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Urban Futures, Past and Present

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Editorial Board

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Abstract

The current conjuncture demands deeper reflection on how we imagine the future of cities. This article responds by taking stock of the conceptual resources and analytical tools we possess by looking back to key moments of urban history in which the future has taken shape in particularly influential ways. It outlines an approach for conceptualizing the "future" as an historically specific cultural horizon that defines how societies organize themselves and their institutions, and one that is inextricably bound up with the history of urbanization and with the "city" as both idea and spatial form. The discussion is organized into three thematic sections that correspond to recurring themes in the history of the urban imagination, and that continue to resonate today.

Keywords

Acknowledgements

1. The Future is Everywhere

A consensus has emerged in the first decades of the twenty-first century: the global future is an *urban* future. We are now accustomed to hearing the rather meaningless but incontrovertible fact that, for the first time in history, the majority of the world's population now lives in cities. We may also be aware that more than one billion people live in the so-called "slums" of the global South, and that this is where the majority of world population growth will take place. These sorts of statements are pervasive. At the same time, everyone also seems to agree that the urban *future* is a centrally important problem. As opposed to other possible temporal orientations, of which there are many, the future has become a preeminent focus of contemporary urban policy, planning, design, development, and governance. To grasp something of the ubiquity of this peculiar space-time construct, consider the frequency with which "urban futures" or "future cities" appear in contemporary public culture.

Most media outlets, from CNN to the *Guardian* to the *Atlantic*, have a webpage or blog on urban futures. Publishing houses have book series organized under this heading. Major universities have research initiatives, degree programs, and faculty positions dedicated to this pursuit, while some have created entire centers or institutes. Schoolchildren are encouraged to participate in "future city" simulations and competitions. There are multiple Future Cities Labs (one in San Francisco, another split between Zurich and Singapore), a Future Cities Catapult, and cities-of-the-future exhibitions have taken place in London, Shanghai, and New York. Multinational corporations specializing in energy (like Shell), technology (like Siemens and IBM), and management consulting (like Ernst & Young) offer expensive future-city scenarios and solutions. City-branding and place-making agencies offer to "curate" or "design" the future of your city while think tanks disseminate handbooks on how to make cities "futureproof." If we take time to notice, it can easily begin to feel like the urban future is everywhere (Rosenberg and Harding, 2005, p. 3).

The COVID-19 pandemic intensifies this trend by introducing deep uncertainty about the future of cities. Established principles of urbanism, such as density, circulation, and exchange, are thrown into question by epidemiological dictates such as "social distancing" and "self-isolation." These measures, which render cities unfamiliar and unsettle core values of urban life, contribute to the widespread sense that cities may never again be the same. Yet despite the cloud of uncertainty hanging over the urban future, efforts to imagine the "post-pandemic" city inevitably engage with the archive of experiences, images, and ideas from before COVID-19 hit (Colomina, 2018). For example, discussions about how to manage an

imminent "second wave" and other future biothreats draw on preexisting repertoires of urbanism, such as "smart-city technologies" (Sonn and Lee, 2020). Likewise, the controversial notion of "herd immunity" aligns with the equally contentious idea of "resilience" and its goal of making cities capable of bouncing back from exogenous shocks while absorbing an acceptable amount of loss (Howell, 2020; Schwab and Vanham, 2020). Commentators who find glimmers of hope in reports of reduced air pollution, increased wildlife activity, or flourishing mutual aid networks follow an established tradition of seeing utopian potential in urban crisis (He, Pan and Tanaka, 2020; Moss, 2020; Tolentino, 2020). And media forecasts of panic-buying publics and overcrowded hospitals harken back to dystopian future scenarios that have long been in circulation (Chandran, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic also reflects the long-standing influence of health threats on processes of urbanization. It will be some time before we know exactly how the imperative to control the spread of the virus reshapes cities and urban life. However, we can already see that the edict to "shelter in place" heightens the vulnerability of low-wage laborers unable to "work remotely." Meanwhile, proposals for ending lockdowns and "returning to normal" effectively naturalize the gendered, racialized, and classed privileges that structure access to affordable healthcare, quality housing, and secure livelihoods, and which are responsible for unequal mortality rates in the first place. As the world looks anxiously ahead to the "post-pandemic" city and prepares for the next outbreak, engaging critically with the historical archive of urban future-thinking is especially timely.

If the current conjuncture indeed demands deeper reflection on how we imagine the future of our cities, it is worth taking stock of the conceptual resources and analytical tools we possess by looking back to key moments of urban history in which the future has taken shape in particularly influential ways.[1] In doing so, this article aims to lay the groundwork for a critical analysis of urban futures that identifies what is at stake in imagining the future of cities in one way rather than another. The ultimate objectives are: to equip urbanists to think critically about how the future of cities has been thought about and acted upon in different times and places; and to use the history of urban future-thinking to inform contemporary debates in human geography and related disciplines. The underlying justification is that this pursuit has real significance for the kind of city we want to, and eventually will, ourselves inhabit.

