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**THE
EXCELLENCE
OF
RELEVANCE**

THE UNITED NATIONS PROJECTS THAT THE

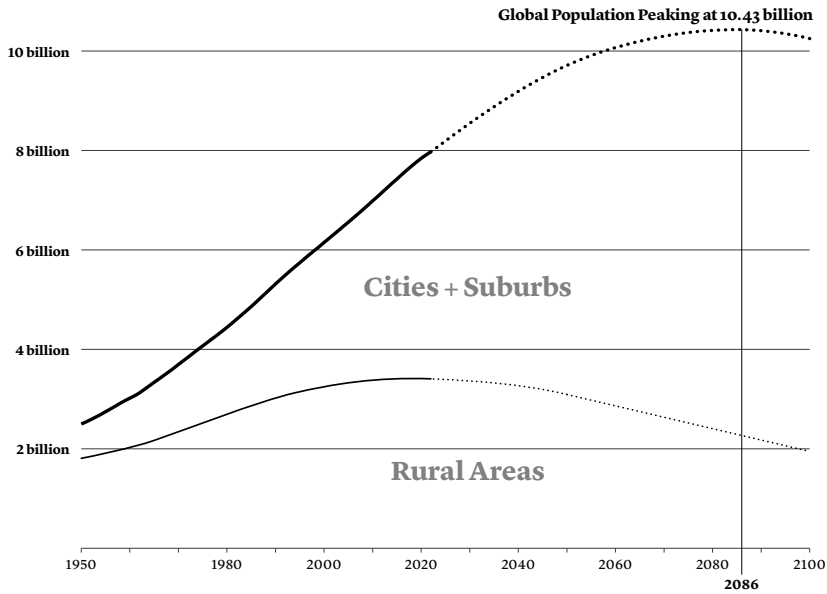
world's population will plateau at just over ten billion people by the close of this century, and while birth rates are declining in wealthy nations, most experts state that by 2100 we will share the planet with over two billion more neighbors than the eight billion we have today.¹ Despite significant reductions in global poverty and famine over the past several decades, too much of our existing population remains in precarious circumstances, while the rest of us consume far more resources than our environment can afford. Given the addition of two billion more individuals on the earth, the stakes seem clear, perilous, and, for many, hopeless. But rather than be fearful, imagine the overwhelming intellectual, artistic, social, and material bounty these billions of new hearts and minds would offer humanity if we could all live sustainably, in dignity, together. Imagine the discoveries made, the books written, the cures found, the music scored, the planets visited, the food grown, the plays produced, the intelligence created, and the peace established if we could form a healthy and harmonious world of ten billion. Given that most people worldwide already live in urbanized environments—including both cities and the suburban regions that surround them—the prospect of a sustainable planet of ten billion is only achievable if we intentionally design more ecological and equitable spaces of collective living, be they small villages or big cities.²

A city is a cultural, social, political, economic, and infrastructural construct, formed as much through people, policy, and advocacy as it is through its physicality. Cities have always been my fascination because they spatially mediate between people and the planet. The promise of the city is to be a beehive abuzz with multitudes who through their individual and collective agency produce culture and commerce, where the unexpected and iconoclastic are embraced, where politicians are directly accountable to their constituents, and where leaders and residents can innovate at scale. As we will see, new policies that address equitable housing, global warming, social infrastructure, or public space can be adopted en masse across a large city but also can be spread to other communities, large and small, around the world to great effect. Carbon negative urban buildings, groundbreaking cultural institutions, unique public spaces, streets closed to private cars, local manufacturing, new forms of supportive homeless housing—these are all initiatives mayors can enact and share. But beyond government, everyday people in cities regularly alter human history. Largely peaceful protests, be it those of Black Lives Matter, the Velvet Revolution, or the Arab Spring, almost always occur in cities because that is where the revolution gets televised; without cities, nations and the societies they house would rarely change.

Architecture, by contrast, has traditionally been a monastic practice limited to a handful of us absorbed in form, space, material, light, use, construction, and the theories that bind them. As architects we toil with the knowledge—and too often the resentment—that excellence is narrowly judged, rarely achieved, and poorly

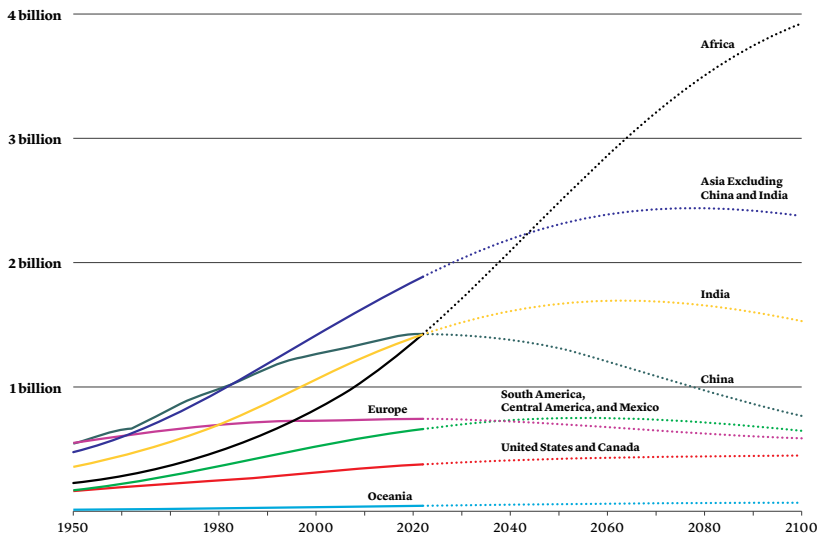
A World of Ten Billion

The United Nations projects the global population to plateau at just over ten billion people by 2100, with the vast majority living in cities and their suburbs. Two billion people are projected to be rural residents by 2100, which is similar to the number of rural inhabitants worldwide during the 1960s.



A Tale of Two Trends

Birth rates are declining—in some cases precipitously—in today's wealthy nations, but the overall global population is still projected to rise until the end of this century. It is clear to this author that the empowerment of women, sustainable urban and rural development, and sound immigration policies will stabilize population by equalizing opportunity in regions devastated by colonialism, slavery, and ongoing exploitation.



understood. For humanity, cities may be physically composed of architecture, yet this is taken for granted as much as the air we breathe or the sidewalks we traverse.

