

Growing up in a City Will Make You Unhappy
Later in Your Life.

AND:

No Urban Malaise for Millennials

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outline

Growing up in a City Will Make You Unhappy Later in Your Life

No Urban Malaise for Millennials: Regional Studies 2018

bonus: towards urban unhappiness theory

bonus2: brfss

bonus3: city misery in pictures

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What we know so far

- [my signature argument: cities are bad: aok.mooo.com]
- [i take this to extreme to push understanding]
- we know that humans are least happy in largest places
- (assuming that a country is not very poor)
- for literature review see my: “Happiness and Place: Why Life Is Better Outside of the City”
- compare to: “Triumph of the City: How Our Greatest Invention Makes Us Richer, Smarter, Greener, Healthier, and Happier” by Ed Glaeser
- he got it already wrong in the title!
- not just wrong, but he got it all upside down!

What we don't know

- don't know the effect of size of a place in childhood/adolescence on SWB later in life
- studies about migration, incl urban-rural or rural-urban are not about a place where one grew up!
- nor they focus on current urbanicity or control for it
- this study is inspired by Lederbogen et al 2011:
“City living and urban upbringing affect neural social stress processing in humans.”
- it found (like Simmel!) city unhealthy for human brain
- and added that urban upbringing damages brain

my study

- US GSS
- “Which of the categories on this card comes closest to the type of place you were living in when you were 16 years old?” and it is farm, and steps of urbanicity
- a caveat:
 - assume 16yo urbanicity is a place where a person grew up
 - actually i'd say not that likely that urbanicity will be very different at 16 from that in most of childhood/adolescence
 - others assume the same! and publish in ASR
 - sure, noisy measure, but not useless: should have some signal!

OLS of SWR: fully standardized coeff

	1	2	3
place 16yo (base: country)			
farm		0.027***	0.017**
-50k		0.004	-0.012+
50k-250k		0.006	-0.008
city sub		0.014*	-0.009
250k-		-0.013*	-0.020**
xnorcsiz (base: country):			
lt 2.5k	0.007	0.007	0.008
2.5-10k	-0.009+	-0.007	-0.002
10-50k	-0.011*	-0.008	0.000
uninc med	0.004	0.006	-0.001
uninc lrg	-0.005	-0.001	-0.011*
med sub	-0.014*	-0.010+	-0.011+
lrg sub	-0.025***	-0.017*	-0.018*
50-250k	-0.038***	-0.033***	-0.012+
gt 250k	-0.078***	-0.067***	-0.024***
usual controls	no	no	yes
N	57709	57613	51687

*** p<0.001 ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, +
p<0.1; robust std err

conclusion

- people who grew up in cities are less happy later in their lives above and beyond unhappiness associated with currently living in a city
- the negative effect of urbanicity in one's youth is about as strong statistically and practically (effect size) as effect of urbanicity of current place
- there may be a happiness benefit to growing up at a farm