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[1] For a parallel discussion, see Dobraszczyk (2019). For an argument in favor of using "critical excavations of the past with views to future urbanisms," see Sankalia (2012). For earlier efforts to track the history of urban futures, see Lewis Mumford's work (1965; Kornbluh, 2003)

2. The Future as Urban Fact

In *The Future as Cultural Fact*, Arjun Appadurai (2013, p. 5) calls the future a "cultural horizon" that different societies organize in different ways. Societies also organize themselves in different ways in relation to the future, which is to say, "the future is a part of how societies shape their practices" (Appadurai, 2013, p. 292). Humans are "future-makers," which means the social sciences and humanities can treat "future-making" as an object of analysis (Munn, 1992; Appadurai, 2013, p. 285). Though many scholarly and professional fields have dedicated themselves to studying how humans construct their future (e.g., economics, environmental science, disaster management, design, architecture, and planning), Appadurai laments that social and cultural analysis has not followed suit. This is curious since the future is "not just a technical or neutral space, but is shot through with affect and with sensation," a "culturally organized dimension of human life" (Appadurai, 2013, pp. 286–7, 294). It is about "hope," the "good life," and what people want to achieve; just as often, it is about what they want to avoid. And there are ethical and political stakes attached to the different ways in which the future is organized. Appadurai (2013, p. 295) characterizes this as a struggle between the "politics of probability" and the "politics of possibility." The former is the domain in which the future can be bought, sold, and controlled, where it becomes an object of capitalist speculation or governmental management. The latter is about ordinary people's everyday practices of imagining, anticipating, or aspiring to different futures. In short, the tension between different ways of constructing the future, and of organizing the present in relation to it, is a central feature of social and political life.

These concerns take on historical depth if we consider Reinhart Koselleck's (2004) thesis that concepts of time and temporality are historically specific. Koselleck argues that past generations (or societies) have particular kinds of futures that go through changes over time but that also get passed along to their successors (cf. Luhmann, 1998). He tells the story of the shift from the Middle Ages to modernity in Europe by comparing different ways of envisioning the future. In short, he shows how the Christian idea of prophecy, which foresaw the End of the World and was the sole property of the church, was overtaken by a secular idea of prognosis, which predicted political events and belonged primarily to the state. This shift involved intense competition between different ways of imagining, foreseeing, and anticipating the future. Eventually the state achieved a "monopoly on the control of the future" by

"gradually eliminating from the domain of political consideration and decision making the robust religious expectations of the future" (Koselleck, 2004, p. 16).

Following Appadurai and Koselleck, we can say that the "future" is an historically specific cultural horizon that defines how societies organize themselves and their institutions. But what does the "future" have to do with cities? In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams (1973, p. 272) connects the two: "Out of an experience of the cities came an experience of the future." He argues that the social experience of urban life provided the possibility to imagine that the future could be created or transformed through collective agency (and was not the result of destiny). Williams cites writers like William Morris and H. G. Wells, who drew on the transformations occurring all around them in late-Victorian London. While Morris's vision was utopian and Wells's dystopian, both came from their experience of the city, the crises produced by urbanization and industrialization, and the movements for social change emerging around that time. The future is not only a *cultural* fact, but also an *urban* fact.

For Williams, the urban experience and its perpetual crises create the collective consciousness of the future. He argues that this continued throughout the twentieth century, with writers such as Aldous Huxley and George Orwell depicting urban futures as a way to comment on the movements for social change motivating their predecessors. On the one hand, Williams (1973, p. 278) suggests that the possibilities are infinite: "In a sense, it seems, everything about the city—from the magnificent to the apocalyptic—can be believed at once." But for Williams, there are always historical conditions shaping how and why the future is envisioned one way rather than another, and diverging future visions have different material consequences. Following this line of inquiry, we might ask: What forms of urban future-thinking and future-making have recurred and endured, and how might their histories inform contemporary debates in human geography and related disciplines about the future of cities in times of profound uncertainty?

Guided by these questions, the remainder of this essay is divided into three thematic sections, which correspond to historically influential ways in which the future has shaped cities and urban life. The first, "Better City, Better World," refers to the urge to break free from the past and the present in order to create something new, different, better. The second, "Urban Futures, Bought and Sold," refers to the process by which the urban future is rendered available as a source of economic value. The third, "The Future is Our Enemy," refers to the imperative to govern cities and urban life in anticipation of future threats. These themes—idealization, capitalization, and securitization, to attempt to encapsulate each one in a single term—are recurrent in the history of the urban imagination and they continue to reverberate throughout

contemporary discussions of the future of cities. They are not meant to be exhaustive or absolute; there are many reference points that are not captured here, and there could be other ways of organizing the ones that are. These themes are also not meant to be mutually exclusive, as they have often appeared simultaneously, nor are they necessarily compatible, as they have sometimes reinforced each other and sometimes moved in opposite directions. Although the upcoming discussion is grounded in the conviction that there is an important association between the "urban" and the "future," we do not wish to make that association seem necessary or automatic. And while the focus here is primarily on grand visions of the urban future, other scales and perspectives also deserve to be taken into account. Despite these qualifiers, which will be addressed in the conclusion, what follows is an attempt to open pathways for human geographical research and teaching on a topic poised to remain with us for a good long while.

