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# EUTOPIA NOW!



Above, left: Charles Chaplin as Adenoid Hynkel in *The Great Dictator*, 1940. © Charles Chaplin/Photofest  
Above, right: Al Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth*, 2006. © Paramount Classics/Photofest

Our most important task at the present moment is to build castles in the air.

Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, 1922

Utopia gets a bad rap. For a generation of scarred scholars, including Hannah Arendt, Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, and others, Auschwitz was utopia's inevitable omega point. For them, utopia was the implacable enemy of pluralism, freedom, and individualism—the very core of liberalism. After Hitler and Stalin, the utopian virtues of harmony, leisure, peace, prosperity, pleasure, health, cooperation,

freedom, and love seemed simply part of a rhetoric of deception and delusion, values that could not be produced by—were, indeed, antithetical to—utopian styles of desire. This anti-utopianism was an attack not simply on a mode of thought but on the horrifying political project to realize “utopia,” which they had all witnessed.

The fear of the totalitarian results of universalizing ideologies is both historic and legitimate. The Nazis and the Khmer Rouge were both utopian in the sense that they were the enforcers of reductive blueprints that sought a radical transformation of society via the reconfiguration



of its human subjects on the basis of some higher good. But to retrospectively trash every utopian writer, from Bellamy to Plato; every utopian experiment, from Drop City to Brook Farm; and every utopian urbanist, from Ebenezer Howard to Filarete, is to slight a discourse that is vital and useful, and to pile skepticism on sunniness as a style of argument—something that architects and planners simply cannot abandon.

Such bright, Emerald City imaginings are tough to sustain nowadays (in *Blade Runner*, it's always raining), and we muzzy advocates risk being tarred as fascists or—worse—as superannuated, hopelessly naive fossils of the “Sixties,” that utopian decade. Nor does it help that so much of our contemporary critical discourse is rooted in a broad pessimism, in the kind of over-aestheticized styles of negation that has gripped so much architectural theory. “If,” writes critic Rey Chow, “the terms for grasping the classical order of things are resemblance, analogy, continuity, and propinquity, those for grasping the modern world have to do with estrangement, difference, discontinuity, and distance.”<sup>1</sup> This is the *heimat* of dystopia, the sum of our fears, attuned to the threat of cruelty rather than the possibilities for joy. Foes all of totalizing master narratives, we are too fearful of the flip-side nightmare to see the upside of the imaginary, and so we surrender the useful, constructive example of the all-at-once.

But to evoke dystopia is also to make clear that utopia always embodies the means of its own critique. While it's hard to trace the origin point of utopia, its form always conflates paradise and politics: a portrait of both the forms and the means of ethical social organization rolled out as a fiction. Like the binarism that structures so many views of the afterlife—every heaven needs its hell—utopian argument oscillates between portrayals of better possibilities than the present and the idea that things could be a lot worse. In utopia's discourse, the static is dangerous: Inaction either perpetuates a drear present or brings on the maelstrom. Just as paradise and the inferno represent the perfection and degeneration of the societies to which they are meant to appeal, so utopia deploys the same metaphor of construction to ideas of perfection and degeneration both. The dystopian tradition—with its reserves of both terror and irony—runs from Plato (whose vision of the ideal city was produced dialogically in relationship to alternatives less ideal and for whom the very unrealizability of that city was its predicate) to More to Swift to Malthus to Yevgeny Zamyatin to Orwell to Philip K. Dick to half the movies at the multiplex. Utopia, properly imagined, is always obliged to explain why it isn't a nightmare, whether in its outcomes or its methods.

Theorists of utopia recognize not simply distinctions between utopian and dystopian styles of argument but also distinctions within the category of utopia. These differences are not precise but are invariably organized around the poles of prescription and critique. Historian Russell Jacoby—one of several sympathetic left utopian revivalists writing today—distinguishes “iconoclastic” and “blueprint” utopias, paralleling Fredric Jameson's split between the utopian wish and the utopian form. Urbanist Françoise Choay writes of “progressivist” and “culturalist” utopias. There are golden ages and far horizons. While one appreciates the need to distinguish, let us say, Ernst Bloch from Yona Friedman, there may be less to these distinctions than meets the eye. It bears repeating that it is the nature of the utopian project to speak its wish through the medium of form, however inversely or obscurely. This is the source of both its power and its problem.

A utopian argument always includes the idea of construction, some series of human measures to bring about the “ideal” thing itself, however vaguely, provisionally, or fictitiously described. The condition of utopia is that it *proposes* its own realization, a deliberation with an outcome: Without its *topos*—the idea of place—utopian thought would simply lapse into some other style of ethical, metaphysical, or political speculation. And this is why it is so important—utopian thought is the only way of speculating concretely about a projective connection between architecture and politics. To design utopias is to enter the laboratory of politics and space, to conduct experiments in their reciprocity. This laboratory—unlike the city itself—is a place in which variables can be selectively and freely controlled. At the point of application, of the concrete, utopia ceases to exist.

The topoi of utopian urbanism have remained remarkably consistent for centuries and originate in the homology between city and society, begging questions of boundedness and growth, of the relationship of publics and their spaces, of the right dimensions and organization of communities, of the character of the beautiful in just societies, of the connectedness of built and natural, and of the interaction of subjectivity and space. Within the territory of architectural utopias, these issues can be invoked in various ways, and the idea of the blueprint—of the model—is always rhetorical. While utopia and dystopia may simply be different figures used to produce the same argument, the special power of dystopia is both that it clarifies the risks in the present and that it is mute about specific alternatives to *its* alternative.



For those fearful of the inescapable immanence of the totalitarian in utopia, dystopian representations have the advantage of insulating the critic against the risk of excess prescription. But it's an irony of criticism that will only countenance utopian thinking in dystopian form that it requires a literal-minded, fundamentalist hermeneutics—that it takes its utopia straight—not so different from the kind of biblical exegesis that fixes the birth of time exactly 6,000 years and twenty-three minutes ago. Envisioning the new in anything approaching its all-at-once is seen as an incitement to the bloody obliteration of the now unless it is figured as a warning. Chilled by the risks of idealism, such critiques of utopia are simply too fixed on the Platonic lie to see the value of dreaming.

Utopia is a telos, not a floor plan. But it uses such plans as its metaphor and the design of the city as medium for political argument. Any blueprint, however metaphorical, begs the questions of how real, how accurate, how practical, how close, how specific—as well as how provisional and how contingent—the representation is. Because utopia is always a fiction, a fabricated reality, it must work by opening up a useful difference between the current now and a hypothetical one. As suggested by Jameson's and Jacoby's classifications, these questions are always of degree. No reasonable person would take Thomas More's utopia as a literal proposition—its very distance from its present locates its space in critical, not practical, territory. It is, nevertheless, a code of behavior and its prescriptions no less "real" than those of the Garden City.

