

# Utopian Urbanism in the Anthropocene

Ben Small + Gabby Henrie, BAs (almost)

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# Welcome to Nowhere

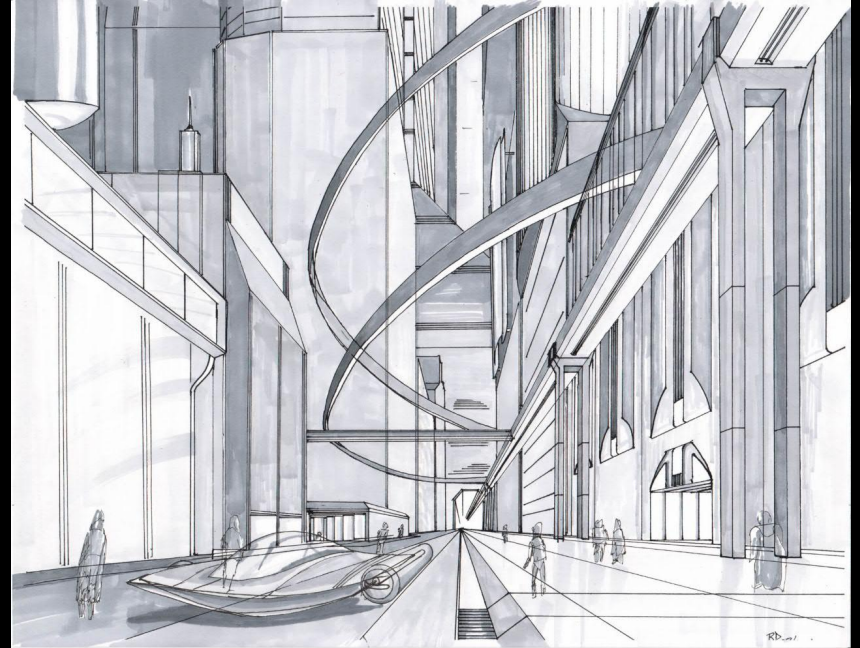
- Utopia from the greek *ou* for “not” and *topos* for “place.”
- Eutopia, a homophone in English from the greek *eu* for “good.”



Odysseus and the Lotus Eaters,  
Wikipedia

# Concrete utopias in the anthropocene

- Cities: utopias or dystopias?
- From the mind, through tangible designs and policies, to the physical plane.
- Anthropocene: concept of the world as fundamentally shaped by humans.



Rob Devine

# Utopian Urbanism in the Anthropocene

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# I. A brief history of utopian urbanism

1. City Beautiful & Progressive era utopias
2. High modernist urbanism
3. Urban Renewal: Backlash against utopia
4. Neoliberal/post-utopian cities
5. New directions?

# 19th century cities



Rapid industrialization  
and urbanization

→ increasing  
congestion, chaos, and  
social conflict in cities

← Chicago in the late 1800s

# City Beautiful & Progressive Era Utopias

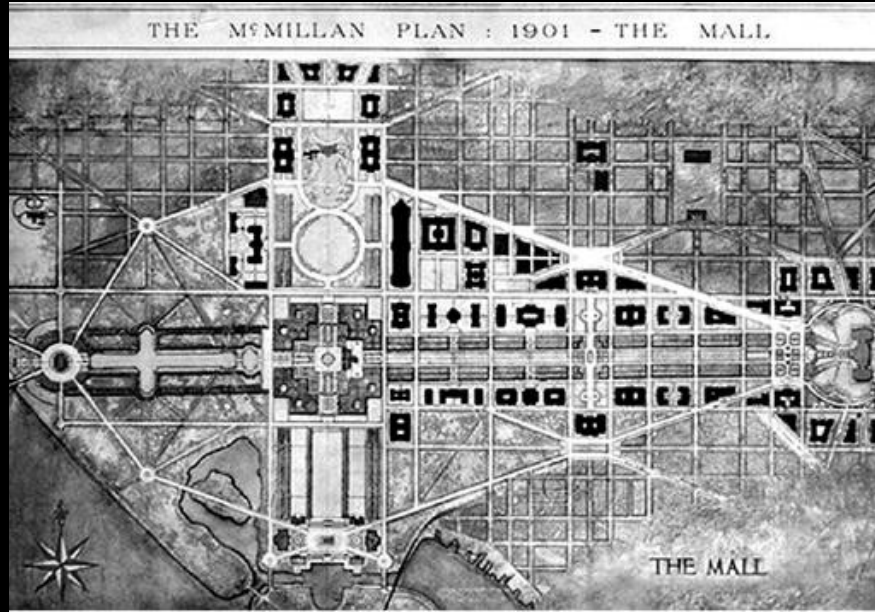


- ~1890s-1910s
- Grand, stately, neoclassical architecture
- Meant instill civic virtue (lots of libraries, museums, city halls)

1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago



# City Beautiful, cont.



Burnham's 1901 plan for Washington  
DC



Old Penn Station, NYC



# The Modernist Urban Utopia

- Great faith in Progress
- Technological utopianism: better living through innovation and design
- High density, linear, efficient, rationalization of space



Le Corbu's 1922 "Contemporary City"

“....only architecture and city planning can provide the exact prescription for [society’s] ills...The house that can be built for the modern man (and the city too), a magnificently disciplined machine, can bring back the liberty of the individual—at present crushed out of existence—to each and every member of society.”

-Le Corbusier

# Backlash against Urban Renewal



Slum clearance, Chicago



1973 protest against slum clearance in NE Portland to make way for Emanuel Hospital.