3. Better City, Better World

The pursuit of improvements to the human condition has a long and winding history in which the city has consistently played a fundamental role. It is somewhat cliched to begin this discussion with ancient Greece, but ideas emerging in that context remain with us today. One of the most influential is Plato's (2002) depiction of a city whose spatial form and political system would enable the perfection of the soul. This model figured centrally in Plato's conception of ethics and politics, as his ideal city was understood as the physical expression of the ideal society and state. Aristotle (1984) also based his theory of politics on his concept of the city, as both originated in the human desire to enter into partnerships, which formed the basis of the *polis* (which is translated variously as "city," "state," or "city-state"). The *polis* was the necessary outcome of the human search for fulfillment, which was only possible in the city. This ideal applied to a specific category of person (the property-owning and slave-holding patriarch) who was the beneficiary of the advantages of urban political life. As Aristotle (1984, p. 37) famously wrote of the *polis*, "while coming into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well."

The assumption that the city is the endpoint of a natural progression—that the nature of society is to self-organize, both spatially and politically, in urban form—is taken for granted in almost all models of human and social development. So, too, the idea that a city's spatial order reflects (even determines) the physical and moral constitution of its inhabitants and their

social relations is deeply ingrained in urban planning, design, and governance. These models speak the language of universality while frequently presuming a subject with certain characteristics (usually adult, male, able-bodied, and propertied). Uniting these long-lasting ideas is the enduring belief that the desire for a better world—either the interior world of the individual or the exterior world of society—can be satisfied by creating a better city.

The emphasis on the city as the key to human flourishing took on another important dimension in religious texts, in which the city served to illustrate the contrast between the divine and the profane. Saint Augustine's (2005) opposition between Civitas Dei, the heavenly city inspired by the love of God, and Civitas terrena, the earthly city of non-believers, offered a lasting inspiration. Likewise, Quranic references to Paradise motivated attempts to work out the ideal spatial form, such as the original circular plan for Baghdad (Eaton, 2002, p. 37). Renaissance architects also derived their notion of the ideal city from the heavens: if the universe was arranged rationally according to mathematical laws then the city's physical design and political authority should follow the same principles. Common to these diverse systems of religious thought is the tendency for the city to serve as the stage on which the struggle between good and evil is played out.

The ability to conceive of cities as inventions, and to break with the past in order to create them, owes much to Sir Thomas More. *Utopia*, in which More (1989) claimed to depict the ideal city of Plato's *Republic*, was inspired by contempt for his own society as well as by imperial expansion and the "discovery" of the so-called "New World." The first book of *Utopia* is an explicit critique of contemporary England, while the second contrasts it with an imaginary, distant world superior in every way. Whether or not More's description of the fictitious island was meant as a model—after all, he did not offer a program or plan for how to achieve what the Utopians had—*Utopia* as a way of thinking inspired much debate and imitation. It allowed existing legal systems, social relations, political institutions, and spatial forms to seem strange, and that sense of estrangement is what makes it possible to imagine them otherwise. In short, More's work inaugurated the search for alternative arrangements of society and space that could serve as a model for the future.

This search took many forms, but a common thread was to pair the critique of existing urban conditions with the plan for an altogether superior alternative. The utopian socialist William Morris (1905) complained about the "sickening hideousness" of "irredeemably vulgar" London and longed for cities to be replaced by towns and villages surrounded by fields and gardens. Morris's future imagination was shot through with nostalgia for the pre-industrial and the pastoral, which inspired his vision of a socially and environmentally balanced world

where money, property, and government disappeared and everyone lived in harmony. Morris's vision joined the outpouring of utopian ideas that emerged in response to the social upheaval caused by early industrial capitalism. Among them was the Garden City movement founded by Ebenezer Howard (1902), which sought to integrate the social and economic benefits of the city with the moral and aesthetic values of the countryside. Howard and many of his contemporaries saw the cities of their day as "unhealthy" and used organic and biological concepts to diagnose their ills. Appealing to "natural laws," they argued that the city was a living organism out of balance and in need of medical intervention. This line of thinking led to theories of sanitation and hygiene, as well as to eugenics: all forms of intervention that were dissatisfied with the current state of cities and sought to "improve" their social, moral, and environmental conditions simultaneously (Pinder, 2005, p. 32).

Just as More's *Utopia* was inspired by the European conquest of the Americas, Gwendolyn Wright (1991, pp. 1–2) argues that the history of colonial urbanism reveals European notions of how a "good environment…should look and function." Like the interventions being pursued in the cities of the metropole, colonial cities were planned and built with the aim of creating new social and spatial orders. A similar impulse to remake the city and society also animated decolonization processes as newly independent nations sought to establish their political objectives in the urban sphere. Decolonization itself might be considered an urban ideal, as the city was often the place in which the identity of the postcolonial nation could be fostered. This is evident throughout the "architectures of independence" that span postcolonial Africa, which were important symbols of an independent nation inserting itself into the global sphere of modernity (Hess, 2000; Herz *et al.*, 2015). The same impetus animated the efforts of postcolonial governments to replace the fragmented infrastructures inherited from the colonial era with universalized systems of service provision that would reach even the poorest citizens (Kooy and Bakker, 2008).

