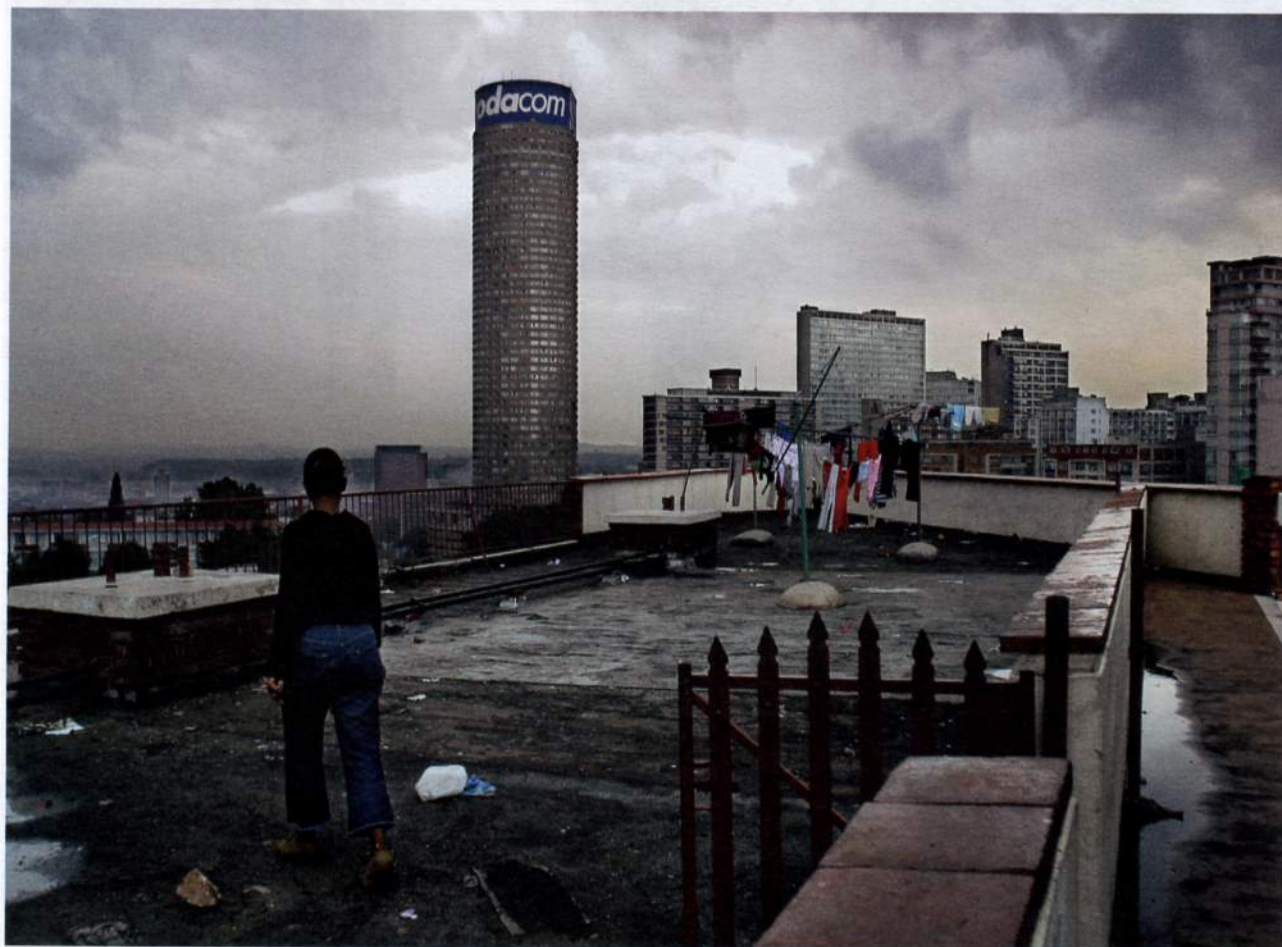


REVIEWS

CRITICISM OF BOOKS AND OTHER MEDIA



ENDLESS CITY A gloomy portrait in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Book

Big Thoughts For a New Era By Josh Stephens

The Endless City

Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic, eds.
Phaidon Press

THE ENDLESS CITY		
121	10%	4%
18,000	14%	23.7%
14%	50%	85%
19m	47.5x	58%
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24.7%		2.5x
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PHAI	13%	21%
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After 10,000 years, we have reached a quorum.

A few months ago, a baby was born in Dhaka or a migrant arrived in Lagos, and we became a predominately urban species. Fifty percent of the world's 3.2 billion people now live in cities. That percentage will rise to 75 by 2050 as the world's total population increases by nearly one-third.

Humanity may take generations to appreciate the enormity of this occasion, but *The Endless City* is looking ahead, attempting to identify the challenges of this new era and foment new ways of thinking before things get out of hand, whether in the extralegal slums of the developing world, the stagnant cores of Europe, or the gloaming into which all cities

continue to sprawl. Success depends on understanding the "connections between transport and social justice, between public space and tolerance, and between good governance and good cities." Failure will mean strife, poverty and marginalization for billions.