The nexus between cities and architecture has been written about extensively, especially in the twentieth century.³ But ours is a new world, emerging from a global pandemic, embroiled in ongoing fundamentalist and increasingly violent challenges to democracies worldwide, and riddled with environmental, racial, political, economic, and technological challenges that few thinkers from centuries past could have anticipated much less addressed. Consequently, issues of racial equity and sustainable ecology permeate this book unlike the work of some canonical twentieth-century urbanists like Jane Jacobs and Rem Koolhaas.⁴

Despite the remarkable possibilities and challenges confronting the professions of the built environment, practitioners, rather than coalesce in response, have splintered over the last few decades in the wake of both global capitalism and social critique. As someone who alternately works among architects, planners, academics, journalists, policy wonks, community advocates, preservationists, environmentalists, political leaders, business executives, and entrepreneurs, I see the walls that divide the professions much more than the bridges that connect them, which frightens me considering the multiple planetary emergencies we collectively face.

Given this precarious state of the planet, why write a book about, of all things, architecture?

Most find architecture to be of little relevance to the pressing challenges of our time, including a climate in crisis, domestic terrorism, unprovoked wars, overdue racial reckoning, expanding social inequity, world-stopping global pandemics, the abrogation of established rights, and accelerating technological dislocations. (Instead of the tech-sector idea of “disruptions” I prefer the term “dislocations,” which refers to a series of effects society experiences as a result of technological change, including jobs replaced by automation, remote and hybrid work, fraying political discourse fueled by social media, and the dissociative psychological impact of people absorbed more by the bubble of their smartphones than the world around them.)⁵ Given that some of these challenges are truly existential—which together are culminating in a resurgence of fascism worldwide—shouldn’t it be our leading policymakers, scientists, and social critics who address the pressing questions of our time? Given the enormity of these challenges, what relevance do architects and cities have? Reciprocally, perhaps we as practitioners need new standards for excellence in order to achieve relevance.

Practicing architects, urban planners, and engineers might balk at such questions by claiming their relevance based upon certain inarguable facts. For example, two of the leading sources of global carbon emissions are buildings and cars, topics about which the design disciplines have deep expertise. Affordable housing production and social infrastructure projects are intended,

however unsuccessfully, to ameliorate inequity. Much of the racial and gender discrimination found globally is geographic and territorial, with urban renewal as envisioned by architects and perpetrated by planners having played a demonstrable role in racial segregation and heteronormative gender typecasting.⁶ The ubiquitous problems created worldwide by the promulgation of highways and the incentivizing of segregated suburbs throughout the twentieth century are unquestionably central to today's issues of global warming and racial division.⁷

Theoreticians might go further still, arguing that all these problems stem from the means by which space itself is produced. Landscape architects and city planners, typically operating on broader territories than most architects, could claim more relevance to the problems of our epoch, given the larger-scale impacts their respective fields have on human habitation and land use. A communal finger from all these disciplines might point at neoliberal economics as the main culprit of our woes, bolstered by undeniable evidence that the religion of free markets and weak government has fueled many of our current societal, public health, environmental, and geopolitical failures.⁸

And while all these assertions ring true, and are indeed discussed in the pages that follow, there is at the heart of this book a more direct correlation between the problems of our world and the potentials of design, a correlation directly centered on the instrumentality of *connective design* and its ability to reknit the fragmented cultures of our ever more polarized world. Throughout this book I will use the term “connective design,” whether at the scale of architecture or larger-scale urban strategies, to refer to something more comprehensive than socially responsible efforts at sustainability or affordability, both of which are necessary but not sufficient. Connective design as discussed here is an intentional method of practice, describing the conscious attempt of the designer to forge deeper physical bonds across society at every scale, whether it be the placement of a door, the creation of an arcade, the planning of public space, the place-based evolution of a skyline, or the deployment of materials or tectonics that reflect local narratives, all in the service of creating connections across the fractious human condition we must together reknit. This is not a Pollyannaish plea for a homogenized, gentrified, go-along-get-along world; to the contrary, it is a plea for embracing difference. Connective design, when successful, generates *positive social friction* across differing cultures, races, and classes, enabling through serendipitous physical encounters our ability to confront, understand, and bridge the differences among us, thereby generating *urbanity* as defined below. Cities are the starting point for this investigation but by no means the end. In the pages that follow, we will explore the idea of connective design as a prerequisite to the condition of urbanity, which can manifest in rural areas and walkable villages, as well as in cities.

Why focus so specifically on the design of cities and communal settings as a means for connection? Because to address our largest challenges like global

warming, we must design more ecological communities—but such designs will never be adopted rapidly enough to be impactful when we have a society as disconnected as ours. Metropolitan regions are the primary form of habitation for our species today, and as such are fertile ground for cultural connection even though they, too, are polarized politically, economically, racially, and socially.

In 2013, I wrote a book, building upon the work of many, that extolled the environmental, economic, and social benefits of building dense, transit-based cities both in the United States and globally. *A Country of Cities: A Manifesto for an Urban America* was well received, but for its Achilles' heel.⁹ Informed by exhaustively researched data and infographics, readers were open to the argument that dense urban life produces a lower carbon footprint per capita, creates more opportunities for shared health and prosperity, and improves social mobility when coupled with progressive policies that build affordability and infrastructure. But the dilemma of this argument is that it is largely quantitative without speaking to the qualitative aspects of city building. Many people, even if they are open to greater urban density, find most contemporary metropolitan growth to be soul crushing, especially when built by mainstream developers.

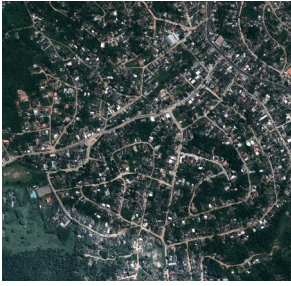
Of all the arguments that challenged my previous book, the one I could never address to my satisfaction is this: most people find new high-density districts to be formulaic and most new buildings to possess few praiseworthy qualities—most find the environment that run-of-the-mill development offers to be devoid of culture, history, texture, or humanity. Backed by solid evidence and popular opinion, critics point to the ubiquity of blue glass skyscrapers, historicized shopping streets, privatized public space, and repetitive chain stores, and can rightfully claim that our cities are oversaturated with these uninspired forms of urban growth, however transit-oriented they may be. The quotidian in our built environment used to be quaint and quirky—now it is mundane and monolithic. In a world of social media, the urban commons is increasingly the only thing we physically share, but its design has become so commonplace that a rare consensus among progressives and conservatives has emerged: the growing global metropolis is largely a banal physical future brimming with ennui.¹⁰

When we speak of a new, transit-based, denser world, to quote Peggy Lee, *is that all there is?*¹¹ And if all we can manage to build is a technocratically performative yet culturally repellent world, doesn't the entire urban project unravel? Even if—and it's a very big if—we could address all the concerns that come with new urban growth—gentrification, community agency, sustainability, congestion, traffic, diversity in representation, fair labor, data privacy, and so on—does any of it matter if humanity finds the new world we build to be experientially repugnant?