The search for better arrangements of society pursued through cities arguably reached its apex in what Susan Buck-Morss (1995, p. 1) calls the "industrial dreamworlds" that "dominated the political imagination in both East and West for most of the [twentieth] century." Despite the significant differences between capitalism, socialism, and fascism, Buck-Morss argues that they all mobilized dreamworlds that provided optimistic visions of "mass utopia" by using aesthetic forms (architecture, fashion, arts, music, film, and so on) to compete for the loyalty of the masses (Zarecor, 2018). From the arcades of late-nineteenth-century Paris to the artistic and architectural styles flourishing after the Russian Revolution, Buck-Morss (1995, p.

8) argues that common to modernity's aesthetic forms, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, was the "premise that new social environments would create new inhabitants."

This premise was at the heart of modernist urbanism, epitomized by Le Corbusier's (2011) famous assertion that the destruction wrought by World War I resulted in conditions perfect for building cities that could lead to an ideal social order and an improved individual. Le Corbusier's ideas were universalized with the establishment in 1928 of the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM), which facilitated the application of standardized principles across scales, regardless of context, from the house to the city. Le Corbusier believed that the creation of cities along modernist lines required a strong, authoritarian state, and the fascist movements arising in Italy and Germany around this time pursued their quest to create new social orders by intervening in urban space (Scott, 1998). In the Soviet Union, the city and its material forms were central to the project of building a future according to socialist principles (Boym, 1994).

According to the version of modernization theory propagated by Washington in the post-war period, urbanization was "a teleological process, a movement toward a known end point that would be nothing less than a Western-style industrial modernity," as James Ferguson (1999, p. 5) puts it. The city was believed to be the ultimate endpoint of history, but not just any city. It was the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Euro-American city (especially Paris, London, New York, and Chicago) that became symbols of the "modern" (Robinson, 2006; Parnell and Robinson, 2012). The idea that history was advancing toward a better or more complete condition was linked to urban and infrastructural forms, which were the most tangible manifestation of having arrived at the stage of civilizational achievement known as "modernity." The profession of city (or town) planning played an important role in the circulation of this idea by propagating visions of desirable futures that could be attained by intervening in urban space (Hall, 2002). Even with the end of the Cold War and attacks on modernism coming from all corners, the city's centrality to pursuing a better future and to improving the human condition remained intact.

Among the many contemporary iterations of this paradigm, the "smart city" is perhaps the most pervasive (Datta, 2019). While ambiguous in definition, the "smart city" aspires to a technologically-infused urban sphere, with technology companies holding the key to creating an efficient, sustainable, and inclusive world (Marvin, Luque-Ayala and McFarlane, 2016; Caprotti, 2019; Angelo and Wachsmuth, 2020). According to their sleek and shiny proposals, a combination of sensors, apps, and platforms can generate the data needed to build the cities of the future, and to manage them better (Kaika, 2017). Consulting firms like McKinsey

promise that "smart-city technologies" can reduce commute times, save lives, cut crime rates, improve health, lower carbon emissions, detoxify the air, speed up emergency response, and much more (Woetzel *et al.*, 2018). As an all-purpose technological solution to social ills, the "smart city" is only the most recent in a long line of future visions that seek to make the world a better place, one city at a time.

4. Urban Futures, Bought and Sold

Entangled with the paradigm of human-through-urban betterment is the process by which the urban future is leveraged to create profit. This process also features prominently in the urban imagination over the past few centuries, and continues to influence contemporary debates. Timothy Mitchell refers to this process as "capitalization" (Abourahme and Jabary-Salamanca, 2016). The common definition of capitalization, he reminds us, is the provision of capital for a company, or the conversion of income and assets into investments. However, capitalization also names a speculative process, equally central to modern forms of political economy, whereby the future is rendered available as a source of economic value (Bear, Birla and Puri, 2015). This often happens through the building of durable structures that promise future revenue and the selling of that promise to investors in the present. We see this unfolding across the contemporary urban world, but also throughout the historical relationship between capitalism and the city.

A classic example is the transformation of Paris under the reign of planner Baron Haussmann. As David Harvey (2003a) recounts, Paris in the 1850s was tormented by class struggle, corruption, crime, and cholera. It was a city mired in crisis with ageing infrastructure that was incompatible with emerging forms of production and consumption. To resolve these problems, Haussmann began an urban transformation of vast proportions. He ordered the construction of a new road system to improve the circulation of goods and people, which also enabled the military and the police to access areas infamous for revolutionary activity. But Haussmann's vision for the future was one in which more than just the circulation of goods and people was liberated—capital, too, needed to be set free. As Walter Benjamin (1978, p. 159) pointed out, these reforms favored finance capital, and Paris under Haussman began to experience "a great speculative boom." This speculative efflorescence was integral to the

capitalist mode of production described by Henri Lefebvre (1991), in which urban space itself was a commodity to be bought and sold.

