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A Country of Cities: A Manifesto for an Urban America: Vishaan Chakrabarti Metropolis Books, 2013 261 pages, 150 images \$29.95 (hardcover)

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nonarchitecture. The role played by the Chamber of Architects in this period represents both an attempt to establish architects' control over urban development and a political agency mediating the politicization of squatters.

The third section deals with the recent past and analyzes the post-1980 era in three chapters. The first of these (chap. 7) examines the architectural scene through the new building types for the rising activities of tourism and consumption. Incidentally, as the authors underline, a third activity that gradually came to the foreground after the 1980s was worshipping; this made mosque building a significant field of architectural work, especially during the reign of the AKP in the 2000s. However, the authors' discussion on mosque architecture is curiously limited to the three paradigmatic examples of the Kocatepe Mosque (monumental "neo-Ottomanism"), the Parliament Mosque (contemporary "non-traditional" approach) and the Karakaş Mosque (not imitating but literally following the traditional mosque architecture of brick and masonry). This limitation leaves out the wide range of mosques that were commissioned by the emergent devout bourgeoisie and displayed a plural architectural vocabulary in the last fifteen years. Nevertheless, the authors do a very good job presenting the recent dynamics of urbanization, the problems raised by neoliberal development, and its reliance on the production of urban space. One critique that could be posed here is about the depiction of the urban effects of globalization, which is limited to the major cities. Since the 1980s, Anatolian towns went through different development processes: while some of them (such as Kayseri and Gaziantep) developed individual ties with the global market networks and were later supported by the

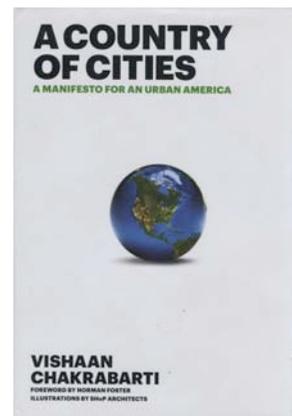
AKP government, some of the cities (Adana, Mersin, and especially Diyarbakır) were particularly affected by the predicaments of the Kurdish insurrection and witnessed a new wave of urban poverty much more severe than that of the postwar urban migration.

Despite the critical points I raised, this is a very well written text, easy to read for even nonarchitects since the technical and stylistic discussions are kept to a befitting amount. Bozdoğan and Akcan contribute not only to the Turkish architectural history but also to the discussions on modernism in architecture. The book is well beyond a descriptive overview of modern Turkish architecture and it provides sound discussions for architectural historians as well as social scientists interested in the built environment and the wider questions regarding modernity and modernization.

Bülent Batuman studied architecture at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey. He received his PhD in History and Theory of Art and Architecture from State University of New York–Binghamton. He is the Chair of the Department of Urban Design and Landscape Architecture at Bilkent University in Ankara and teaches urban design and visual politics of modern urbanism. His research areas include social production and politics of built environment, history and theory of modern architecture and urbanism, urban politics, and critical social theory.

Note

- ¹ S. Bozdoğan, *Modernism and Nation Building: Turkish Architectural Culture in the Early Republic* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001); E. Akcan, *Architecture in Translation: Germany, Turkey, and the Modern House* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).



A Country of Cities: A Manifesto for an Urban America
Vishaan Chakrabarti
Metropolis Books, 2013
261 pages, 150 images
\$29.95 (hardcover)

This book is a polemic in favor of "hyperdensity" or the dense "city," which author Vishaan Chakrabarti defines as at least 30 dwelling units per acre, which, in turn, he describes as the lower threshold for an effective subway or rapid transit system. Halfway measures such as relatively low-density New Urbanist communities, light rail without vast increases in the density of the surrounding fabric, or solar panels on suburban houses are not for him. He argues that hyperdensity is the solution to a host of problems, including "economic stagnation, our rising seas, our spiraling health care costs, our vulnerability to petro-dictators and our free-fall into a sprawling national deficit."

