# III URBANISMAND CONSUMPTION



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# Between Crisis and Myth

### The City at the End of Modernity

### Torsten Lange

The 1970s marked a critical juncture in the discourse surrounding city planning and architecture. The period was characterized by a pervasive sense of crisis that underscored the limitations of modernist approaches to urban development. This notion of crisis also found expression on the pages of *archithese*. Significantly, after the journal's relaunch as a series of thematic monographs in 1972, the inaugural issue was dedicated to the "crisis of city planning" and put a question mark behind the word *urbanism* in its title. "Most new cities," Stanislaus von Moos remarked in the issue's editorial, "still give the impression that city planning, urbanism, is a matter of composing volumes in space."<sup>1</sup>Nevertheless, for more than a decade, word had been out that architects' urban plans, no matter how ambitious and well-crafted, played a relatively subordinate role in city-making processes that were chiefly determined by economic and social factors.<sup>2</sup> This admission—that design endeavors were inherently subservient to these intricate forces-represented a seismic shift in perspective, highlighting the limited authority architects exerted in shaping the urban milieu. Von Moos's barb against architects: plan-makers were not necessarily good planners. Furthermore, "a good architectural plan might even get in the way of sound planning development."3 While this predicament had haunted the profession for at least a century as architects shifted their attention from erecting monuments for those

in power to more quotidian challenges, the sentiment that experts in building design may not have all the answers to people's ever-changing needs was now more acutely felt-first among those affected by architectural solutions, city residents and users, and later by architects and planners.<sup>4</sup> Because of its scale of intervention, city planning, more than other design tasks, causes unforeseen consequences, often with far-reaching ecological, material, and socioeconomic ramifications. In their 1973 essay "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber put a name (and theory) to the frequently perceived "wickedness" of the problems confronted by design and planning professionals.<sup>5</sup> Planning problems, they argued, due to their uniquely complex and open-ended character, resist being reduced to a set of general principles and therefore defy definitive and static solutions in favor of temporary resolutions. Arguably, precisely this recognition of architecture's relatively restricted influence on the urban scale threw the profession and its long-held beliefs into crisis—with ripple effects lasting to this day. This is not to deny that, during the 1970s, cities underwent genuine crises that were symptoms of more significant ecological, economic, and social upheavals.

A sense of disenchantment with modernist urban planning had already set in during the 1960s. Until then, professionals were widely in agreement not only in their assessment of the condition of the "industrial city"—an ideal type in the Weberian sense—but also concerning the broader aims, analytical methods, and instruments with which planning sought to overcome the perceived common ills of the modern metropolis: its uncontrolled growth and resulting formlessness, congestion, pollution, poor housing, and segregation. From the start of the decade, the clash between city planners' idealized visions and urban realities on the ground increasingly received critical attention; moreover, existing urban forms and their qualities became objects of analysis and reappraisal.<sup>6</sup> In 1961, Jane Jacobs warned of the imminent death of North American cities at the hands of "modern, orthodox city planning and rebuilding."7 Only a few years later, across the Atlantic, Berlin-based journalists Wolf Jobst Siedler and Gina Angreß together with photographer

Elisabeth Niggemeyer announced the "murder" of the historic European city (in contrast to Jacobs, however, they refrained from declaring modern planning guilty of the crime, instead noting that the historic city had become the victim of new social conditions).<sup>8</sup> Preceding the historic preservation movement, which gained traction in the run-up to the European Architectural Heritage Year 1975, the authors mourned not the loss of the city's material fabric per se but rather the disappearance of a sense of "urbanity" that, they claimed, had persisted over time and enabled affective experiences of the city and its "dwelling figures" (Wohnfiguren).<sup>9</sup> In 1965, psychologist Alexander Mitscherlich diagnosed modern cities as increasingly "inhospitable" environments that caused human isolation and alienation.<sup>10</sup> The growing interest in urban patterns and their experiential qualities was mirrored in the architectural and planning disciplines through studies informed by Gestalt psychology, like those of Kevin Lynch.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, Aldo Rossi championed a renewed understanding of the continuity of urban form and memory through adaptation, in contrast to the rupture and loss resulting from large-scale urban reconstruction and other drastic interventions in the city.<sup>12</sup>

While this historical sketch is far too brief and schematic to properly delineate the contours of what might be called the postmodern turn in urbanism, it must suffice to set the scene for how the discussion on urbanism and the city played out across the twenty-four issues of *archithese* published from 1971 to 1976. Overall, this discussion followed the broader perception that the crisis of city planning was indicative of a larger crisis of modernity-its promises, enduring faith and confidence in technical solutions, and the overstated agency of experts. Furthermore, it reflected vital characteristics of the shifting urban discourse of the time; above all, the growing interdisciplinarity of knowledge, combining insights from sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, political theory, and the nascent cultural and media studies. Crucially, it also reflected the turn to history within urbanism. This not only left its mark on the face of the city itself through a revaluation of the historic urban fabric, including the hitherto reviled

nineteenth-century city; it also involved growing awareness of both the city and urban planning's historicity. Because cities were subject to change over time, historically distinct ways of conceiving and making cities became connected to different economic conditions, technological transformations, and shifting ways of life. Finally, the role of architects in urban processes was profoundly interrogated and reformulated in response to an influx of critical theory, particularly the analysis of "architectural ideology" by the influential Italian architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri.<sup>13</sup>

The original contributions to *archithese* chosen to accompany this essay as primary sources to support its core arguments embody the abovementioned characteristics. Their authors reflect a relatively broad spectrum: among them are a sociologist (Henri Lefèbvre), three historians (Franziska Bollerey, Kristiana Hartmann, and Tafuri), one architect (Rem Koolhaas), and a design collective (Superstudio). The articles have been culled from volumes one, two, three, and six of the journal. Urbanism and the city are explicit themes in only five of the issues — two from the early phase of *archithese* (nos. 1 and 3, 1972) and three from its late period immediately preceding the merger with Das Werk (nos. 17, 19, and 20, 1976, dedicated to the theme of "Metropolis"). In the interim years, planning and the city remained essential concerns. However, they were folded into such topics as "Anfänge des sozialen Wohnbaus" (Origins of Social Housing; no. 8), "Spontane' Architektur" ("Spontaneous" Architecture; no. 9), "Das Kollektivwohnhaus (1900–1930)" (The Collective Dwelling; no. 12), "Realismus in der Architektur: Las Vegas etc." (Realism in Architecture: Las Vegas etc.; no. 13), and "Grosshaushalt" (Communal Household; no. 16). The five years from 1971/72 to 1976 are characterized by a noticeable shift in approaching the topic of urbanism, from an engagement with present-day concerns to a more clearly delineated historical outlook that aims to uncover pervasive and unquestioned truths about the links between modernity and the making of the early twentieth-century American metropolis.

Crisis and myth thus form the two brackets between which the discourse on the city in *archithese* unfolds. While the former

bears witness to the waning of modernity, the latter seems to foreshadow developments and debates that would crystallize about a decade later with the emergence of the postmodern city as a vehicle for "flexible accumulation"—already embryonic in both historical and speculative analyses of Manhattan and the skyscraper as a distinct building type.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to the modern city as a site for industrial production, the postmodern city with culture and consumption at its heart is simultaneously a financial asset and economic factor.<sup>15</sup> Revisiting these 1970s urban discourses is worthwhile not only because their questions persist to this day, but also because the articles hold several unfulfilled lessons. Today, many architects remain fixated on object making and continue to show little interest in grasping the social and economic dynamics of cities, let alone in developing systematic strategies to intervene in these dynamics. In architectural education, the socioeconomic factors of design continue to be a sidenote too. While knowledge about the dynamics of space production has multiplied and deepened within the social sciences and cultural studies, this interest is not matched by architects, many of whom still refuse to engage meaningfully with this "external" knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, large parts of the profession cling to the enduring ideal of autonomy, to which critical theory could not provide a fix but could at least offer a necessary corrective.

#### The Crisis of the City

When we delve into the issues of *archithese*, the theme of crisis is present from the outset. Whether "we are currently in the midst of a crisis in urban planning" was the opening question that the journal's coeditor, Jean-Claude Widmer, a journalist from Geneva, posed to the renowned French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Lefèbvre in their conversation published in issue two of the inaugural volume. The latter's resolute answer: "We have been in one for a very long time! To the extent that architecture has tried to solve the contemporary world's problems, it has very plainly subordinated itself to a certain number of economic requirements, such as the requirement for industrial growth."<sup>17</sup> In Lefèbvre's view, the fundamental challenge of the

present lies in overcoming this growth paradigm. In contrast to the past, when architecture supplied the forms required for industrial expansion, the present need to change course (already urgent in 1971 and still unresolved today!) called for the invention of "something profoundly novel, but that something cannot be isolated, architecturally speaking, from issues that are political in nature.<sup>318</sup> One of Lefèbvre's fundamental tenets, that architecture is a heteronomous discipline enmeshed in a web of ideologies, practices, laws, regulations, and institutions, all of which shape its field of action, shines through here. That is, architecture constitutes a social practice that does not operate in isolation but is one among many actors engaged in the production of space, typically through the medium of the plan/drawing. Hence, any critique—and potential reconception—of its operations must begin with this recognition. The extent to which the conditions of architectural production could be reflected upon and ultimately changed from within the discipline thus remained a highly controversial question -indeed, one over which Lefèbvre quarreled with the other influential Marxist position on architecture and the city presented in the journal, that of Tafuri.<sup>19</sup> But more on that later.