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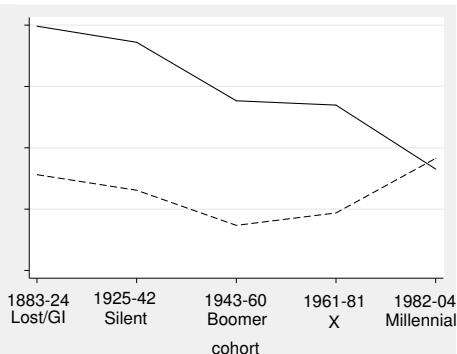
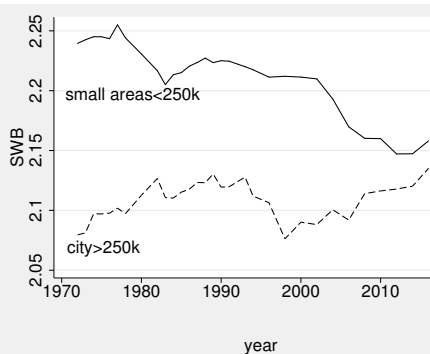
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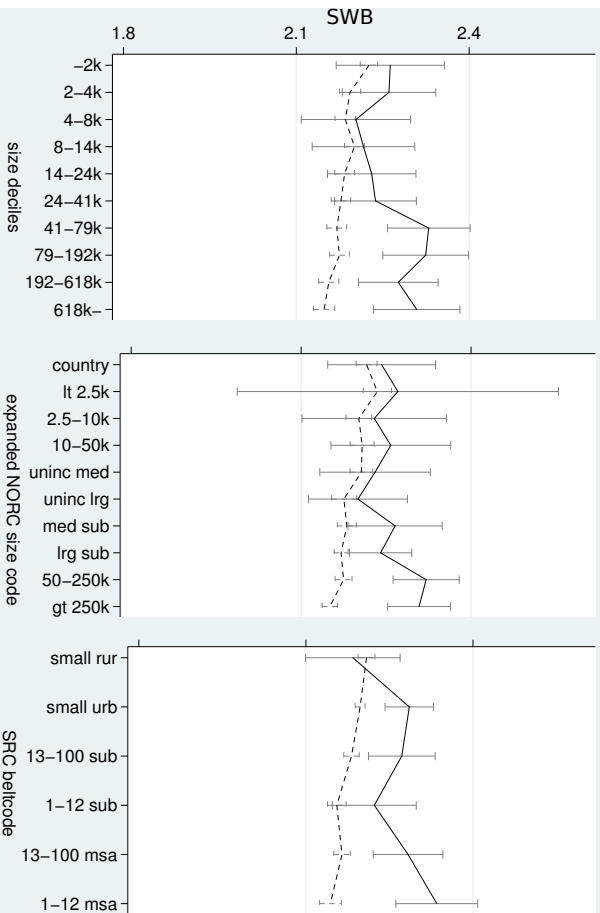
this study

- US GSS
- Millennial/genY: 1982-2004

avg SWB: cities (dashed) v smaller areas (solid)



Mediated GWR many (local) v. older (global)



conclusion

- Millennials (1982-2004) happiest in large cities
- SWB gap of genY v others in largest cities is as big as \$100k in family income!
- something wrong with Millennials! :)
- everyone else happiest in small towns and rural areas
- yet the advantage of rural living is declining:
- rural Americans are becoming less happy relative to urbanites
- published in regional studies; for this and more:
- aok.mooo.com

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why city is bad? what is the mechanism?

- unnatural to almost any life!
- bet even pigeons and rats must be city unhappy
- (can study happiness in animals, (eg ?))
- life does not belong with concrete, asphalt and glass
- yes, largest cities must be crowded by definition!
- and crowding is bad for all mammals including humans and rats (?)
- ok, bees and ants thrive in crowding, but we're different!
- city is unhealthy to human brain (???)

why? what is the mechanism?

- some of happiness killers:
 - commodification, inequality, and social comparison (eg ??)
 - overwork, rat race, consumerism, and conspicuous consumption (???)
 - also light, air, and noise pollutions
 - and information pollution (advertising!)
- and they are all centered and exemplified in cities!

my problem with economics

- it's economists like Glaeser who push urbanism most
- to them humans are rational
- and whatever humans do is good for them by definition!
- and so cities must be good, because they grow
- and since to them $\text{utility} \approx \$$, cities must be good, too:
most \$ made and spent in cities
- SWB lowest in cities? no problem! just assume that SWB is part of utility function just like pair of socks:
“happiness is a commodity in the utility function in the same way that owning a car and being healthy are” (?, p. 89).