Sociologist Karl Mannheim—a writer friendly to utopian practice—described planning as the "rational mastery of the irrational," a description that also nicely fits psychoanalysis. Like a dream, a city is constructed from the concrete, but it constantly reconfigures the familiar in new—and sometimes startling—ways. We create the city by interacting with it, by changing its capacities of connection, appearance, behavior, imagination, and exchange via the dialectic of template and accident, knitting its fabric out of zillions of feedback loops to create a present—not an eternal—particular. Henri Lefebvre is right to call the city an "oeuvre"—a work rather than a thing. This is at once fundamental and vague. Both things and processes can go wrong, and the history of planning—like utopia's—is the ongoing perception that things are not completely right with the city as we know it, that outcomes are unsatisfactory. Utopias argue outcomes by inversion, dystopias by extrapolation.

Every politics—from Plato's to Marx's—deploys some format for the prospective and some theory of the good.

Utopia is the rationalist's paradise, and its great modern complication is science. With its instrumentality and aura of positivism, science—and its parallel systems of economic, social, and logistical organization—has materialized a new realizability for massive social undertakings and supplied an ethical (if controversial) cover. There is a reason those red states are afraid of Darwin: Biology re-situates creation. Technology has, in both its representation and its reach, contributed to the myth of its own autonomy, a godlike set of truths working themselves out beyond human agency.

It is no coincidence that the most extensive contemporary work of utopian—and dystopian—imagination has taken place in science fiction, which has assumed a central social role in the popular understanding and critique of space. Our imaginative world is richly populated with Cyborgs and Hobbits—with their kingdoms and planets, their cities and architectures, their monsters and saints—that map contemporary forms of paranoia just as our utopias, from Club Med to Vegas, limn our own possibilities for hope. I think it can also be argued that these representations—because they are founded on ideas of social values and relationships—have contributed to a larger vision of the city as a social arrangement, rather than an artifact. From *Solaris* to *Gaia* to the Super-organism, consciousness, too, is being defined upward.

The bleakness of most postwar "science fiction" is understandable and a generally pejorative descriptor that has had the effect of largely shutting down formal utopianism (depicted as impractical at best and deeply sinister at worst) by reinforcing the dominant negative reading, by making the forms of our anxiety too mesmerizing, and by repetitively fixing imaginative territory within familiar limits. Most of this falls along the Huxley/Orwell polarity of soft (*The Truman Show*) or hard (1984) styles of total control, reflecting the same fears as those of the more theoretical anti-utopians about modern universalisms and the risk of subjectivity reduced to Agambenian bare (or unthinking) life—or any other form of existence without a capacity to transform itself—the kind of centralized authority required to realize utopian organizational schemes in literal precision. And it doesn't hurt that the fears themselves—of slavery, concentration camps, faceless multinationals, mind control, genetic engineering, the duping simulacrum, and all the rest—are both authentic and ubiquitous.

In a more specifically architectural way, it surely doesn't help that the trope of "the city of the future" serially infuses our actual building construction. It's hard not to be a Platonic idealist—and an anti-utopian



skeptic—when the world is so littered with realizations of models that first saw life as speculations about what the city might best be. I've recently returned from Korea, much of which is an astonishingly precise reproduction of the *Ville Radieuse*, right down to its oversize roadways and dysfunctional separations of uses. A few weeks before, I'd been to Almaty, which is rapidly acquiring a crust of gated golf communities—the end of the line of the Garden City, yeoman to duffer—Ruskin hands Morris his niblick and drives. The main drag in Dubai is lifted intact from the 1939 *General Motors Pavilion*. Vegas is the apotheosis of postmodern semiotic recombination, a world of signs. Crystal City, Virginia, is a megastructure at Metabolist scale. The afterlife of these “utopian” morphologies is both fertile and foul.

## **IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL ARTICULATION, WHAT WORRIES US MOST ABOUT UTOPIA IS THAT IT IS HOSTILE TO DIVERSITY, THAT IT OBLITERATES ACCIDENT AND DIFFERENCE.**

Although I want to argue that the critical reinvigoration of the formal repertoire of the urban is crucial to both the practice of architecture and the fate of the earth, this can only happen in an intimate and searching relationship to politics. Given the city's necessary relationship to global resources and their distribution, as well as its role in the fateful, breakneck alteration of the planetary environment, it's clear that much of the field of a specifically urban politics forms around these urgent questions. It's also evident that the nature of the autonomy of individual cities within tightly laced systems of global economic and political organization is becoming a more and more crucial issue for both individual and federated forms of freedom. As ever, today's utopias must strike new balances between liberty and limit.

In contemporary political articulation, what worries us most about utopia is that it is hostile to diversity, that it obliterates accident and difference. This is an understandable anxiety. The discredited Modernist utopia is dominated by a single political figure: equality, which it simply understands arithmetically. While struggles to realize

myriad forms of human equality must always drive any progressive politics—in fact must always form its predicate—the idea can take on a very nasty inflection when pushed to its mathematical limits. The camp is a dystopia of sameness, the equality of bare life, of life outside the political. The postmodernist dystopia runs a special variation on this style of dread, evoking styles of manufactured difference, at once winnowed and infinite. Today's urban nightmare is the city in which the differences are simply architectural, the contemporary articulation of utopia's historic preoccupation with the formats of idealized geometry.

In the critique of Modernist planning exemplified by Jane Jacobs, utopia and the master plan become strictly analogous. This elision between *any* visionary physical thinking and a particular style of operations with a known history of negative consequences led to a suspicion of big plans in general, especially if they make claims for a strict isomorphism between form and values. This anxiety applies to both contemporary utopias of formal order—like those of the New Urbanists with their unwaveringly Modernist sense of the correct—and utopias of devolved restraint like those of “everyday” urbanists and preservationists or of Jacobs herself. Although all of these deploy the rhetoric of a golden age—including the idea of the golden age in some especially valued present—their shared claims to a more democratic style of planning (their political underpinnings) unite them with the longer history of utopian urbanism, including its Modernist branch.

I do not wish to dismiss any of these arguments but to argue that the consistency of their political claims suggests the actual (if camouflaged) vigor of utopian urbanism and a widespread (if rhetorical) agreement about the notional qualities of a good, democratic life, predicated on the defense and cultivation of difference, opportunity, and enjoyment. There is, however, a deep contradiction in the idea of an exclusionary diversity that invalidates the special authority of any particular formal utopia: the idea that a contemporary utopia cannot be expressed as a formal singularity with universal aspirations. If, as I am arguing, to be a utopian is to embrace a strong principle of tolerance, open-endedness, and continuous disputation over the reasons for it, this means that there will be many translations of principles into practice, that there must be many utopias, that the fantasy of a single point of formal convergence must be trashed in favor of an inexhaustible multitude of non-homogeneous outcomes. Utopia is important precisely because it is *not* a city but a representation of one.



Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration  
Camp, gated entry, Poland, 1979.  
© Raymond Depardon/Magnum Photos



The necessary singularity of *any* utopian image will be alleviated by multiplicity—every utopia adds to the repertoire of urban possibilities—and by a general recasting of urban utopianism as the study of points of departure rather than of end states. For utopians, history cannot end.

If the task of utopia is to expand the repertoire of urban formal differences, it must be on behalf of a politics that values difference in some particular way, not as one *more consumer choice*—Coke or Pepsi, Frank or Rem. What utopia *represents* is always also an idea about social relations, which are constrained or made legible via the medium of architectural, urban, or territorial organization. At a minimum, this means that the set of utopias should be heterotopic and multiple, and should provide an armature for thinking about mutability and some proposition about limits, however extreme. The counterargument is that any *projective* representation that exceeds a certain scale must be a representation of thwarted difference precisely because it is not the product of actual clash and collaboration, of differences voiced by different actors. But this argument denies the usefulness of the imaginary and of fantasy in fueling interpretive diversity, the role of artists and thinkers operating in their special spheres, and the fact that utopias add to rather than subtract from the global store of ideas.

Resistance to scaling—one of utopia's liberties—ignores the true dimensions of our crisis. Need I dwell on it? Six and half billion people. Half in cities. Half of these in slums. The urban population is growing by a million people a week, and most are poor. By 2015, according to the UN, there will be 358 cities of 1 million or more, by mid-century, 1,000. Of these at least 27 will be megacities—cities of more than 10 million—of which 18 will be in Asia. Our wildly imbalanced distribution of resources

produces the twin crises of overdevelopment and inequity. There are limits to growth, and the engine of continuous economic expansion is already running up against the hard edge of the earth's finite bearing capacity: For everyone in the world to live as we do would require the surface of an additional planet. Consider China, where rates of automobile ownership are at the level of the United States in 1912, and policy is to catch up with the Joneses ASAP. Already, Beijing has the most toxic air of any city on earth. What will happen if this great leap forward is successful? To its credit, the Chinese government is beginning to accelerate green moves, but the ice cap is melting fast. The canary in the mineshaft has croaked.

The only rational solution to these interlaced crises is to construct many radically sustainable new cities. These must be a new kind of city—one that builds on thousands of years of thinking about and making good cities, one that recognizes a radically reconfigured urban situation as its inescapable site, one that takes the survival and happiness of the species as its predicates, one that finds and defends numerous routes to meaningful difference, and one that advances the project of freedom. There is intense need for research and speculation into what the forms and agencies of these cities might be. There is, in short, a desperate need for utopia.

The force of utopian thinking lies in its disinterested projection of places that are nowhere yet but already all around. We may all agree on the utopian bromides I've just uttered, but their bridge to form is rightly fraught and radical, a shift in categories, from should be to could be. This is the moment when utopia ceases to be utopian and can no longer claim the defense of abstraction. But how do theory and critique morph into worldly practice? How do the vivacity of hope and the particularity of formal





"The Free State of Christiania," Copenhagen, Denmark. Originally military barracks, Christiania was briefly occupied by young squatters called "The Free State" in November 1971. © Alamy/Diomeida

expression characteristic of utopia take the next step into becoming? Since this is at the center of my own architectural project, I would—rather than surrendering its operational potential—like to finesse it orthographically and discuss not utopia but "eutopia," following the usage and meaning of that prescient eccentric Patrick Geddes. The switch makes explicit the ameliorative agenda of the project, eliding its fiction with real opportunity.

I adopt the prefix "eu"—*better* place—advisedly, despite its risky resonance with another project of improvement (eugenics) which, in its arc from medicine to murder, offers a much more resonant image of the utopian fallacy than any utopia that simply operates on the body of the city. Geddes's biologism also seems useful at a time when biology is increasingly displacing physics as our emblematic scientific endeavor. This is reflected in the current crisis of architecture in which the frantic search for formal complexity—for angularities in seeming defiance of gravity, for explosiveness, for knotting up the loose ends of quantum mechanics, for the coy inevitableness of hands-off scripting—has become an increasingly uninteresting and narrowly aesthetic preoccupation. The discursive shift to questions of urbanism reflects both this shift in paradigm and a certain repolitization of the urban. It is no coincidence that our renewed interest in the city parallels the rise of environmentalism and the greening of historically red concerns.

Geddes himself was greatly interested in eugenics and its translation into urbanism, but his take was unusual, even twisted. Geddes pioneered a respiratory model of urbanism, and his work on the interaction of cities and regions helped to build the ecological understanding of cities as elements in the larger planetary environment. Eugenics was enabled by the rise of modern theories of

evolution, the discovery of the biological basis for the mutability of species and the attempt to control it for some purported good. Its practical implementation depended on specific mechanisms, on mutations at the genetic level and the nature of the generational transmission of human characteristics. Geddes's biology, however, was that of the losing party to the debate about inheritance—which was still lively at the turn of the last century—casting its lot with Darwin's predecessor, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and his belief in the heritability of nongenetically acquired characteristics.

Geddes's urbanization of Lamarck, however, turned its defective biology on its head, effectively redeeming it. By analogizing the city with an organism, Geddes formulated the idea of a *social* heritage that resided in the forms and behaviors of the city and that, by being both fixed and endlessly transmissible, could indeed be passed down the generations. The concept—never mind the science—is crucial because it offers utopian speculation as both a site and a regulator, the idea of the city as an accumulation of the social, the complexifying result of a history of compacts and arrangements that are the encoded source of the evolutionary character of the city itself: urban memory. However, memory—like evolution—is produced conflictually, and the future of the city is always forged from a shifting set of uncertainties and perspectives.

The city is a historical phenomenon, and the act of envisioning its future cannot be undertaken without accounting for its past-in-present, which gets us back to Jane Jacobs and her own particular and powerful style of utopianism. To be reductive, this includes two components. The first is the idea of the good city as a self-organizing system, the outcome of maximized participation by its inhabitants via the medium of a free,



but disciplined and caring market. In Jacobs's utopia, participation is not necessarily political in a direct sense but constitutes a particular way of being-in-the-city that, because it is demandingly (and pleasingly) interactive, amounts to a kind of political suffusion, analogous to the *agora* and the *polis*, to cite the physical and political components of that most resilient of retrospective utopias, Athens.

The other element of Jacobs's utopia-in-the-present is morphological, and her work is an intensely prescriptive utopia of form. That the particular forms she celebrates are derived from the contemporary condition of certain parts of certain American cities of 18th- and 19th-century origin does not make her project any less utopian: It shares the same idea of a fixed and reciprocally determining relationship between good form and good life that also underlies the speculations of Le Corbusier, Sitte, Howard, Fourier, and, for that matter, Plato. Nostalgia can also be utopian. Like all these predecessors, Jacobs's work is the product of a particular idea of the good, and like all utopias, it begs the difficult question of dissent and therefore requires a perpetual questioning of what the question actually is.