In the book, Chakrabarti, an architect and partner at SHoP Architects in New York and director of Columbia University's Center for Urban Real Estate, starts by setting out a history of what he considers our country's decline into dysfunctional, low-density urbanism. He reports that this has happened in earnest since the 1920s. He blames a deep-seated American antiurban attitude and a lot of bad public

policy, notably what he considers to be enormous subsidies for suburban development, for example, federal dollars for highway construction and the mortgage interest deduction on the federal income tax, which he says disproportionately favors suburban homeowners. He proposes abolishing the mortgage interest deduction, reducing spending on roads, and increasing spending on transit.

Chakrabarti's book is perhaps the most polemical entry into a growing literature describing or celebrating dense cities, including Alan Ehrenhalt's *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City*, Edward Glaeser's *The Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener and Healthier*, and Richard Florida's *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure Community and Everyday Life*.¹ Chakrabarti's book includes a great deal of information compiled from a great many sources. The text is written in an easy, breezy way and is accompanied by a set of compelling graphics. All in all, it is a skillfully assembled package, and it will be convincing for many readers who live in dense cities or who would like to.

For those who don't share Chakrabarti's enthusiasm for the dense city or his obvious approval of liberal Democrats like Barack Obama and dislike of conservative Republicans like George Bush, there will be a lot of red flags. For example, take the rosy picture of high-density living in Manhattan painted by architect Norman Foster in his introduction when he describes how he can walk from his apartment overlooking Central Park to join his friend Vishaan at a café on Madison Avenue in fifteen minutes. While this arrangement works out very well for a certain café society that lives and works in Midtown Manhattan, it fails to account for the fact that many of the employees of that café are likely to have to endure

very long and crowded subway and bus rides into Manhattan because they can't afford to house their family anywhere nearby. In fact, the New York urban area has some of the longest commute times in the country.

Chakrabarti would like to paint suburban development as fairly recent and typically American because only then can he argue that it was caused by specific policies that tilted the playing field in favor of the suburbs. But anyone looking for a minute at Paris or London in the eighteenth or nineteenth century will recognize that in each case the tiny medieval city exploded outward through suburban development at constantly lower densities, a development still clearly visible in each city's place names, for example, Faubourg Saint-Germain or Ladbroke Grove. The case for American exceptionalism is also weakened considerably by the fact that suburban trends have been similar in countries without American income tax subsidies and that low-density suburbs are springing up around virtually every affluent city in the world. Chakrabarti's 30 dwelling units per acre threshold is today seen in only a few small patches of urban territory anywhere in the affluent world, in Manhattan, for example, but not even in New York City as a whole, which is by far the densest large city in the country. There is also the obvious historical problem that one of the greatest periods of rising prosperity in the United States occurred from the 1940s to the early 1970s, a period that also saw the greatest urban decentralization. The book even trots out the long-discredited contention that the demise of streetcars in America was largely due to a giant conspiracy by General Motors and other automobile interests.

The book contains numerous sweeping claims. For example, the author asserts that city dwellers are healthier than their suburban counterparts, that infrastructure in

dense cities is cheaper per capita than in the suburbs, and that city dwellers of any income level have a smaller carbon footprint than their suburban counterparts. Very few of these highly dubious assertions are supported by any real data, and in some cases they defy common sense. In addition, the clarity of the graphs and charts in the book is heavily undercut by sloppy preparation. In many cases there is little indication where the data come from, and in some cases where the source is given, it appears that the data have been badly misinterpreted. For example, the label on a chart on page 80 would have us believe that residents of Houston use nearly eight times as much energy as those of Hong Kong. However, these data were collected over fifteen years ago by Australian scholars Newman and Kenworthy, and their chart was clearly labeled to show that it was not about energy use per capita, only about gasoline consumption per capita, which is a completely different proposition.

Chakrabarti's policy suggestions are likely to inspire even more skepticism. He proposes hyperdensity as a silver bullet solution to a great many problems. Many readers will have observed the remarkable tendency of silver bullet solutions throughout history to backfire. After all, one of the most important silver bullet solutions to urban land use was Ebenezer Howard's Garden City idea, one of the chief culprits in the suburbanization that Chakrabarti deplors. Architects, from Le Corbusier and his Radiant City to Frank Lloyd Wright and his Broadacre City, have been particularly prone to this kind of physical determinism in formulating silver bullet solutions to social, political, and economic problems.