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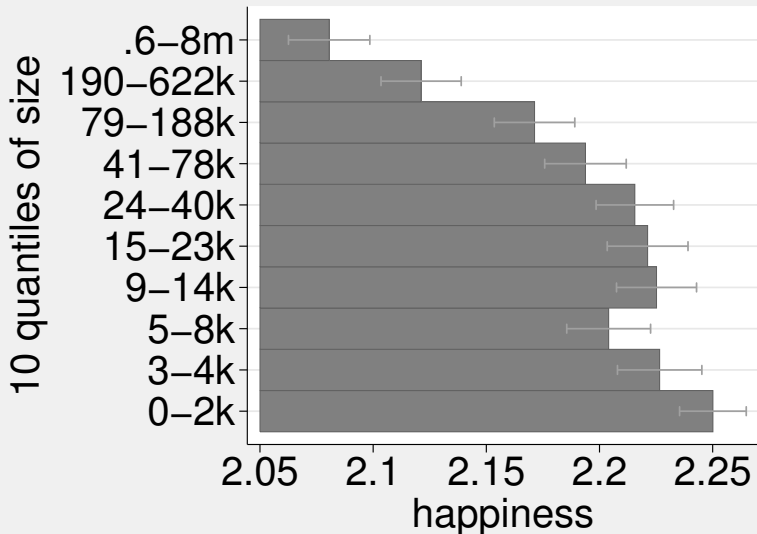
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happiness gradient smooth except 3rd decile



most miserable and happiest counties from BRFSS

county	density	happiness
St. Louis city MO	5.7k	3.18
Bronx NY	>30k	3.18
• Kings NY (Brooklyn)	>30k	3.2
Johnson KS (close to Kansas city)	1.1k	3.51
Shelby TN (some of Memphis)	1.2k	3.54
Douglas CO (borders Denver)	.3k	3.56

most succesful cities less happy that non city avg!

- avg for counties that are nonmetropolitan areas: 3.41
- Economist's Quality of Living; Mercer's Best cities
- Boston; Suffolk County MA: 3.29
- NYC; NY County (Manhattan): 3.31
- Chicago; Cook County IL: 3.39

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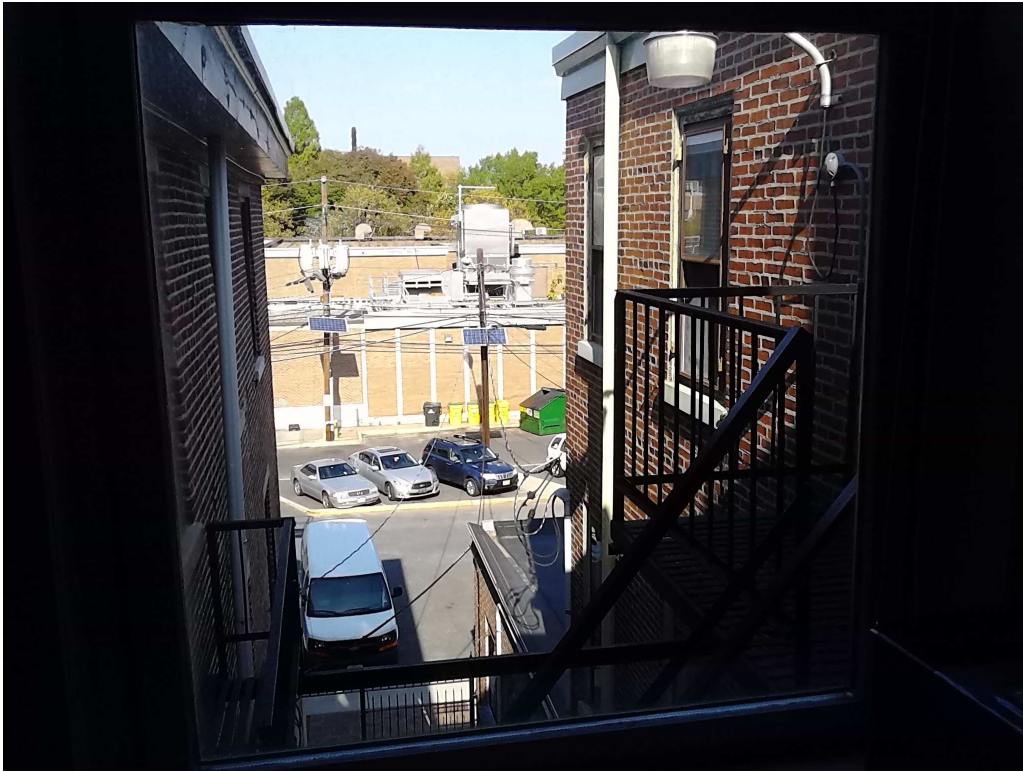