Presumably Jacobs would argue that a self-organized system constructs itself via an internalized dialectics of demurral and that its outcomes always embody an integrated force of critique. Or that the model she foregrounds is specifically—even uniquely—capable of nurturing diversity, of accommodating the needs of difference. Jacobs thought that this condition of critical mass, critical mix, and critical thinking could be achieved and conserved by a combination of direct action, a fairly heavily modulated market, and intelligent design—in short by the forces already at work to produce the neighborhoods she idealized. But, as is often—and relevantly—asked about Jacobs's ideas, how can this set of prescriptions work on the tabula rasa? Is it possible to make a new city based on her ideas?

I think the answer is yes but that her morphological arguments cannot stand outside her politics and that their nexus is very particular to a special time and place—Greenwich Village in the 1950s and '60s. Here's the nub of the historic morphological fallacy: the idea of the reversibility of the relationship of form and politics, of creation and representation. The dispute between "everyday" urbanists and "new" urbanists, for example, might be said to represent the divorce of the co-dependent components of the Jacobs schema, and this leads to the characteristic incapacities of both "practices" and the fruitless argument over the more authentic matrimony.

*The set of politics is always larger than the set of architecture, which means that although architecture can be political, there is no such thing as a political architecture.*

But let's get back to the question of diversity as a widely held value that tests the idea of the good city. The question is one not of difference per se but of the match between differences and desires and the question of how these are produced and valued. Consumer culture provides one model, with its inculcated narcissism of the small difference and its apparatus for making meaningful the choice between 1,000 breakfast cereals. The urban equivalent often focuses not simply on the diversity of a single class of goods but—as Susan Fainstein and others have pointed out—on the diversity of the opportunities for a single class of people. While the *Time Warner Center* in New York has an extensive mix of restaurants, residences, hotel rooms, and offices, and is therefore at some level a paragon of "mixed-use," it is a mix directed at a very particular group of people—the extremely rich. And up-market and down, the mix is not exactly self-organized. Harlem's 125th Street has moved from a blend of small, individually owned retail and commercial establishments to a standardized array of multinational outlets—from the Gap to Starbucks—that remake the local on the model of the shopping mall. Fainstein sharply traces the migration of the value of diversity from critics on the left to proponents of growth like Richard Florida, who explicitly separates the ideas of diversity and equity, frankly describing his famous "Creative Class" growth machine as a "diversity of elites."

If freedom is opportunity, then diversity is the predicate of choice, and the enlargement of choices theoretically is a good thing. But the idea of enlargement must deal with which choices in particular are fertile areas of growth and how choices—as well as their construction—are distributed throughout society. The city is a distributor and modulator of choice and opportunity as well as a medium for invention of new possibilities. Its success can be judged by the harmonization of choices and desires; by the accessibility and convenience of choice-making; by its creativity in the invention of those choices; and by the consequences of what is chosen by its citizens. If we are to continue to speak about the idea of good cities, it will continue to be necessary to distinguish Athens and Gomorrah. More important, though, is that choice be shifted from choosing between existing *things* to an idea of choice as an *act* that creates things, the ability to invent a life (or a thing) of your own.

While the logic of a broadly constructed politics of diversity grounded in fulfilling and "authentic" choice-



making seems a slam dunk, questions still remain for the idea of diversity, and here again I will channel the muse of Geddes and return to a biological model or analogy. Biodiversity is a core issue for biological and ecological communities, and its value is assessed in a number of ways. Much of the debate today centers on the question of extinction, and there is hot discussion about its rate—with Norman Myers's famous 1979 estimate of 40,000 species lost every year setting the outer limit of alarm—and about the impact of human alteration of the environment (cutting down the rainforest, emission of greenhouse gases and other contaminants, and so forth) on this effect.

In arguing *why* extinction is a bad thing, a number of positions are offered, and most have some resonance with questions of human social diversity and with the role of cities as habitats for this process. Just as the rainforest is the planet's most biodiverse environment, so the city is its most socially diverse, and the two are complementary sites for making this argument by analogy. Both are very large systems and both can be imputed with "intelligence." Interestingly, one of the most frequently made arguments in favor of species preservation—perhaps because it is a compelling one for the communication of scientific concerns—is a general appeal to our immediate self-interest in the unknown, to the possible cures we will miss, sources of nutrition we will lose, exotic materials we will be denied, energy answers we will never know, beauty spots never to be visited, and questions we don't yet find to ask.

The issues for diversity raised by the question of extinction (including the extinction or discontinuous transformation of the historic city) include the loss of social or genetic memory and the attendant loss of opportunity, as well as the quasi-economic issue of the productivity that ecologists (suggestively) always study in terms of communities. There are three key diversity effects on the ecological productivity of such ecological communities. The first is "complementarity," the idea that species coexistence—diversity expressed in spatial terms—is made possible by "niche partitioning," by the different resource requirements of different species. This suggests that a more diverse community will use available resources more completely and efficiently. In the social territory, complementarity offers a self-interested argument for cooperation, another value we prize politically.

"Facilitation" is another, more explicitly synergistic effect wherein one species modifies the environment in such a way as to facilitate the well-being of another. This includes the enrichment of the soil by nitrogen-

fixing plants, the distribution of seeds by fruit-eating birds, or the benefit of "nurse plants" that alleviate water and temperature stress in their young neighbors. Finally, the "sampling effect" suggests simply that there is a greater likelihood of finding a species of great inherent productivity in a patch that is more diverse. The sampling effect includes both elements of variety and scale and is an enabler of greater facilitation and complementarity via diversity.

## **THE FRANTIC SEARCH FOR FORMAL COMPLEXITY—FOR ANGULARITIES IN SEEMING DEFIANCE OF GRAVITY, FOR EXPLOSIVENESS, FOR THE COY INEVITABLEISM OF HANDS-OFF SCRIPTING—HAS BECOME AN UNINTERESTING AND NARROWLY AESTHETIC PREOCCUPATION.**

The word *sampling* is a particularly suggestive one for the city, and its various usages cut a number of ways. Sampling is key to the genetics of rap music, crucial to its meaning-in-mutation. Lyrics, beats, tunes, riffs, and licks from existing music are lifted and spliced into the frankly recombinant new organism. This is an operation that is intrinsic to the elaboration of cities as well as a potentially risky one. Cities, after all, are clearly recombinant mechanisms but not completely aleatory ones. Like "natural" selection, the city is defined by the way in which accidental interactions collude with more calculated events to produce new species, conditions, events, insights, and possibilities. Rules of attraction and repulsion are received, invented, evolved, and discarded.

As a directional and historical phenomenon, such development begs the question of progress. In a simplified Darwinian sense, progress is associated with survival, and the value most conducive to survival is "fitness." In the social realm, other values, many of them less assured and more transitory, stand in this position. The city—as a container, crucible, and selection of values, many of which are translated into space—deploys more subjective and contradictory tests for determining fitness,



Below: Pavel Elagin, *Blade Runner Tribute*. © Pavel Elagin  
Opposite: *The Wizard of Oz*, 1939. © MGM/Photofest



including tolerance, economic benefit, power, delight, and so on. While the old law tenement may have been a remarkable fit for the mercantile environment of 19th-century immigrant New York, it was not fit for habitation, and its mutation via legislation (the law selected certain characteristics—ventilation, insolation, sanitation—and transformed the old organism to a new one that embodied these qualities) was clearly eugenic.