One of the key policy recommendations in the book is the repeal of the mortgage interest deduction and the use of this money for new

infrastructure. There is no doubt that repealing the mortgage interest deduction might go a long way to making the housing market more rational, and spending considerably more on infrastructure is something that many people across the ideological political spectrum could embrace. But the idea that the deduction necessarily favors single-family houses is not tenable. If most Americans chose to live in condos in dense cities, the mortgage interest deduction would overwhelmingly favor them. And the “savings” from repealing the deduction is no real savings. It is merely redistribution. Every dollar “saved” for use by the federal government is a dollar lost in income to the taxpayers. And any savings would be unlikely to go to new infrastructure when there is such a large national debt. In any case, it would provide only one-seventh of the \$3.5 trillion that Chakrabarti would like to spend, all of the rest coming from what would be essentially new taxes.

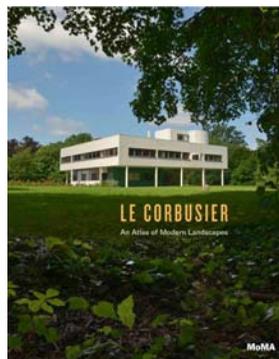
Polemics are useful, and a strong polemic in favor of dense cities could be a powerful tool in alerting a broad public to the fact that central cities are now safer and more pleasant places to live than they have been at any time in the last several centuries. Chakrabarti’s defense of the Asian city and his clear-eyed view of the problems of old European cities are all fine contributions to the urban literature. Many readers will appreciate the examples of what he considers good urbanism and would have liked more. Unfortunately, the real merits of the book are undercut by the way claims are overstated and data misinterpreted. Even so, it is a book worth reading and one that will get a lot of people thinking about urban choices and possibilities, and that is undoubtedly a good thing.

Robert Bruegmann is a Historian and Critic of the built environment and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of

Art History, Architecture, and Urban Planning at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is the author of numerous books and articles, including *The Architects and the City: Holabird & Roche of Chicago, 1880–1918* (1998), *Sprawl: A Compact History* (2005), and *The Architecture of Harry Weese* (2010). His main areas of research are architectural and urban history, landscape design, and historic preservation.

Note

- 1 Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Great Inversion and the Future of the American City* (New York: Knopf, 2012); Edward Glaeser, *Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier* (New York: Penguin, 2011); and Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: and How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).



Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes

Jean-Louis Cohen, Editor
The Museum of Modern Art, 2013
402 pages, illustrated
\$75.00 (hardcover)

Le Corbusier: An Atlas of Modern Landscapes accompanied the exhibition of the same name held at the Museum of Modern Art in 2013 and cocurated by Jean-Louis Cohen, Sheldon H. Solow Professor of the History of Architecture at New York University, and Barry Bergdoll, Meyer Shapiro Professor of Art History in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University and Philip Johnson Chief Curator of

Architecture and Design at MoMA from 2007 to 2013. The book is profusely illustrated with Le Corbusier’s travel photographs and sketches, design drawings, and photographs of buildings and building complexes, including a number of previously unpublished images as well as new photographs of built work commissioned from Richard Pare.

Bergdoll describes the primary ambition of these efforts: “to organize a new generation of research, analysis, and interpretation of Le Corbusier’s practice using the metaphor and, in part, the form of an atlas,” a form that serves “to recognize a profound relationship between practice and place in Le Corbusier’s life and work” (p. 19). Although the reciprocity of architecture and landscape during the twentieth century has been a prominent theme for a number of historians over the past thirty years or so, the myth of Le Corbusier as a designer of autonomous buildings set within utopian urban propositions persists in the minds of many practitioners of architecture and landscape architecture, and even certain scholars of these disciplines. Accordingly, the *Atlas* serves as more than an exhibition catalog; it is an initial foray in pursuit of the curators’ broader aims.

Just as the exhibition constituted a retrospective of the architect’s creative work, so the *Atlas* comprises a retrospective of recent Le Corbusier scholarship, much of which is translated into English for the first time. The contributors consist primarily of scholars who have been working on Le Corbusier’s oeuvre over the past twenty or more years. Their essays—often only marginally adapted to the purposes of this publication—are compiled geographically and interwoven with brief project descriptions by Cohen, whose introduction addresses themes of landscape and nature in Le Corbusier’s publications,