Figure 1: A book about place and cities would be incomplete without showing a place where it was created. As you can see, it is a city. Old-fashioned, red-brick, Rust Belt style built environment with some asphalt covering road and parking lot at the bottom, and power lines at the top. Now, let's try to find happiness in this picture. Views like that are arguably one reason for urban malaise.

Figure 2: Natural happiness.

(a) Jan Thomas van Ieperen: Pastoral Idyll



(b) Georges Philibert Charles Maroniez: Rural Landscape





Figure 3: Cleveland, 1960.



Figure 4: Rowhouses in Camden, New Jersey.



Figure 5: Urban sprawl, Las Vegas, Clark County NV.



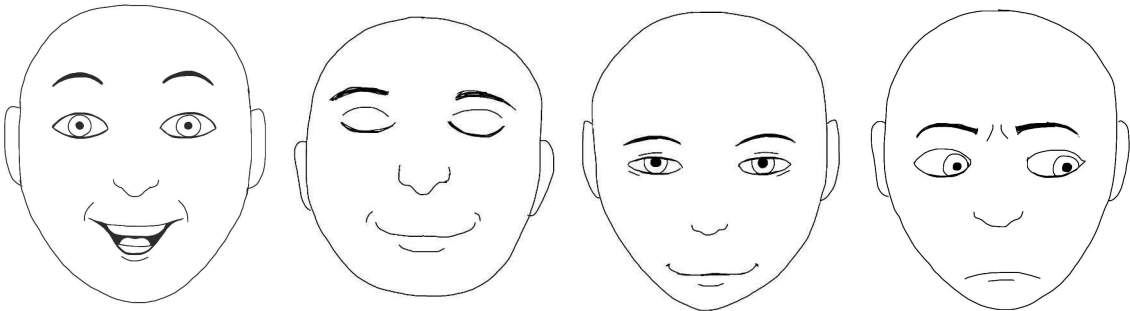
Figure 6: Burj Khalifa—the tallest building in the world as of 2014.

Figure 7: Imagine a person from a city, say, Chicago or London, meets a person from a town, say, Beeville TX or Vineland, NJ. Some likely face expressions (exaggerated; people hide emotions) of a city dweller are on the left, and of person from a town are on the right.

(a) city: snazzy, awesome, cool, amazing, sexy, fantastic, spiffy, hot, great, pretty, sharp, stylish, jazzy, nifty, hip, (b) town: boring, ugly, ordinary, dull, average, normal, lame, plain, bland, stupid, common, dumb, unattractive