This predicament is precisely why the practice of architecture and its allied fields is so relevant today: because great design centers on lived experience. Empirical success without experiential uplift is a pyrrhic victory.

Is that all there is? —Homogeneous Suburbs across Six Continents

Outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (*top left*); Bangalore, India (*top middle*); Cairo, Egypt (*top right*); Paris, France (*bottom left*); Sydney, Australia (*bottom middle*); Toronto, Canada (*bottom right*).



Is that all there is? —Homogeneous Downtowns across Six Continents

Frankfurt, Germany (*top left*); Johannesburg, South Africa (*top middle*); Panama City, Panama (*top right*); Sydney, Australia (*bottom left*); Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (*bottom middle*); Calgary, Canada (*bottom right*).



Achieving important performance metrics such as transit-orientation and affordability is necessary but not sufficient to reach a world that meets our aspirations, a world in which experience matters as much as efficiency. In terms of both global warming and social inequity, most reasonable people agree that we must invest in our communities and their infrastructure. Among progressives and some centrists a consensus appears to be emerging that we must reconsider the way we live, the way we use land and other resources, the way we tax ourselves to equalize opportunity, the way we invest in social and physical infrastructure, and the means by which we invest in these changes in terms of labor rights, social mobility, and community input.¹² No matter what new technologies emerge, if we are to save the planet and the civilization that inhabits it, we need to adopt more compact lifestyles that are undergirded by social fairness, self-determination, and human agency. This last point demands particular emphasis if we are to focus on lived experience: one can imagine a sustainable and economically equalized society that is governed as a totalitarian state. Human agency, our freedom to realize our own aspirations—to be entrepreneurial, to be racially and sexually free, to be expressive without fear, to control our own bodies—must be part of any humanitarian vision for our collective future.

What is exciting is that we, as a society, are finally beginning to talk about all of these issues as an interrelated set of problems that could be addressed holistically. As a noted climate expert at the University of California, Berkeley, said to me in 2020, “It used to be that we felt it important to leave untouched nature alone, but it has become apparent that there is no such thing as untouched nature, therefore the entire environment is fundamentally a design problem.”¹³ This is not to suggest that holistic approaches equate to monocultures and groupthink. To the contrary, as we consider comprehensive approaches to our challenges, we must have a fuller understanding of the planet’s diversity—not only in the cities and regions in which most of us will live but in the rural environments, oceans, and wilderness that sequester our carbon, shield us from zoonotic diseases, supply our food, give us solace, and house vibrant cultures that should remain distinct from urban and suburban life.

Given the emerging consensus around community investment and the need to rethink the design of our environment, what are our aspirations for how we live? If we were to design dense but humane new forms of habitation that accommodated our anticipated population growth, the palimpsest of our narratives, the rich biodiversity of our planet, and the needs of the species with which we share it, what would such a world look and feel like? What would its experiences be? Humility demands that the full resolution of that future is far too much to seek to envision, cognizant as we are of failing past attempts at the same. But can we at least imagine some immediate glimpses of a better horizon, of some pixels that hint at a hopeful vision as our lens hunts for clear focus?

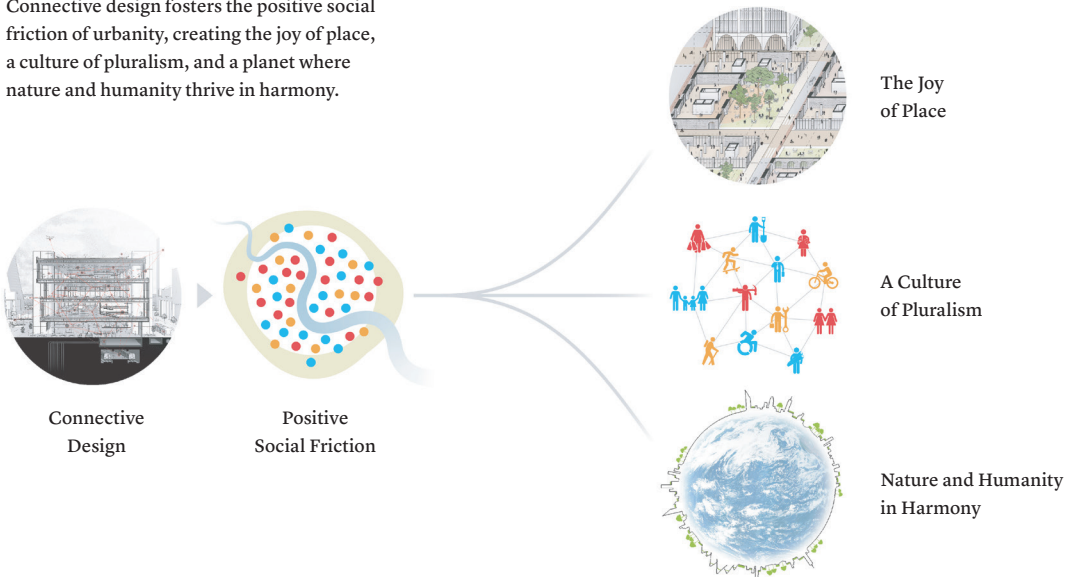
I will attempt to address this dauntingly complex question through the inextricable relationships among architecture, cities, and our shared global ecology, drawing, in chapter 7, on the select efforts of a small group of practicing international architects who together are moving toward this asymptote and increasingly represent new forms of excellence that extend beyond singular notions of sustainability, affordability, or social responsibility. Implicit in this collective body of work is that this asymptote has a name, has a complex central and subtle aspiration, which is to nurture *urbanity* in projects across communities large and small as models of shared health and prosperity. As these examples will hopefully illustrate, connective design generates positive social friction in the service of nature, culture, and joy.

“Urbanity” is a common term, but what does it really mean?

