of a post-industrial economy in America, and to facilitate San Francisco's integration with globalization, particularly in terms of attracting people, business and tourism from the Pacific region. Consequently, San Francisco's downtown was marked by an instant 'Manhattanization', and its redevelopment scale was hardly matched by another American major city in the post-war decades (McGovern 1998). This round of modern high-rise development in downtown San Francisco was mostly new office construction.

The massive post-war urban redevelopment offered the context for one strand of literature on urban design in downtown San Francisco: the urban contestations on San Francisco's downtown redevelopment. Largely from a political-economic perspective, much of this strand of literature deals with the conflicts between the two groups that held opposite stances on downtown redevelopment – the pro-growth group and the growth control group (Mollenkopf 1983; DeLeon and Powell 1989; DeLeon 1992a, 1992b; Godfrey 1997; McGovern 1998; Hartman 2002; Hu 2009, 2012). Broadly speaking, the pro-growth group was dominated by the business sector and supported by the city hall, while the growth control group was led by activists and supported by the community. The pro-growth group was the major driving force behind the post-war redevelopment. On the contrary, the growth control group grew from grassroots to fight against the negative impacts of the large-scale redevelopment, first for aesthetic and environmental concerns, and later for pollution, pressures on transport and housing, and social equity (Vettel 1984; Graham and Guy 2002; Hu

2008, 2009, 2012). The growth control group lamented not only the changed size and height of buildings, but also the loss of the city's architecturally cohesive and pedestrian-oriented downtown following the sterile functionalist corporate International Style (Vettel 1984). They turned to public ballots known as 'initiatives' to curb the discretionary urban growth, and achieved their biggest victory in Proposition M 1986 – the strictest cap on commercial office development ever imposed in a major American city.

The influence of Proposition M on San Francisco's downtown development has been fundamental; it represented not merely a change *in* the system but a change *of* the system (DeLeon 1992a). This change in the urban contestations on downtown development is depicted as a regime shift from a 'pro-growth regime' to an 'anti-regime' (DeLeon 1992a), or a political transformation from 'hegemonic privatism' to 'counterhegemonic activism' (McGovern 1998). The Urban Design Plan 1972 and the Downtown Plan 1985 were regarded as the city government's efforts to regulate the post-war redevelopment, as well as a response to the growth control movement (Hu 2012).

The San Francisco experience of downtown development seemed to present a challenge to the thesis of Frieden and Sagalyn (1989) that a downtown is not just a business district; it is an enterprise run by the city government and corporate interests. This thesis fits the growth machine theory that a city is dominated by some land-based elites of the mayor, planning office and downtown business interests, and that the very essence of a city is its operation as a growth machine (Molotch 1976, 1988; Logan and Molotch 1987; Logan, Whaley, and Crowder 1997). However, the applicability of the growth machine theory and its type to San Francisco's redevelopment after the Downtown Plan 1985, particularly after Proposition M 1986, is problematic given the existence of an anti-growth machine (Hu 2012). The privatism-dominated downtown development thesis is more applicable to San Francisco's micro urban design. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee (1993, 1998) combined an analysis of specific urban design projects in downtown San Francisco (compared to Los Angeles and San Diego) with a policy analysis, and noted a phenomenon of public-space privatization that corporate open spaces reflect a market-driven urbanism – planned, designed and packaged to satisfy an exclusive clientele.

Unlike the first strand of literature, which analyses the political and economic forces that have shaped San Francisco's downtown development and urban design plans, the other strand of literature makes a content analysis of the plan documents, so as to identify technical and thematic patterns. Vettel (1984) offered a technical review of the development of urban design regulations in downtown San Francisco, and illustrated its evolution from 'discretionary decision making' to 'demanding objective requirements' with the imposition of the Downtown Plan. Vettel (1984, 566) admitted that the importance of the Downtown Plan lay in the city's ambition that "its growing downtown becomes not a dull and uncomfortable concrete wasteland, but an inviting, vital, diverse urban environment". Vettel's analysis was made soon after the Downtown Plan was released, which limited its analytical depth, and is not beyond the technical regulations of the plan and its association with urban design practices in the early 1980s. Punter (1996, 1999) provided a more comprehensive analysis of the urban design plans in San Francisco and a comparison with other West Coast US cities (Seattle, Portland, Irvine and San Diego), and summarized some prescriptive urban design themes that can be learned by cities in the UK and elsewhere.