(c) ecstatic (d) adored (e) adoring (f) embarrassed



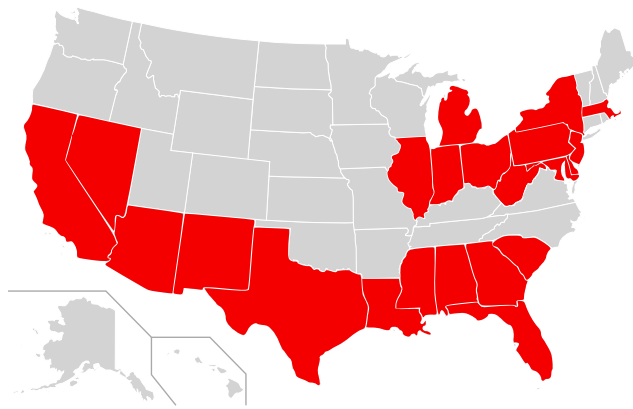
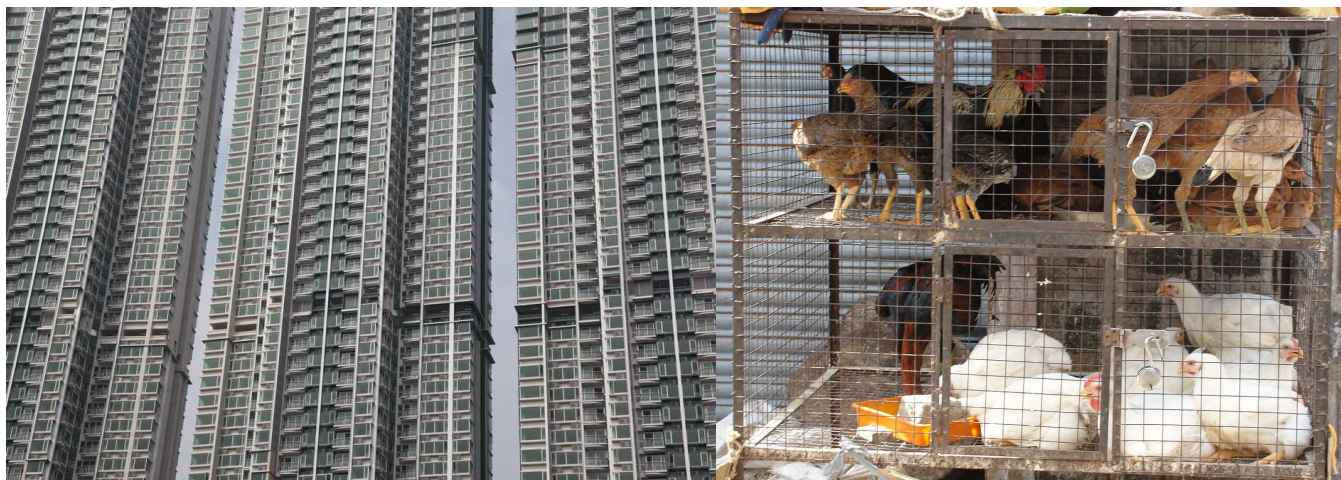


Figure 8: American Rust Belt (North East and Midwest) and Sun Belt (South). Note: this is a rough approximation without within-state differentiation.

Figure 9: Happiness in High Density? Towers as economically efficient housing for mammals (humans) and birds (chickens). Human tower: new construction in Sha Tin, Hong Kong SAR, February 2010.

(a) Human tower.

(b) Chicken tower.



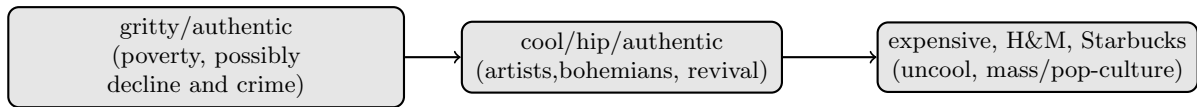


Figure 10: City is unnatural. City is contradictory. Success kills affordability and authenticity. Gritty is most authentic, but at first it is accompanied by poverty, possibly decline and crime. Then people flock in to this authenticity, and it becomes more cool and hip and less poor and as opposed to declining, it is now growing and revitalizing. But then it grows so much, there is so much demand, that it attracts H&M and Starbucks and luxury apartments and these in turn drive out the original authenticity so that place starts to become uncool and unauthentic.



Figure 11: Coalbrookdale by Night; Madeley Wood (or Bedlam) Furnaces, which belonged to the Coalbrookdale Company.



Figure 12: Camden, NJ is one of the poorest cities in the US. Camden suffers from high unemployment, poverty, and many other issues. Much of the city looks like what you see in the above picture. Although, it appears, there is little improvement recently.