The fact that Lefèbvre was interviewed for *archithese* not only testifies to its interdisciplinary and international scope - a red thread that runs through its early years. It also speaks to Lefèbvre's position as a central figure in urban discourse in France and internationally, primarily through his leadership of the Institut de sociologie urbaine (ISU) from 1962 to 1973. Łukasz Stanek resituates Lefèbvre's key theoretical contributions on "everyday life" (1947, 1961, 1981), "the right to the city" (1968), and "the production of space" (1974) by showing that these concepts were shaped in dialogue with the empirical studies the French sociologist conducted at various public research institutions over his decades-long career, thus pointing to the intersections between "his critical reflections on the general condition of modernity, his research on the process of urbanization, and his project of spaces for a transforming society."<sup>20</sup> Owing to his rich oeuvre, unconventional thinking, and political commitment, also expressed in his

close involvement with the journal *utopie* (1967–1978), Lefèbvre became a transformative force within the urban planning discourse and practice of his time.<sup>21</sup> His conceptualization of space as a material construct and a sociopolitical arena engendered an especially profound reevaluation of urban studies. His triadic formulation of "perceived, conceived, and lived" space in *The Production of Space* instigated a conceptual shift, challenging abstract functionalist perspectives on the city as championed by members of the Congrès internationaux d'architecture modern (CIAM) and foregrounding the dynamic interplay between spatial configurations, lived experiences, and societal power structures instead.<sup>22</sup> Notably, Lefèbvre also advocated for a participatory and inclusive approach that recognized the agency of city dwellers in shaping their environments.<sup>23</sup>

Lefèbvre's interview for archithese-which runs through his critical positions on industrial modernity, the agency of city residents, the link between urban planning and capitalist production (he did not distinguish between state-managed capitalism and socialism in producing modern abstract space), architecture's role in representing political ideologies and embodying bureaucratic rule, the disillusionment with technocratic utopias, reforms in the education of architects and city planners, and alternative forms of practice-introduced a Swiss readership not yet familiar with Lefèbvre to his complex thinking.<sup>24</sup> Many of the interview's central theses resonate with the third *archithese* issue, "Zürich & Co.," published in 1972. This issue focuses entirely on Switzerland's largest city, where some of the dynamics Lefèbvre had described played out directly on the lead editor's doorstep. Von Moos and the issue's contributors, including Max Bill, Lucius Burckhardt, Martin Fröhlich, Martin Steinmann, and Sibylle Schroeder-Keller (the last three working at the Institute for History and Theory of Architecture (gta institute), ETH Zurich), were representative of the growing population that had become weary of growth and development for profit's sake. "Enough of the shiny showcases, spicy business advertisements presented in the form of pop facades, and musically accompanied pedestrian passages," von Moos wrote.25 Since the mid-1960s, the editorial summarized, the restoration

of Zurich's city center had pushed out residents; zoning plans had been drawn in the shadow of institutions using dubious methods; car-friendly transport planning had torn up the urban fabric; and banks, department stores, insurance companies, and hotels had shot out of the ground—all in the name of "progress," "prosperity," and "pride."

In 1969, Richard Allemann, chief executive of the City Vereinigung Zürich (Zurich City Association), the umbrella organization of downtown businesses founded in 1967, publicly presented his visions-propelled by the optimism of the economic boom years — for the development of Zurich into a "European metropolis."<sup>26</sup> In the preceding years, several speculative proposals had fired the imagination. For instance, authors dreamt of expanding the city into the lake basin, beginning with Werner Müller's "Seepark" proposal (1956), followed by Andre E. Bosshard's "City im See" (1961) and Hugo Wandeler's megastructural "Seebrücke" (1969), a multistory inhabitable bridge connecting the western and eastern lake shores.<sup>27</sup> Many of these projects sought to tackle the problems of densification and congestion simultaneously. One such example was the "counterproposal for the configuration of expressways and layout of the Sihl area" along the western side of the city center between the central rail station and Selnau offered by the Zürcher Arbeitsgruppe für Städtebau ZAS (the Zurich Working Group for Urban Planning) founded in 1959 as an initiative of eighteen young architects, including Benedikt Huber, Eduard Neuenschwander, and Beate Schnitter, to promote their vision of a better city.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the growing public awareness of the "limits of growth"-the Club of Rome report was published in 1972, the same year as the Zurich issue of *archithese*—spelled an end to these visions as disillusion with dreams of linear progress set in. The population's rejection of the city's plans to construct an underground railroad in the 1973 cantonal referendum was a decisive turning point.<sup>29</sup> Lefèbvre's critique of architecture and urban planning in the service of capital spoke through many articles that renounced large-scale urban reconstruction for profit not people, as did his disdain for the architect-expert as the embodiment of state bureaucracy.<sup>30</sup>

#### **Disenchanted Utopias**

Without a direct link to the situation in Zurich, yet in dialogue with Lefèbvre's disavowal of abstract and technocratic utopias (though he nonetheless maintained that the construction and interrogation of what he called "concrete utopias" was crucially important), was an article by the Italian radical architecture collective Superstudio published in the 1971 "Urbanismus?" issue.<sup>31</sup> Conceived initially by group member Piero Frassinelli as a total of "twelve cautionary tales," each describing a vision of an ideal city turned dystopian nightmare due to the hyperbolic exaggeration of prevailing concepts of modern urbanism, such as users' needs, dwelling cells, or production, the complete project was simultaneously launched in various international architecture outlets, including AD Architectural Design and Casabella.<sup>32</sup> For the archithese spinoff version, only three narratives of "ideal cities" were chosen, all of which heavily drew from popular science fiction both in content and narrative style: "First city: 2,000-Ton City," "Second City: Temporal Cochlea-City," and "Third City: Continuous Production Conveyor Belt City" (the seventh city in the AD version). They were accompanied by a sinister epilogue in the form of a personality test that would reveal to readers whether they embodied a (designated) "head of state," "an element of the system," "a worm," or someone who had not "understood that the descriptions represent cities now," depending on how many of the portrayed visions one hoped would come true-from three to none.33

Superstudio employed a deliberately prophetic tone to depict prevailing trajectories of the time and amplified them through a lens of profound irony and corrosive commentary, offering a dramatic and scathing interpretation of urban realities and their repressive and inhumane character. In the collective's eyes, the (post)industrial city was a thoroughly rational apparatus shot through with totalitarian control that threatened the destruction of nature and caused the alienation of its inhabitants. People's needs and behaviors were entirely subordinated to the primacy of the system's self-preserving mechanism, tolerating no dissent.<sup>34</sup> Their work was informed by critical theorists like Herbert Marcuse and his notion of the "end of utopia" in advanced capitalist society, presented in 1967, where ideas pose as utopian while, in truth, being no more than the negation of existing realities. Rather than offering a means of liberation, utopian ideals had been co-opted and neutralized by the prevailing system, becoming a form of social control. A reinvigorated and subversive form of critical thinking should thus challenge the existing system's domination and conformity. At the same time, Superstudio's "projects" were informed by the strategy of refusing work championed by the Italian labor theorist Mario Tronti and members of the Operaismo (Workerist) movement. Against this backdrop, Superstudio renounced the creation of utilitarian items, the act of building, or pragmatic urban planning and engaged instead in communicative strategies, perception, and the construction of subjectivity.<sup>35</sup>

In presenting a negative form of utopia, or "counter-utopia," Superstudio also eschewed the work of many leading architectural historians—in particular, those charged by Tafuri with operative criticism; that is, distorting their reading of the past by conforming to the needs of the present—who recounted the involvement of architects imbued with a sense of moral duty in pursuit of "utopia" and social betterment through meticulous and rational urban planning.<sup>36</sup> This is where the contribution of the German and Swiss urban historians Bollerey and Hartmann lies. The pair sought to create an alternative to this established historiography by excavating the "theories and experiments of the utopian socialists Robert Owen and Charles Fourier."<sup>37</sup> Their article, published in *archithese* 8 (1973; guest edited by art historian Kurt W. Forster), drew heavily from Bollerey's PhD dissertation submitted at TU Berlin.<sup>38</sup> Hartmann had completed her doctoral thesis on the German garden city movement, cultural politics, and social reform at Freie Universität Berlin at the same time.

For Bollerey and Hartmann, Owen's proposals for ideal workers' communities and their corresponding social infrastructures and Fourier's Phalanstère, a palatial building to achieve collective luxury, presented an ambiguous heritage. On the one hand, their work stood out against other reform models of the period as it offered "overall conceptions for a new urban organism" while "at the same time anticipat [ing] new social conditions" based on the recognition that, "in the bourgeois order, ... true misery is and cannot be eradicated."<sup>39</sup> Projecting the past into the present, Owen's and Fourier's "ideally conceived housing schemes"—shunned as ideological by later proponents of scientific socialism—were therefore viewed as an antidote to the technocratic operations of urban planning in the postwar era. On the other hand, the authors concluded that "the complexity of their planning, which is today interpreted as progressive, ... condemned all pragmatic approaches to failure. The complexity was not planned for a restructured society but was supposed to contribute to the restructuring. Idealism operating in isolation failed because of its existence as a foreign body within the society."40 Nevertheless, Owen and Fourier were of interest to historians of architecture precisely because they lent concrete forms to social and urban ideas—even if, according to Bollerey and Hartmann, they differed in how they approached the status of the formal solution vis-à-vis the social vision. Owen interpreted the "transformed architectural environment [as] the precondition for the socialization process," while Fourier held that "architecture should be adapted to the psychological and physical conditions of human beings."41 That said, the authors also stress how, in the case of Owen, formal and aesthetic expression were secondary concerns behind the suitability of the proposed infrastructures for their intended social purpose, not least because architects at the time were skeptical of these projects, so actors from outside the discipline ended up planning them. In contrast, the graphic rendering of Fourier's Phalanstère by Victor Considerant (1840) is, in its deployment of lavish classical ornament on the exterior facades, interpreted as a marketing stunt that sought to play to prevalent bourgeois tastes in order to secure funding for the ambitious project. In closely attending to the historical conditions from which the urban models of these two utopian socialists emerged and by tracing their historical trajectory over the nineteenth century until they eventually became subsumed by bourgeois society, Bollerey and Hartmann

sought to instill a historical consciousness in the often uncritical present-day search for planning concepts, a project of demystification to counter the commonplace ahistorical citation of precedent.<sup>42</sup>

#### **Metropolitan Myths**

This ambition to dispel "myths" through rigorous historical analysis, shared by most if not all members of the editorial board of *archithese*, also defined the work of Tafuri, the Italian Marxist architect turned historian based at the Istituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. He contributed an article titled "New Babylon': The New York of the 1920s and the Search for Americanism"—his second for the journal—to the third monograph on the theme of "Metropolis."43 This essav was an early draft version of a lengthier chapter published four years later as part of his La sfera e il labirinto: Avanguardie e architettura da Piranesi agli anni '70 (The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s).44 It reframed, as Joan Ockman highlights, Tafuri's earlier work on the American city conducted as part of a decadelong collaborative research program, beginning in 1968, with "[t]he aim ... to study twentieth-century architecture and cities in relation to the three 'great systems' that had shaped them: Soviet communism, American capitalism, and European social democracy.<sup>345</sup> With its ambition to construct a multidimensional picture of New York as an enigmatic symbol of modernity and the embodiment of Americanism, the effort by the editors of *archithese* may have taken inspiration from the research project that Tafuri had launched shortly before. Indeed, as the editorial of the first of the three "Metropolis" issues confirms, he was involved in the issue's conception alongside Claude Lichtenstein, Werner Oechslin, Andreas Adam, and Rosemarie Bletter as part of a team of guest editors spanning three countries and two continents.<sup>46</sup> The first issue focused on European representations of the American city that oscillated between admiration and revulsion, while the second issue focused more intensely on the architecture of the city: "the traffic machinery, stylized to the essence of the metropolis"; "the lighthouse as 'model'

of the modern skyscraper"; "the battle for the tangibility of the metropolitan skyscraper as a single form"; "the looming divergence of large architectural form and decorative-theatrical infill, tasked with the communication of meanings on a human scale."<sup>47</sup> The third and final "Metropolis" issue, edited by Oechslin, continued the focus on the skyscraper, and here is where Tafuri's article was placed.<sup>48</sup>