On the other hand, the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco have received criticism for their technical regulations. Both the Urban Design Plan 1972 and the Downtown Plan 1985 are control plans, and taken together, may be more stringent than those in any other major American city (Vettel 1984). Lai (1988) expressed concerns about San Francisco's total design control approach, which is seen as an 'invisible web' as opposed to the market-led capital web. Punter (1999) noted that the complex urban design review process in San Francisco seems to have been nearly as much a nightmare for the planners as for the developers. Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee's (1993, 1998) comparative studies showed that San Francisco employs a 'paternalist' or 'determinist' style of urban planning in contrast to Los Angeles. Rose's (1999) observation is critical and cynical: the Urban Design Plan has impacted the city more in what it has prevented than in what it has promoted.

Another group of literature in this strand does not make a content analysis of San Francisco's urban design plans. Rather, it incorporates San Francisco as an important case in a comprehensive content analysis of downtown plans in America, in order to summarize thematic patterns from a historical perspective. Abbott (1993) examined American downtown policy discourse and planning since 1945 and identified five successive historical themes which are generally applicable to San Francisco. Similar studies have been made to understand the thematic evolutions of urban design in American cities, including San Francisco. According to the synthesis of Linovski and Loukaitou-Sideris (2013), American cities have experienced three generations of urban design plans: the first generation in the 1960s, the second generation in the 1970s and 1980s, and the third generation in the 1990s and 2000s. Southworth and Southworth (1973) evaluated the first generation of urban design plans, with a focus on environmental quality that encompassed multiple dimensions of urban design, such as legibility, ease of pedestrian movement, preservation of historic and aesthetic features, and street amenities.

Later, using 'urban renewal' as a dividing line, Southworth (1989) compared the second generation of urban design plans in 1972–89 (post-'urban renewal' era of urban design) to the first generation plans in 1960–72 (early 'urban renewal' era of urban design). Southworth (1989) argued that the second generation of plans demonstrated more concerns for user needs, more focus on the quality of character of large areas, and more emphasis on the assets of environments, in contrast to the first generation of 'urban renewal' plans. Following a similar approach of the previous studies (Southworth and Southworth 1973; Southworth 1989), Linovski and Loukaitou-Sideris (2013) examined the third generation of American urban design plans, which revealed a greater focus on the contemporary concern of sustainability, but less concern about diversity, equity and economic development. According to these historical categorizations, San Francisco's urban design plans in this study fall into the second generation of American urban design plans. It should be noted that San Francisco's Urban Design Plan was released in 1972, the dividing year in Southworth's (1989) categorization of 'urban renewal' and post-'urban renewal' urban design plans, or the first and second generations of urban design plans in America.

Built upon the strand of literature on a content analysis of the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco, this study employs a critical approach to advancing the scholarship along two lines. First, it makes a critical discourse analysis of the plans in contexts. Second, it applies the Kuhnian framework of

'paradigm' to evaluating the contributions of the plans in urban design history. This study aims at more than a technical and thematic summary of the urban design plans, but a holistic understanding of the plans, including their contextualization, their innovations and legacies, and their professional and disciplinary contributions.

Reading through Urban Design Plans

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis treats texts as points of entry into social phenomena (Fairclough 1995). As an analytical method, it focuses closely on text analysis, but connects them with their broader institutional and cultural contexts through the analysis of orders of discourse – genres, discourses and styles (Fairclough 2003). MacCallum and Hopkins (2011, 485–488) summarized how this method could be applied to analyzing plans: texts realize genres; genres are recognizable; texts of a particular genre (e.g. strategic metropolitan plan) share identifiable characteristics; genres might change as society's expectations of institutional practices change; decisions to change textual modes and styles are also decisions to alter the broader practices which such texts realize; many genres (e.g. policy documents) undergoing rapid changes in style and modes of representation reflect contemporary cultural and political shifts. This method is particularly useful to the study of social changes, including planning; it is an effective method to compare plans, identify shifts and contextualize changes (MacCallum and Hopkins 2011).

Using critical discourse analysis, this paper examines three levels of meanings in the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco: (1) factual meaning, or thematic patterns from plain text reading; (2) contextual meaning, or relation to political, social, economic, and physical conditions; and (3) temporal meaning, or its historical changes. They aim to uncover the multiple artefacts of plans beyond the 'plain sense': plans are also ideological artefacts, cultural artefacts, and historical artefacts (Ryan 2011, 310).