The dictionary definitions of both “urbanity” and “urbane” have only a vague relationship to cities, referring instead to general notions of sophistication or snobbery.¹⁴ Their formal meaning tends to be pejorative, with connotations of “city slickers” that I suspect have been biased by the anti-urbanism long embedded in Western culture. (Such bias dates back to the Bible—consider the Old Testament story of Sodom and Gomorrah, in which God destroys two cities in response to the sins of their citizens, or contemporary disaster and science fiction films like *Independence Day*, in which cities outside “the heartland” like New York and Los Angeles repeatedly get destroyed.) In more recent decades, the term “urban” has been used synonymously with inner-city culture, rarely in a positive manner, and often with a deeply racist subtext. This dovetails with the incendiary and retrograde anti-urbanism infamously conjured by the phrase “this American carnage,”

The Architecture of Urbanity

Connective design fosters the positive social friction of urbanity, creating the joy of place, a culture of pluralism, and a planet where nature and humanity thrive in harmony.





Anti-Urbanism in Western Culture

Cities destroyed by God: *Sodom and Gomorrah* (1680). Cities destroyed by aliens: *Independence Day* (1996)

a craven political sensibility that is a cynically effective and highly profitable wedge in our long-standing, largely manufactured, and increasingly global urban-rural divide.¹⁵

We must bridge this division if we are to survive as a species. The urban and rural are inextricable—we need each other too much to withstand the animus that has been created between us. We must think of urbanity as a condition that transcends the physical and economic phenomenon of the metropolis: the condition of urbanity can be found or nurtured in tight-knit rural villages, interwoven academic campuses, international refugee settlements, and in some, but only some, of our big cities. All great cities should strive to be urban, but communities certainly can be urban without being cities.

Despite the stereotype of being elitist, urbanity speaks to the converse of elitism because it refers to the grittiness of the commons, a place where social, racial, and economic differences collide positively, if not always comfortably. For the purposes of

this book, we will use the words “urban,” “urbane,” and “urbanity” in a positive, egalitarian, and expansive light, particularly given that most people worldwide live in metropolitan regions and, consequently, our future as a species is contingent upon successful policies and projects that have no implicit anti-urban bias.

In this book we will also use the word “urbanity” as it is linked to the lesser-known term “cosmopolis.” Distinct from the elite connotations of the word “cosmopolitan,” the term “cosmopolis” has been in widespread use since the mid-nineteenth century and is derived from the Greek *kosmos*, meaning world, and *polis*, or city, revealing a simple definition, “*a city inhabited by people from many different countries.*”¹⁶

A silver lining of both capitalism and colonialism, it is not a coincidence that the idea of the cosmopolis would emerge during the Industrial Revolution and the height of European colonial power when widespread global travel—whether by free will or enslavement—became possible.¹⁷ As architectural historian Kathleen James-Chakraborty has noted, the suburbs may well have derived in part from the colonial cantonments designed to separate the colonizers from the colonized. As the colonized inevitably immigrated to the cities of their colonizers, those same overlords sought segregation in domestic cantonments, or suburbs, in an effort to escape a cosmopolis like London. Thus the diversity of the cosmopolis



The Urbanity of Rural Villages in India

In the Kakinada district of Andhra Pradesh, a tight-knit neighborhood of farmers is surrounded by paddy fields.

in its original incarnation was hardly seen as a good thing; it was simply an inevitable by-product of early globalization.¹⁸

Instead of focusing on city dwellers hailing from different *countries* per the original definition of cosmopolis, let's rethink the idea as a city inhabited by people from many different *cultures and classes* to be more expansive in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomics. Yet this too is insufficient because if such a city is sprawling and segregated like most metropolises today, the diverse populations they house will rarely meet face-to-face, which arguably

is the requisite condition for generating the cultural exchanges that cause society to progress. When this criterion of physical proximity is introduced, we can retool the old idea of cosmopolis as *a city inhabited by people from many different cultures and classes who spatially interact*.

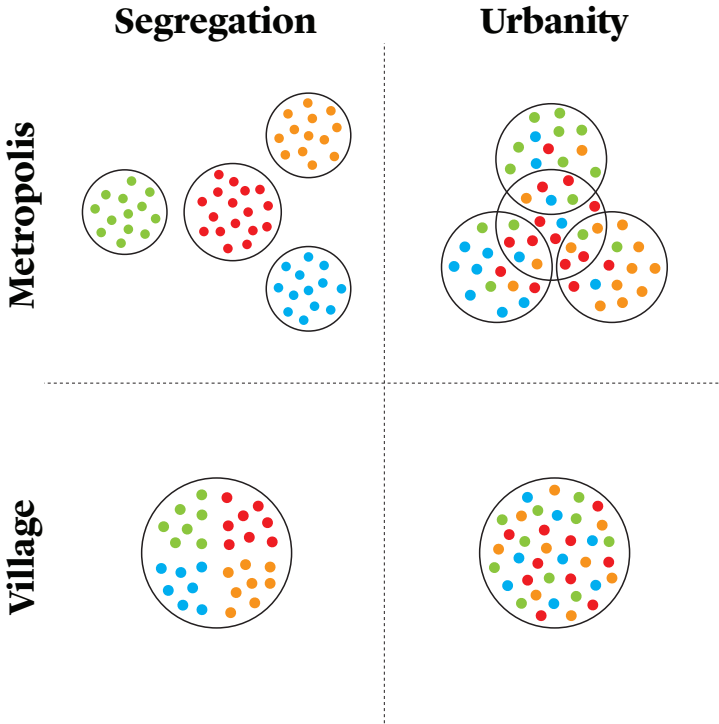
Some of the best examples of small but intensely urbane communities exist as two very different forms of human settlement: academic campuses and international refugee camps, both of which at times house people from a wide range of cultures and classes. In the formal economy, however, cities tend to have these urbane characteristics more than most rural areas, in part due to the vast expanse of agrarian geographies. Therefore, while this book will not participate in a faddy fetish for the rural—although in the last chapter we will discuss the tantalizing possibilities of “rurbanity” in the Garden of Urban—for our purposes and in the spirit of optimism, we establish here a renewed definition for the condition of urbanity: *a community inhabited by people from many different cultures and classes who spatially interact*.

The merits of aspiring toward pluralism in this definition of urbanity—as opposed to more technocratic goals like density for density's sake, metropolitanism, or smart growth—become evident upon further consideration. For example, if a municipality upzones a neighborhood for greater density without enacting protections for local tenants against harassment by landlords, displacement of existing residents can occur, which in turn erodes urbanity by erasing the cultural richness provided by the stable presence of a mixture of races and classes. A metropolitan region might include suburban sprawl, but an urbane region by definition would not, because the spatial segregation of sprawl would inhibit the positive social friction of different cultures and classes mixing together eye to eye. Even smart growth, or the more nefarious marketing of so-called smart cities, does not equate to urbanity in the sense that technology is never a silver bullet.