In hindsight, the editors' interest, in the mid-1970s, in the theme of Americanism may seem surprising, perhaps even slightly anachronistic. Undoubtedly, the United States exercised huge geopolitical, economic, and (pop) cultural influence throughout postwar Europe, mainly through the proliferation of consumer goods and mass media ("soft power"). However, the country's influence as an aspirational role model had faded after the U.S. involvement and atrocities in the Vietnam War. In this context, the widespread perception by the European public and intellectual elites of the United States as a "laboratory of modernity" and its blanket association with "everything considered modern" gradually became questioned, a process of deconstruction and demystification that continues today as scholars on both sides of the Atlantic undo these monolithic constructs with postcolonial and other readings that shed light on the multifaceted and incoherent experience of modernity in the United States, including its dark aspects and historical oversights (settler colonial violence, slavery, and racism).<sup>49</sup> In a way, this shifting assessment is already somewhat palpable in the three "Metropolis" issues, even though some of the contributions repeat more than deconstruct the "fictions of the European avantgarde" about New York and the United States.<sup>50</sup>

As Ockman notes, the capitalist metropolis was difficult to pin down. Was it "an exceptional phenomenon, unique to the special circumstances that gave birth to it, or was it an unconscious anticipation of what was to come everywhere?"<sup>51</sup> At least when it came to understanding the role of the skyscraper within this constellation, Tafuri's verdict was clear: it was less a unique typological invention insofar as its volumetric form, dramatically staged in the renderings of Hugh Ferriss, sprang from zoning legislation introduced in the 1910s. Likewise, the eclectic and loose reinterpretation of Indigenous motifs in its decorative treatment was chiefly aimed at providing a "consumable image."<sup>52</sup> The skyscraper, a mythical construction, therefore presented "an (ultimately futile) effort by technocratic architects and planners to resist urban formlessness by means of a singular, monumental building."<sup>53</sup> In this sense, it shared the same fate as the architecture designed and built in the other socioeconomic systems Tafuri studied — communism and social democracy — because a joint trajectory of modernity and capitalist development shaped it.

In this assessment, Tafuri differed drastically from the last position presented in the archithese "Metropolis" monographs to be discussed here—that of Koolhaas. For Tafuri, the skyscraper type proved an unsuitable model for future urban invention because it demonstrated, in historical retrospect, that possibilities for control on the urban scale had run aground under American capitalism. He ended his 1973 essay "The Disenchanted Mountain" by noting that "the realism that characterized the creation of the Rockefeller Center-to the point of cynicism-marked the end of any utopian ideal of comprehensive public control over the urban structure."54 Koolhaas, in contrast, perceived Manhattan as the starting point for further speculation, "a germinal moment, the dawn of a new world of possibilities for architecture and architects."55 The skyscraper and urban grid became the chief characters in his "retroactive manifesto for Manhattan." After graduating from London's Architectural Association at the beginning of the 1970s, the young Koolhaas, captivated by the enduring myth of New York like so many modern architects and artists before him, moved across the Atlantic to continue his studies at Cornell University. A few years later, he was one of two designers researching the hidden creative potentials of Manhattan's past and present at the Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies in New York, next to the French-Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi.<sup>56</sup> The result of this investigation was his 1978 book *Delirious New York*, of which his article for *archithese* "Roxy, Noah, and Radio City Music Hall," is an early fragment.<sup>57</sup>

Koolhaas's short text, later woven into the book's significant fourth chapter on the Rockefeller Center, focuses on the episode

of the conception around 1930 of Radio City Music Hall, the gigantic (yet empty) performance machine dreamt up by theater director Samuel Lionel "Roxy" Rothafel and installed in the center's belly. In condensed form, the article rehearses some of the book's core arguments regarding the unconscious production of architectural and urban form without a mastermind, largely "automatic" and without any conventional — that is, professional-design intent. Koolhaas says, "In Roxy the Music Hall has a planner whose vision is the laughingstock of his fellow men, or at least of his architects."<sup>58</sup> Moreover, using the metaphor of Noah's Ark, Koolhaas claims that, in anticipation of impending (economic or ecological) catastrophe, each single Manhattan block contained an entire city able to reproduce itself. The blueprint for this thinking, which reveals Koolhaas's doubts about the potential of planning and prediction, can be found in his close collaboration with Oswald Mathias Ungers on their 1977 study "Berlin—A Green Urban Archipelago." With its embrace of loosely connected urban islands, or nuclei, surrounded by urban greenery, Koolhaas gave up on previous modernist theories of comprehensive urban development.<sup>59</sup> This is why he hailed Manhattan (and the Rockefeller Center as its main achievement) as "the result of a feverish dream, a phantasmagoric delirium freed from any rational control." It had "evolved without a script or master plan, in a space void of theory, unconsciously and at breathtaking speed."60

#### **Conclusion:**

#### From the Industrial City to the City of Flexible Accumulation

The discussion of urbanism and the city in *archithese* from 1971 to 1976 encompassed an impressive array of positions, from the emergence of critical urban theory in response to the crisis of city planning (Lefèbvre), to debates concerning the exhaustion of utopia and the presentation of counter-utopias, as well as utopia's demystification (Superstudio, Bollerey and Hartmann), to the deconstruction and reactivation of the myth of the metropolis (Tafuri, Koolhaas). As a representative of the younger generation, Koolhaas, despite sharing with Tafuri the impetus for revising modernist historiography and similar methods,

had a significantly different outlook on planning compared to the other voices discussed here. Furthermore, the view in the rear mirror discloses a process of departure from the industrial city, with its corresponding scientific and comprehensive urban planning approaches, toward the gradual emergence of the postmodern city of flexible accumulation and its concomitant abandonment of overarching theories for reshaping urban realities. For Harvey, postmodernism in the urban context marks a "break with the idea that planning and development should focus on large-scale ... design, and that vernacular traditions, local history, and specialized spatial designs ranging from functions of intimacy to grand spectacle should be approached with much greater eclecticism of style."61 Such new forms of postmodern urbanism deliberately seek to promote new cultural values and practices in line with the regime of flexible accumulation. Transitory spectacle, play, and festivities have become core features of this new urban reality. Work on the "generic city" today, to refer to one of Koolhaas's dictums, is piecemeal and happens through individual objects that are supposed to act as catalysts for urban change.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, the forces shaping contemporary urban dynamics and its challenges have steadily grown, provoking the question anew whether it is time to rethink the accepted truths about urban planning.

1 Stanislaus von Moos, "Urbanismus?," *archithese* 1 (1972): 2.

In the Swiss context, the sociologist 2 Lucius Burckhardt had been a crucial voice in urbanistic debates since the mid-1950s and advocated process-based thinking. At the 1961 meeting of the Federation of Swiss Architects focusing on transport planning at the national scale, he cautioned professionals in a talk titled "The Crisis of the City" that the factor of time presented a challenge to planning decisions. Referring to Martin Wagner, Burkhardt argued that city planning had to consider the "never-ending development of the city," which meant planning with economic factors and the life of the city itself. Lucius Burckhardt, "Die Krise der Stadt," Das Werk 48, 10 (1961): 336-37.

3 Von Moos, "Urbanismus?" (see note 1), 2.

4 See the essay by Gabrielle Schaad, 311–26 in this publication.

5 Horst W.J. Rittel and Melvin M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4, 2 (1973): 155–69, http://www.jstor.org /stable/4531523. For further background to Rittel's work and its resonance in architecture and urban planning since the 1970s, see Torsten Lange, "Rittel's Riddles: Design Education and Democratic' Planning in the Age of Information," in *Re-scaling the Environment: New Landscapes of Design, 1960–1980*, ed. Ákos Moravánzsky and Karl R. Kegler (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2017), 61–80.

6 Angelus Eisinger, Die Stadt der Architekten: Anatomie einer Selbstdemontage (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2005), IOI-2.

7 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random, 1961).

8 Wolf Jobst Siedler, Elisabeth Niggemeyer, and Gina Angreß, Die Gemordete Stadt: Ein Abgesang auf Putte und Straße, Platz und Baum (Berlin: F.A. Herbig, 1964).

9 Ibid., 7.

10 Alexander Mitscherlich, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte: Anstiftung zum Unfrieden* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965). 11 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

12 Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984). The first edition, in Italian, was published in 1966.

13 Manfredo Tafuri, Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976). The first edition, in Italian, was published in 1973.

14 David Harvey, "Flexible Accumulation through Urbanization: Reflections on 'Post-modernism' in the American City," *Perspecta* 26 (1990): 251–72. See also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990). Recently this debate has been revisited and expanded with a focus on the skyscraper. See Mariano Gomez Luque, "The Late Capitalist Skyscraper Theoretically Considered" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2019).

15 See Andreas Reckwitz, "Die Selbstkulturalisierung der Stadt: Zur Transformation moderner Urbanität in der 'creative city," in *Kreativität und Soziale Praxis: Studien zur Sozialund Gesellschaftstheorie* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), 155–84; Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, "Cultural-Economy and Cities," *Progress in Human Geography* 31, 2 (2007): 143–61, https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132507075361.

16 Eisinger, *Die Stadt der Architekten* (see note 6), 7.

17 Henri Lefèbvre, "Questions for Henri Lefèbvre," interview by Jean-Claude Widmer, 232 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 2 (1971): 11–15.

18 Ibid.

19 Łukasz Stanek, Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 165–66.

20 Ibid.

21 Craig Buckley and Jean-Louis Violeau, *Utopie: Texts and Projects, 1967–1978* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011). 22 Henri Lefèbvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1991). The first edition, in French, was published in 1974.

23 See the chapter by Gabrielle Schaad, 311–26 in this publication.

24 Swiss professionals may already have been familiar with Lefèbvre's critique of modern city planning through his commentary on the SNF-funded project for a new city near Otelfingen in the Furttal Valley developed by a team around Ernst Egli, professor for urbanism at ETH Zurich. See Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre* on Space (see note 19), 93–99.

25 Stanislaus von Moos, "keinerlei Proportion," *archithese* 3 (1972): 2–3, here 3.

26 For an account of Zurich's resistance to Großstadt thinking until the mid-twentieth century, its brief embrace of metropolitan visions, and the rapid disillusionment with dreams of progress from the start of the 1970s, see Thomas Schneider, "Die Grossstadt—Des Schweizers Wunsch oder Albtraum?," Medienheft Dossier, 17 (2002): 38–43. In the "Zürich & Co." issue of archithese, Fröhlich and Steinmann looked at the unbuilt Zurich. Martin Fröhlich and Martin Steinmann, "Zürich, das nicht gebaut wurde," in "Zürich & Co.," special issue, archithese 3 (1972): 25–33.