To highlight the degree to which commodification was coming to dominate not only the material production of urban space, but urban cultural life more broadly, Benjamin focused extensively on the Parisian arcades: precursors to contemporary department stores where the mass commercialization of luxury goods was first introduced. Benjamin saw the arcades as having initiated a "cult of commodities" that offered "the promise of happiness for the urban masses" (Buck-Morss, 1995, p. 2). Desirable products were not the only thing on display; so, too, was an optimistic vision of "mass utopia" to be achieved through collective consumption. World Exhibitions, which Benjamin (Benjamin, 1978, p. 151) called "sites of pilgrimage to the commodity fetish," also performed this operation by creating a fascination with the world of objects, imbuing them with supernatural powers, and obscuring the human labor that went into producing them. In both the arcades and in World Exhibitions, visitors encountered the "phantasmagoria of capitalist culture," or the enchanting, dreamlike visions of future fulfillment that could be acquired for a price (Benjamin, 1978, p. 153; Cohen, 1989; Hayden, 2012).

Neither the reforms spearheaded by Haussman nor the attendant commodification of urban social and cultural life were unique to Paris, or for that matter to European cities. After all, nineteenth-century European metropolises were linked to empires whose colonial territories represented problems of rule but also promises of aesthetic inspiration, scientific discovery, and (perhaps most importantly) economic reward. As Wright (1991, pp. 2–3) shows in the case of French Morocco, Indochina, and Madagascar, the colonies became "a terrain for working out solutions to some of the political, social, and aesthetic problems which plagued France," with urbanism forming the "core of such efforts" and cities serving as "laboratories" for testing ideas that could eventually be brought "home." Solutions to ills plaguing the French city, such as overcrowding and poor sanitation, for example, could be trialed overseas, with economic stagnation in the metropole being of preeminent concern (Wright, 1991, p. 54). To rectify the crisis of overaccumulation at home, colonial administrations and allied private ventures often deployed a spatial fix with temporal dimensions: they sought to remake the colonial city to facilitate speculation on the promise of future revenue (Mitchell, 1991; Harvey, 2003b).

Just as colonialism was a complex historical phenomenon, with different strategies of rule manifesting in different approaches to urbanism, the phenomenon of decolonization encompassed an equally diverse set of histories. However, one common thread recurs

throughout anti-colonial movements: breaking free from oppressive structures of the past involved imagining a future in which the city would play the role of protagonist. Frantz Fanon's (2004) analysis of colonial power recognized the linkage between urban space, social relations, and the colonized body and mind, and his attempt to conceptualize a decolonized future implied a simultaneous transformation across these interrelated domains (Scott, 1999, p. 211). However, the field of postcolonial studies has consistently shown that decolonization never entailed a clean break with the past, especially in geo-political and geo-economic terms.

Filip De Boeck's work on the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, demonstrates how colonial institutions of governance and planning continued to shape postcolonial cities long after formal decolonization. While colonial Kinshasa was marked by division between *La Ville*, the home of the European population, and the surrounding, peripheral African city, commonly known as *La Cité*, the growth of the city after independence in 1960 followed the same logic. Although there were some shifts away from the spatial layout, work ethos, time management, and linguistic order of colonialism, urban reforms and public works programs continued to be "inspired by the earlier moral models of colonialist modernity." (De Boeck, 2011, p. 273). Even contemporary urban development projects remain entangled with the social and spatial forms of colonialism, such as the segregationist model of *ville* and *cité*, but now with a twist: "Kinshasa...is again looking into the mirror of modernity to fashion itself, but this time the mirror no longer reflects the earlier versions of Belgian colonialist modernity, but instead it longs to capture the aura of Dubai and other hot spots of the new urban Global South" (De Boeck, 2011, p. 274). This pivot away from Europe, Ananya Roy (2012, p. 10) observes, is characteristic of new "practices of inter-referencing" that are guided by "South-South coordinates and emergent South-based global referents." Although this shift undoes certain colonial legacies, such as the idea that Northern cities are the final stage in an evolutionary process of development, it leaves others untouched, such as the degree to which the urban future is embedded in capitalist political-economic orders.

Efforts to challenge this trend have been repeatedly overwhelmed by the historical conjuncture that has structured the global urban imagination from the 1970s onwards. On the one hand, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) across the global South decoupled urbanization from industrialization, even from development, setting the stage for rapid urban growth to result in the mass production of poverty (Davis, 2006). On the other hand, economic restructuring throughout the cities of the global North encouraged a shift away from industrial production and towards more flexible modes of capital accumulation (Harvey, 1990). This conjuncture destabilized the social objectives of post-war urbanism, which had promised

benefits like full employment and decent housing, while embracing urban fragmentation and celebrating "urban entrepreneurialism" (Harvey, 1989). The competition between cities and regions was animated by the "regulating fiction" of the "global" or "world-class" city, which became the "authorized image of city success" and the "end point of development for ambitious cities" (Robinson, 2002, p. 246). Across the urban world, this concept has motivated efforts by a wide array of actors to make themselves and their cities "global" or "world-class" (Ghertner, 2015). The dominant strategy for doing so is an intensification of the long-standing process by which speculative development becomes the dominant mode of capital accumulation, and the urban future is rendered a profitable commodity (Goldman, 2011).