Paradigm Shift in Urban Design

The concept of paradigm shift in urban design is derived from the Kuhnian framework of 'paradigm' in science (Kuhn 1970). The Kuhnian framework uses the term 'paradigm' in two different senses:

On the one hand, it stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community. On the other, it denotes one sort of element in that constellation, the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science. (Kuhn 1970, 175)

In the history of science, scientists encountered anomalies that could not be explained by a prevailing paradigm, and then a new paradigm was created to address the problems – a paradigm shift occurred. According to Kuhn's definition, there are two broad strands of 'paradigm shift'. One strand is in the strict sense that a paradigm shift is a revolutionary shift in thought and

fundamental theoretical changes. The other is in the liberal sense that a paradigm shift describes significant changes in thoughts, not necessarily fundamental to our world views or conceptions.

The Kuhnian framework of ‘paradigm’ has been applied to planning and urban design, although scholars differ in which sense of the Kuhnian paradigm they use. Taylor (1999) offered a most summative description of three outstanding changes in planning thoughts in the post-war decades in the English-speaking countries – from the planner as a creative designer to the planner as a scientific analyst and rational decision maker, from the planner as technical expert to the planner as a manager and communicator, and from Modernist to Postmodernist planning thoughts. However, he argued that none of the three changes represent a paradigm shift in the strict sense of the Kuhnian framework. Drawing on the scholarly arguments on what makes an urban design paradigm (Madanipour 1996; Lang 2005), and the Kuhnian framework, Garde (2008) posited that an innovation in urban design needs to satisfy at least two conditions to be identified as a paradigm: it serves as an example for replication; it is conceived and promoted as a model of good design. Apparently, Garde’s proposition of an urban design paradigm is in the liberal sense of the Kuhnian framework, not in the strict sense used in Taylor’s (1999) examination of planning thoughts in the post-war decades.

Urban Design Plan 1972

The Urban Design Plan comprises four sections: City Pattern, Conservation, Major New Development, and Neighbourhood Environment. Each section includes four parts: an elaboration on human needs, an overall objective, a set of fundamental principles with illustrations and measurable criteria, and a series of policies for implementation.

City Pattern

San Francisco’s city pattern is made up of water, hills and ridges, open spaces and landscaped areas, streets and roadways, and buildings and structures. The human needs for the city pattern range from perception to psychology, including the image and character of the city, psychological effects upon residents of the city, identification of districts and neighbourhoods, and understanding of the city, its logic and its means of cohesion. The Plan particularly points out two controllable elements that help strengthen the city pattern: visually prominent landscaping and street lighting.

The overall objective for the city pattern is “emphasis of the characteristic pattern which gives to the city and its neighbourhoods an image, a sense of purpose, and a means of orientation”. To achieve the objective, the principles provide guidance on the needs and characteristics of views, topography, streets, building form and landscaping, which are the major elements of a city pattern. Most principles address how the city pattern can be recognized, protected and enhanced through urban design at the street and open space levels, such as landscaping, lighting and width and route of streets. The policies are centred on three categories of issues: image and character, organization and sense of purpose, and orientation for travel.

Conservation

Conservation applies to natural and built environment. The natural areas are irreplaceable resources that answer human needs for rest, escape and view. Older buildings are resources for character, culture, education and recreation. Traditional neighbourhoods and streets are further resources for conservation. The objective for these human needs is “conservation of resources which provide a sense of nature, continuity with the past, and freedom from overcrowding”.

The majority of the principles are about the protection of older buildings with historical values, the harmonization of new developments with historical neighbourhood buildings through architectural details and consistent urban forms, and the preservation of street patterns and blocks. The policies stipulate approaches to achieving the desired outcomes in three areas: natural areas, richness of past development and street space.

Major New Development

The central concern of human needs for new development is ‘a matter of scale’. Scale is relative. Good scale depends on the balance and compatibility of buildings’ height and bulk with the total pattern of the land and the city. Unusual buildings and large building sites present the greatest problems and challenges for urban forms. The overall objective is “moderation of major new development to complement the city pattern, the resources to be conserved, and the neighbourhood environment”.

