

Cornell University,
Department of Architecture
College of Architecture, Art, and Planning
ARCH 3819/5819
Tuesday 12:20 - 2:15 pm, 261 B E Sibley
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Cities and Climate Change



Aerial view, Makoko, Lagos, Nigeria. Photo by Yann Arthus-Bertrand

“The modern city wears the badges which distinguish it as a product of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Polluted rivers, a polluted atmosphere, squalid industry, vulgarity of commerce [...] a century with unequalled wealth and technology, [has resulted in] the least humane physical environment known to history. It is a problem of major importance to understand why the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have failed in the creation of a physical environment; why the physical environment has not been, and is not now, considered as a significant aspect of wealth and social justice.” Ian McHarg, 1963

How might we begin to understand the relationship between architecture and the climate crisis? How is it that as Ian McHarg noted, our physical environment has become degraded rather than enriched by processes of modernization and development? This seminar proposes a lens through which we might make sense of the multiple, complex, and entangled factors that implicate architecture with development and *growth*, understood as ever-increasing levels of material consumption. How might architecture play a role in re-thinking its own place as a key instrument of development? Some of the questions we will consider include to what extent has the ongoing extraction of materials and resources contributed to a pervasive inequality in our cities? Who are the stakeholders and how can their voices be better heard? What are ways that cities can be modified or redesigned to address social and environmental sustainability? Lastly, what new roles can we imagine and claim for design and architecture today, or how might our physical environment start to be considered as a significant aspect of wealth and social justice? We will use case studies and readings about cities both in the North (Copenhagen, Rotterdam, Venice), and the emerging megacities of the global South (Lagos, Mumbai, Jakarta).