27 Christina Gubler, "Versunkene Ideen," Hochparterre: Zeitschrift für Architektur und Design 29, 1–2 (2016): 34–37.

28 "Gegenvorschlag für die Expreßstraßenführung und die Gestaltung des Sihlraumes in Zürich," *Das Werk: Architektur und Kunst* 48,10 (1961): 348–53. On the thirty-year history of the ZAS, see Benedikt Huber, "Die Stadtvisionen der ZAS und ihre Bedeutung für Zürich: Zürcher Arbeitsgruppe für Städtebau, 1959–1989: Eine Dokumentation," *Schweizer Ingenieur und Architekt* 118, 20 (2000): 432–44.

29 Ulrich Pfammatter's article in the "Zürich & Co." issue formulated a stinging critique of the underground railway project from a class perspective. Ulrich Pfammatter, "Die Zürcher U-Bahn," in "Zürich & Co.," special issue, *archithese* 3 (1972): 22–24.

30 Another contemporaneous example of this broader shift is the exhibition

Profitopolis oder Der Mensch braucht eine andere Stadt (Profitopolis, or another city for human being), curated by the architect Josef Lehmbrock and the art historian Wend Fischer, on display from November 1971 to February 1972 at Die Neue Sammlung in Munich.

31 Superstudio, "Three Warnings against a Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism," 242–51 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 1 (1972): 3–6, 36.

32 Superstudio, "Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas: Premonitions of the Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism," *Architectural Design* 41, 12 (1971): 737–42; Superstudio, "Premonizioni della parusia urbanistica," *Casabella*, 361 (1972): 45–55.

33 Superstudio, "Three Warnings," 251 in this publication. The test was also part of the extended version published in the December 1971 issue of *AD*.

34 Daniela N. Prina, "Superstudio's Dystopian Tales: Textual and Graphic Practice as Operational Method," *Writing Visual Culture* 6 (2015): 88–102, here 93.

35 Ross K. Elfline, "Superstudio and the 'Refusal to Work," *Design and Culture* 8, 1 (2016): 55–57, https://doi.org /10.1080/17547075.2016.1142343.

36 Prina, "Superstudio's Dystopian Tales" (see note 33).

37 Franziska Bollerey and Kristiana Hartmann, "Collective Housing: Theories and Experiments of the Utopian Socialists Robert Owen (1771–1858) and Charles Fourier (1772–1837)," 252–71 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 8 (1973): 15–26.

38 This was later published as Franziska Bollerey, Architekturkonzeption der utopischen Sozialisten: Alternative Planung und Architektur für den gesellschaftlichen Prozeß (Munich: Heinz Moos Verlag, 1977).

39 Bollerey and Hartmann, "Collective Housing," 252 in this publication.

40 Ibid., 268.

41 Ibid., 259.

42 Bollerey, Architekturkonzeption der utopischen Sozialisten (see note 38), 168. Fourier was simultaneously being reread by Lefèbvre, among others, for his work's potential use in fusing the two opposing concepts of "unitary architecture" and differential space. See Stanek, *Lefebvre* on Space (see note 19), 170–79.

43 Manfredo Tafuri, "New Babylon': The New York of the 1920s and the Search for Americanism," 272–94 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 20 (1976):122–24, 51.

44 Manfredo Tafuri, "The New Babylon: The 'Yellow Giants' and the Myth of Americanism," in *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 171–89.

45 Joan Ockman, "Russia, Europe, America: The Venice School between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A.," in Re-framing Identities: Architecture's Turn to History, 1970–1990, ed. Ákos Moravánszky and Torsten Lange (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2017). 121–48. For an earlier account that emphasizes Tafuri's reception in the United States more than his perception of the country, see Joan Ockman, "Venice and New York," Casabella 59, 619/620 (1995): 57-71. Tafuri's earlier work culminated in a collectively authored volume: Giorgio Ciucci, Francesco Dal Co, Mario Manieri-Elia, and Manfredo Tafuri, eds., The American City from the Civil War to the New Deal (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979). The first edition, in Italian, was published in 1973.

46 Stanislaus von Moos, "Metropolis I," archithese 17 (1976): 2–3.

47 Stanislaus von Moos, "Metropolis II," archithese 18 (1976): 2–3.

48 According to von Moos, a later, unrealized plan was developed to assemble all the contributions in a book, prefaced by an introduction written by Reyner Banham.

49 Thomas Welskopp and Alan Lessoff, "Fractured Modernity—Fractured Experiences—Fractured Histories: An Introduction," in *Fractured Modernity: America Confronts Modern Times*, *1890s–1940s*, ed. by Andreas Wirsching (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012), 1–17. The issue of "race" in Tafuri's work on the American city (and indeed the other contributions to *archithese*, "Metropolis I–III"), suffers from a similar weakness, inherited from Lewis Mumford, who is a standard reference, despite the presence of the civil rights movement at the time. See Charles L. Davis II, Mabel O. Wilson, and Irene Cheng, *Race and Modern Architecture: A Critical History from the Enlightenment to the Present* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2020). An important corrective is Adrienne Brown, *The Black Skyscraper: Architecture and the Perception of Race* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

50 On the significance of Americanism, particularly in German modernist circles, see M. David Samson, "Unser New Yorker Mitarbeiter': Lewis Mumford, Walter Curt Behrendt, and the Modern Movement in Germany," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 55, no. 2 (1966): 126–39.

51 Ockman, "Russia, Europe, America" (see note 45), 137–38.

52 Tafuri, "New Babylon," 285 in this publication.

53 Ockman, "Russia, Europe, America" (see note 45), 138.

54 Manfredo Tafuri, "The Disenchanted Mountain," in *The American City* (see note 45), 484.

55 On Tafuri's and Koolhaas's shared material and method but opposed views, see Marco Biraghi, "Games, Jokes, Masked Balls," in *The Project of Crisis: Manfredo Tafuri and Contemporary Architecture*, 145–72 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 165.

56 Martino Stierli, "Montage and the Metropolitan Unconscious: Rem Koolhaas's Delirious New York," in *Montage and the Metropolis: Architecture, Modernity, and the Representation of Space*, 228–67 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 245.

57 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978); Rem Koolhaas, "Roxy, Noah, and Radio City Music Hall," 296–307 in this publication. First published in *archithese* 18 (1976): 37–43. Another partial publication that appeared prior to the release of *Delirious New York* is Rem Koolhaas, "Life in the Metropolis' or "The Culture of Congestion," *Architectural Design* 47, 5 (1977): 319–25. 58 Koolhaas, "Roxy, Noah, and Radio City Music Hall," 296–307 in this publication. The article does not mention Raymond Hood, and the Associated Architects (designers of the Rockefeller Center) are a mere footnote. The story centers on Roxy and his "dream" as the project's origin—hardly the traditional narrative of the execution of an architectural brief. 59 Stierli, "Montage and the Metropolitan Unconscious" (see note 56), 240–41. See also the critical reedition of Ungers's manifesto: Oswald Mathias Ungers et al., *The City in the City: Berlin, a Green Archipelago: Manifesto* (1977) (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013). 60 Stierli, "Montage and the Metropolitan Unconscious" (see note 56), 235.

61 Harvey, "Flexible Accumulation through Urbanization" (see note 14), 253.

62 Eisinger, *Die Stadt der Architekten* (see note 6), 20.

# Questions for Henri Lefèbvre

<sup>Authors:</sup> Jean Claude Widmer Henri Lefèbvre

Source: *archithese*, 2 (1971): 11–15

Translated by: Brett Petzer

In our present moment, while it is not the case that everything is changing, some of the most central problems are transforming quite rapidly. A few decades ago, urban and townplanning problems were not the center of attention. I think that there has been a shift in focus, in the scientific as well as the political sense, and that that shift has gained ground with exceptional speed. Over the last two or three years, urban planning issues that were already well defined have been moving into the mainstream, but they have done so in a very strange way, by means of minor and indirect aspects. For example, we start talking about the environment or about pollution when, in reality, the central problem lies elsewhere. But little by little, we arrive at that problem by following its edges and adjacencies.

### Can we say that we are currently in the midst of a crisis in urban planning?

We have been in one for a very long time! To the extent that architecture has tried to solve the contemporary world's problems, it has very plainly subordinated itself to a certain number of economic requirements, such as the requirement for industrial growth. Architecture has simply provided the morphology that industrial expansion requires, such as low-cost housing and bedroom communities: places for the workforce to rest from their labors. And even a certain architect-you know who I'm talking about; it's Le Corbusier-who was considered a creative genius among architects, has in fact provided this society with both state capitalism and state socialism. He provided the places such a society needed, which were only pseudoinventions. Today, now, we have our backs against the wall; we have been put on notice to invent something profoundly novel, but that something cannot be isolated, architecturally speaking, from issues that are political in nature.

The fundamental problem, in my opinion, is this: For how long will the major industrialized countries, of which we are a part, persist in maintaining growth patterns that subordinate everything else to industrial growth? When will they realize that industrial growth cannot continue indefinitely and that we need to adopt different development patterns, starting right now? That means thinking about a society, indeed a civilization, in which the growth imperative is not the measure of all things,

### Questions

### à Henri Lefèbvre

J.C. Weiner

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#### Pensez your que la formation que l'on donné actuallement aux fotors architectes set sufficiente?

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#### Mais pour y pervenir, il faudrait que les architectes ou les cherchetes en architecture deviennent des bossmas politiques ?

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# But don't you believe that people-that is, city residents-get the architecture they deserve?

Your assessment is a little harsh. Yes, people get the governments they deserve, and they get the places and the social morphology they deserve, but people are not entirely passive either. They may accept things, they may resign themselves to the way things are, but that acceptance and resignation have their limits. Once that limit is reached, you will see what might be called spectacular repercussions that are socially and politically spontaneous.

#### If you had to give an example of an interesting architect or researcher at this point in time, who would it be?

Your question puts me in a bit of a delicate position, because in my research across many different countries, most of what I've seen is indescribable chaos. I will never tire of talking about some of the urban chaos I have seen in North America or Japan. If I had to name a place that has been particularly successful, I could mention Stockholm, but most of all, Montreal, a city that is very close to my heart, and I can tell you exactly why. It lies at the crossroads of several cultures and civilizations. It is at once French and American. It is highly industrialized, but its old town dates back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And in the heart of Montreal, which was designed and redeveloped by very smart architects and urban planners, you have the Place Ville Marie, one of the most beautiful places in the world. It's a traffic-free square framed by vast American-style buildings where you can find cafés and cinemas, with access to an underground city that is perfectly suited to pedestrian movement and crowds in the winter months. Place Ville Marie, seen in the context of capitalist urban planning-and I must insist on that very important gualification-is, as capitalist urban planning in a highly urbanized, wealthy country, an altogether remarkable achievement.