The principles provide criteria for good skyline and urban form, as well as guidance on the prevention of negative impacts of tall buildings with unusual shapes and large bulks. The emphasis is on the visual effect of the city’s urban form and pattern. Technical specifications are provided on enhancing user’s experience at the street and public space for new developments; urban design guidelines are provided for height and bulk of buildings (see Figure 1). The policies suggest approaches for new developments in three areas: visual harmony, height and bulk, and large land areas.

Neighbourhood Environment

Human needs for a neighbourhood environment include a tolerable and comfortable living environment, safe and free from stress. Many factors contribute to a good neighbourhood environment, including safety and security, neighbourhood maintenance, open space and recreation opportunities, and the streetscape. The objective is “improvement of the neighbourhood environment to increase personal safety, comfort, pride and opportunity”.

Principles on enhancing the neighbourhood environment are provided, covering a range of urban design issues, including trees, open space and landscaping, sidewalks and streets, parking areas, traffic restriction, pedestrian-friendly space, transport modes and waterfront space. The policies suggest approaches to achieving the objective in four areas: health and safety, feeling of neighbourhood, opportunity for recreation, and visual amenity.

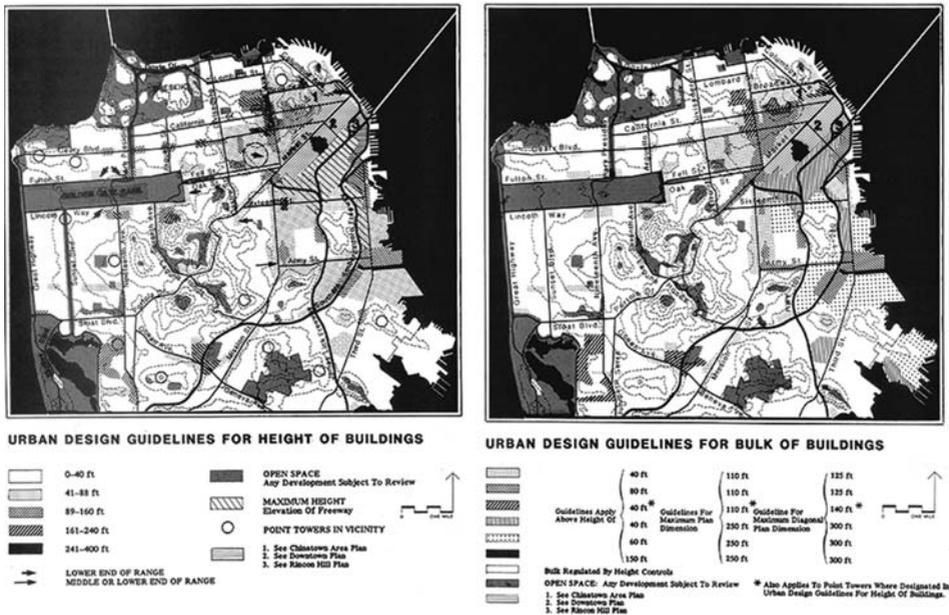


Figure 1. Urban design guidelines for height and bulk of buildings. *Source:* Urban Design Element, San Francisco General Plan.

Downtown Plan 1985

The Downtown Plan contains seven sections of important issues concerning downtown development, ranging from commercial space, housing and transport, to seismic safety. Three sections address exclusively urban design issues: Open Space, Preserving the Past and Urban Form.

Open Space

There are three objectives for preserving and enhancing open space:

[providing] quality open space in sufficient quantity and variety to meet the needs of downtown workers, residents, and visitors; [assuring] that open spaces are accessible and usable; [and providing] contrast and form by consciously treating open space as a counterpoint to the built environment.

A number of policies stipulate how to achieve each objective. Overall, the objectives and policies deal with two key requirements for open space – availability and accessibility for users, and complementarity with the surrounding built environment.

The Plan provides technical guidance for open space design and policy measures for creating more open space. It specifies details (size, location, access, seating, landscaping, services, sunlight and wind, public availability, etc.) on different types of open space (urban garden, urban park, plaza, terrace, greenhouse, snippet, atrium, indoor park, public sitting, etc.). One benchmark target is that everyone will be within 900 feet of a publicly accessible space “to sit, to eat a brown-bag lunch, to people-watch, to be out of the stream of activity but

within sight of its flow". The Plan requires provision of publicly accessible open space for all new construction projects – 1 square foot of open space per 50 gross square feet of building space in the commercial zone, and 1 square foot of open space per 100 gross square feet of building space in the retail zone. In addition, an open space linkage fee of \$2 per square foot of new office building space is required to fund the acquisition and development of parks and open spaces in downtown areas.