However, as the example of the tenement should suggest, the genetic, evolutionary model is a tricky one, and Geddes's theory of the heritability of acquired social characteristics via their inscription in the forms and habits of cities will take us only so far. The fault line divides the two ways in which I've used the idea of sampling. In many senses, our contemporary urbanism is a giant Sample City, a recombinant, eugenic organism that—like the television system—produces an endless number of juxtapositions, splicings, and constructs. While there is an obvious creativity in this as well as a certain *recherché* artistry of defamiliarization, the problem is that these recombinations often depend on a narrowing stock of possibilities rather than an expanding one, like the illusory

mixed use of the *Time Warner Center*. Here, diversity is a cover, and the “real” global city is the outcome of actions by a small number of producers of possibility who themselves “sample” opinion and demographics and construct environments in which the identities produced by those samplings are reconciled with their (the producers') desires in order to smooth the efficiencies of large-scale consumption from increasingly concentrated sources via the calculated construction of a series of useful publics. Such triangulation is a profoundly political exercise.

If there's an overarching condition for judging an ecosystem, it is the idea of “health” and our interventions—whether active or passive—in assuring a healthy environment are rich with politics and the social. How do we measure the health of an environment? We measure our own via longevity (the antithesis of extinction), via the presence or absence of disease, and via quality of life—all phenomena as easily analogized with the rainforest as with the city. A healthy ecosystem is one that is productive (in the senses described above) and stable, and diversity is crucial to both. For planners, the idea of community stability, while complex, is, like diversity,





a widely shared value. Ecologists correlate diversity and stability in a number of ways. These include the idea of “averaging,” the greater ability of diverse systems to account for differential responses to change by members over time; and “negative covariance,” the idea that if some species do better when others are not doing well, a greater number of species in the system will lower the overall variance, a mark of greater stability. Competition is a great source of negative covariance, of insurance. The presence of a “redundancy” of species buffers the system by offering a greater number of possible responses to disturbance: resistance to invasion because of a fuller use of resources and the likely preexistence of the invading property or process, and resistance to disease via diversity’s ability to limit the epidemic effect in any particular species.

As the history of utopia abundantly proves, the construction of analogies can be a dangerous thing. Some, however, are more resonant than others at any given moment, and—it seems to me—biology has special meaning just now. We are facing a crisis as a species, and the need for the transformation of architecture and urbanism

into a genuinely “organic” practice is urgent. Not simply has the Modernist vision of machines for living become hopelessly limiting, architecture’s media are increasingly ecological, and the elision of built and natural form has long since ceased to be a purely visual matter. The emergence of disciplinary hybrids such as “landscape urbanism” is both an acknowledgment of this communion and a demand for the necessity to model at scales from patch to planet. We cannot exist without the embodiment within us of all such voluntary evolution.

But what about justice? What about freedom? What about community? The neo-Lamarckian model that Patrick Geddes develops finds its aptness in its embodiment of the vector of choice, in opening up the field of values that can be actively contested by our own agency and by the infinite and unfolding mystery of the noosphere—a space only accessible via human comprehension. The risk, to repeat, is that our participation will be hemmed by a system of “post-democracy”—described by Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe, and others—in which power and choice are so radically disarticulated and distributed to non-state actors (from corporations to NGOs) that politics



becomes a sham, and we are all trapped in an automatic individualism, without the possibility of collective action or real participation, which is to say, robbed of the possibility of dissent.

Biodiversity—with its aleatory, evolutionary component—presents a pregnant model for urbanism, for the continuous renewal and interrogation of its forms and habits. The continuous mutation at the core of the production of biodiversity suggests an urbanism that seeks to increase the number of collisions of both people and forms, maximizing the recombinant and frictional energy of their interaction. Politics is the means by which the results are vetted and found fit, and a tractable density is the medium of its survival and articulation. Diversity is not simply a value in and of itself: It is evidence. Of the exercise of the Lefebvrian “right to the city,” that is, of the right to imagine its future. Of tolerance, the waning of “unfreedoms.” Of invention. Of the health of the planet. Of the rightful dissimilarity of individual ideas. Of the fraught character of any fixed “consensus,”—that which, according to Rancière, annuls the more fundamental democratic value of “dissensus.”

At the end of the day, though, the question is whether—and if so how—the work of physically producing the city can channel these values. Sometimes, the connection is direct: Certain “freedoms” have necessary spatial implications. Freedom of assembly and freedom of movement depend on conducting spaces, and both virtual and representative alternatives—by piling on shadowy mediations—cannot be allowed to annihilate the encounter of bodies, the right to the street. Other equities—the right to affordable housing, the right to the city, the right of neighborhood choice—are not so susceptible to physical solutions, whatever role they may play in the contour of good outcomes. And accidents—the genesis of unfolding diversity—cannot, by definition, be planned.

Urbanism’s problem is to create a sticky—but non-imprisoning—surface for inhabitation and meaning. The utopian project has always been about expanding the repertoire of possibilities, about fertilizing the present with arguable alternatives. As a representation, the Modernist utopia may have depicted the annihilation of variety, but as an artifact in context, it was an addition to the reservoir of possibilities for the urban form of the city, and a responsive one: the embodiment of new modes of production and social organization, new technologies, new ideologies and political arrangements, new styles of representation, new feelings for form and space. It demands to be read *differently*, and so it continues as a useful instrument for the investigation and description of diversity.

Since I am asserting a eutopian basis for these ideas, I conclude this overview by offering a constellation of desires for a better city. These criteria are meant to be actionable, a basis for bringing good city form closer to “reality.”

Let’s call it a manifesto!

## Manifesto: 12 qualities for Eutopian cities

### 1. Strictly neutral

How do you measure sustainability? By keeping strict accounts of inputs and outputs. And against what standard? I begin with a utopian impossibility, an end state never to be achieved but still to be constantly measured. The economic model that most closely describes the mechanism of urban self-sufficiency is that of import replacement. In her classic *The Economy of Cities*, Jane Jacobs argues that this process has been the historic driver of rapid urban growth and differentiation from the earliest days of cities. Although generally used to describe a strictly economic dynamic, the idea also contains a teleological component. It begs the question of why cities grow and, implicitly, contains a notion about the limits of growth.

This balance between political autonomy and environmental self-sufficiency has a clear vector of scale, and once again, the only reasonable solution to unchecked growth is to create new cities, lots of them. Of course, this process is taking place all the time and answers to no designer but the invisible hand, which can only draw the bottom line. The default is simply the undisciplined growth of existing towns, coalescing in the global spread of the interstitial ooze of edge city sprawl. We lead the way. The American economy directs the majority of urban investment and development not to traditional urban centers but to the endless periphery of the multinational globopolis, producing a new kind of distributed space that owes its fealty only to capital.