### But urban planning in Western countries is still in the hands of capitalists?

Yes, but the most surprising thing is that urban planning in socialist countries is not so different. Whether it's pure capitalism or state capitalism or state socialism, it's the imperatives of economic growth that govern how space is organized. And it is within this framework of subordination to the growth imperative that the way in which space is occupied leads to the extraordinary chaos of the kind of city region that we rather grandly term a "megalopolis" or even "ecumenopolis." In reality, these spaces need a complete reorganization from top to bottom, beginning with an acknowledgment of new challenges.

### And what about Brasília, which was roundly praised by international "critics" in its time?

I must confess that I have a particular aversion to Brasília. I have a particular aversion to the works of Oscar Niemeyer. Niemeyer may be a great architect, but he has come to embody state bureaucracy in architectural design.

The work he is doing elsewhere - for example, the plans for the new Algiers that I was shown not long ago-look indescribably appalling. You might even call it madness. The new Algiers is to be a bureaucratic complex of 500,000 residents on Cape Matifou, created under the pretext of a search for a colossal architectural gesture to complement the Bay of Algiers. Imagine what it means to set down a city of 500,000 residents-nothing but bureaucrats—on a rocky promontory. The most basic common sense tells you that access is going to be difficult. Niemeyer's town planning and architecture are utterly bureaucratic, and that, to me, is the worst thing you can say of an architectural project.

# At the same time, it seems to me that the political contexts of Brazil and Algeria are quite far apart, if not diametrically opposed.

I'm afraid that state bureaucracies have certain features in common, regardless of the regime. That assessment may shock some people, but I stand by it. State power, state bureaucracy, and the compromise between bureaucracy and technocracy in many countries: all of these impose a kind of common denominator, whether the regime styles itself a capitalist or socialist one. There may be differences elsewhere, but as far as the role and social function of the bureaucracy is concerned, there are common elements, and they come to light through architecture. We can take architecture-and, for example, Niemever's architecture-as symptomatic of a unique rapprochement between states and state bureaucracies, whether they call themselves socialist or capitalist. Algeria has a particular kind of socialism. Brazil has a fairly hard-nosed strain of capitalism, it is even overseen by a rather strong military authority. And yet, they share common elements, which we find not only in Algiers or Brasília but also in Paris, where Mr. Niemeyer is putting up a building of especial importance—in fact, it is none other than the headquarters of the French Communist Party.

#### So far we have been rather pessimistic. What positive outcomes can we expect?

We can expect to see a burst of invention and creativity that, I think, hasn't yet broken through but is taking shape on all sides.

#### Are you referring here to those who were called "Utopians" ten years ago, people like Yona Friedman, or to someone else?

I have some reservations about technocratic utopias. Technocratic utopias like Friedman's reduce society to a schema of truly excessive simplicity. A space cut out like a piece of rough construction is supposed to be the only social space? I don't think so at all. But attempts are being made on all sides. I'm thinking of Ricardo Bofill in Spain. I'm thinking of Constant in Amsterdam, and I'm also thinking of a number of social formations that may be a little rough and spontaneous, and perhaps won't go very far, but which can create morphologies. I am thinking of communities such as hippie communities or communities of students that form in different contexts. And I am thinking of all kinds of attempts to create spaces.

Imagine someone studying slums. Imagine someone studying all the underground shelters that Vietnamese fighters made to escape the terrible bombings of the American air force. Just think what would be possible if we studied all of these kinds of space creation—don't you agree that surely we would come up with new notions of space?

### Do you think that the training currently being given to future architects is sufficient?

No, I don't think so. But I think that a transformation of architectural teaching is underway; it's still in the making. In my view, this approach to teaching architecture cannot be separated from a theory of space. Here I am advocating for my own work a little; an area in which I think I'm somewhat competent. It is this theory of space that I am trying to develop further, and it would be a theory of a new kind of space, a space produced in full cognizance of the facts, taking into account all the elements—social, political, technological, formal—of which it consists. For example, I emphasize the fact that information technology is a very important element in the constitution and creation of space on a global scale.

# But in order to achieve this, wouldn't architects or architectural researchers have to become politicians?

This is an extremely difficult question to answer, because one could demand of architects that they develop an encyclopedic knowledge of many fields. For example, demography and sociology, because real, actual people must inhabit what the architect builds; or psychology, because these people have tendencies and desires; or psychoanalysis, because urban reality, after all, has a subconscious of its own. The architect should be conversant in mathematics and anthropology, and, in addition, the architect should be political. So that's the great difficulty. We are called upon to create truly encyclopedic syllabi. And then, once we've created these enormous course loads, we must trim them and bring them down to a level accessible to students between twenty and twenty-five years old who need to be prepared to work in a challenging profession and within fairly narrow limits. And I must say in all honesty that this problem has not been solved.

### And yet, there is still the option of working in teams?

Yes. So, in this area, we have tried to build collectives, teams. I must say that, thus far,

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#### So, the architecture of the past is no longer applicable to our society, but the architecture of today, or that of tomorrow, must still be created?

Yes, those are the stakes of the situation. If problems had been solved, they wouldn't be interesting. If it was only a question of drawing a line under the past, that wouldn't be very interesting either. We have to take stock of what has been done up to now. There can be no question of setting out with a clean slate. After all, to some extent, we can also draw on history and historic architecture and historic cities. On the other hand, the problems of the future are immense, almost limitless. In my opinion, a whole era will face these problems, and I don't think they can be solved at all in the short term. As far as I'm concerned, it is possible only in the long term, and I think that for decades, maybe centuries, users, on the one hand, and builders and theorists on the other, will be confronted with profoundly new problems. This is the start of a whole new period, one I call the urban society, as opposed to the industrial society from which we are beginning to emerge and, even more so, the agrarian society from which we have already, to a large extent, emerged.

### Would ours then be the generation that gets sacrificed?

All generations are sacrificed to the future. But no generation is completely sacrificed. They live their lives as they can; they assert themselves. I don't think I belong to a generation that has been sacrificed. We did what we could. We've asserted ourselves, sometimes quite strongly. On other occasions, particularly political ones, we have been rather vigorously thwarted by governments. But it must be said that, through the clashes and the conflicts and what in my Marxist terms is called the dialectical process, you can trace a thread of something that has a certain orientation and a certain meaning.

# Three Warnings against a Mystical Rebirth of Urbanism

Author: Superstudio

Sources: archithese, 1 (1972): 3–6, 36 "Twelve Cautionary Tales for Christmas," Architectural Design 42 (December 1971): 737–42 (EN)

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

Here follow visions of three ideal cities: apotheosis of humanity after twenty thousand years of blood, sweat, and tears. They show Man, having arrived at the goal of his dreams, in possession of the Truth, finally freed from contradiction, equivocation, and indecision. Totally and forever subsumed in the abundance of his own PERFECTION.

#### First City 2,000-Ton City

Even and perfect, the city lies amid green lawns, sunny hills and wooded mountains; slim, tall sheets of continuous buildings intersect in a rigorous, square mesh, one league apart. The buildings, or rather the single, uninterrupted building consists of cubic cells 5 cubits each way; these cells are placed one on top of another in a single vertical stack, reaching a height of a third of a league above sea-level, so that the relative height of the building varies in relation to the level of the ground on which it rises. Each cell has two external walls. Cell walls are of opaque material, porous to air, rigid, but light. The wall facing north (or if this is an external wall, the wall facing west) is capable of emitting 3D images, sounds and smells. Against the opposite wall is a seat capable of moulding perfectly to the human body, even of enclosing it completely. Incorporated in this seat is an apparatus for satisfying all physiological needs. When not in use, this membrane and all apparatus withdraw and the wall reforms. The floor is a simulator, and can evoke all sensations of living things. The ceiling is a brain-impulse-receiver.

In each cell is an individual whose brain impulses are continually recorded by a ceiling panel and forwarded to the central electronic analyzer. This analyzer, a complex system of apparatuses, is located at the top of the building, beneath a continuous semicylindrical vault. It selects, compares, and mediates between the needs of the individuals, programming the life of the entire city moment by moment with the aid of the broadcast wall, the material simulator (floor), and the reflexes of the automatic "housing wall." In this way, all citizens possess at every moment the same preconditions of equality.

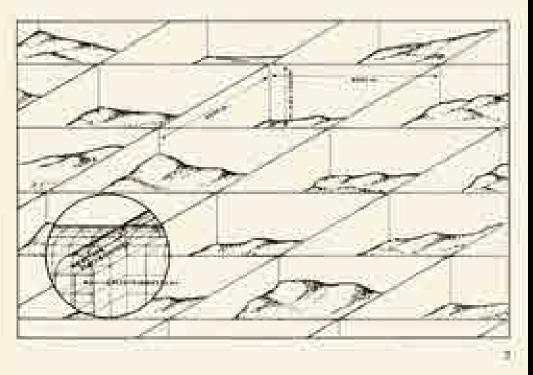
Death no longer exists. Sometimes someone indulges in absurd thoughts of rebellion against the perfect and eternal life granted to him.

### Drei Warnungen vor einer mystischen Wiedergeburt des Urbanismus

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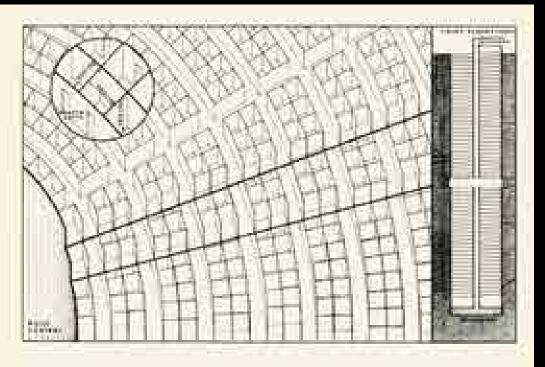
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At first the analyser ignores the crime; but if it is repeated. the man who has shown himself unworthy is rejected. The ceiling panel descends with a force of two thousand tons until it reaches the floor.

At this point, in this marvellous economy, another life is initiated. The panel returns to its original height, and all the individuals living in cells within a distance of a quarter of a league from the empty cell donate an ovum or a group of spermatozoa, which are transported in channels created for this purpose in a mad race to the now-empty seat. Here, an ovum is fertilized and the seat is transformed into a uterus, protecting the new son of the city for nine months, until his happy dawn.

### Second City Temporal Cochlea-City

The city is an endless screw, 4.5 Km. in diameter, completing one revolution a year.