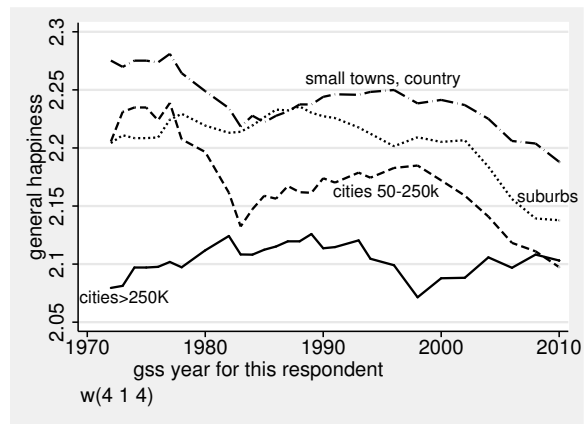


Figure 13: Happiness over time in the US. Data from American General Social Survey smoothened with 10-yr moving average.

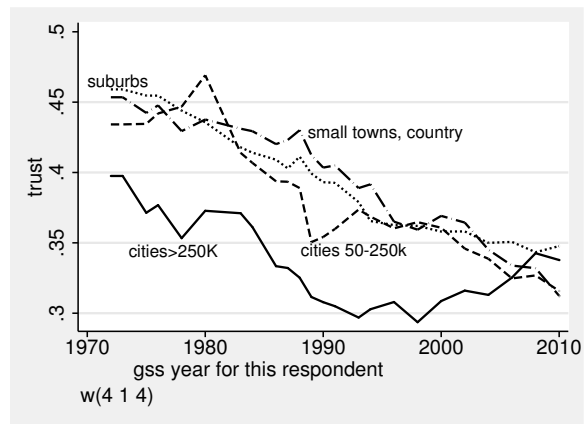


Figure 14: Trust over time in the US. Data from American General Social Survey smoothened with 10-yr moving average.

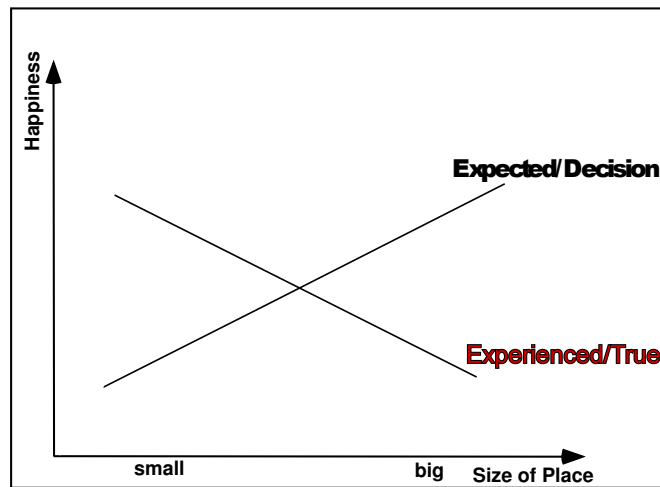


Figure 15: Expected vs. experienced happiness. We make decision about moving to a city based on expected or decision happiness—but the experienced or true happiness is lower among urbanites.