Preserving the Past

This section contains the objective to "conserve resources that provide continuity with San Francisco's past", and a number of policies on preserving the historical buildings and designing new buildings in harmony with the old ones nearby. The Plan does not provide many technical guidelines; rather, it includes two key measures for implementation. For one measure, it classifies downtown buildings according to their historical values. Categories I and II are buildings of individual importance, and are considered 'Significant Buildings'. Categories III and IV are rated very good architectural design, and are considered 'Contributory Buildings'. All non-rated buildings are defined as Category V. The classification system enforces measures and incentives for the retention or demolition of the old buildings. The Plan creates conservation districts in areas with special characteristics and qualities. For the other measure, the Plan permits the Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) from historically rated buildings to new development sites in the district. It serves a dual purpose of retaining historical buildings and maintaining development potential in downtown areas.

Urban Form

The Plan provides one objective and a few policies for each of the four aspects of urban form: height and bulk, sunlight and wind, building appearance and streetscape. For height and bulk, the objective is to "create an urban form for downtown that enhances San Francisco's stature as one of the world's most visually attractive cities". For sunlight and wind, the objective is to "create and maintain a comfortable pedestrian environment". For building appearance, the objective is to "create a building form that is visually interesting and harmonizes with surrounding buildings". For streetscape, the objective is to "create and maintain attractive, interesting urban streetscapes". A dozen of policies are articulated for controlling new buildings, so as to achieve a good-looking skyline from a distance, harmonious building blocks and façades, and a friendly street experience for pedestrians.

The most technical part of the Plan pertains to urban form. It regulates new constructions' shapes, volumes and styles, as well as their relationship to the sidewalks and streets, with reference to detailed specifications, maps and illustrations. It requires new constructions to be harmonious with the existing city pattern in scale and façade; it requires decorative architectural variations and setbacks for the tower tops, for an interesting look and sunlight access at the street level (see Figure 2). Large bulks and boxy shapes are prohibited to avoid overwhelming aesthetic and psychological effects. Overall, the urban design considerations are centred on three levels: skyline composition, street level urban design and microclimate.

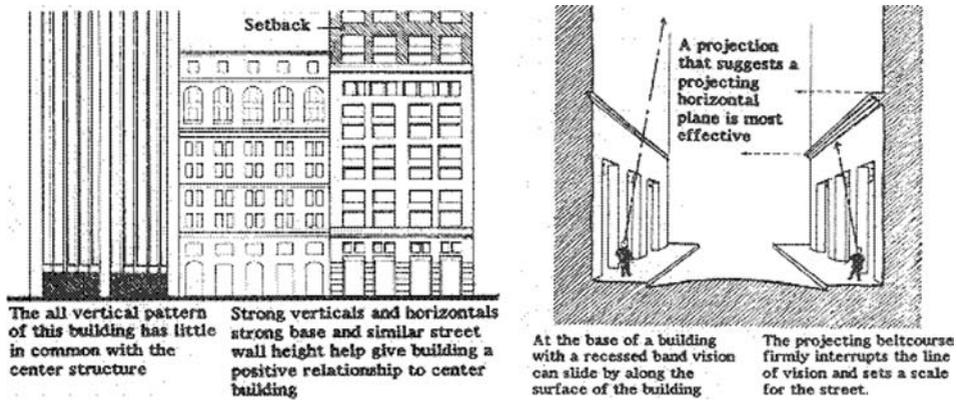


Figure 2. Building form requirement. Source: Downtown Area Plan, San Francisco General Plan.

Innovations and Legacies

The question for discussion is as follows: do the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco represent a paradigm shift in urban design history? To answer this question, the two plans will be analyzed both philosophically and methodologically, to determine whether they demonstrate sufficient 'newness' to qualify as an expression of a 'paradigm shift'. Their legacies on the city's forms and development will also be examined.