Like a spaceship, the city moves in the lithosphere with an angular velocity of 2' 28"/sec.; the perimetral velocity is 3,584 mm/hr. Its lower extremity, facing the centre of the earth, consists of an excavating apparatus (a kind of turbine, with blades) that, in revolving, crushes rock, forcing all matter towards the centre of the cylinder and through a duct up to the ground. Above the turbine is the propulsion apparatus, an atomic power centre set to last 10,000 years and the automatic plant and electronic computers that control the city.

The upper extremity grows gradually, remaining constantly at the level of the ground outside. Growth is realized through the continuous construction of new sections of city by means of an automatic building-site placed like a bridge between the centre and the perimeter. On this site, rock detritus from the excavations at the bottom is used as building material.

The city is composed of living-cells arranged in a double row of concentric circles. The wall of each cell is as tall as it is deep: 280 cm. Between the two contiguous circles of cells is a roadway 280 cm across. 1,440 radial roadways connect the circular streets. Each cell has a single opening, a door giving on to the circular roadway; the other walls backing onto other cells are totally opaque and soundproof. The difference in levels between two floors is 330 cm.

The floor of the cells is soft, all apparatus required for the satisfaction of individual living needs are hidden in the ceiling and are tele-controlled. The entire city is climatized at a constant 25°C, with 60% humidity. Each cell is constantly lit to an intensity of 150 lux; the roads are illuminated to an intensity of 500 lux; this light contains all the wavelengths of the visible spectrum; that of the roads also contains small quantities of ultra-violet light. The entire ceiling surface serves as a light source, both in the cells and on the streets, making it impossible to create zones of shade or semishade.

The cells have no system for closing or screening.

Inhabitants live one to a cell, and possess no clothes or other objects because the city provides for their every need. They are absolutely free to act and organize their lives, both as individuals and as a community; to be alone; to gather in groups; to create laws or regulations; the only restriction is that they cannot go outside the city because the upper ends of the circular roads are closed by the automatic building-site. Each cell contains an "automatic obstetrician" which, applied to the abdomen of the future mother, extracts the foetus painlessly. The baby is transported by pipeline to a cell in the newly-built section, where it is fed and looked after automatically. Only in this phase is the door of the cell sealed by a steel panel. For four years the child remains in his cell, during which time he learns the ethics and working of his city. Thereafter the metal door slides away and disappears forever into the wall.

Materials used for building the city remain unaltered for a century, without maintenance; then they begin to degenerate; this is also true of the equipment and machinery. Naturally, load-bearing structures and the general equipment of the city are an exception.

The inhabitants spend a lot of time in the roads near their cells; often, in groups or alone, they climb the spiral roads until they reach the children's zone and beyond, into the last four deserted and silent spirals where the newborn babies live. Often, placing their hands and ears against the warm, vibrating metal walls of the building-site, they try to penetrate the mystery of the outside world. But it is rare for someone to go down the road beyond the zone of extreme old age, into the spirals of decay and putrefaction of things and men, and yet further into the uncertain light and the heat, into the spirals scattered with detritus, dust, bones, until they reach the dark, suffocating and vibrant zones spiralling towards indefinite depths.

### Third City Continuous Production Conveyor Belt City

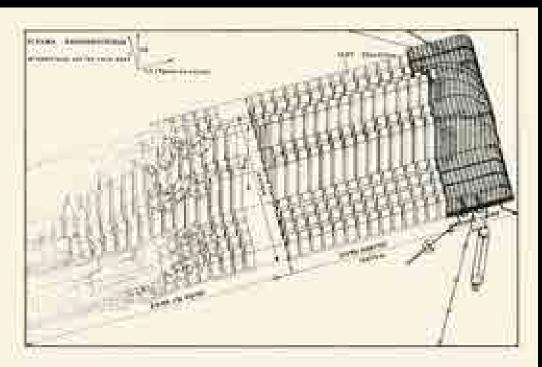
The city moves, unrolling like a majestic serpent, over new lands, taking its 8 million inhabitants on a ride through valleys and hills, from the mountains to the seashore, generation after generation.

The head of the city is the Grand Factory, four miles wide and 100 yards high, like the city it continuously produces. The Grand Factory exploits the land and the underground materials of the territory it crosses, and from these marvellously extracts all that it requires for the construction of the city. The Grand Factory devours shreds of useless nature and unformed minerals at its front end and emits sections of completely formed city, ready for use, from its back end. The Grand Factory moves forward at a speed of 1 ft. 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. per hour. The plan of the city is based on a chequerboard of roads perpendicular and parallel to the Grand Factory; the roads separate square blocks, 261 × 261 yards, and are 29 yards wide. The perpendicular roads are numbered progressively, starting from the central axis of the city adding the letter L or R to the number according to whether it is on the left or the right of the axis; the parallel roads however are called by the name of the month and year of their construction. The Grand Factory produces a series of blocks (including the segments of perpendicular roads between them) in 27 days and the parallel road next to them in 3 days. Because the production of the streets is completely automated, the factory remains closed during these 3 days. This break in the incessant work is called "month end" or. popularly, "street holiday."

The greatest aspiration of every citizen is to move more and more often into a new house because the houses produced are continually modernized and equipped with the yet more perfect commodities that the Administrative Council invents for the joy of the citizens. The Great Families move monthly into the houses just built, following the rhythm of the Grand Factory. The other citizens do their best and only those with little willpower and the laziest wait for four years before moving house. Luckily, it is not possible to live in the same house for more than four years after its construction; after this period, objects, accessories and the structure of the houses themselves decay, become unusable and soon after collapse. Only society's rejects, mad or insane individuals, still dare to wander amongst the ruins, the detritus and rubble that the city leaves behind it.

It is in order to prevent the citizens being reduced to such a desperate state that from their earliest age they are inculcated with the concept that everyone's greatest desire must always be a new house, and it is for this reason that the newspapers, TV and all other media continually advertise the marvellous novelties of the new houses, the technical innovations, the never-before-seen comforts.

What could be more fascinating and reassuring than the spectacle of the families that daily drive up the perpendicular roads in the little yellow buses put at their disposal by the Administrative Council, in the direction of the Grand Factory, towards their new houses? What could be more stimulating than the continual rivalry between all citizens in trying to live on parallel streets with the most recent dates? What day could be happier than when you move into your new house, and your Director gives you a day off on special grounds and congratulates you? What hour could be happier than when you enter your new home and discover all your new things, your new equipment, your new clothes and everything else that the Grand Factory has prepared for you? Admire the city from above, with its great black head, plumed with the smoke of thousands of factory chimneys, with its tidy body eight miles long, with at its centre the grandiose crest of skyscrapers, flanked by great blocks



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of popular housing estates, and stretches of villas with gardens at the edges; with its interminable wake of rubble indicating the ground covered. Look at the perfect city that produces more goods for export than any other city. Look at the rows of lorries arriving empty and going away loaded with goods to contribute to the greater prosperity of our great country and the better fortunes of our well-loved shareholders.

(Excerpt from "Happy Birthday, Grand Factory: Our Town Is Two Hundred Years Old," published by the public relations office of the city).

### Epilogue

Now you have been presented with three\* examples of the lavishness of the dreams produced by the slumber of our civilization. Three: a magic, reconciling number. A kind of homage by us city dwellers to the people of a remote time who will invent the cities.

The moment has come in which to reveal the significance of these descriptions. It is a test, no less meticulously compiled than the tests glossy magazines often publish. As usual, here, too, you will find the answers.

READ THEM CAREFULLY, AND YOU WILL KNOW WHO YOU ARE. THE REVELATION IS NIGH.

*Question*: "How many of these three cities whose descriptions you have just read awaken in you the desire that they become reality? Or: Are you of the opinion that their coming about would benefit humanity?"

Results on page 36

\* The complete version compiled by Superstudio has twelve ideal cities; see *Casabella*, no. 361 [(1972): 44–55].

### **Results of the Test on Page 7**

Three: You are a head of state or hope to become one, or at any rate you are suited to be one. You have completely assimilated the logic and the mechanism of the system. They are part of you indeed, you are identical with them. You are but an empty shell, a dark and humid cavity into which the system has penetrated like tendrils of pumpkin plants into earthy crevices, completely filling them. You are a horrid vision of hell indeed, you are horror personified. You are not a human being. You are simply a zombie.

Two: You are an element of the system, a cog functioning perfectly within the whole. Oiled and lubricated by the logic of the culture and thus free from friction, you turn smoothly, perfectly synchronized with other members of your species. You are the perfect product of your creator: hallucinating and sadistic, you disseminate terrors. You are not a human being, either, but a small and crippled "golem."

One: You are a worm. You have got the idea, and you don't want to admit it even to yourself. You have amputated your legs, arms, and teeth because you're scared even to run away. And now you're hidden away in a dark corner with your snout in the mud so as not to see or hear. But the disgusting thing about you is that you'd like to be less frightened so as to be like everyone else. You are a bogeyman. You're a human being, but perhaps it wouldn't be as bad if you weren't. You are an obscene "mutant."

None at all: So, you feel self-satisfied, but you shouldn't. Because you have not caught on: you haven't understood that the descriptions represent cities now. Is it possible that you didn't realize that it is enough to carry forward the logic of the system until it becomes rigorous logic, to concretize many more hallucinating fantasies than those described here? Hold on, the way is broad, the "technologically advanced" countries are running rapidly along it (ever nearer their goal), and the "developing countries" are following close. You are an "idiot."

Only IF YOU UNDERSTOOD THE GAME from the beginning can you hope to be saved. From the horror of us and our surroundings, "revelation" could spring. Ascend, then, up to the Old Man of the Mountain and be of his children. Observe time through the white hairs of his beard, and when you have been reborn, descend with a pill of hashish beneath your tongue and a knife under your shirt, to exterminate the spirits, monsters, and demons that infest the Earth, and finally, purified with water and incense, you can prepare the foundations for the new City of the White Walls.

# **Collective Housing**

Theories and Experiments of the Utopian Socialists Robert Owen (1771–1858) and Charles Fourier (1772–1837) <sub>Authors:</sub> Franziska Bollerey Kristiana Hartmann

Source: *archithese*, 8 (1973): 15–26

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

Utopian designs for collective housing developments reflect the urban planning practice of their time and at the same time anticipate new social conditions. It is in keeping with the self-image of the utopians not to present their architectural ideas in an isolated space; their planning concepts are instead part of general proposals to restructure the entire society. The urbanistic reflections of the advocates of utopian socialism-Owen and Fourier-differ from those of the utopians and planners of ideal cities of antiquity and the Renaissance in their relationship to the changed conditions of production. Owenite activity and the theoretical and practical models of architecture to be described here fell in the era of the Industrial Revolution and the establishment of the industrial bourgeoisie. The concepts of Fourier and his disciples emerged against the backdrop of postrevolutionary events, the Napoleonic era, the Restoration, and the period after the July Revolution.<sup>1</sup>

The proposals for reform resulted from analyzing contemporaneous sociopolitical deficiencies. In the effort to redress those ills, two possibilities stood out. On the one hand, in the urbanist sector the old cities were countered with new forms of living together; on the other hand, there was an effort to resolve partial aspects of the problem in a kind of pseudo-redevelopment. In the process, however, they lost sight of the connections and, unlike the utopian socialists, did not come up with overall conceptions for a new urban organism.