With the adverse effects of climate change looming on the horizon, the commodification of the urban future has taken on new dimensions. While the fields of "green architecture" and "ecological urbanism" represent a significant shift in the urban imagination, some versions, such as the work of French botanist Patrick Blanc, who designed and patented "living walls" or "vertical gardens" in late 1980s, remain complicit with the speculative dynamics of capitalist urbanization and the aspirational excess of elite consumption (Gandy, 2010; Lovins and Cohen, 2011). And like the concept of "sustainable urbanism," which once aspired toward a future of socio-ecological transformation without fundamentally questioning existing tenets of economic growth, the climate crisis is enabling what Sarah Knuth (2014) calls "speculative urbanism in the green economy." The new paradigm of "climate urbanism" centers on the management of carbon alongside investment in resilient infrastructure, both of which offer a broad spectrum of initiatives that can serve as targets for investment and development (Long and Rice, 2019). Energy-efficient retrofitting practices in the United States, for example, are "being positioned…as at once a decarbonization strategy, frontier for green innovation and entrepreneurialism, and prop to capitalist accumulation-as-usual" (Knuth, 2019, p. 488). Though wrapped in a cloak of moral and ecological superiority, the most attractive feature of these emerging urban environmental solutions may be their promise of lucrative returns. As it turns out, the urban future of a climate altered world need not be depressingly scary; creating the "eco-city" of tomorrow can also be wildly profitable.

5. The Future is Our Enemy

The previous two themes have often appeared in parallel, sometimes working in tandem and sometimes at cross-purposes, while frequently intersecting with a third: the imperative to

govern cities and urban life in anticipation of future threats. This outlook owes much to political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes (1996), who presumed that humans, in the state of nature (that is, in the absence of authority), inevitably engage in a struggle for dominance—a war of all against all. Having experienced the bloody English Civil War, Hobbes believed that such horrific violence was caused by the absence of sovereign power. To avoid conflict and bloodshed, he argued, we have no choice but to enter into society and into contract with the state. Hobbes did not describe the spatial form of such a society or state, but the print that accompanied the original publication of *Leviathan* offered clues. It depicted the sovereign with sword and staff, exercising absolute power over an orderly, fortified city. As wilderness lay just outside the walls, the potential to revert back to chaos and conflict was always looming. Hobbes's view of human nature has since been central to urban future scenarios. Fast-forwarding to the present, we could say that many contemporary forms of urbanism are Hobbesian in their focus on securing the city against unwanted eventualities and in curtailing freedom in return for protection.

Cities are now increasingly understood as spaces of convergence for multiple threats, as strategic sites that must be secured. The phrase "city-as-target" captures the dual nature of an urban imagination that sees the city both as something to aspire to and to protect from, or in other words: "The city is...something to shoot for as well as shoot at" (Bishop and Clancey, 2008, p. 55). Stephen Graham (2010, p. xv) has argued that this has become the new normal: "[F]or the first time since the Middle Ages, the localized geographies of cities and the systems that weave them together are starting to dominate discussions surrounding war, geopolitics and security." While Graham's focus is the "new military urbanism" that has spread across cities of global North and South, an orientation toward "security" in a broader sense has saturated urban policy debates, infrastructural systems, and popular culture (Zeiderman, 2016). Across these domains is the imperative to eliminate, minimize, or manage threats to the city and urban life.

While concerns about urban security may be currently ascendant, their relationship to the future emerged at key moments in urban history. In his genealogy of the mechanisms of power operating in contemporary society, Michel Foucault (2007, p. 12) identified the growth of cities (or towns) as an important factor. In medieval Europe, towns were separated legally, administratively, and physically from one another, and this strategy worked to prevent unwanted things from happening within their walls. For Foucault (2007, pp. 15–16), these were juridical mechanisms, or the system of laws, regulations, and punishments designed to prohibit the undesirable from occurring. As new towns were built, their spatial layout was meant to

encourage certain desirable behaviors and functions by enabling inspection and control. Such disciplinary mechanisms comprised techniques of surveillance, supervision, and correction to ensure prescribed outcomes. In the eighteenth century, both juridical and disciplinary power were challenged as urban growth, the birth of nation-states, and the increase of extra-local economic exchange combined to force the city to open up to circulation. These developments posed a political question: How to secure cities without being able to seal off their borders or closely supervise daily activities? In response, new mechanisms were invented for organizing circulation and minimizing losses (Foucault, 2007, pp. 19–20). These mechanisms began to treat objects of concern (theft, disease, famine) as future events whose probability could be calculated and managed according to an average considered optimal or acceptable. This approach to governing the city, which Foucault alternately called "security" and "governmentality," came to influence urban politics and society, though it did not replace juridical and disciplinary power. All three coexist in the contemporary city as ways of governing urban life in anticipation of future threats.

