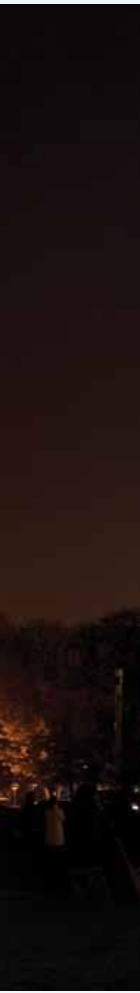


# *Intense Cities*

**T**he concentration of people in cities produces a more intense urban life, with greater connectivity, productivity and buzz. Prof **Marilyn Jordan Taylor** explored this notion of intense cities at the WORLD CITIES SUMMIT in July 2012, held in Singapore. She argued that “a whole city cannot be intense, intensity can only exist in relationship to its opposite, and there are characteristics that we know when we experience them that tell us that we are in a place of intensity, and a place that we will enjoy.” This photo-essay explores six characteristics of intense cities that Prof Taylor highlighted, accompanied by excerpts from the transcript of her talk.





Berlin Cathedral.



Havana.

### Age & Patina

Age – the layers of time, the experience, the contrast and the place itself – characterises Berlin, a wonderful example of a city of intense places. It's an old city with a very young population, demonstrating that contrasts can bring out a sense of intensity.

Another example of being in a place of age and one that has acquired a distinctive patina is Havana, where we see the framework of the old city, the cars of mid-century and the excitement of a new young population coming into existence.



Park Güell, Barcelona.

## Arts & Culture

Most of the places that we think of as intense express a culture and sometimes its arts. There are values being expressed there – some more about fun, others more serious, and some about art as a doorway to understanding the culture we're in. In wonderful cities like Barcelona, we actually have the art of building that tells you someone

invested greatly in a place and is using architecture and the city to express qualities of life. We also have an art culture, the constant presence of entertainment whether it's in a subway car or in all aspects of our lives. The combination of arts and culture, at high to low manifestations, is a part of an intense city.





### Sense-ability

Using your senses is also important – you cannot just watch an intense place. We have the wonderful Crown Fountain in Chicago’s Millenium Park, where there is the sound of water, the spray in the air, the giggle of voices, the rush of activity when the water spouts out of the mouth in the art work. It seems to me that needing to bring your senses to bear, not just your rational view of life, is one of the ways that you know you’re in an intense place, in an intense city.



Crown Fountain in Millenium Park, Chicago.

### **Individual Initiative & Shared Responsibility**

Beyond these things, an intense city is somehow the combination of individual initiative – building a business, getting a job, doing your job well, working at a level of commitment – and then sharing that in a greater sense of responsibility. That is important to the intense places in our lives. We have the new phenomenon of everyone in a shell of his own iPhone, iPad, or smartphone, waiting for the train but already at work in the morning because we know that we need jobs to drive our lives. At the same time, there is the experience of going together.

There is a seriousness of intense cities that brings out a commitment to each other that we are going to make life better. I had the chance to experience that in Khayelitsha, just outside of Cape Town... In a place lacking the public realm, people came out of the homes they are living in, in an informal settlement, and together built, properly used and made safe the community centres that pull their community together. This is indeed a place of intensity and a very special one indeed.



Khayelitsha, Cape Town.