The Endless City would seem an audacious undertaking except that it, like cities themselves, is a collective enterprise. Edited by Ricky Burdett and Deyan Sudjic, it derives credibility from the Urban Age Project, a series of conferences sponsored by the London School of Economics and Deutsche Bank, and represents a semblance of consensus among thousands of (mostly Western) experts. It's a vaguely suspicious — even arrogant — provenance, but perhaps an appropriate one

under the circumstances.

As an object, *The Endless City* is no less enormous than its topic. Better suited for the coffee table than the bedside table, its 500 pages comprise both banal analysis and remarkable insights into the global archipelago where the world's wealth, power and cultural production reside. Through an even-handed slate of essays, photo essays, graphics and portentous trivia, Burdett and Sudjic argue that, henceforth, history will be indistinguishable from urban history: The global economy is an urban economy; global politics are urban politics; cities, not countries, are the "organizing units of the new global order."

Six chapters are devoted to disparate case-study cities — New York, Shanghai, London, Mexico City, Johannesburg and Berlin — that illustrate the trends of the "urban age." Each provides plenty of fodder for grand theorizing, but ultimately, they only reinforce the sense that every city is *sui generis*. Comparative analysis of cities within a single region might be useful, but it's unclear exactly how Shanghai can learn from Berlin.

The second half of *The Endless City* assumes a more general perspective, with 14 essays by luminaries such as Richard Sennett, Rem Koolhaas, Saskia Sassen and Enrique Peñalosa, who expound everything from office space to climate change. Though disjointed and sometimes redundant, these essays, taken as a whole, effectively argue that no one urban problem is subordinate to any other. (The customary academic bombast, neologisms and malapropisms, however — "linkages," "typology," "intervention," "morphology," "densification," etc. — obscure the overall message.)

The Endless City concludes with a manifesto for a new "agenda that must empower people, with more integrated and transformative programs and policies, through a heightened awareness of the physical 'place', with a realignment of politics and an infusion of new partners." Those partners include universities, corporations, designers, political leaders and other "city builders [who] cut across disciplines." Who will assume the mantle of philosopher-king and how they will make sense of such "complex and interdependent" challenges remains to be seen.

If the founding residents of Çatal Hüyük and Jericho could see us now, they would surely wish us good luck and godspeed. We're going to need it.

Book

Urban Identities

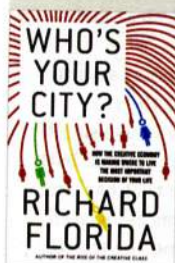
By Edward Featherstone

In his newest offering, *Who's Your City?*, superstar urban economist Richard Florida explains that each of us faces three cardinal decisions in our lives: what career to pursue, where to pursue it and with whom. Most of us devote enormous mental energy to the first and third, but the second is more often than not an unconsidered byproduct, the

result of following a significant other or pursuing a great new job opportunity in a city far afield. Florida contends that we need to deliberate more over our choice of location, especially given that everything else could go awry. As bad as it is to lose a job or suffer a breakup, both are "substantially worse if you find yourself in a place that offers few options in the job market or the mating market," he writes. "It's exponentially easier to get back on your feet when your

Who's Your City?: How The Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life

Richard Florida
Basic Books



location has a vibrant economy ... or a lot of eligible single people."

A significant departure for Florida, *Who's Your City?* is a self-help book with wide-ranging discussion of location's importance in our lives. Appropriately, the book is long on theory and short on specific recommendations. Locations, personalities and life goals vary enough

Each of us faces three cardinal decisions in our lives: what career to pursue, where to pursue it and with whom.

that no one place will fit two people for exactly the same reasons. So even though he covers some of the cities best suited for "The Young and Restless," those "Married with Children" and empty-

nesters, the book aims rather to give the reader the "mental framework" necessary to find the right location, which, Florida says, "can be a hedge against life's downsides."

Florida first says that, even in the globalized world, location remains important. In no uncertain language, Florida rejects Thomas Friedman and his "death of distance" ilk. If the world were really getting flatter, Florida argues, economic output would spread away from the traditional urban centers. But the opposite is true: A greater proportion of output is occurring in fewer places. "By almost any measure," Florida writes, "the international economic landscape is not at all flat. Place continues to matter — a lot." Behind this phenomenon, we're told, is the economic "multiplier effect" of smart people working and living in close proximity, who then share and develop innovative ideas at a more rapid pace.

Unfortunately, Florida has mangled and misinterpreted Friedman's titular concept, overstating the contrast to his own "spiky world" where higher output peaks emanate from global cities. Friedman at no point claims in *The World Is Flat* that location is unimportant, only that advances in technology and transportation, together with geopolitical shifts, have divorced output and opportunity from the geographic determinism of yesteryear when coal, deep water ports and heavy tariffs ruled the economic roost. Competitive advantage now relies less on superior access to natural resources and more on human talent, information and innovation — all of which, Florida shows, have a tendency to cluster in specific cities. Thankfully, Michael Porter, a Harvard Business School professor, has summarized this "location paradox" in a way that harmonizes the two theories: "The more things are mobile," he claims, "the more decisive location becomes."

Florida goes on to show that this "clustering effect" underpins the vast geographic sorting currently underway, in which the highly educated and the highest paying jobs funnel toward a small subset of cities. This growing concentration, Florida hints, will ultimately wreak havoc on job markets, real estate prices and population demographics in second- and third-tier