

The next city and complex adaptive systems

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Abstract. Urban futures are typically conceptualized as starting anew; an urban future is usually represented as a quest for an ideal state, replacing the status quo with visionary statement about ‘better’ futures. Repeatedly, propositions reinvent the way we live, work and play. The major urban innovations for the changing cityscape from the last 100 years, however, have opportunistically taken advantage of unprecedented technical developments in infrastructure rather than be drawn from architectural inventions in their right, such as telecommunications, services, utilities, point-to-point rapid transit including the elevator. Howard’s Garden City therefore presaged the suburb, just as Le Corbusier et al proposed the erasure of significant sections of inner city Barcelona and Paris to replace them with the newly contrived towers; the city reformed as the significantly more mobile and dense ‘Ville Radieuse’. More recently Masdar emerged from virgin sand and Milton Keynes from pristine pasture, serving as counterpoints to the paradigm of erasure and rebuild. Despite all these advances in technology and science, little has changed in the paradigm of urban form; the choices we have today are largely restricted to the suburban house or the apartment in the tower. Should the “next city” offer an alternative vision for the future, and what new design processes are required to realize the next city?

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