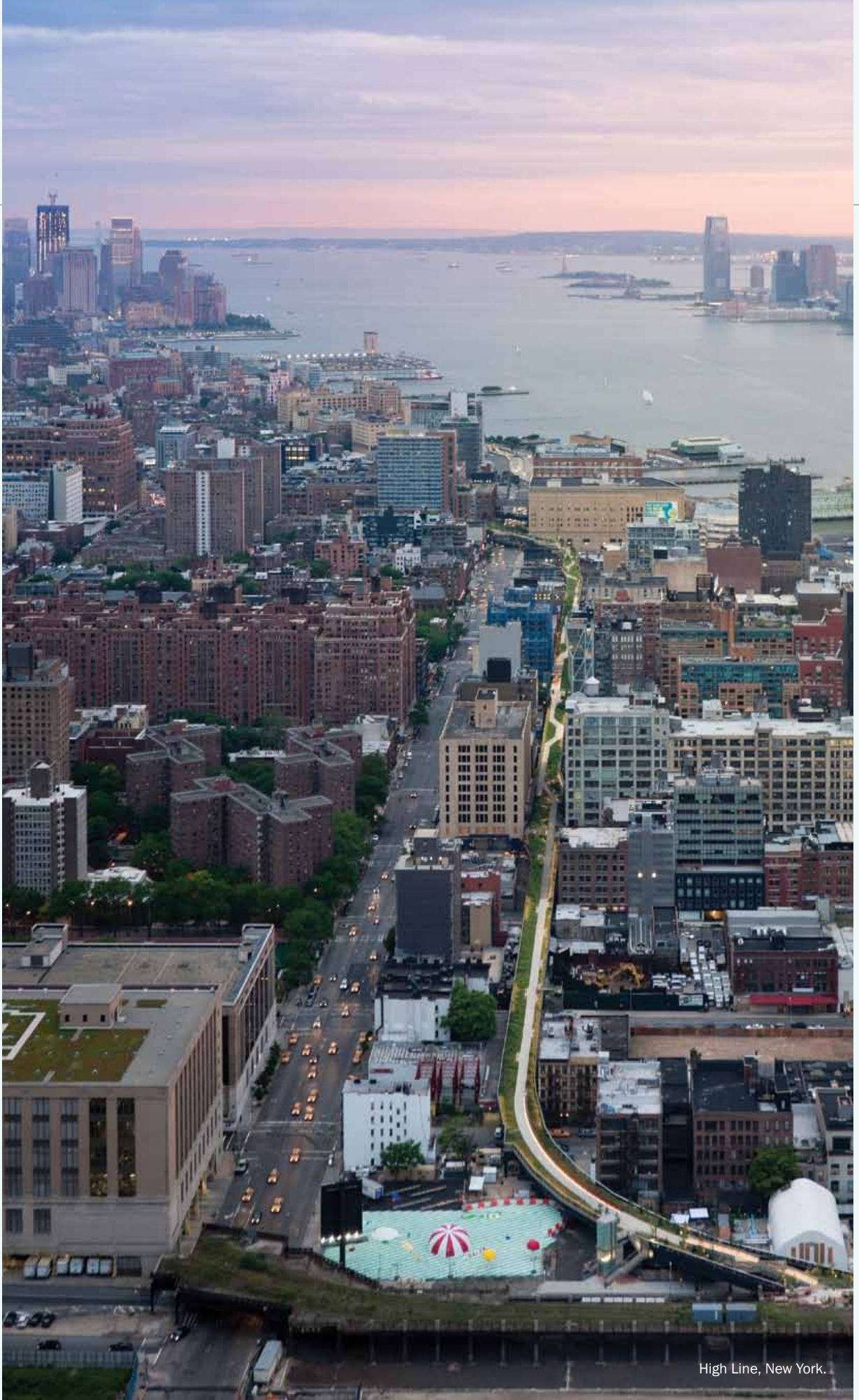


Shibuya, Tokyo.

### **Temporality**

Intense places have their temporality. Just as they have to have the opposite – non-intensity – to exist, their intensity changes across time, across a day, across a season, across the calendar, across the years. An example of this is, of course, the night. How fantastic it is, how you feel you're in a place of importance and intensity when the night arrives and the lights come up and the darkness is the balance

to all those lights, or when you are out in the clubs. There are so many places in our cities where the clubs themselves are an indicator of intensity. We are assaulted with the brands and the trends of our lives... Here in Tokyo, there is an intensity about this, getting out there and reacting to everything, amidst the excessive consumerism that the world is offering us now.



High Line, New York.



## Buzz

All of this adds together to create a sense of buzz. When you're in an intense place, you know you're there. You can feel it... when you feel the intensity, you know you're in an intense place. The High Line [in New York City] fell into disrepair over the years and has come back to life in a project we have all heard about, a one and a half mile walk, 22 feet in the air, usually only about 22 feet wide, in which people can be mobile, in which they can sit and watch each

other, the people they are with, or the city all around them. It becomes a weaving line that ties things together. It is not a dense place, yet it is a place that has brought magic to this part of the city.

This is a great example of an intense place in a generally intense city and something that really is hallmark of why we enjoy coming together and being, as we often are in cities, the place where we reveal our best selves.

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**Prof Marilyn Jordan Taylor** is Dean of the School of Design, University of Pennsylvania. A former Partner at Skidmore Owings & Merrill LLP and its first woman Chairman, she was involved in major urban projects, airports and transport systems, and civic initiatives around the world. She was also the first architect and first woman to become chairman of the non-profit Urban Land Institute, where she championed a focus on cities, sustainable communities, and infrastructure investment.