While Foucault's genealogy was primarily concerned with the urban history of Europe, colonial cities presented another sort of problem. On the one hand, they were spaces to be managed in relation to the threat of anti-colonial resistance. In the case of British colonialism in Africa, administrators feared that rural-urban migration would "detribalize" African populations and undermine indirect rule, and they devised techniques for keeping colonized populations in place and under control. On the other hand, colonial cities were seen as the breeding ground of disease. In colonial Lagos, for example, the threat of malaria jeopardized the goal of making the city, in the words of a colonial governor, the "greatest emporium of trade in this part of the continent," and the response was a combination of swamp drainage and mosquito control projects alongside official and unofficial policies of racial segregation (Gandy, 2014, p. 89). Fanon's (2004, pp. 3–5) famous depiction of the divided cities of the colonized world pointed to the civilizational hierarchies and racialized inequalities that underpinned European colonialism at large, and which were reflected in attempts to govern the colonial city in relation to future threats.

Today, some of the same logics continue to reassert themselves in discussions of the so-called "megacities" of the global South. In certain circles, these cities have become potential hotbeds of disease, terrorism, organized crime, political upheaval, and economic migration. From influential texts like Robert Kaplan's (1994) "The Coming Anarchy," Mike Davis's (2006) *Planet of Slums*, or Laurie Garrett's (1994) *The Coming Plague* to reports by the US Army on how to prepare for "a complex and uncertain future" (Harris *et al.*, 2014), cities of

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the developing world are seen to pose a threat not only to their host countries, but also to rich nations in the global North. The modern environmental movement emerged with a similar concern, as evidenced by the influential book, *The Population Bomb*, by biologist Paul Ehrlich (1968). Its dismal outlook on the global environmental future treated the growth of cities in the developing world as a sign of "overpopulation," which would eventually lead to ecological crisis and mass starvation if left unchecked. Here Fanon's depiction of the hierarchies and inequalities endemic to colonial cities is scaled up to the urban world as a whole, and the walls that once separated the "native" and European sectors are erected at international borders to keep external threats at bay. These spatial divisions are also rendered temporal, with poorer cities (and especially their slums, shantytowns, and squatter settlements) symbolizing a dystopian future that may eventually spread beyond their borders.

Such anxieties, taken to their logical extreme, have led to the development of "fortress cities," which Mike Davis (1990, p. 224) has described as cities "brutally divided between 'fortified cells' of affluent society and 'places of terror' where the police battle the criminalized poor," and where the defense of wealth and privilege is translated into repressions of space and movement. The fortification of the urban landscape to which Davis refers has occurred across multiple scales. In the domestic sphere, fortified enclaves, which Teresa Caldeira (2000, p. 83) defines as "privatized, enclosed, and monitored spaces for residence, consumption, leisure, and work," have been marketed as an "escape from the city" where one can live among people of similar social class in a "secure domestic environment." In the public realm, concepts like "defensible space" and "hostile architecture," which aim to discourage certain people and activities through design, have often translated into blatant exercises in criminalizing poor, racialized urban citizens and the spaces they inhabit (Newman, 1973; Kipfer, 2015). Uniting these fortification projects is an urban imagination that sees the city as a space of potential danger, and whose effects are unevenly distributed: some more frequently enjoy a sense of security, while others are more frequently identified as security threats (Browne, 2015).

With climate change and the notion of the Anthropocene, the future has become increasingly menacing to urban life as we know it. Along with mounting scientific evidence, a series of climate-related disasters have drawn attention to "a wide range of hazardous, even deadly, conditions that now face urban citizens and ecosystems" (Gotham and Greenberg, 2014, p. 3). In response, Ash Amin (2013) notes that a "new lexicon of words with ambiguous meanings" (such as preparedness, resilience, adaptation, and mitigation) has emerged to prescribe how urban governments and citizens should deal with "the inevitability of danger and disruption" on the horizon. These concepts foresee an inherently volatile future that cannot

be controlled or managed according to existing frameworks and institutions, hence the need to redesign the social and infrastructural systems of cities to withstand and bounce back from any and all eventualities. The "smart city" is being positioned as a potential solution to this urban fear, offering technological solutions to a set of emerging threats that appear poised to disrupt the city's political stability and economic success. So, too, what Joshua Long and Jennifer Rice (2019, p. 1004) call "climate urbanism" assumes a defensive posture, with the environment coming to serve as "the chief justification for preserving, securing, and promoting the livelihoods of some cities and their citizens over others, leaving landscapes of inequality and violence in the name of security and safety."