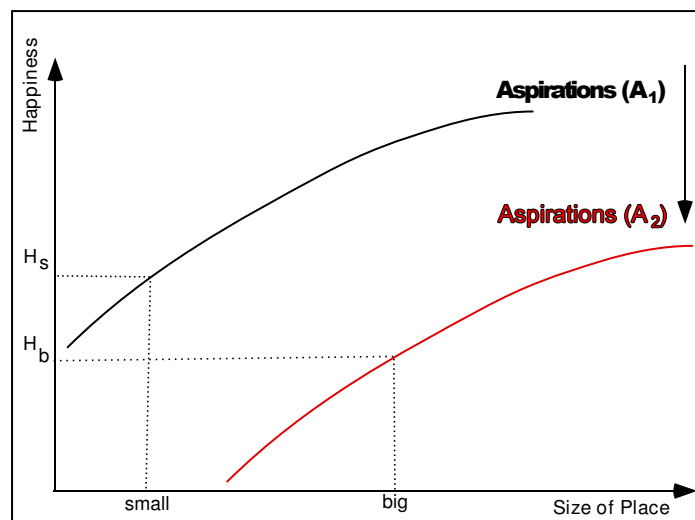


Figure 16: Happiness given aspirations. Maybe cities should increase happiness given some aspirations, but as we increase size of a place, aspirations curve shifts from A_1 to A_2 , that is aspirations increase as well (note: aspirations level is higher for lower curve as indicated by reversed scale). Hence, the resulting happiness is lower than expected because the aspirations shifted (increased).

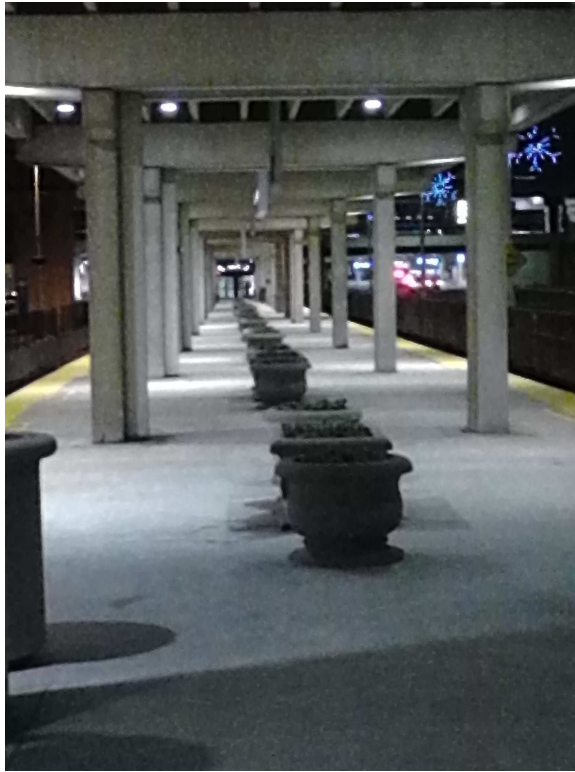


Figure 17: Fake nature: Some small flowers in large concrete round flowerpots in the middle. Philadelphia airport, Terminal A, SEPTA train platform.



Figure 18: UT Dallas Student Service Building.



Figure 19: Colorado Springs, Colorado. Suburbia by David Shankbone.

Figure 20: Concrete-blanketed Woodlands with added nature v Natural Medford Lakes with added houses. Google satellite images.