Technology has never neutrally promoted cultural exchange and must be held accountable to larger humanist goals. There is mounting evidence that technology

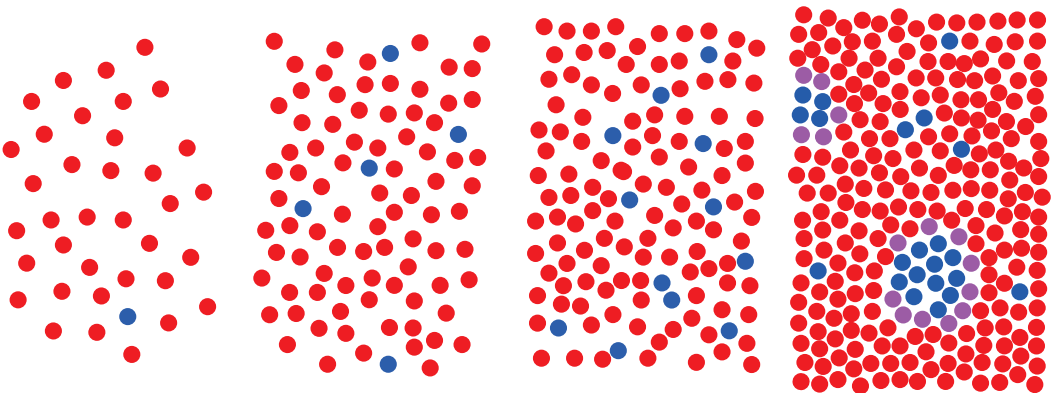
Big ≠ Urban and Urban ≠ Big

A segregated metropolis is not synonymous with urbanity, whereas a pluralistic village can be recognized as such.



Urbanity Advances Culture

Urbanity engenders cultural progress by hosting face to face contact with people who differ from mainstream society. (See also page 87.)



companies profit from anger-fueled rhetoric on their platforms.¹⁹ Of course social media can peacefully connect people around the world, but it is also clear that it has become an organizing platform for rising global fundamentalism. These fascist populists, fragile as they are in their delusions of being replaced, are terrified by the prospect of a world brimming with communities inhabited by people from many

different cultures, all mixing, face-to-face. Such a multicultural vision is at the core of their worst fears, animating their desires for civil war. In this era of widening spatial, social, and technological tribalism, few ideas could be as important, as galvanizing, and as filled with civic delight as that of urbanity instilling a collective, pluralistic, and necessarily friction-filled sense of cultural belonging to a physical commons.

If we are to avoid the civil unrest associated with our fractious global politics, we cannot focus on the urban to the exclusion of the rural. Urbanity is not dependent on cities: a pluralistic small town can have all the fixings of a big metropolis in terms of cultural exchange if it is truly diverse, truly inclusive, and in both its demography and geography it manifests a true sense of belonging for all who inhabit it. The fictional small town in *Schitt's Creek* embodies this spirit, as does the burgeoning village of Patchogue, New York, which has made a series of investments in denser housing, social infrastructure, and a broad range of restaurants, producing a quilt of small-town urbanity imbued with economic and racial diversity.²⁰ A famous example of modestly scaled urbanity, in this case surrounded by farmland, is Columbus, Indiana, where the Miller family hired famed global architects and landscape designers for public and private commissions, instilling within that small city a palpable sense of communal innovation that is lacking in many a large, immodest metropolis.

By this definition an urbane community is not elitist or metropolitan. It is a community that embraces and celebrates pluralism across race, class, and gender regardless of its size. It is a community that creates a sense of belonging for all. After all, for those of us who constantly bandy about and praise the idea of community, we would be wise to remember that communities are not intrinsically



Small-Town Urbanity

Patchogue, New York (*top*); Goodwood, Ontario (*middle*, filming location for *Schitt's Creek*); and Columbus, Indiana (*bottom*).

urbane—some nurture difference and change while others tacitly or explicitly revel in their stasis of social, class, or racial segregation.

As used in this book, the terms “urbanity” and “urbane” represent expansive, positive, and inclusive concepts that describe many of the greatest communities, large and small, on the planet. While these words might conjure a metropolis like New York City, we must think more broadly about the many places that fit this revised definition of urbanity, such as Rio de Janeiro, Kolkata, and Mexico City, in addition to the refugee settlements and academic campuses we will discuss in further detail.

Similarly, a city like Tokyo does not house vast numbers of people from many different nationalities, but it nonetheless feels urban because it is a hotbed of thriving subcultures. This is an important distinction that allows one to escape the tired focus on the polyglot nature of London and New York, as well as the rather demeaning Western view of the ever-expanding “third-world megalopolis,” such as São Paulo or Mumbai, as problems to be solved rather than a condition to be celebrated, albeit critically so. (It is important to note here that the term “third world” was coined in the 1950s not to connote poverty but rather to identify those nations during the Cold War that were not aligned with either the Western or Soviet bloc.)²¹

Not every city fits this definition of urbanity because of the degree to which many cities value cultural conformity over pluralistic differences, regardless of how racially diverse yet segregated their populations may be. For example, we must question whether cities that are the vaunted paradise of planners, such as Copenhagen, actually represent heterogeneity as opposed to a fundamentally homogeneous vision of urban life.²² Such places do not sufficiently value a mix of skin color, bank balances, and—perhaps most importantly—mindsets in a way that true urbanity must. In this sense, a city without social friction isn’t really a city no matter how big, sustainable, wealthy, healthy, or self-important.

Thus defined, urbanity is identified in this book as one of the central goals to which mindful design practice should aspire if architecture and its allied arts—including landscape architecture, urban planning, historic preservation, engineering, and a host of other related disciplines—wish to be relevant to today’s global challenges. (I say “one of the central goals” because I do not wish to be exclusionary to the efforts of others who are exploring mindful design practice for other arenas, such as the non-Anthropocene, the oceans, or outer space. Valuable as these investigations may be, they are not the focus of this book.) Despite the risk of being criticized as positivists, we must recognize that the means to promote urbanity are complex but clear.

**AS ARCHITECTS, URBANISTS,
POLICYMAKERS, AND ALL OTHERS WHO CARE
ABOUT BETTERING OUR COMMUNITIES**

WE MUST

DESIGN with dedication and impassioned skill that flow from talent and tenacity—our political, social, and environmental convictions are most impactful when they are grounded in, rather than substitutes for, our core aptitudes. The work of designing urbanity is extraordinarily difficult and must be undertaken with study, commitment, and rigor.

PREPARE our communities for global warming while reducing further catastrophic damage through intensified metropolitan land use coupled with the conservation of unbuilt territories, resilient infrastructure, green urban construction, and advocacy for environmental justice.