Eutopian urbanism seeks the neutrality of going it alone. The goal of self-sufficiency—of urban neutrality—is to provide a primary measure of a city’s responsiveness to the biosphere and an inventory of global economic and environmental justice. A city striving to support itself—via this predicate of economy—find a more meaningful and defensible place in a world community increasingly characterized by weak states and powerful corporations. Equally crucial, the self-sufficient metropolis will limit its growth by harmonizing its production with the bearing capacity of its site and the desires of its population.



Economies of scale are not based on an ever-increasing gyre of size. True economy is a proportioning system, a means of balancing needs, wants, and resources. The self-sufficient city will find the medium of its own singularity by evolving an economy that does not simply reproduce a universal pattern of supply and demand based on the corporate invention of want, but that engenders forms that incorporate historic habits, desires, and uses. It will specialize for both competitive advantage and self-identity, and—because of the depth of its internal economy—promote welfare and exchange among its citizens, and be ever open to question.

## **WHILE WE MAY PREFER TO THINK OF NATURE AS AN ARTIFACT—A PET-LIKE REMNANT OF RATIONALIST IDEOLOGY—THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THE “NATURAL” ENVIRONMENT IS CRUCIAL FOR BOTH OUR PSYCHICAL AND OUR PHYSICAL SURVIVAL.**

### **2. Limited**

The debate over compact, bounded cities needs to be continued. But bounding is still crucial: A primary agenda for any urban growth is the retention of the difference between what is urban and what is not, a proposition about both character and edges. While we may prefer to think of nature as an artifact—a pet-like remnant of rationalist ideology—the continued existence of the “natural” environment is crucial for both our psychical and our physical survival. The only cure for sprawl is to call a halt to it, to build cities in which boundaries are clear and cities that are able to continuously inventory the means of their own survival, differentiation, hospitality, and assets. This will produce a double cycle of growth. The first phase—that of enlargement—will outline the expanded territorial requirements of the city. The second—characteristic of “historic” cities—will be an ongoing differentiation in place. As cities mature and become successful, this differentiation will devolve on a set of shrinking physical sites, resulting in the continuous

growth of complexity rather than extent. In the democratic city, this will be provided by both an accumulation and an interrogation of dissent, the opposition that will serve to limit the ease of involuntary transformation, favoring the most widespread—and differing—styles of compact, rather than the autocracy of the top-down or the emptiness of predigested choice.

### **3. Open**

Free access is the precondition of free assembly, the most important manifestation of democracy in space. Open cities imply that the structure of their internal differences will not prohibit free movement within them or the exercise of free choice by their citizens about where to live or how to be. The open city, whatever its physical limits, will be founded on hospitality, on a willingness to accommodate difference and to welcome outsiders. Of course, such cities cannot survive without a reciprocal willingness by other cities to incorporate similar freedoms and without a global effort to ensure that all cities find their fair share of the world's wealth. The vast army of refugees and migrants that mark the modern world are produced by a globalization in which the greatest mobility belongs to capital, which enjoys a circuit of choice born of unfettered opportunism sustained by radical inequality. Open cities will offer people their own free choices, based on desire, not coercion or desperation.

The open city will also be a place in which the bounding membrane is permeable to nature. The hard boundary of growth will extend only to the spread of the inorganic outward, not to the penetration of the natural environment inward or to the accessibility of the not-city to those who live in the city itself. For them, the horizon will always be dual, offering the opportunity both to plunge deeper into the urban labyrinth or to find an easy track out. No particular form, whether the grid, the cluster, the corridor, or the gradient, holds any special authority here. All must ultimately be judged not by their intentions but by their effects.

Finally, the Eutopian city will move beyond the historic strictures of zoning to a far more open planning format. Zoning arose as an instrument for segregating obnoxious uses and dangerous people and a means for making the functional organization of the city more legible (a project that fascinated the framers of the Athens Charter). But, as the world moves, however unevenly, to more benign forms of manufacture—as the digital revolution offers individuals greater freedom of choice about where to be, and as we cease hating our neighbor for her culture, color, or class—the city can



become more like a loft, ready to adaptably accommodate a legion of differences, choices, refusals, and eccentricities anywhere. The open city will be one of endlessly refreshed juxtapositions. Of course, this happy picture takes as its unassailable predicate a reversion of control to the people, the end of involuntary mobility, the defeat of manufactured consent, the purity of tolerance, and the eternal power of dissent.

#### 4. Body-based

Green urbanism—Eutopia—sees cities as *habitats*. Placing and maintaining ourselves in healthy environments is central to its task. There is some holy writ here: Whatever the augmenting mix, self-propulsion has priority. Setting aside the current utopian horizon—eternal life and perfect health—the Eutopian city will strive to accommodate and comfort all sorts of bodies and will privilege human locomotion as the source of their mobility and bodily comfort as the source of their dimensions. City air makes you free, but only if you can get a breath.

The walking city ramifies in its architecture. Easy accessibility mainly generates an architecture that is low. I've lived on the fifth floor (the natural limit for stair-climbing on a regular basis) of a walk-up building for over twenty years. The Modernist would say that the exercise of mobility in both horizontal and vertical axes is crucial to the health of the organism but only achieves this mobility via an alienating sequence of encapsulations, elevator to car to elevator to.... Messages that urge us to buy a vehicle and start driving, patterns that offer no alternative but the automobile, the growing predominance of the elevator high-rise, even the fantasy of the infinite reparability of our bodies through drugs, surgery, or other centrally administered forms of "self-help"—all contribute to the marginalization of the body as a driver of form. Unless it is restored to the center, architecture is dead.

#### 5. Diverse

In the United States, most households already live in non-nuclear family arrangements. As our affinities become increasingly elective and our lifestyles more diverse, our urban architecture must accommodate a broadening range of choices. We rely on our environments not simply to reflect the reality of our desires but to authenticate our differences. This implies a city of numerous good, expanding, and tractable choices, a city that extends tolerance to the point of celebration. The goal of architecture is happiness, but our pleasure must not be purchased at someone else's expense; the Eutopian city has no tolerance for the ghetto. The post-zoning loft city will be especially adept

at the push-pull of local transformations that will allow diversity to flourish without exclusion. Its boundaries will be both flexible and creative, ecotones not walls, places where the mingling of desires and expressions will constantly produce new ones. This is not some fantasy of an impossible future but the reflection of a reality that already exceeds our ability to house it.