(a) Woodlands TX

(b) Medford Lakes NJ

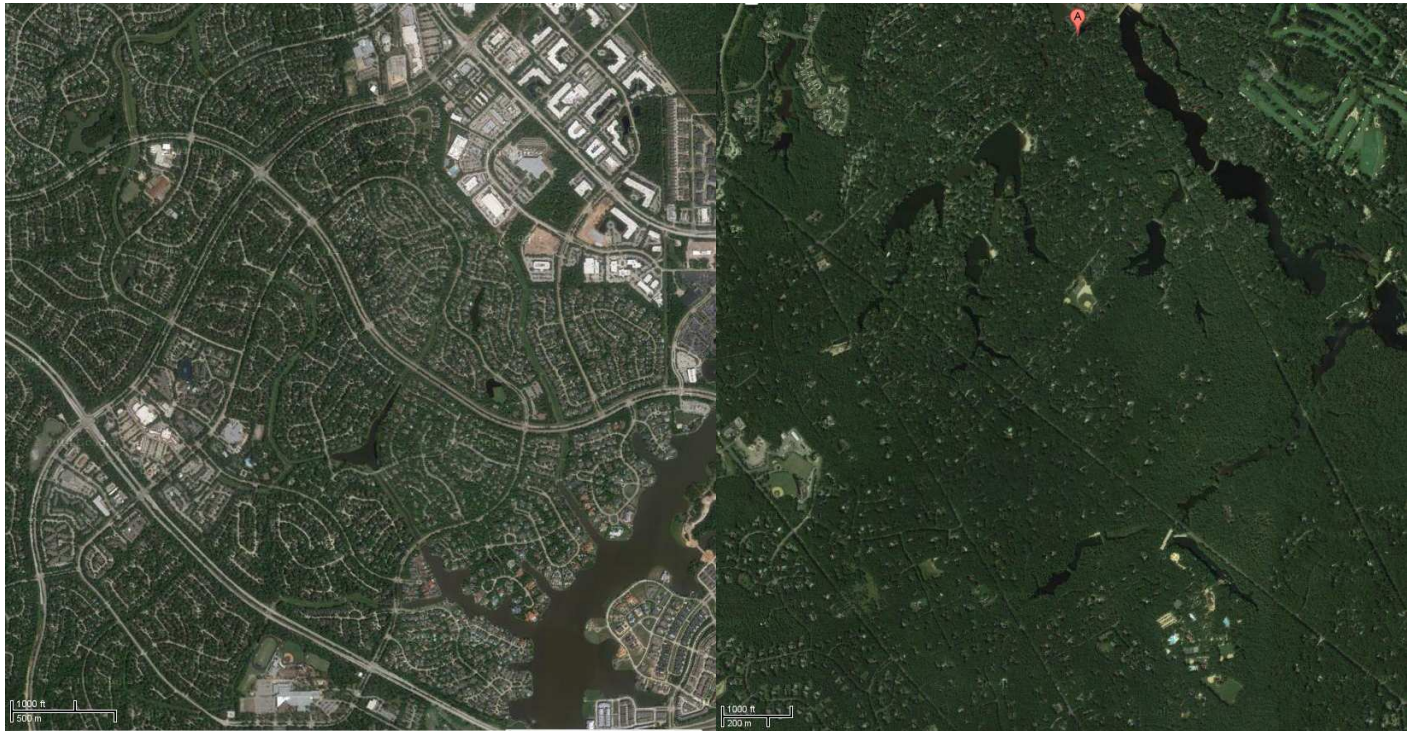


Figure 21: Living in a natural setting as opposed to living in a suburb imitating a natural setting.

(a) more fake nature (everything looks fake!): Purcell and Elmslie's a hardscaped pond on the right), but background trees look natural: Purcell-Cutts house



(b) less fake nature (pathway made of low shrubs and what appears to be a hardscaped pond on the right), but background trees look natural: house amongst redwood trees, Cascade Canyon



(c) natural nature 1: Morningside Nature Center LHF cabin



(d) natural nature 2: nested in natural nature, literally (even covered with nature): Museum of Skogar, Iceland



Figure 22: Typical urban plastic-fantastic ugliness—sprinkling a city with fake nature.

(a) The skyline of downtown Tulsa, Oklahoma



(b) Glaeser's "Triumph of The City" book cover. Why is there a word "triumph"? Who wants to live there?

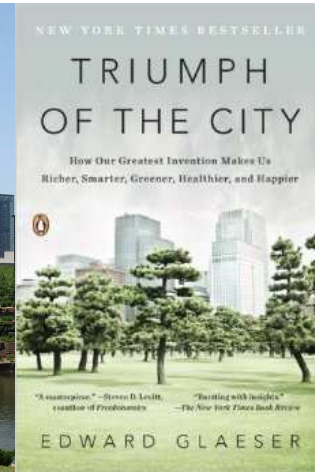




Figure 23: Replica of Thoreau's cabin near Walden Pond and his statue.



(a) city



(b) vampire

Figure 24: City as a faceless and formless vampire.