But alongside these dystopian visions of the urban future are what Matthew Gandy (2014, p. 211) calls "counterdystopian" projections, which "present an avant-garde response to climate uncertainty as a space for reinventing relations between society and nature." Gandy (2014, p. 213) cites imaginative renderings of London in 2090 adapted to a permanently flooded state, which he says contains "an optimism almost entirely lacking in much contemporary environmental discourse about human capacity to create a better future." Likewise, visions of "sunken cities," according to Paul Dobraszcyzyk (2017), contain both dystopian and utopian representations of urban life submerged by the forces of climate change, specifically rising sea levels. The broader implication, Dobraszcyzyk (2017, p. 885) notes, is that "the imagination of urban futures is not simply a game to be played—a diversion from life in the real world—but rather an essential way in which we can cultivate resilience for ourselves, not in order to wallow in pessimism or justify inaction, but rather the opposite—to nourish mental lives that *resist* the increasingly polarizing political and social discourses that are emerging out of radically uncertain urban futures and the threat of catastrophe." Thus, while acknowledging that the threats from climate change are real and serious, these projections question the assumption that the future is our enemy, and instead envision a better version of human society emerging from the ruins of the contemporary city.

6. Ways Forward

If engaging critically with the urban future is now more urgent than ever, we believe the time is right to look back to key moments of urban history for conceptual resources and analytical tools that can help make sense of the current conjuncture. We began by highlighting the consensus that the global future is an urban future, and that this future presents a pressing

problem. Whether or not these perspectives are accurate, they do point to an emerging reality—that the urban future is everywhere, so to speak. Departing from this observation, we outlined an approach for conceptualizing the "future" as an historically specific cultural horizon that defines how societies organize themselves and their institutions, and one that is inextricably bound up with the history of urbanization and with the "city" as both idea and spatial form. We argued that it is worth taking into account the history of urban future-thinking and future-making, and considering how that history might inform contemporary debates in human geography and related disciplines about the uncertain future of cities. We then shifted to a wide-ranging discussion of historically influential ways in which the future has shaped cities and urban life. This discussion was organized into three thematic sections that correspond to recurring themes in the history of the urban imagination, and that continue to resonate today.

In conclusion, we would like to return to the four qualifiers that were mentioned briefly at the outset, as they point to possible ways forward. The first is that the themes elaborated here are by no means exhaustive or absolute. Our focus on idealization, capitalization, and securitization was motivated by our sense that these processes remain of fundamental importance to the contemporary urban imagination, but we are aware that our account is partial and incomplete. With this in mind, we hope that this article will inspire others to consider the wide spectrum of alternative or additional future visions that were not discussed, or to reorganize (and, in so doing, reconceptualize) the ones that were.

If our conceptual framework does have potential utility beyond what has been presented here, we want to suggest that may be for analyzing the ways in which idealization, capitalization, and securitization relate to one another. Although the structure of the article might give the impression that these are independent, unrelated processes, we encourage others to track the moments in which they intersect, sometimes working toward the same objective and sometimes working at cross-purposes. For example, the process by which the urban future is embedded in capitalist political-economic orders hinges on the notion that the human condition can be improved through interventions in urban space. Likewise, the imperative to govern the city in anticipation of future threats draws its ideological power from the fact that the urban future is both morally and economically valuable. Yet efforts to protect the city against undesirable eventualities can also turn out to be unprofitable and may indeed work against values integral to the notion that a better city will lead to a better world. In other words, there is more work to be done in examining both convergences and divergences in processes of idealization, capitalization, and securitization in the domain of the urban future.

Although we stand by our claim that the "urban" and the "future" are tightly linked, we find it equally important to stress that this link is by no means necessary or automatic. Many contemporary urbanists treat the urban condition as a foregone conclusion for the planet, and in doing so elevate their authority and expertise while rendering obsolete other rich traditions of thought and practice. In contrast, we urge urbanists to question the teleological inevitability of the "urban" and to remain open to future visions emanating from outside their purview—that is, from beyond the urban world, however defined. We believe this is especially necessary at a historical moment in which the urban future is radically uncertain, given ecological and epidemiological concerns of a global nature—concerns that force us to contend with the possibility that the city as we know it may be threatening the future survival of humanity.

Finally, while our focus has been on grand visions of the urban future, we want to end by reminding our readers that other scales and perspectives are of fundamental importance. We do not wish to romanticize ideas emanating from the everyday, the quotidian, or the grassroots—they can sometimes be quite unsavory—or to treat them as categorically distinct from the realm of governmental management and capitalist speculation—politicians and capitalists are human actors, too, after all. We do, however, want to suggest that the truly transformative ideas, which contemporary urban society so desperately needs, are unlikely to come from the privileged and the powerful—those who got us into this mess in the first place!—but rather from those whose voices have been silenced and whose existence has been marginalized. While we have sought to offer critical resources for grappling with the urban imagination by returning to the historical record, we urge others to advance this pursuit by engaging with the archive of future visions that have been willfully ignored, woefully unappreciated, or systematically erased.

Looking ahead, we suspect the urban future will remain a strategic terrain of social and political struggle and we hope that this paper will support the efforts of urban scholars, practitioners, activists, and citizens alike to engage—critically, creatively, and constructively—with the city of tomorrow, today. This will involve grappling not only with the presence of historical processes that have continually shaped the urban imagination, but also with the emerging contours of the future visions presenting unfolding—some of which are potentially promising, while others are downright troubling. By taking stock of both historical perspectives and contemporary possibilities, we can learn to better understand the imaginary and material processes that bring cities into being, and perhaps even how to shape them in widely beneficial and truly inclusionary ways.

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