Robert Owen (1771–1858) and Charles Fourier (1772–1837) shared with the utopians of antiquity and the Renaissance an opposition to the apologists for existing conditions and the insight that in the bourgeois order, despite the liberation of the individual from feudal society, true misery is not and cannot be eradicated.<sup>2</sup> Like the former, they assumed that the society they designed could be established at any time and in any place. This overestimate of the field of influence of ideally conceived housing developments provoked the critique of the representatives of scientific socialism. For the utopian socialists, therefore, it was "necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society from without by propaganda, and, wherever it was possible, by the example of model experiments."3

"Periods of development that are supposed to redesign what exists from the ground up [are]



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## Kollektives Wohnen Theorien und Experimente der utopischen Sozialisten Robert Owen (1771-1858) und Charles Fourier (1772-1837)

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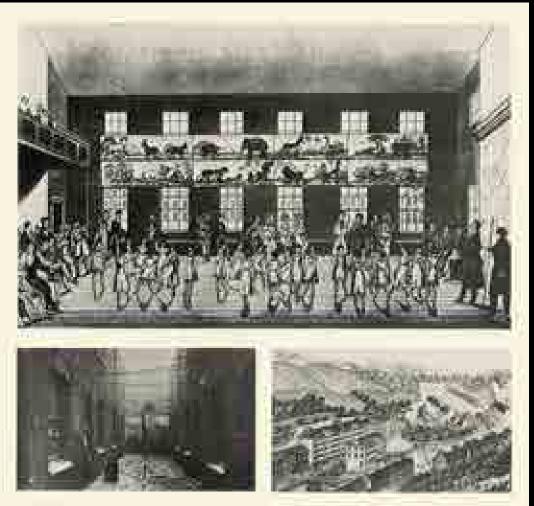
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### 1. Das Owensche Siedlengeporvielogrenen als Ort der Sozialisation

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← fig. 4 Cottages in the Southwark working-class district of London.

← fig. 5 New Lanark, title page of a Russian book on the settlement. The "New Institute" is the building in the center with a portico.

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#### 2 Der Idenierenenf für New Harmony

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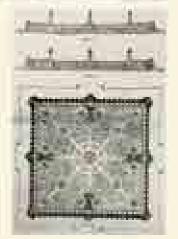
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← fig. 8 Drawing of the floor plan of the same design.

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*The Communist Manifesto* shed light on the contradictions of the earlier movements but also contributed to political theory underestimating all urban planning movements and experiments, "since they would like to have all proposals for partial reforms subsumed entirely under a general reform of society. Separated from the political discussion, urban planning increasingly becomes for its part purely a technology in the service of the ruling class."<sup>5</sup>

For Owen as for Fourier, the housing development-that is, the architectural vessel developed for the existing living conditions of the lowest classes of society (fig. 4)—is merely a component of a new general social system. The divergence within architectural planning in Owen and in Fourier-interpreting architecture as the principal agent of emancipation results from the different ways they engage with the human being. For the pragmatist Owen, the transformed architectural environment was the precondition for the socialization process he intended. Fourier, by contrast, presumed that architecture should be adapted to the psychological and physical conditions of human beings.

In both cases, the metamorphosis of the environment is planned as an emancipatory act. The site of this emancipation is not the single-family home, not the isolated small family, but the large housing unit.

### 1. The Owenite Parallelogram Settlement as the Site of Socialization

Robert Owen (fig. 1) ran, as acting partner, the cotton mill in New Lanark from 1800 to 1824 (fig. 5). There he had the opportunity to put into practice his theoretical reflections. He shortened the work week, increased wages, created more humane housing, and built a school, a hospital, a cooperative store, and, in 1816, the Institution for the Formation of the Human Character. Setting out from education, Owen sought to counter the existing process of disintegration and to reintegrate workers in an ideal community. This "new institute" was the central communication center of New Lanark and was adopted in similar form in all the later ideal plans and practical experiments (fig. 3). New Lanark became the oft-visited model example of the paternalist charity of early enlightened industrial management.

Borne by the idea of realizing his experiment on a broad basis, Owen refined his architectonic concepts for the building of housing developments. The "Villages of Unity and Mutual Cooperation" were designed in 1817 as a solution to the problem of unemployment that had arisen after the Napoleonic Wars.

In his "Report to the Committee of the Association for the Relief of the Manufacturing Poor" of 1817 and, following another economic crisis, his "Report to the County of Lanark" of 1820, Owen explained his geometric model for housing developments (fig. 6). This architectural design, first rendered graphically in 1817, was then refined and expanded by the architect Thomas Stedman Whitwell in 1824.<sup>6</sup>

Owenite housing developments, each for circa 1,200 people on 1,200 acres, were supposed to gradually cover the entire country. The two-story residential wings of a parallelogram surround a square on which the common buildings are arranged around its center (public kitchen, dining halls, school, kindergarten, reading and clubrooms, library, and so on).

Three of the residential wings serve the housing needs of the (mostly) married adults (housing units of four rooms). Two of the elevated central avant-corps of these wings are reserved for the apartments of the general superintendent, the clergyman, the teachers, and the physician. The third central avant-corps serves as a storeroom. The fourth wing has dormitories for the children above the age of three and the staff that supervises them. The two short outer wings of this section house an infirmary and a wing for guests.

Behind the buildings, outside the square, lie gardens surrounded by streets. Adjacent on one side are power plants and production facilities, which, like the stables and the slaughterhouse, are separated from the settlement by trees. On the opposite side are the laundry, bleachery, and at some distance the farm buildings along with the brewery and mill. The first and most important function of the Owenite parallelogram was to offer opportunities for production and consumption to the residents. That ambition, along with the provision of economical social infrastructure for the community, made it necessary to limit the number of residents on a circumscribed territory. Owen's calculations were based on populations of between 300 and 2,000 and on 2,000 acres for the upper limit of population (and 1,200 acres for 1,200 people).<sup>7</sup>

The parallelogram was organized on a model of self-help. Addressing social problems also represented the effort to overcome the separation of city and countryside. The Owenite communities were constituted to counter urban sprawl in the countryside and the chaotic explosion of the cities. "Villages of this extent, in the neighbourhood of others of a similar description, at due distances, will be found capable of combining within themselves, all the advantages that city and country residences now afford, without any of the numerous inconveniences and evils which necessarily attach to both those modes of society."<sup>8</sup>

The formal statement of architecture was, at first, a secondary problem. Owen was primarily interested in the social suitability of the facilities he had conceived. Contemporaneous architects were primarily interested in designing stately buildings in the Georgian style for private and public clients. The Industrial Revolution presented them with the problem of industrial architecture and the associated housing construction. They approached these new construction problems with skepticism. Consequently, the planners of these projects were not architects but engineers, inventors, and entrepreneurs.<sup>9</sup>

### 2. The Ideal Design for New Harmony

In Great Britain, Owen's proposals were never implemented. Tired of his European experiences but nevertheless following the European trend of attempting in the New World that which was impossible in Europe, he went to America in 1824. There he acquired from the Rappites, who along with the Shakers were some of the most successful settlers, 20,000 acres of land, stone buildings for circa 700 people, and several production facilities in Harmony, Indiana. Owen entrusted management of the New Harmony community, founded on June 5, 1825, to his son William. He devoted himself to propagating his ideal. In a speech before the American Congress on March 7, 1825, he defined his concept for New Harmony, as summarized in a plan by Thomas Stedman Whitwell (figs. 7 and 8).<sup>10</sup>

The overall grounds were planned to be built on forty acres with the narrower residential area on a lot of twenty-seven acres, corresponding roughly to three times the size of Russell Square in London. The exterior, whose gabled fronts resemble Georgian terraces, was planned to be one thousand feet long. One of the planned diagonal lines was supposed to coincide, if possible, with a meridian and point to a striking feature in the landscape. This would also ensure that all of the buildings received uniform sunlight.

The elevation of the model colony, which does not deny that its theoretical existence is also indebted to the ideas of the likes of Plato, Lord Bacon, and Sir Thomas More, has at first glance little similarity to the design for a "village of unity" from 1817. The boom of inventions during the Industrial Revolution had scarcely slowed, and the community should have all the "advantages of scientific discoveries down to the present";<sup>11</sup> this pointed more to technological comfort than to the embryonic conception.

The Whitwell Model is raised above ground. as if on a platter, on artificially elevated land. The very broad esplanade (o), a variation on the boulevard with green spaces and paved roads (p), is adapted, where it stands out in its bordering, to the accents on the corners and centers of the square structure. The bypass boulevard can be accessed at the corners and in front of the accents in the middle via stairs (s). The promenade highway is surrounded by a terrace (t) and connected to the landscape on one side by a ramp for vehicles. Built underneath it is an access way to the subterranean supply system (r). The whole is intended to rise in a paradisiacal landscape of trees, espaliers of fruit, and cultivated land. The symmetrical square of residences is flanked by flat-roof corner buildings with neo-Gothic elements (e), while the early Owenite design related only loosely the four boundaries of the square (fig. 6).



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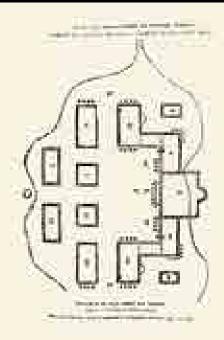
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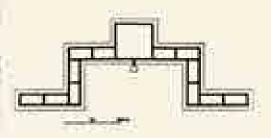
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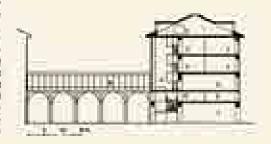
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It fig. 11Course of the street-galleries.Reconstruction by Leonardo Benevolo.fig. 12Elevation of a *phalanstère*.

Whitwell adopts the central avant-corps of the Owenite plan, borrowed from the "Georgian style," by directly integrating them, stylistically analogously to the corner buildings, with the sections with the various service and social infrastructure facilities (f, g, h, i), which extend into the center of the square. Although they perform different functions, the latter have the same structure. Connected to the central section by the continuous interior terrace and an arcaded walkway (g), a section of the building, also with a flat roof, looms up from the nearly square ground plan. The section of the building that faces the center of the square is the base for the 200-foot-tall fluted round towers with exterior spiral stairs (I) – a tower construction that resembles Boullée. The living spaces proper are located in long wings extending between the flat-roofed central and corner buildings. Bay windows and variations in window size and gable height lend rhythm to the elongated facades (m, n).