Philosophically, the plans are responsive, interventionist and balancing. The Urban Design Plan 1972 and Downtown Plan 1985 responded to the large-scale redevelopment of the time, which had raised aesthetic and environmental concerns in the beginning, and social concerns later (Vettel 1984; DeLeon 1992a; McGovern 1998; Hartman 2002; Hu 2012). The two plans were planning efforts to address the problems caused by the previous redevelopment model (analogous to the 'anomalies' in the Kuhnian framework). Before the plans were enforced, San Francisco's planning was described as being minimally controlled, discretionary and dominated by a private hegemonism (Vettel 1984; McGovern 1998; Hu 2012). The *laissez faire* practice was superseded by the interventionist regulations in the two plans, which provide principles, policies, criteria and technical specifications on desirable urban forms and space. Underlining the interventionist approach was scepticism of market forces that had previously dominated San Francisco's downtown development, and a belief that government interventions guarantee a more equitable outcome (Hu 2012). The supremacy of the interventionist planning only came to fruition after decades of urban contestations (DeLeon and Powell 1989; McGovern 1998; DeLeon 1992a, 1992b). To redress the prior redevelopment practices, the plans aimed to achieve a balance between goals, and a balance between the physical, social and economic dimensions of planning and development.

The interventionist philosophy determines that the concerns of the plans are more than the physical dimensions. The physical principles and policies have strong non-physical aspirations. The Urban Design Plan 1972 is not only a regulatory document and an implementation strategy, but an articulation of urban design philosophy. The Plan is highly conscious of the social roles of urban design, which are manifest in its elaboration on 'human needs'. It is a champion of the philosophy that good urban design, in addressing the physical and the emotional

aspects of city life, meets a human need. Urban design is not merely a means of making a beautiful place; it is also essential to the quality of people's lives, on a very individual, psychological level. This reflects the democratic ethos of the late 1960s, in direct contrast to the earlier slash-and-burn, top-down redevelopment programmes (Rose 1999). The non-physical aspirations of the urban design elements in the Downtown Plan 1985 are even stronger. In addition to redressing the Modernist style buildings that negatively impacted San Francisco's urban character aesthetically and socially, the Downtown Plan defines two primary goals: liveability and economic competitiveness. Liveability is to be achieved through better open space, urban form and historical protection, while the competitiveness of the city requires the type of environment that is attractive, compact, walkable and accessible (Hu 2012).

On the physical and aesthetic dimensions of urban design, the thematic linkage between the Urban Design Plan 1972 and the Downtown Plan 1985 is the Lynchian approach to urban forms and images. A pioneering Postmodernist urban design thought, the Lynchian approach rejects the Modernist design principles which are seen as authoritarian, elitist, deterministic and top-down (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). On the contrary, the Lynchian approach emphasizes the importance of environmental psychology and environmental behaviour – that is, knowing how people use and perceive a city, or a city's 'imageability' (Lynch 1960). In San Francisco, the Lynchian approach was used to develop design guidelines and regulations to protect and improve the appearance of the city. The underpinning belief is that urban design could directly and indirectly enhance individuals' quality of life through the promotion and preservation of the imageable elements of a city (Rose 1999). Meanwhile, the promotion of an urban character harmonious with traditional architecture and reminiscent of old buildings indicates a flavour of Postmodernism and departure from the Modernist International Style (Lai 1988; Punter 1999).

Methodologically, the plans demonstrate innovative practices in two major aspects. One is the research-based process and professional consultation in preparing the plans; the other is the shift of urban design from architectonic drawing to public policy. The Urban Design Plan 1972 was well resourced in terms of time, funding and professional expertise. Its preparation started from 1967 as a planning initiative. Funded by the federal government, a study was carried out in 1968–70, which involved the planning director Allan Jacobs; consultants Marshall Kaplan, Herbert Gans and Donald Appleyard; and a citizens' advisory committee. The final Plan was built upon eight preliminary reports designed to encourage public response, three specialized studies and pioneering consultancies of the time. The use of well-sourced surveys for making design plans contrasted with the reluctance of design professionals to use empirical knowledge to shape designs, and often haphazard and overly subjective urban design analysis and problem identification (Southworth 1989; Lang 2005). For the Downtown Plan, an earlier version was released by the planning director, Dean Macris, in 1983. It was finally approved by the Board of Supervisors in 1985 after two years of contestations between the pro-growth group and the anti-growth group (DeLeon 1992a, 1992b; Hu 2012). These preparation steps were important for assuring the quality of the plans' content and presentation. In terms of clarity of expression in plan objectives, design principles and policies, and of comprehensiveness in addressing urban design issues, both plans are pioneering and are models of best practices.

