This book is a conversation between the authors and the readers about cities. It asks how people’s ideas about what cities are have changed throughout history and across different cultures.

The books consists of illustrated notes, medieval engravings, quotes and images from science fiction movies and architectural drawings. In this book, you’ll find many different city designs, both imaginary and real. Some of these designs are symbolic, some will be realistic, three-dimensional drawings, and others like scribbles in the margins. There are cities drawn from above with a bird’s eye view, as well as close-up, detailed images of the tinier, individual parts that go into city planning.

Like the other books in the A4kids series, Future Cities is the result of a dialogue with two people: my (then) 4-year-old son, Benjamin, and my (future, now late) husband, anthropologist and activist David Graeber. It has been written over many years and has since been translated into several languages. In the current edition, several chapters have been added. But there are also now two versions of the book: one for reading and thinking, the other for drawing and dreaming. The latter can be freely downloaded at a4kids.org

I hope to continue to update the book, collecting new notes and as well as including comments sent to me by readers. Future Cities.

In 2008, the world’s urban population surpassed its rural population for the first time, and since then, the rate of urbanization has only increased.

Millions of people are leaving rural areas for cities every month. However, this urbanization seems driven by two antisocial processes: climate devastation and capitalist dispossession are pushing the rural’s poor into cities, adding their numbers to already impoverished and overcrowded spaces. At the same time, wealthier city-dwellers have started to buy properties in the countryside and migrate out of the cities, especially during the Coronavirus pandemic. This recent trend has been made possible by the increasing feasibility of remote work by the expansion of high-speed internet beyond urban centers.

SO WHAT WILL THE CITIES OF THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

While some imagine ‘smart’ cities governed by artificial intelligence, promising to provide residents with clean air, alternative energy sources and plenty of public spaces, most people in the future will be living in refugee camps, where asylumists will be huddled in tents without access to basic amenities such as sewage, drinking water, internet, forget beautiful architecture or public space.

HOW DO WE FEEL ABOUT THESE CHANGES? ARE THEY NOT REVERSIBLE? AND, IF WE COULD INTERVENE, HOW?

I don’t have answers to these questions. That’s the point of this book. Let’s think about it together! After all, a city is always a collective project.

At the end of the book, in «Further Reading,» you can learn more about real and fictional city projects and the people who worked on them.

They remind us that often the most daring fantasies or brutal nightmares can become our reality.
That Always Sleeps

The City

People no longer know what the real world is. They live in a dream.

Imagine that you are a machine generating dreams for people. What kind of dreams do they need? Would you agree to live in a city like this? If not, why?

What would you change?
Draw the details of your flying city: private jets, air taxis, housing complexes and libraries, science laboratories, and concert halls.
CITY IN THE CLOUDS

Draw a design for a floating city built as a military machine that controls those who are living on the ground below.

Write how your flying city is organized.
The Flying City Bat, devouring everything in its path. Draw your full-page city.

Describe how it works.
CITY
OF FIGHTERS, WHOSE CITIZENS ARE CONSTANTLY PREPARING FOR WAR

Draw a map of a military town.

The fighters always have to know where their leader is — they need order and discipline. The streets look like they've been drawn.

Come up with completely different types of fighters. For example: chess players, boxers, military... who else?
Draw a map of a town where everyone is friends with each other.

City of Freedom
Home of artists, florists, children, parents, and just about anyone, except for the military.
It is only allowed to play, make friends and look after each other.
The perfect place for a playground —
finish drawing it.

This map shows a city in which everything is upside down. Right and left are confused; top and bottom have swapped places.
Describe robots and scientific inventions that do all the work in the city of little girls and boys. Shall we start with flying cars?
Imagine a city where inhabitants have to pay not only for housing and medicine, but also the air they breathe.

Draw a map of the city where everything is up for sale. Where do the owners live? How do the buyers live?
The city-family, where everyone knows and loves each other. Fill it with pleasant and useful family things to do.
How would your city in the desert look?

CITY IN THE DESERT

The whole city is a space that protects us from the heat, produces food, and provides a place for creativity and leisure. Don’t forget to add places to be together or in solitude.
DRAW A PLAN FOR A CITY, WHERE IT'S GOOD TO LIVE TOGETHER!
Draw a city plan for all mankind.

How people will live in a giant city-house that will fit all of humanity.

Climate change could turn all of humanity into refugees.
He is always here. He rewards the good and punishes the bad. He can be seen from anywhere.

Draw a map of Big Brother City. If he is in the center, then where and how do all the citizens live, work, play, read and walk? Perhaps this city has neighborhoods where Nothing is Allowed, Punishment, neighborhoods for Heroes, neighborhood for others... What?
Write rules for a city where every person is under constant surveillance.

In this city, nobody is ever alone!
Imagine that you live in a transparent city. How does it work? Where is your house? With a dotted line, mark on the map how the residents watch each other.
Imagine and draw the masks that the people of the carnival city wear. Draw carnival costumes. Let them be really unexpected!

Invent of these people's outfits to make them look protected, but playful and cheerful.
What rules would there be in a city of invisible people? What is allowed? And what is prohibited?
THE HOME OF A WEALTHY LONDONER AT THE TIME OF QUEEN VICTORIA

When privacy is a luxury, it calls for luxurious surroundings.

Fill up the whole page with stuff that would make you feel like you were in the center of a giant empire, caught in the middle of the world, in perfect solitude and confusion. Please be extravagant.
IN THIS CITY, YOU ARE ALONE!
JUST ONE SINGLE RESIDENT
LIVES IN THIS CITY. THE
CITY FORESEES EVERY
CONCEIVABLE DESIRE OF THE
CITIZEN. THERE IS JUST ONE
THING LACKING — NEIGHBORS/
COMPANY/COHABITANTS.
Draw a map of the city, whose inhabitants are able to disappear at any moment.

FOR INVADERS, THERE'S NOTHING TO SEIZE IN A CITY LIKE THIS — IT'S JUST A SET OF BARE WALLS, WITH NO PEOPLE OR THINGS.
A CITY WHERE EVERYONE’S RUNNING

On top of the drawing, draw your own plan for a city of runners. What if they have springboards for jumping over roofs? What if they descend by parachute? What if they dig underground tunnels?
What rules would there be in your underground city? Will it be governed by a computer, a director/president or all the residents collectively?
what would be the plan?

A city that is suspended on balloons. It is constantly swinging.
IF YOU LIVE IN THE OCEAN, THEN YOU'RE A HARD TARGET TO ATTACK! YOU CAN ALWAYS ESCAPE (SAIL AWAY).

Draw a plan.
And some residents.
What will they look like?
Amphibian people.
A city of policemen and prisoners. What would you build in the center? How the whole city is set up? Write the main rule of the city.
Scientists are constantly inventing a city that no one never has to leave.
SUN CITY, WHERE EVERYONE'S EQUAL

MAGICIANS AND SCIENTISTS RULE THE CITY.

Draw a map of your city of equal and happy people.
Each book in the series «In Pictures and Dialogues,» is about characters from children’s play: they are Kings and Queens, Pirates and Ghosts, Witches and Knights.

I began writing it with my late husband, anthropologist and activist David Graeber, who remained a child until his death.

This doodle book is about pirates, adventure, violence, magic, and freedom.

Now it’s filled with your drawings and stories, so it’ become our shared book and game.

Thank you, dear co-author!