BUILD income-based multifamily and transitional social housing, not only because it is an ethical imperative that would generate far more equitable outcomes across many metrics from higher educational achievement to reduced incarceration to more resilient public health to less homelessness but also because urbanity requires the presence of the alternative cultures that affordable communities create.

CREATE a magnetic public realm for a multiplicity of cultures across myriad races, ages, abilities, and societal classes so that we can thrive together in the space of our communities, not merely to have “diversity” as a consumable good but for us to be challenged by face-to-face differences in an urbane society that values positive social friction and just public safety over the allure of working from home.

ADVANCE pluralistic cultural, educational, and social institutions in villages, campuses, and cities that celebrate diversity, justice, and urbanity.

REIMAGINE urban mobility by dispensing with daily private car trips in our metropolitan regions, regardless of the technology behind the drivetrain, in order to enhance commute times, safety, and experiences while saving our planet.

COLLABORATE with like-minded counterparts in the public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors to achieve our goals across multitudes.

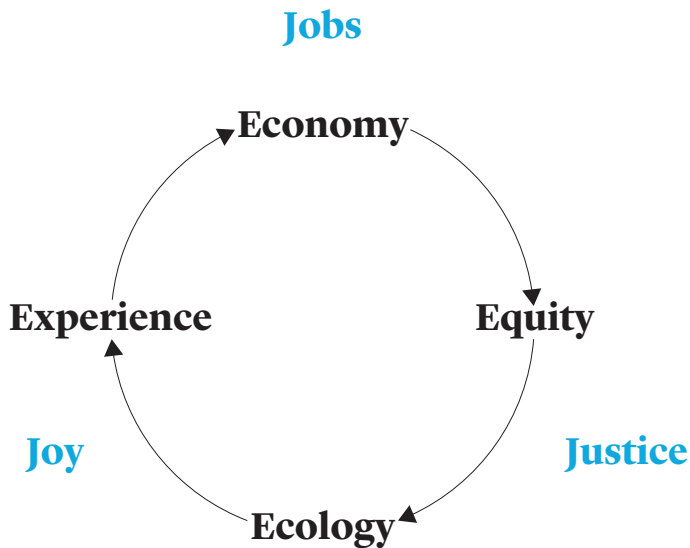
RECOGNIZE the means of production, including the economic, environmental, and labor standards that undergird our efforts in and beyond our offices.

If architects ignore these broader imperatives and instead continue down the more-is-more irrational exuberance of the 1990s, fueled by an increasingly irrelevant and insular “starchitect” culture, the profession will never tackle the fundamental challenges of the human condition nor will it have the economic or societal value it claims to desire. Historicist architects, who differ in their style but not necessarily in their solipsism, may arbitrarily deploy Western symbols from eras past in an effort to humanize architecture, but they too must consider the degree to which producing such symbols are off-putting to those of us not from the dominant culture, which in turn degrades the pluralism demanded by urbanity. (A “New Urbanist” once white-mansplained to me that the colonial architecture in India was better than its modern architecture, oblivious to both the oppression such historic architecture represents and the pride with which many progressive Indians view their homegrown contemporary architecture, despite the efforts of the current conservative government to regress.) Similarly, the attempt in 2020 to adopt neoclassical architecture as the official government style of the United States was eerily reminiscent of both the aesthetic leanings of the Third Reich and the subsequent attacks on modern art and architecture as communist symbols during decades of McCarthyite Red Scare hysteria.²³ Lastly, in addition to both profligate starchitecture and retrograde historicism, architects must reject the twentieth-century, tabula-rasa urban renewal impulses that led society to tear down too much and preserve too little, which not only introduced far more embodied energy into our cities but erased the cultural narratives that generate a sense of cross-cultural neighborhood belonging, particularly in black and brown communities. As we go forward, it is paramount to implement historic preservation only when it is conceived with surgical justification, rather than when it is wielded as a cudgel to stop progressive high-density mixed-income development that sustains the cultures of our existing neighborhoods while meeting the needs of our growing population.

To have meaning to everyone beyond the profession, architectural practice must adopt broad approaches and strong guardrails with little regard for the self-referential paradigms and prerogatives of the twentieth century. Design can regain its societal relevance but to do so, architects cannot be the people who live off of gentrifying luxury condominium developments, who bankrupt cities with budget-busting “public” monuments, who shrug when indentured servants die on building sites, who sexually harass or don’t pay employees, who blithely work for dictators and human rights abusers, and who visibly, recklessly, and to the detriment of us all fiddle while Rome burns. If architects do not strive toward a stronger, clearer sense of what they will and will not do as professionals, how can they avoid the adage that they represent “the second oldest profession in the world,” and thereby relegate themselves to the dustbin of the irrelevant?

It is time—once and for all—to exterminate the idea of the starchitect, and from its ashes let the phoenix of a new definition of architectural excellence rise, one in which we act as design thought leaders, one in which we act as the honorable, impactful professionals the world actually needs.

This book, however, seeks to illuminate a different path forward not only for architects but for landscape architects, city planners, historic preservationists, cultural leaders, public officials, civic advocates, community activists, artists, engineers, technologists, educators, entrepreneurs, and builders dedicated to the art and science of creating urbanity. This path would lead to a sea change, recasting the significance of all urban professions that share the goal of creating climate-conscious communities of belonging, communities that are as experientially uplifting as they are empirically performative.



To better understand the broader path I am advocating, consider the fact that before the pandemic public officials commonly repeated the economic development refrain of “jobs, jobs, jobs” with the assumption that metropolitan regions would attract human capital, and therefore fiscally thrive, as long as their economies supplied employment for their residents. By contrast, today’s public policy mantra may want to become “jobs, justice, and joy” to reflect two undeniable realities. First, many employers, though certainly not all, will for the foreseeable future offer their personnel some degree of flexibility to work from home, meaning that for cities to thrive they must now work harder to create better designed public experiences instead of lazily relying on the economic activity generated by frustrated commuters who, until recently, had few alternatives

to ugly commutes on substandard infrastructure. Second, employment is a necessary but insufficient condition to attract and retain people because most forward-thinkers, be they fresh out of college, new immigrants and migrants, long-standing community residents, smart entrepreneurs, or empty nesters, want to know that their municipalities value justice and joy in equal measure to jobs. Whether it be the murder of George Floyd or the ravages to New Orleans's Lower Ninth Ward during Hurricane Katrina, most of us want to live in a community that practices racial and environmental justice, which by no means is a stand against first responders or law enforcement because what is the law enforcing if not justice? This leaves joy as the most ineffable of the triad, but who are we without it? What good are jobs and justice if we can't experience the collective joy of a playground brimming with kids from every walk and color of life, or a beautiful tree-lined urban streetscape composed of diverse architecture and uses, or an electrifying subway pole dance that evokes smiles between strangers? As a species we need more to satisfy us than good analytical outcomes, no matter how important they may be.