#### 6. Neighborly

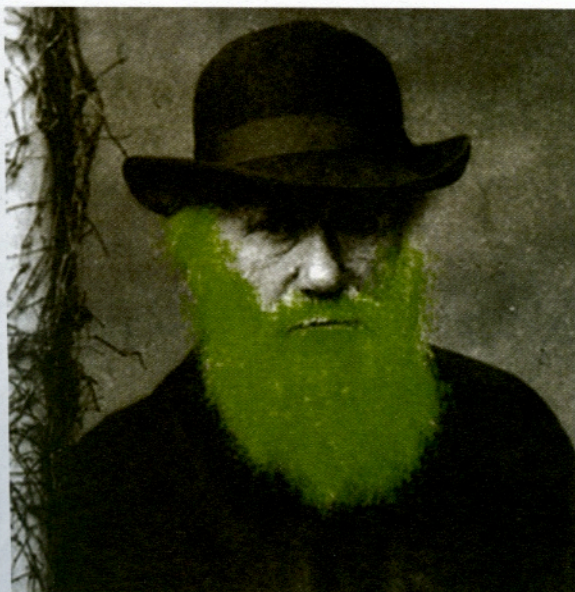
Neighborhood bridges the Athenian and the medieval ideas of the commune with that of the metropolis. The neighborhood is the fundamental increment of urban social and formal organization and the medium of urban propinquity. If walking is the alpha means of urban circulation, then the basic construct of urban organization—the neighborhood—will be both sized and differenced to accommodate people on foot. This suggests that neighborhoods should be highly mixed in use, supporting the range of daily necessities—employment, education, commerce, conviviality—that are crucial to full and active life. The legibility and tractability of the neighborhood is also central to the spread of a democratic polity. Urban politics is not simply about a site but also a condition, and neighborhoods are essential to the creation of human autonomy and the birthplaces of urban sociability.

If we are to fully participate in the life of the planet, we must have the right to control our bodies and our homes and the right to participate in the management of our immediate environments. Good neighborhoods make this immediacy clear, and by investing them with rich possibilities, we help offer the rich choices that give meaning to collective decisions. Neighborhoods—whether in Greenwich Village, Vällingby, or Jakarta—are the foundation for neighborliness, the greatest virtue in the repertoire of urban citizenship, the core of global civility. That these bonds are produced even under the worst physical adversities is a testament to their abiding importance. The real struggle for neighborhoods, though, is in finding the means to be non-exclusionary.

#### 7. Many-centered

Public assembly is foundational for both democracy and sociability. Facilitating such gatherings is perhaps our most critical task as designers and the measure of such interactions our most useful index of urban success. We have increasing difficulty speaking of public space, both because of the surge of privatization—the global flood of gated communities, shopping malls, and theme parks—and because of a suspicion of its traditional physical forms, the streets and squares, the parks





Above, left: Charles Darwin with a green beard.  
Above, right: Sir Patrick Geddes with green beard.  
Courtesy of the author

and cafés, of historic urbanism as anathema to our multiplicity. Such places, however, are bulwarks for the expression of our rights and one are still strong symbols of the meaning of collectivity. The bodily right of access is fundamental and is guaranteed by the spaces that we set aside as public. Indeed, the humanity of the city can be measured, in part, by the character and the care reflected in such spaces. The good city reflects an accumulation of social compacts about how to use it, about how to be urban. Strolling the plaza at sunset, sipping tea as the world passes by, picking up a team for soccer in the park, skateboarding under the highway—all of these are the treasures of urbanity, and displacing them in the name of innovation or “security” is both stupid and pernicious.

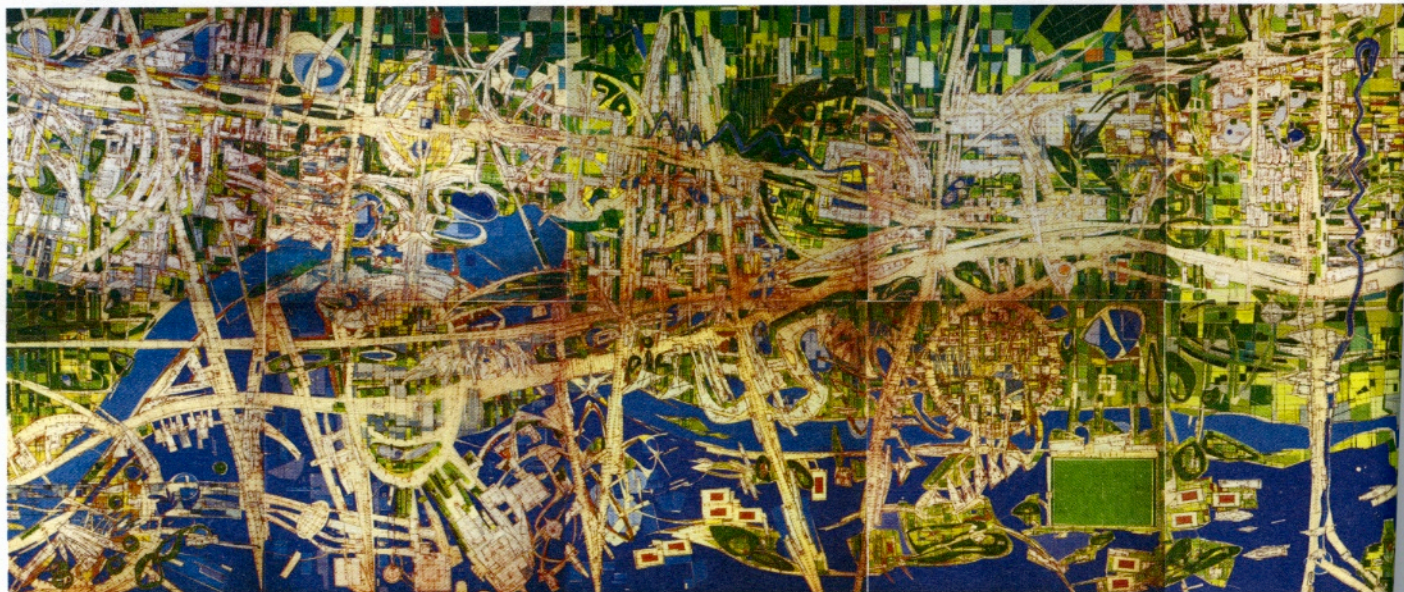
Although “netizenship” and other forms of virtual adjacency are marvelous means for augmenting our relations around the planet—for organizing affinities that transcend our immediate environments—we abandon the face-to-face at our peril. Being green means recognizing the patterns of our own sociability. It is not simply a distraction from what might seem more pressing principles but a crucial rearticulation of the terms of political argument for managing a globalizing culture. To the degree that the ownership of the urban and natural environment—and America and its ideological allies are pressing for the rapid devolution of the global commons into private hands—marks the world distribution of

wealth, its stewardship becomes the marker of what once was called class struggle. However, equally crucial to the character of the green city—which I understand as conceptually fully interchangeable with the idea of the just city—is the way in which it fulfills the primal role of democratic space, providing the setting for both the deliberate and the accidental meeting of people.