# 1989: The end of utopia?



- Conflation of 20th century utopianism and totalitarianism
  - Russell Jacoby (2005) calls this a “false conflation”
- Fall of Berlin Wall



# Cities after the “death” of utopia



Fortress architecture in pioneer square?

(Right) Frank Gehry's 1984 hollywood public library—which Mike Davis calls “the most menacing library ever built” →





← The Mall of America: a “degenerate utopia”?



# Toward new utopias?



New Urbanist town plan



Rendering of Masdar Eco-city, Abu Dhabi



# III. The Anthropocene: Revisited

- Change in Earth systems resulting from human behavior such as fossil fuel consumption.
- Impacts range from climate change to resource scarcity and social conflict.



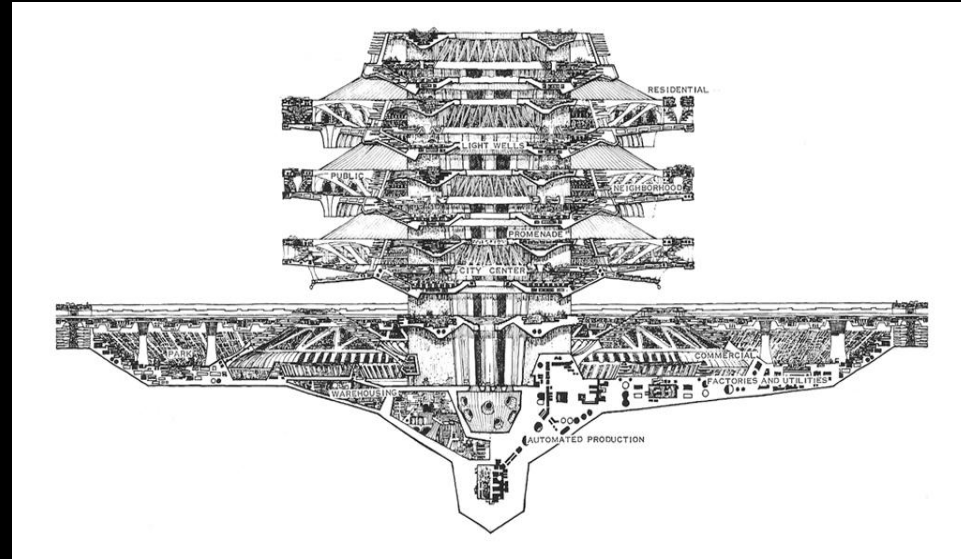
# Unprecedented Challenges + Solutions

- Unprecedented challenges require unprecedented (read: radical, normative) solutions.
- Saliency of urban focus, yet there is no silver bullet.
- Utopianism is about the ability to look beyond what *is* (current material/ideological paradigm) and envision a fundamentally different and better future.



# Utopian Urbanism in the Anthropocene

- "Utopia has been discredited, it is necessary to rehabilitate it. Utopia is never realized and yet it is indispensable to stimulate change" - Henri Lefebvre (1991)
- Utopian Urbanism as response to Dystopian Anthropocene.



# Discussion Questions

- What should inform urbanism in the Anthropocene? (What should the priorities of urban planning in the Anthropocene be?)
- Is utopian urbanism in the anthropocene a legitimate hope for progress or merely a method for survival?
- How might the cities of today be adapted to become more resilient to the pressures of the Anthropocene? What current trends in urbanism should be (dis)continued?
- How might urban planning become a more inclusive process informed by community sourced concerns and visions for urban change?

# Images

## Part I:

1. "Chicago in the Late 1800s": <http://publishing.cdlib.org/ucpressebooks/view?docId=ft4779n9pn:chunk.id=d0e1245:doc.view=print>
2. "Burnham's 1901 plan for Washington DC": [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/McMillan\\_Plan.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/McMillan_Plan.jpg)
3. "Old Penn Station": [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania\\_Station\\_\(1910%E2%80%931963\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pennsylvania_Station_(1910%E2%80%931963))
4. "1893 Columbian Exposition" <http://www.radford.edu/rbarris/Women%20and%20art/amerwom05/maincourtcolumnbianexpo72.jpg>
5. "Le Corbu's 1922 *Contemporary City*" [https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4109/5015467532\\_c669ba524e\\_z.jpg](https://c1.staticflickr.com/5/4109/5015467532_c669ba524e_z.jpg)
6. "Slum clearance, Chicago" <https://www.flickr.com/photos/uicdigital/7803412570/>
7. "1973 protest...Emanuel Hospital" [http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical\\_records/popup.cfm?doc\\_ID=0004CBF8-16F2-1ECD-A42A80B05272006C](http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/popup.cfm?doc_ID=0004CBF8-16F2-1ECD-A42A80B05272006C)
8. "There is no Alternative" <http://i1.wp.com/www.scriptonitedaily.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/th11.jpg>
9. "Frank Gehry's 1984 Hollywood Public Library" <http://millenniumhollywood.net/2013/04/25/frank-gehry-the-hollywood-public-library/>
10. "Mall of America" [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a5/Mall\\_of\\_America-2005-05-29.jpg/1280px-Mall\\_of\\_America-2005-05-29.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a5/Mall_of_America-2005-05-29.jpg/1280px-Mall_of_America-2005-05-29.jpg)
11. "New Urbanist Town Plan" <http://www.trbimg.com/img-517858c6/turbine/bs-md-co-crossroads-development-20130424-001/600/600x431>
12. "Masdar City" <http://www.fosterandpartners.com/media/Projects/1515/img0.jpg>