Both plans employ a 'total design' approach (Lai 1988). The total design approach controls the concise objectives, design principles and policies, standards of performance, quantitative criteria, maps of special heights and bulk districts, and visuals of urban forms and architecture. This total design approach is characterized as an 'invisible web' implemented by the police power of zoning (Lai 1988), in contrast to the more flexible 'capital web' of market-led design initiatives (Buchanan 1988). The control approach in San Francisco was strengthened by the passage of Proposition M and the introduction of the Beauty Contest programme, both of which were imposed in 1986. Proposition M enforced a permanent annual cap of 950,000 square feet on all new buildings of more than 25,000 square feet, and reserved an annual area of 75,000 square feet for small buildings – the strictest control that had ever been implemented on new development in an American city (Hu 2008). The Beauty Contest programme required that proposed new projects each year be evaluated against each other by a set of criteria on architecture and urban design qualities. Compared to the previous Modernist style buildings, the Beauty Contest projects demonstrate more design elements and architectural luxury, and better interface with historical surroundings (see Figure 3).

Furthermore, the plans represent a significant methodological shift from an architectonic approach to urban design as public policy. Jonathan Barnett (1974) established the notion of 'urban design as public policy'. Rather than a series of drawings envisioned by architects and designers in the way they designed a building, urban design plans became documents that listed a set of desirable goals – visual, environmental, economic and social – and policies to achieve them. With the Urban Design Plan of San Francisco came a significant change in the way urban designers seek to shape the built environment in cities; rather than use an architectonic approach, the urban designers sought to form the built environment by influencing decisions with policies, plans, programmes and guidelines (George



Figure 3. Beauty Contest project: Marriot Hotel. *Source:* Photography by the author.

1997). This Lynchian approach to urban design as public policy marked a shift from Modernist to Postmodernist urban design process and procedure (George 1997; Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). The tactics of urban design as public policy include describing certain maximum, minimum or otherwise desirable characteristics of individual buildings; going beyond individual buildings to the relative position of different buildings; and offering incentives for making certain desirable decisions (or not making certain undesirable decisions) (George 1997). The first two tactics are well reflected in the physical regulations and desirable performance standards for users in both plans. The third tactic is embedded in the Downtown Plan's innovative practices of TDR and Linkage programmes for historical conservation, and of incentives for increasing open space. Through the 1980s, the practice of urban design as public policy in the forms of sophisticated plans and review processes took root across many American cities (Punter 2007). Lang (1996) categorized two ways of considering types of urban design projects – one in terms of the products, and the other in terms of methods by which they are developed – and argued that the first is traditional, but the second is fundamental to understanding the activities of urban design and the responsibilities of urban designers. The innovative practice of urban design as public policy offers a new approach to urban design.

In San Francisco's General Plan, the Urban Design Plan 1972 became the Urban Design Element; the Downtown Plan 1985 became the Area Plan for Downtown. They have been important planning documents controlling urban design in downtown San Francisco until today. They embody a strong philosophy, whose influence has been profound in San Francisco and elsewhere. The Urban Design Plan has influenced the planning process and day-to-day decisions, and has influenced subsequent planning efforts, including the Downtown Plan (Rose 1999). In answering whether the Downtown Plan has ultimately resulted in better-designed buildings, Dean Macris and George Williams, who were respectively San Francisco's planning director and assistant planning director when the Downtown Plan was made, quoted the observation of the architectural critic Robert Campbell that "The purpose of plans is not to insure beauty or excellence. The purpose of guidelines is to prevent disaster, not to insure great design. Only talent will do that. Guidelines stimulate creativity and talent" (Macris and Williams 1999). For the two key authors of the Downtown Plan, the Plan's contribution has been in preventing urban design in downtown San Francisco from getting worse, and in encouraging better design projects through its public policy guidance.

When the Downtown Plan was approved in 1985, the Board of Supervisors also required that monitoring reports be prepared periodically to keep track of and observe its impact. A 25-year monitor report indicates that the Downtown Plan has made significant achievements in the urban design areas of open space, preservation and urban form; new open spaces were created downtown as a result of the Plan (see Figure 4). The open spaces have been generally successful and well used, and many of them are now connected by a network of pedestrian thoroughways as called for by the Plan; the Plan's historical preservation requirements have contributed to the retention of hundreds of individual buildings, as well as the character of historic districts; since 1985, the urban form requirements of the Plan has led to positive changes in skyline composition, street level urban design and microclimate (San Francisco Planning Department 2011).



