1. Does "(urban) form follow function," or vice versa? Drawing on material discussed in class, analyze the changing functions of cities and urban regions, their changing form or "morphology," and how we should make sense of the connections between them – historically, contemporarily, and in the future. You may use cities that you know (about) to illustrate your arguments. (1,250 words)

Recently NASA[1] published a series of images that showed the Earth over the course of several years. When strung together, the transition between the seasons showed something remarkable: the growth and recession of snow cover in North America and Russia, and the browning and greening of the vast spaces of South America, Africa and Asia, which gave the appearance of an entire planet breathing. After 150 years of industrial expansionism and growth, this rise and fall, swelling and subsiding, can now similarly be observed in the American urban form. While America's most immaculately designed indoor supermalls are hollowing out[2] as super-stores like JC Penney's[3] shrink to nothingness, downtown Portland's former rail yards have been transformed into the Pearl District. In the US, urban form (high-density apartments, ample transit options) follows function (accessibility, livability). In the current post-modern service economy, urban functions are most preferred by Americans wealthy enough to choose their lifestyles that decide the urban form. The question that should be on the minds of every climate change-conscious planner is whether the current centripetal inhale taking place in America's cities will last, and if so, what areas outside of city cores will look like.

While there are many forces at play in evolving the contemporary urban landscape, the post-industrialization of the American urban form is chief among them. The industrial cities of the 19th century were mono-centric homes of plentiful manufacturing jobs, with even more plentiful pollution, so it made sense, when given the opportunity via streetcars, that those who could afford to live outside the city would immediately choose to do so (tax incentives and cheap, plentiful land were added bonuses). This was the first time that technology gave urban centers the ability to expand, or exhale, beyond the distance most residents were willing to walk twice a day. In this city model, where mass production of affordable goods is the prerogative, the form and location of streetcar suburbs is determined by the economic function of the city.

The rapid advancement of automobile infrastructure in the 20th century gave birth to polycentric cities, which displaced manufacturing from the urban core at the same time as corporate finance and other service industries began to shape the global economy. This changed the function of the urban core from an unsightly, toxic factory district to a place with enormous white-collar office space and housing development potential. With the polluting factories (and factory jobs) gone, wealthier residents began to take advantage of the rent gap by investing de-valorized neighborhoods, causing an urban core inhale. Soon after, the local rivers and brownfields that once served an industrial economy became opportunities to increase livability, particularly in the areas surrounding the old financial district.

Gentrification is not a new phenomenon by any means, but over the last two decades the process has reached a critical mass that challenges how planners and residents of urban America saw the city for much of the 20th century. The (seemingly) sudden popularity of places like North Brooklyn and Northeast Portland among well-educated white Americans is confounding to many planners and political figures who still see the "inner-city" as a mostly minority-occupied place of crime and poverty. Meanwhile, the suburban areas that reaped most of the economic rewards in the post-war era are falling out of style, creating new concerns over the "suburbanization of poverty"[4] in places such as Gresham, Oregon.[5] This is largely a result of a new generation not being able to afford home ownership as early on as their parents could, as well as an older generation phasing into smaller homes as they complete their life cycle. However, Gospodini (2006)[6] notes that the broader cultural shift away from suburbs is "due to the city's responsiveness to a wide array of aesthetic concerns and its ability to become a cultural node, offering drivers sophisticated and cosmopolitan entertainment" (pp.317). The suburbs that are managing to hold their appeal are adapting to fit the lifestyles of residents looking for accessibility and a more village-like core. This adaption usually takes the form of smaller cultural amenities, such as performance venues, cafes, and restaurants. The third form is "small town," or "urban cluster" [7], which includes places like Astoria, Oregon. Gospodini lumps these in with his definition of suburb, though they are inherently caught between the two forms and often overlooked in the national political debates.

