

Tony Fry
Re-Making Cities: An Introduction to Urban Metrofitting
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Re-Making Cities: An Introduction to Urban Metrofitting is the latest publication by acclaimed author Tony Fry, who has contributed significantly to the field of urban design over recent decades. Having reviewed Fry's last book – *City Futures in the Age of a Changing Climate* – it was exciting for me to explore his latest thesis on the challenge of urban design within the context of sustainability and resilience.

An initial inspection of the book reveals an immense depth and theoretical richness, which the introduction contextualises in an effective manner, providing a compelling case for the intellectual focus and urgency of the text. Foremost among these justifications is the recognition that whilst cities lie at the epicentre of habitation, their very existence is threatened by the destructive potential of numerous and often connected threats within our risk society: from climate change and migration to food security and conflict. However, grappling with the future of cities requires us to recognise several key points. Firstly, whilst undoubtedly laudable, current ideas and practices focusing on the smart, liveable, sustainable and resilient aspects of urban environments may not equip us for the magnitude of change from the aforementioned threats. Secondly, thinking about the challenge of conceptual urban design necessitates an appreciation of situated context – a recognition that cities vary in numerous respects, from scale and degree of functionality to environmental and political setting.

In taking these arguments forward, Fry is clear about the need to detach ourselves from any notion of pursuing an instrumental technical exercise, instead advocating the need to rethink the very identity and purpose of a city. In a simultaneously distressing and refreshing way, architecture, planning and urban design are held up as relatively ineffective for coping with the dynamism and complexity of the city. Accordingly, 'metrofitting' is introduced as a means of framing thinking and a way of remaking which avoids prescriptive templates and specified practices, instead focusing on redirective, reparative and reconstructive action in a move to transform what relationally exists. In a provocative yet sound way, metrofitting is a direct attack on the viability of promoting sustainability as a means of furthering the benefits of modernity. Equally, there is great merit in recognising the complexity of cities and acknowledging our insufficient understanding of these environments.

In the first of two substantive parts, Fry focuses attention on addressing contexts of change, using eight chapters to examine the limits of how we see cities today. In so doing, the reader is propelled into a series of critical debates which nicely contextualise the place and role of metrofitting. Whilst a short review cannot do justice to the wealth of his arguments, Fry provides an excellent discourse on the need to move away from viewing the city solely as incrementally designed and constructed over time, to also appreciating it as a designing event itself. Exploring this issue further, the reader is afforded an enlightening insight into both the contemporary forces of transformation (logistics and resource proximity, economic events, religion and others) as well as relationally connected determinants (mega-regions and geo-political considerations) and the challenges of dealing with these in the remaking of cities. Crucially, an analysis of the role and importance of historical contingency in shaping contemporary cities is included and these windows into ancient and colonial influences provide helpful insights into futural considerations of space and power. Fry's arguments offer a sound grounding for the final three chapters of part 1, which take the reader into the world of new imaginaries – new ways of thinking about the evolution of cities, or in some cases because of the impacts of climate change, their inevitable demise. Importantly 'rather than these imaginaries being disconnected from existing circumstances, they have to be created out of them' (p. 109), possibly one of the most poignant remarks of the text, in full recognition of the globalised and interconnected nature of the challenge that confronts humanity. In concluding part 1, the statement that sustainability

is failing is met with a legitimate call for the academy to think and act in ways that offer a viable future for humanity.

In part 2, Fry explores the potentiality of metrofitting as a means of addressing the futural challenges that cities will face. This narrative is fluidly constructed through an exploration of different contexts of action – an appreciation of the power of remaking the city ‘not as it was but as it needs to be’ (p. 133). An evaluation of significant planning challenges for cities is accompanied by a clear appreciation of the barriers of embedded professional perceptions and practices in architecture, planning and urban design, many of which are centred on the ‘dialectic of sustainment’ and a value of space over time. In an exploration of metrofitting, *habitus* and time, the reader is advised that metrofitting can only gain the agency required for transformation if we face up to and dispense with current unsustainable practices that constitute the city. For a rethinking of such scale, Fry rightly explores the pivotal role of education and learning in this process, and illustrates that current mainstream Western education (with few exceptions) ‘has failed to unlock the intellectual and creative potential of the majority of school students’ (p. 153). This may be viewed as distressing, given that these and subsequent generations will be faced with the challenge for radically rethinking the ways that we negotiate space and time. To illustrate the potential for metrofitting, Fry provides case studies of two very different cities: Cincinnati and New Cairo, illustrating key arguments from throughout the text. Whilst reiterating the challenges of dealing with place-specific challenges, Fry also demonstrates very clearly the commonalities of challenges with other urban settings, and provides excellent syntheses of workshop discussions on the concepts of risk and resilience in the context of the city.

Overall, *Re-Making Cities* is a theoretically rich and compelling read which takes the reader on a thought-provoking journey through discussion on the future of cities. The intended intellectual contribution of the book is made very clear and the structure allows for a clear narrative whilst retaining a comprehensive critical edge. Aside from its immediate value to researchers in planning, architecture and urban design, the arguments relate strongly to work in geography, politics, anthropology, philosophy and sociology.

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