### 8. Complex

The city is a propinquity engine, a means of organizing the meeting of bodies in space. Creativity and democracy both thrive on the accidental, on the unexpected and continuous enlargement of possibilities. The city must be filled with useful margins and edges, with human ecotones, rich sites of interaction between neighboring ecologies that permit the growth of differentiation and complexity. The good city is marked not simply by the wealth of its choices but by both the efficient and the unexpected means of discovering them. The production of such accidents depends, to a degree, on our ability to get lost in the city. This is not an absolute value: Cities should not be places of fear, nor is every accident a happy one. There’s a clear distinction between what might be called “traditional” forms of urban confusion—the result of complexity, irregularity, and unpredictable changes—and more “modern” forms based on the alienations of indifference, on the confusion that springs from too





Sorkin Studio, *Weed, AZ*, prototype for a small sustainable, post-industrial, post-automotive city, Yuma, Arizona, 1994. Courtesy Sorkin Studio

much sameness. Indeed, this modern style of “equality,” in which our rights are identified with the surrender of all those features that make us and our environments unique, is the greatest enemy to true freedom, freedom based on the enrichment of choice via our own power to question it. Expanding and critiquing the field of good choices is at the core of our duty not simply as architects and urbanists but as democratic citizens and good neighbors.

#### 9. Local

Given the rapid evisceration of the idea of locality by the onslaught of multinational culture, new strategies must emerge for authenticating the individuality of place. A green, minimum-energy, self-sufficient city will be closely attuned to the particulars of its bioclimate, shifting culture, and local resource base. By understanding itself as habitat, the green city will aim for a style of homeostasis that keeps place both dynamic and particular. Rejecting the paradigm of the continuous sealed environment of the multinational corridor and the endless city of sprawl, the green city will engage both the politics and the forms of its own particularity. There are three potential sources for such differentiations of form. First, the weight of culture and history—the fabric of memory and of consent—must be served. This does not mean the limp conservation of forms that have been

totally wrested from their originating contexts of meaning. Rather, it means that forms and habits that remain vital are reproduced and that living textures are reused.

The second source is responsiveness to the bioclimatic particulars of place. These are the emergent morphologies of “green” urbanism; their unfolding will be the most dramatic and important source of the physical transformation of the city. Here, though, best practices will emerge regionally, and there will be strong logic for repetition; many of both the technical and the formal defaults for these newly imagined cities will become widespread. Urban singularity—the unique identity of Venice or Fez, Paris or New York, Istanbul or Dakar—is not automatic or “natural.” In the Eutopian city, to preserve and legitimate difference we must increasingly rely on artistic invention to set the terms of urban singularity. And why not? We have arrived at a moment in which the design of cities can be dramatically reengaged as a discourse of the harmonization of the received with the freshly imagined. It is possible to speculate about forms that are both logical and never before seen. This is a core task for Eutopia.

#### 10. Appropriate in technology

We can keep loving technology—a Kindle can save a copse. But it is time to move on from the giant energy model. Technology is refreshing itself at an astonishing





rate, but we're coming up short with applications and cost-benefits, and too often we cannot answer the question of why we bother. Appropriate technologies of sustainability will be foundational in the disposition of the elements of the city and in their particular configurations. The repertoire of shading, insulating, managing wind, using indigenous materials, carefully considering life cycle from "cradle to cradle," reducing embodied energy in construction, incorporating renewable means of creating electrical energy—all will contribute to the formulation of an architecture of particularity and suitability within the larger context of local wishes and memories, demands, and perplexities.

### 11. Green

This is literal. The Eutopian city will be green and act it. We will surely be thrilled by the marriage of new and historical knowledge about sustainability in the gestation of the forms of Eutopian cities. Buildings will be shaped for sun and air, wastes remediated at every scale, toxins removed, propinquities engendered and shifted, conventions refined, fresh climaxes achieved, compacts agreed or denied. And precedents and models will be attended to, including earlier runs at Eutopia. Among these will surely be the Garden City, which, to its endless credit, sought self-sufficiency, compact dimension, human scale, and a kind of proto-environmentalism that reflected the rapid rise of the natural sciences and the first stirrings of the concept of a global ecology.

The salient characteristic of the Garden City was that it was green. Garden Cities were an early effort to redress what was perceived as a dramatic imbalance in human relations with the natural world. Just as contemporary Darwinism resituated the species within the family of worldly creatures and dealt a mortal blow to received ideas of human exceptionalism, so the protagonists of the Garden City—and successors like Patrick Geddes—re-described urbanism as a sheltering activity with a prominently biological basis. This opening up of the city to an idea of necessary cohabitation with the plant and animal kingdoms produced a new morphology of inclusion, derived from a fantasy of the balance represented by the village life of a previous age. This restoration of the putatively superior social principles of small town and village life was to be advanced not simply by a turning back but by new technologies of movement and communication that allowed the Garden City not simply to be scaled up from a village model but also networked with a hoped-for galaxy of new towns of similar character, with abundant green space in between.

We still have much to learn, not simply from the example of these propositions but also from the way in which the ideas of the Garden City have been twisted and degenerated as they've morphed into vapid suburbanism and one-dimensional visions of new towns too simple, too monochrome, too unquestioning, as if the life of a fictitious past could be revived via the reproduction of its forms. The lesson of these places and this movement, however, must be redirected. The creation of new towns is not opposed to the idea of the big city in general. Big cities remain central to the human project and unique in their ability to deliver lives of richness, confusion, and diversity. Rather, the idea of the Garden City must be applied to its own bastard, suburban sprawl, the real nemesis of urban and planetary sustainability.

Our new and newly green cities will owe a great deal to this earlier project and not just in the terms suggested above. If one can make a blanket statement about the character of these cities, it is that they will literally teem with green. This proposition might seem both too obvious and too simple. But an abundance of plant life in cities will mark their efficiency and progress in the future and color our new global environmental consciousness. For virtually every issue cities confront, nature has an answer. Our new urban gardens—ubiquitous on every horizon—will supply us with oxygen, absorb pollution, control temperatures, provide habitat for our fellow creatures, offer us food, grow construction materials, calm our gaze, and instrumentalize our autonomy. This condition must become the default. Our lives depend on it, on remembering something we've always known but must learn again.

### 12. Equitable

The sine qua non. If urbanism has a teleology, an intelligence behind its design, it must entail the facilitation of justice: "Politics... turns on equality as its principle," writes Rancière,<sup>2</sup> and this is where, again, we begin. Mapping human relations at every scale, the city stands as both an incredibly succinct representation and a monumentally complex and efficient facilitator of contact, a distribution and collation engine. As the instrument of our manifold community, cities—unlike rainforests or rocket ships—are saturated with the political. Any claim to the contrary is disingenuous. Fairness and joy, in forms both known and not yet, is the end of politics, the condition that gives meaning to the abstraction of an empty equity and insistently presses the demand of the beautiful on the town. ♦ *This is the introduction to the forthcoming monograph of the work of the Michael Sorkin Studio.*