The promise of an architecture of urbanity is to deliver jobs, justice, and joy in the near term, and shared planetary prosperity in the far, forsaking forever the architecture of the star and the city of the car. This book centers on a call to redefine excellence within and beyond the design professions, not in an effort to jettison beauty and culture but rather to reimagine them for our pluralistic, resource-constrained age. Both Walt Whitman and Barack Obama declared that as humans we are multitudes, and it is this abundance of being that must be reflected in our collective design processes.²⁴ Unlike the singularity and segregation that defile our history and still dominate our world for reasons we will explore in the first half of this book, we must in lockstep with a much broader range of contributors embrace a multifaceted design approach, as described in the book's second half. The future architecture of our world will be relevant when it celebrates the communities, cultures, climates, and construction methods that together express the pressing narrative of our kaleidoscopic humanity.

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FROM

HERE

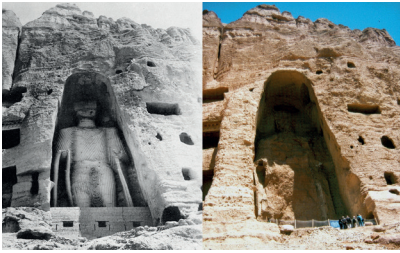
TO

BANALITY

THE WORLD SEEMS TO BE DISINTEGRATING

into a series of warring binaries, with the rural and the urban pitted against each other politically, culturally, and economically. We are used to thinking of politics along the schism of left and right, but the more relevant binary today is inclusion versus exclusion—across our political spectrum many feel marginalized. In some cases this has dangerous implications from policy to public space. Exploiting an increased sense of social, physical, and technological isolation, fascistic political movements fighting for singular religious theocracies have gained power and popular support across Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America, as well as in the far right wing of our largest democracies, including India and the United States, nations that had promised us the exact opposite: pluralistic secularism.

There is little daylight between the fundamentalists in these democracies and the Taliban, who “told us who they were” to paraphrase Maya Angelou, when they destroyed the statues at Bamiyan at the outset of this century.¹ Art embodies



The Century Begins

In March 2001, the Buddha of Bamiyan was destroyed on orders from the Taliban.

the aspirations we hold, the perils we face, and the cultures we risk, which is why it is the target of testosterone. The airplane and the internet, with their physical and virtual promise to bind the world, have just as equally destabilized it. Globalization has wrought a fanatical populist backlash in which the urge to sift, separate, and segregate, both physically and online, has deepened to the point of contempt, violence, and sedition.

While most leaders throughout the private, public, and nonprofit sectors understand this existentially challenging state of affairs, few

consider its relationship to our built environment, which serves as both a mirror and a window into our fractured society. Fewer still consider the latent potential our built environment has to help bridge these fearsome divisions. To understand this possibility we first need to understand the road humanity has traversed to arrive at this segregated juncture—our physical world, brimming as it is with banality, both manifests and foments our divided society. Yes, we are growing economically, but we do so aimlessly, believing growth for growth’s sake will somehow better the situation without acknowledging the obvious: a larger divided world is more dangerous than a smaller one simply because the divisions, too, grow bigger. Yet we hurtle on, if not forward. Today we build metropolis, not urbanity. In terms of most global metropolitan growth and the potential it has to heal our broken world, we are on a road to nowhere.

Well, how did we get here? Below please find a few thousand years of urbanism condensed into a single, admittedly simplified chapter, starting with the idea that as a species predominantly consisting of bipeds, we have throughout history built

societies of streets for communal connection as well as transportation.² Streets and sidewalks are not functional mobility corridors to be planned by technocrats for the contradictory goals of speed and safety; they are fundamental to how we interact with different cultures eye to eye in the space of the city.



Streets Predate Cars

A raised sidewalk and crosswalk can be found on a paved street in the ruins of Pompeii, Italy.

Our city streets have played this connective role for millennia, with sidewalks alone dating back over four thousand years.³ Entire metropolitan worlds are being built today predicated on the rejection of the street as anything more than a corridor for cars, the historical causes for which are unearthed below. Just one century of amnesia triggered by the internal combustion engine has fueled our current metropolitan malaise in terms of both global warming and racial segregation, a century that must now recede in the rearview mirror.



This Is Not a Street

State Highway 121 in Texas, from I-35E toward Grapevine.

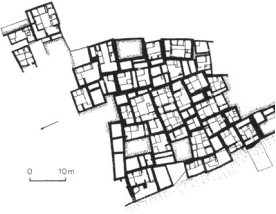
Let's begin with the fact that the majority of humanity seems to believe that the image above is a picture of a street. Most people operate under the misapprehension that streets were invented for cars. Nothing could be further from the truth. For thousands of years humans have used street grids to organize cities and connect communities for reasons as spiritual and societal as they were economic and functional. I begin with the public space of streets because they are the building block of the physical city and how we mix within it, an interaction that today is constantly obfuscated by the isolation of cars, the tribalism of social media, and an urbanism that has evolved since the Enlightenment, as we will see, with the explicit purpose of segregation and separation—an urbanism that has not always been thus.

Throughout the twentieth century, many economists tried to convince us that cities emerged from what they termed *material surplus*.⁴ Essentially, their argument held that as Homo sapiens replaced Neanderthals and humanity became a species