Figure 4. Open space created by the Downtown Plan. Source: 25 Years: Downtown Plan Monitoring Report 1985–2009.

Conclusion: A Paradigm Shift?

The aforementioned philosophical and methodological innovations in the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco are summarized in Table 1. According to the liberal sense of the Kuhnian framework (Kuhn 1970), and Garde's (2008) criteria of urban design paradigm, it can be concluded that they represent a paradigm shift. Both the Urban Design Plan 1972 and the Downtown Plan 1985 are the first of their kind for an American major city. They put San Francisco in a leading position of downtown urban design. The Downtown Plan won the National Merit Award from the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1985, appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* twice, and triggered the debate over 'San Francisco-ization' of Manhattan (DeLeon 1992a, 64). San Francisco is a frequently cited case in the literature on innovative urban design (Jacobs and Appleyard 1987; Lang 1996; George 1997; Schurch 1999). It is used as a best practice example for British cities to learn lessons (Punter 1996). In practice, San Francisco's urban design was followed by cities in the US (e.g. San Diego, New York), and elsewhere (e.g. Canada, Japan).

The next question is as follows: do the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco represent a paradigm shift defined by the strict sense of the Kuhnian framework? The strict Kuhnian paradigm "stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community" (Kuhn 1970, 175). The key to answering the question is to prove whether San Francisco's urban design practice is one isolated case, or is representative of a community sharing common practices. Since San Francisco has been a model of good practice for other cities to learn, it is not an individual case standing alone. The remaining part of the answer lies in identifying the community sharing the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques of San Francisco's urban design practice.

Table 1. Innovations in urban design plans for downtown San Francisco.

	New practices	Old practices
Philosophy	Interventionist Postmodernist Balanced economic, social and environment aspirations User-centric	Laissez faire Modernist Pro-economic growth
Methodology	Research, analysis and consultancy Regulatory Community consultation Urban design as public policy, process and procedure	Built environment centric Technical and intuitive Discretionary Elitist Urban design as architectonic product

A synthesis of some historical studies of American urban design evolution helps prove the existence of such a community. As examined in the literature section, Southworth (1989) reviewed 70 urban design plans for 40 towns and cities in the US prepared between 1972 and 1989. Those plans revealed some common themes, including more concerns for user needs; more focus on managing the quality and character of large areas through policies, standards and design review; and more emphasis on the assets of the environment. They belong to the second generation of urban design in American cities, according to the historical categorization by Linovski and Loukaitou-Sideris (2013). For Southworth, the studied design plans “are a response to the failures of urban renewal projects that often demolished too much of the city, leaving a barren urban landscape with no sense of place or community” (Southworth 1989, 369). Put in the Kuhnian framework, it is responses to the anomalies – urban renewal programmes – that led to the development of a new paradigm in urban design.

On the other hand, American downtown planning since 1945 demonstrated strong common themes in the periods of 1965–75 and 1975–85: downtown as a federation of subdistricts called for community conservation, historic preservation and human scale planning; downtown as a set of individual experiences required regulation of private design and public assistance for cultural facilities, retail markets, open space and other amenities (Abbott 1993). Punter (1996, 1999) reviewed the urban design control experience and developments in five American west coast cities (Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Irvine and San Diego), and identified a set of key issues that are recommendable for British cities. Punter (2002, 2007) also traced the trajectory of urban design as public policy; American west coast cities such as San Francisco and Portland developed sophisticated plans and review processes in the early 1970s, and through the 1980s design review took root across many American cities, and spread across the border into the city of Vancouver. Although it might not be the aim of these studies, the identified patterns help support the claim that the urban design practice in downtown San Francisco did not occur as a single innovation; it was shared by a community with common urban design beliefs, values and techniques, and lasted for a considerably long time, to fit the strict sense of the Kuhnian paradigm.

A critical discourse analysis, combining a content analysis of plan documents with a contextualization in urban design profession and discipline, reveals both philosophical and methodological innovations in the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco. The legacies have been profound, not only in San

Francisco, but also elsewhere. Scrutinized through both the liberal sense and the strict sense of the Kuhnian framework of 'paradigm', with reference to a synthesis of urban design evolution, the innovative practices in the urban design plans for downtown San Francisco are representative of a paradigm shift in urban design history.

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