This third form makes for an interesting study in the current cultural paradigm, as it shares many characteristics with the first two forms, but culturally and structurally fits in with neither group. It is surprising that this relationship has not been discussed as much as the relationship between the first two forms (based on our readings), since these urban environments, which only represent 9.5%[8] of the urban population, make up over 75% of America's urban environments. Similar to the suburbs, small towns (which, in this essay, refers to urban environments that are home to somewhere between 10,000 and 50,000 residents) are politically independent from their big-city brethren, feature more freestanding homes with fewer opportunities to rent, and typically do not publically provide Tiebout's rival private goods (housing, for example). However, their physical form can have much more in common with the hip urban neighborhood than the Levittowns of yore. Similar to the Northwest District in Portland, Astoria is home to art galleries, museums, theaters, restaurants, a college campus, several brew-pubs, a historic district, and a small but diverse business community.[9] Like many post-modern cities, Astoria has developed a "brand" by advertising itself through movies and a variety of arts and performance festivals. In what could be perceived as the ultimate impression of a big city core, Astoria is even considering banning short-term rental services[10] like Airbnb due to a troubling housing shortage. Much of this urban form diversity can be credited to the absence of the restrictive land-use policies that give old-fashioned suburbia its distinctive, monotonous and inaccessible look. Indeed it is Astoria's village-like style that countless suburban developments, such as the Portland developments of Cedar Hills and Tanasbourne, are attempting to emulate in the face of their growing unpopularity. For most of the past 25 years,

Astoria's population has not seen the same boom as the biggest cities in the smaller Western states (Portland, Denver, Seattle), but that is changing. Since 2010, Astoria, Bend,[11] and The Dalles[12] (among others) have witnessed substantial upticks in their population growth rates, while Beaverton's and Tualitin's growth rates have somewhat flattened since 2000. This suggests that if, and when, there is another exodus from the city core, it may be the small town and not the suburb that attracts new residents.

It is critical that we do more to understand this small town urban form as the United States moves further from the mono-centric Fordist landscape. While small towns often contain miniature versions of the same amenities that can be found in big cities, they did not experience the same process of white flight, urban renewal, and gentrification – meaning that these communities may have fewer vacancies and even less land to develop on. Furthermore, not every small town has the same geographic and industry advantages as Astoria (with a deep port) and Bend (with plentiful year-round tourist attractions). As we watch old industries collapse, some small towns like Butte, Montana are left with limited options, and typically choose tourism as it is the lone sole service industry that any physical place can at least attempt to break into. This is often the last-ditch effort of any place attempting to grow economically. This does not always work, as is the case in Escalante, Utah, where Drew Parkin, a former employee of the Bears Ears monument, told National Geographic: "The natural resource jobs went away (after Bears Ears was designated). In an environment like this tourism jobs can't take their place: full-time jobs, with benefits, year-round."[13] As our cities are increasingly sustained by the service economy, and not mineral extraction or manufacturing, we should consider the new functions that we are expecting from old forms, and which forms we can expect to adapt most successfully.

[1] GOOD Magazine: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2yLSLmnsY4

[2] Time Magazine: http://time.com/4865957/death-and-life-shopping-mall/

[3] Mpls-St. Paul Business Journal: https://www.bizjournals.com/twincities/news/2017/06/05/j-c-penney-confirms-its-leaving-southdale-move.html

[4] Confronting Suburban Poverty: http://confrontingsuburbanpoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/metro-profiles/Portland-OR-WA.pdf

[5] Oregon.Gov: http://www.oregon.gov/dhs/business-services/ofra/Documents/High%20Poverty%20Hotspots%20Multnomah%20Gresham.pdf

[6] Gospodini, Aspa (2006). Portraying, classifying and understanding the emerging landscapes in the post-industrial city. Department of Planning and Regional Development, University of Thessaly, Volos, Greece. Cities, Vol. 23, No. 5: doi:10.1016/j.cities.2006.06.002

[7] Census.Gov: https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/ua/uafaq.html

[8] City Lab: https://www.citylab.com/equity/2012/03/us-urban-population-what-does-urban-really-mean/1589/

[9] Village Profile: http://www.villageprofile.com/oregon/astoria/business-and-industry.html

[10] Spokesman Review: http://www.spokesman.com/stories/2017/feb/23/housing-shortage-on-oregon-coast-has-officials-con/

[11] Census.Gov: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/bendcityoregon/INC110216

[12] Census.Gov: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/thedallescityoregon/PST045216

[13] National Geographic: https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/12/trump-shrinks-bears-ears-grand-staircase-escalante-national-monuments/