A Select History of Urban Morphology

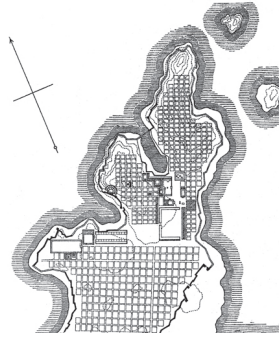
Neolithic City

Çatalhöyük (c. 7100–5700 BCE)
Turkey



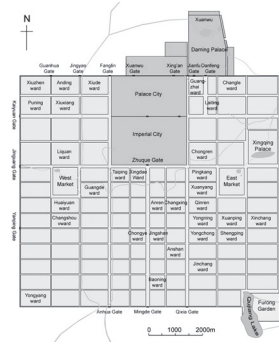
Gridiron as Democracy

Plan of Piraeus, Greece
(c. 500–400 BCE)
Hippodamus of Miletus



Gridiron as Cosmology

Chang'an (c. 200 BCE–800 CE)
China



Early Street Lights

Benin City (c. 1200 CE)
Benin



Beginnings of Urbanism

Mohenjo-daro (c. 2500–1900 BCE)
Pakistan



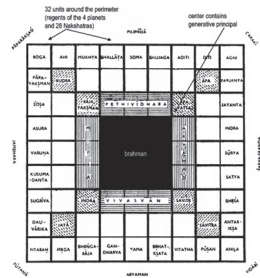
Gridiron as Power

Timgad (c. 100 CE)
Algeria
Roman Empire



Monumental Axes

Teotihuacan (c. 100 BCE–500 CE)
Mexico



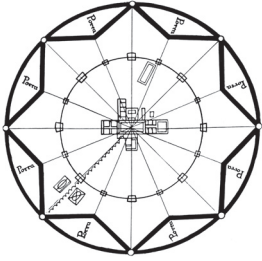
Gridiron as Spiritualism

Vastu Shastra, Hindu
Architectural Science
Vastu Purusha Mandala
(c. 100–600 CE)
India

c. 4000 BCE Invention of the Wheel

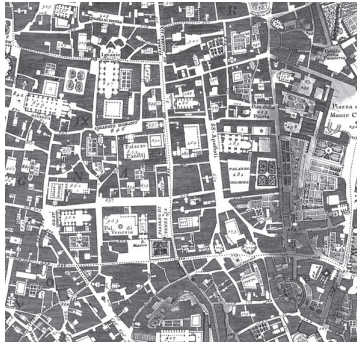
1712 Invention of the Steam Engine

Renaissance Idealism
Plan of Sforzinda (1464)
Antonio di Pietro Averlino

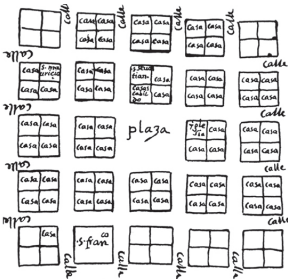
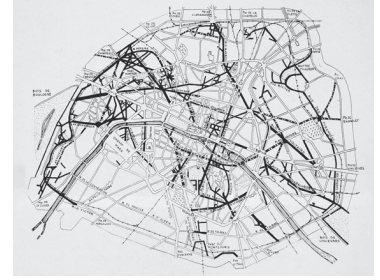


c. 1840s-'50s Cholera & Typhoid Epidemics

Figure-Ground Representation
Plan of Rome (1748)
Giambattista Nolli



Modernization through Boulevards
Plan of Renovation for Paris (1853)
Georges-Eugène Haussmann



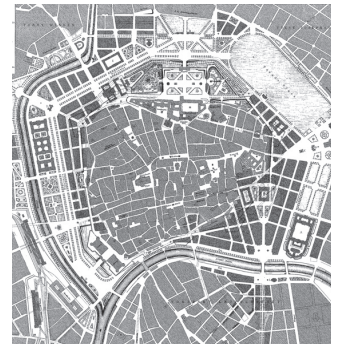
Laws of the Indies
Plan of Caracas (1567)
Venezuela



Gridiron as Utopianism
Plan of Savannah (1732)
James Oglethorpe



Gridiron as Capitalism
Commissioner's Plan
for Manhattan (1811)



Conspicuous Modernity
The Ringstraße (1857)
Vienna

c. 1440s Rise of Modern Colonialism

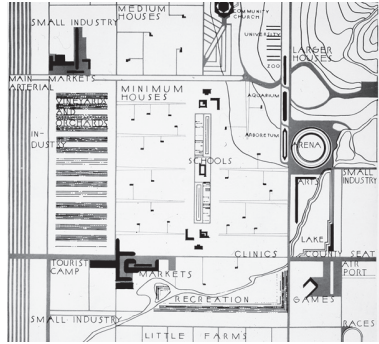
c. 1830s Rise of Rail-Based Transit

c. 1970s-'80s Rise of Neoliberalism

Homestead Suburbanism

Broadacre City (1935)

Frank Lloyd Wright

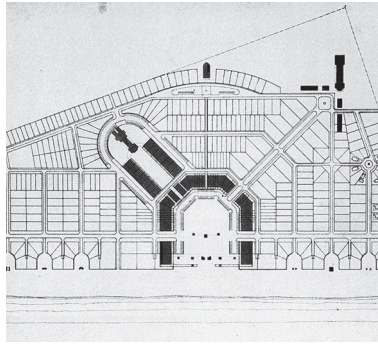


1989 Invention of the World Wide Web

New Urbanism

Plan of Seaside, Florida (1985)

Andres Duany & Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk

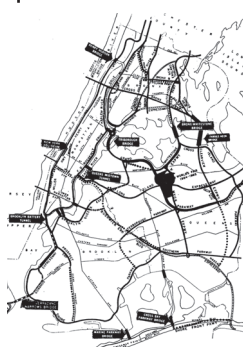
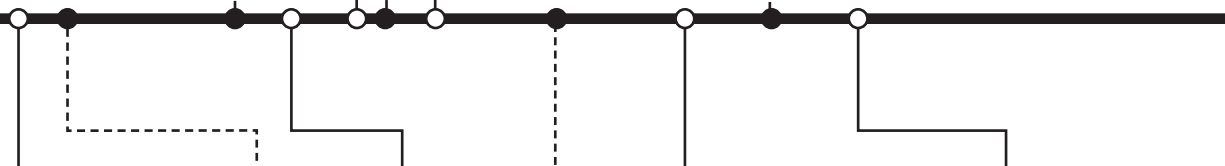


2019 Covid-19 Pandemic

Global Financial Centers

Canary Wharf, London (1993)

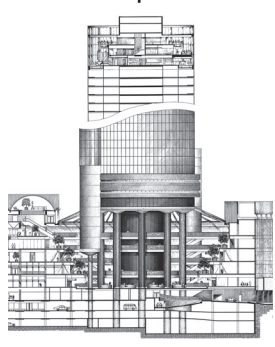
SOM, Cesar Pelli & Others



Urban Renewal

NYC Highway Projects
(c. 1930s-'60s)

Robert Moses



Megastructures

Peachtree Center, Atlanta
(1965-1992)

John Portman



Smart City Movement

Masdar, Abu Dhabi (2014)

Foster and Partners



Urban Resiliency

Living Breakwaters

Staten Island, New York

(Construction Completion 2025)
SCAPE

c. 1960s Civil Rights Movement

2005 Hurricane Katrina

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