

The City

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The City (2021) conceptualizes the modern city not as a static built environment but as a living organism embedded in a continuous and reciprocal relationship with its inhabitants. The city is understood as a form of collective memory—absorbing, structuring, and reflecting the traces, narratives, and emotions of those who move through it. In this relational perspective, urban space is never neutral; it is shaped by social practices and sustained through both individual and shared imaginaries. The perception of the city fluctuates between poles of utopia and dystopia: it can appear as a space for self-realization and appropriation, or conversely, as a fragmented, alienating system. Urban experience is framed as a performative process in which identities, spatial configurations, and narrative structures are continuously co-produced. Responsibility for the city's future lies in the present—specifically in the actions of its inhabitants, whose everyday practices continually influence the city's visual, social, and emotional fabric. The text articulates an ethical and political imperative to actively participate in shaping urban life and to acknowledge the city as a shared space of meaning, memory, and potential.

The modern city, as we know it, is indeed a gigantic man-made structure, yet on a deeper level, it remains an organic one—a living and breathing creature, if you will; it either grows and flourishes, or it withers and dies, depending on how we, its inhabitants, nurture or neglect it.

I perceive the city as a living organism, a collector, telling the stories of its people—their history, achievements, ideology, and fears—always aspiring to have its own unique character whilst constantly demanding our attention. The city never forgets; it absorbs, internalizes, and reflects the behavior of each of us. Every single person that wanders in it—whether a visitor or a resident—leaves their footprints, little pieces of their personality, traces of their existence. We provide the substance that sustains it, and the city is a passionate gatherer. It truly loves our stories; around every corner, behind each façade and through every window, in every second of the day or the night, life unfolds in its purest form, and the city delightfully experiences all of it—yet remains a trustworthy listener and stays concealed, never revealing its secrets. You can expect it to keep your secrets—unless you want your stories to be told, in which case the city serves as a blank canvas, waiting for you to leave your mark. It almost dares you to claim even the smallest corner, to carve yourself into its ever-changing fabric. So go ahead—wander around and leave your marks for others to discover. The city will embrace your gift with gratitude.

For those who dare, the city can turn into a dream fulfilled—as they see it as something inspiring, emotional, and surprising—providing them with nearly limitless possibilities for self-expression and growth, allowing them to live a prosperous life. For those who don't, the city might transform into a cold, indifferent labyrinth of concrete and glass, overwhelming them with its rationality, leaving them trapped in a suffocating, anxious existence. Though the city itself is never truly menacing but merely a mirror of our own inner selves—a reflection of our soul, if you will—it can strike us with the utmost severity at any given time if we feel threatened by it. The city needs to adapt to us as much as we need to adapt to our city. It yearns to become an integral part of our lives, and in the same way that we all are a vital part of what defines it, the city is inevitably a vital part of what defines us. We live in a close relationship with our city—a synthesis; we nurture and shape the city, and in return, it allows us to do the same. We—each and every individual roaming its streets—collectively shape our city, thus providing it with a unique visual identity and making it what it is today: whether a benevolent mother, in whose embrace we find safety, or a relentless, all-devouring behemoth.

We all bear responsibility for our actions, for it is our deeds today that will shape the city of tomorrow. It's up to us to make our city more diverse, more special, and therefore, more desirable; to define whether it is a blessing or a curse. It's up to us to create a city in which we all want to live.

So let's create—and always keep in mind: all cities are beautiful.



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Image

Alexandre Kurek, *Berlin Kreuzberg*, Germany 2017.

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