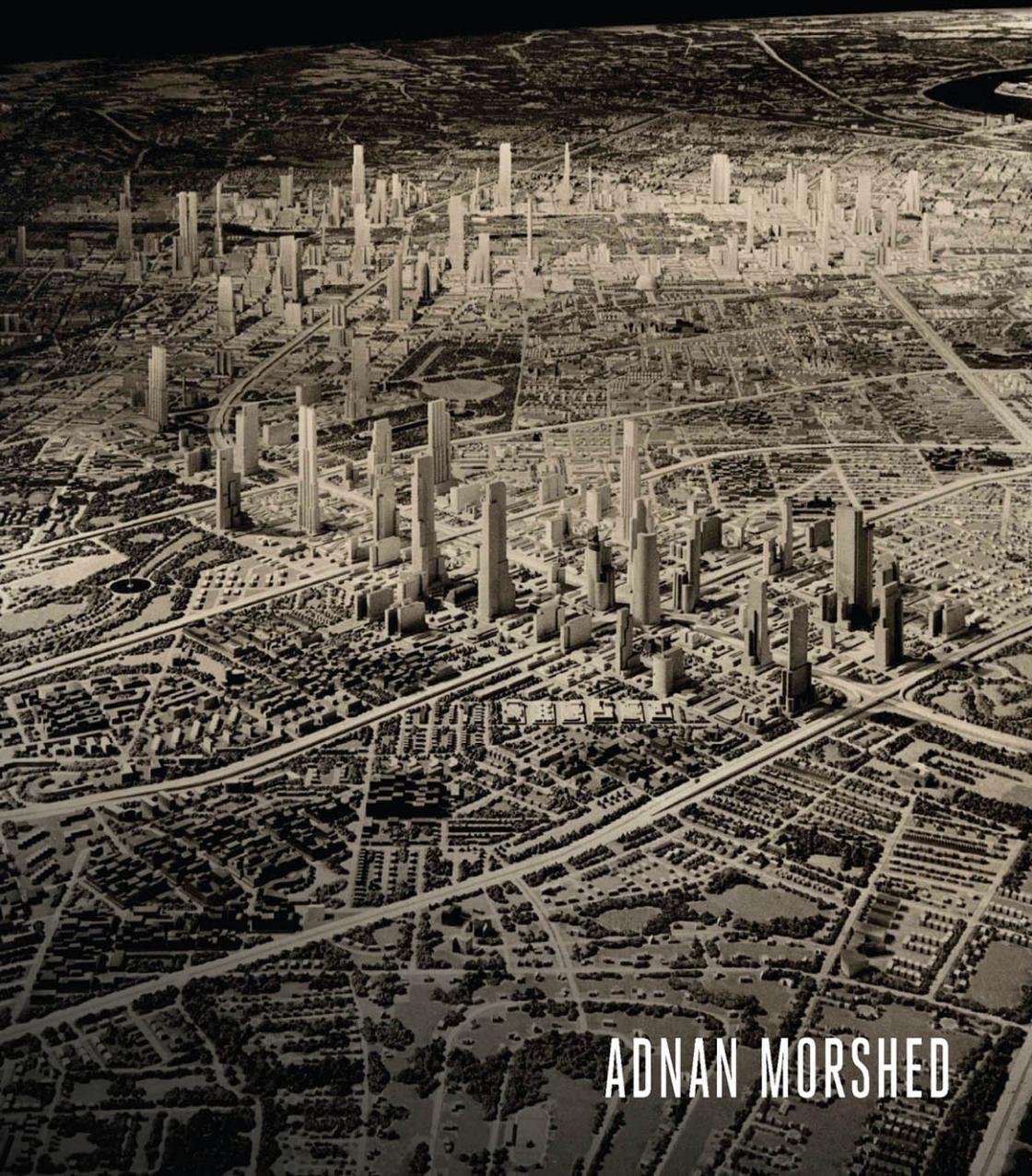




IMPOSSIBLE HEIGHTS

Skyscrapers,
Flight, and the
Master Builder



ADNAN MORSHED

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**Skyscrapers, Flight, and
the Master Builder**



ADNAN MORSHED



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Minneapolis • London

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For my parents,
ZOHARA and MATIN
my sister, TAHMINA
my wife, SADIA

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Acknowledgments



I was inspired to write this book after exploring Le Corbusier's 1929 experience of flight in South America. As I was reading Le Corbusier's *Precisions* and, a little later, his lesser-known book *Aircraft*, I became fascinated with the Franco-Swiss architect's insight that the view from an airplane would propel the modern planner's understanding of how to reorder the world. Further reading on the topic revealed that the phenomenon of human flight was related to broader discussions of modernist visuality and, in particular, a modern politics of seeing. At its core was the ideation of a modern protagonist as a new type of observer. Later, as I expanded my research, I noticed that a parallel debate on the philosophical meaning of seeing things from above—in particular, from the vantage point of a tall urban building—was also crucial to the skyscraper literature of early twentieth-century America. I began to group these research observations loosely under the theme of the "aesthetics of ascension." When I started exploring this aesthetic consciousness in the cultural context of the 1920s and 1930s, I became interested in the ways the phenomenon of seeing things from above was intimately related to the radical practice of envisioning what was then popularly called the world of tomorrow.

To sustain a love affair with a book project for several years, one must have—alongside unflinching devotion to it—a network of mentors, readers, and colleagues. I was fortunate to receive the support of many people. When I began this project, I was a graduate student of architectural history, theory, and criticism at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. James Ackerman, Sibel Bozdogan, Henry Millon, and Akos Moravansky offered many helpful suggestions, one of which was to study the subject from various theoretical and historical angles. Jorge Liernur at Harvard University was an intellectual stimulant.

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