The residential buildings have apartments on the ground floor and second floor, each with one room and a "sitting room" (m). Separate entrances are located on the outer side of the promenade and in the arcaded walkways of the interior courtyard. Stairs provide access to the terrace. The third floor of the residential wings houses dormitories for the unmarried and for children (n), which are reached via stairs in the corner and central buildings. The special feature of these halls is their variability. They can be converted at will into large apartments or small rooms.

The central (f, g, h, i) and corner buildings (e) are not so much the symbolic defensive towers of a fortified castle as they are the main entrances to the interior botanical garden and the linchpins of public life. They house libraries, museums, theaters, exhibition halls, ballrooms and concert halls, communication spaces of all kinds and sizes. There are four more building complexes in the interior courtvard. The "Dining Cathedral" (d) is a brightly lit, stately hall that extends up to the ceiling. It is accessed from the arcades via a vestibule. This entry hall is flanked by the dining rooms for the children and teenagers (k). The service is extremely functional. Dumbwaiters connect the refectory to the kitchen below it.

Baths are located in the small octagonal central buildings (c), which are identical in form to the gymnasiums (b). The breweries, bakeries, and washrooms are located around the towers (j). Rising like an exotic flower in the middle of the grounds is the polygonal conservatory (a). A heating and ventilation system is planned for the private areas of the apartments and for the public area of the wings. Hot and cold water flows from all the taps; repair and cleaning services are open nonstop.

A broadly ramified subterranean system of conveyor belts and rails connects all the parts of the settlement's square. It leads to various storerooms and kitchens and provides mechanical waste disposal. This subterranean network is connected to the aboveground floors via numerous elevators.

Arcades resembling a cloister—and presumably also modeled on one—offer covered access to apartments, schools, theaters, baths, and dining halls. There are benches here, on the terrace above, and on the garden paths.

The four towers far exceed the original design and add functional and stylistic accents. Their base is formed by the central buildings inside the perimeter, from which one can climb comfortable spiral stairs to observatories. Clocks are installed approximately in the middle of that shaft. Lit with gas lamps and visible from every side, the time can be seen even at night. In a ring under every tower gallery, Whitwell installed a system of gas spotlights with reflectors that was intended to be capable of lighting the entire grounds.

In our interpretation, Whitwell is important not for his formally imaginative gimmicks but for his society-based planning criteria. He created an architectural housing for the Owenite social and societal theories that integrates the latest technological achievements.

As a counterpart to the cottages that also were later criticized by Engels,<sup>12</sup> he created the large residential unit. Isolation, exhausting work, crowded, unhygienic construction, and the single-family household were to be replaced by the spacious, hygienic, well-planted construction, the shared kitchen, the service house, communication, and more leisure time. This architectural model born of social commitment and unbroken optimism remained a theory. New Harmony failed as an experimental settlement (fig. 9).

The experimental settlements in the United States and Great Britain (e.g., Orbiston, Ralahine, Harmony Hall) inspired by Owen's proposals failed because of their insular existence. An isolated group—however much idealism its members might have—is not in a position to change the society from which it has closed itself off.

### 3. Palace Architecture in Social Services

Fourier's ideas for the construction of social housing (fig. 10) are embedded into an interwoven sociopsychological and philosophical system. Within the "Schema of the Course of the Social Movements" he conceived, he designed precise architectural models for the sixth and seventh of thirty-two periods. Setting out from the rejection of "Civilization" (fifth period) and its contradictions, he strove for "universal harmony." The new form of society developed by Fourierthe "association of humanity"-subjects itself to the dual causality of the economic and the psychological. In essence, Fourier's philosophy assumes that all social reforms of humanity are determined by the essence of the human being and that social knowledge is of value only if it is based on knowledge of the human psyche. Fourier's objectives are aimed at institutionalizing collectives. He addresses the individual's devotion to the universal-without abandoning individuality or even identity-and hence indirectly the rejection of egoism as a principle of organization. Already in the city designed for the sixth period, the collective housing unit is in the foreground. It is divided into green zones and industrial and residential areas and recalls Howard's garden city diagram (1898).

In *Théorie des quatre mouvements* [*Theory of the Four Movements*], published in 1808, Fourier goes into the details of this form of housing for the first time. In *Le nouveau monde industriel* [The new industrial world] (1829), the ideal architecture of the seventh period—the Phalanstère—is described in detail. Fourier repeatedly points out "that the theoretical approaches can only be realized in relation to their practicality in a completely new founding."<sup>13</sup>

Formally, the Citoyen Fourier seems to have been guided by the splendor of an absolutist palace grounds such as Versailles or Meudon and by the austerity of a monastic grounds of the stature of the Escorial—although he explicitly speaks out against such comparisons. In terms of function, the Fourieresque large housing unit counteracts monarchical and monastic habits.

The societal palace is the architecture center of the 1,620 residents, a phalanx. The settlement communities, of which Fourier imagines a total of 2,985,984 on earth, are supposed to have from 900 to 2,000 members. They are supposed to seek out, if possible, one square mile of hilly terrain with a river running through it and to take care not to destroy the charm of the landscape when establishing cultures, in order to offer the work groups varied work.

The central building of a large winged structure around a *cour d'honneur* houses the dining halls, the library, study halls, the temple, the telegraph office, the observatory, and so on. One wing is reserved for the "noise-producing workshops" — the carpentry workshop, the smithy, and so on—as well as the nursery. The other wing houses the caravansary: the meeting place for outsiders and visitors (fig. 10).

The Phalanstère offers apartments with different floor plans and sizes in eighteen price classes for residents of different strata. Although the quality and price of the apartments was supposed to increase as one moved toward the central building, there should be a mix of offerings.

The idea of the large housing unit, of an organized collective community of consumption and production on the basis of Fourier's hedonistic theory, was supposed to be crowned in a particular way by the "rue-galerie" or "perystile continue" (fig. 11). The rues-galeries, which enable the *phalangistes* to change their location unhindered by the influences of weather, are located on the second story. Fourier imagines the architecture of the street-galleries as follows: "The street-galleries of a Phalanx wind along just one side of the central edifice and stretch to the end of each of its wings. All of these wings contain a double row of rooms. Thus one row of rooms looks out upon the fields and gardens and the other looks



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out upon the street-gallery. The street-gallery, then, will be three stories high with windows on one side. The entrance to all the apartments of the second, third, and fourth stories is located in the street-gallery. Flights of stairs are placed at intervals to ascend to the upper stories. ... The windows of the gallery can be, like those of churches, *de forme haute et ceintrée* [*cintrée*] [long-arched]. It is not necessary that there be three levels of windows like the three floors."<sup>14</sup>

The street-galleries are among the most important architectural aspects. They are a central planning feature of the sequence of functions within the Phalanstère, but Fourier overestimated their effect. "The street-galleries are a mode of internal communication which would alone be sufficient to inspire disdain for the palaces and great cities of civilization. Once a man has seen the street-galleries of a Phalanx, he will look upon the most elegant civilized palace as a place of exile, a residence worthy of fools who, after three thousand years of architectural studies, have not yet learned how to build themselves healthy and comfortable lodgings."<sup>15</sup>

In his concept for these paths of communication, Fourier takes up the early *unité d'habitation* he admired, the Palais Royal. It certainly corresponds to the character of a utopian design to take up contemporaneous or even earlier urban planning practice when anticipating new social conditions, although the resulting formal-aesthetic statement then often remains conventional.

### 4. The Graphic Concretizing of the Phalanstère

Fourier had assembled several disciples around him in Paris. The Fourierist and graduate of the École Polytechnique Victor Considerant published in his *Description du Phalanstère* of 1840, which was intended to systematize and clarify the scattered architectural and sociographic ideas of his master, Fourier, an ideal view that corresponds to the societal concept (fig. 13). Although Considerant assures us that his formal proposal has no claim to absoluteness whatsoever, his Phalanstère dedicated to humanity seems highly determined. The classicistic winged structure evokes once again the association of the architecture of palaces, the association of Versailles. The broad housing palace, the Phalanstère, is located – Considerant adopts Fourier's proposals in this respect—in a garden landscape opposite an industrial and agricultural complex. "Consider the panorama that unfolds before our eyes. A splendid palace rises out of the bosom of the garden, out of shaded beds and lawns, like a marble island bathing in an ocean of greenery. That is the royal sojourn of a regenerated population."<sup>16</sup>

The central square with a tower is flanked by wings of buildings that connect in turn at right angles—framing a large cour d'honneur—to other wings of buildings. The latter bend again toward both sides parallel to the main facade. To accommodate as many people as possible (up to 2,000), this movement of the buildings occurs in two rows.

The sections of the facade that point outward (toward the cour d'honneur, the street, and the landscape) have an elevation of three stories, whereas the sections of the building facing the interior courtyards have four or five windows one above the other. Here, too, Considerant adopts Fourier's concept for the floor plan, in which the *rues-galeries* are oriented toward the interior courtyard and the living spaces toward the countryside or the street.

It can be assumed that the entire complex has three floors (a ground floor and two upper floors). The lower height of the windows facing the interior courtvards results not from a difference in floor height but from the construction of the rues-galeries (or cirsum-galeries). "The gallery-street of a Phalanstère (phalanstery) imbued with the high Harmony is at least as wide, and as sumptuous, as the gallery of the Louvre. It is host to large meals and extraordinary meetings. Adorned with flowers in the manner of the most beautiful greenhouses, decorated with the richest products of art and industry. the galleries and salons of the Phalanstères offer admirable permanent exhibitions to the artists of Harmony. It is likely that, more often than not, they will be built entirely of glass."17

The differences in the architectural design of the exterior facade and the interior one can accordingly be explained functionally. Whereas the facades of the Phalanstère facing the street and the square are articulated architecturally and the different parts of the building have central and corner avant-corps, these classicistic accents are absent from the courtyard facades.

The classicistic citations could be interpreted as a means of propaganda. After all, the goal was to find someone who would finance the large complex being planned. Considerant admits that both stately and more modest apartments are furnished in the Phalanstère ("pour que chacun puisse s'y caser suivant ses goûts et sa fortune" [to each according to their taste and ability to pay]).18 The architecturaldecorative statement of his Phalanstère design can therefore be understood as a concession to the aesthetic ambitions of the bourgeoisie. The central square building is—as in Fourier's design-reserved for luxury apartments and is particularly emphasized. It is impossible to overlook that the avant-corps are more numerous as one moves toward the center; the planned Tour d'Ordre also draws the viewer's eves to itself.

The overall complex of buildings has a continuous balustrade as its upper termination. The facade facing the farm buildings is decorated with figures that correspond to the avant-corps and are repeated at smaller intervals on the garden facade. It is not possible to determine precisely from Considerant's design whether the garden facade and the facade facing the cour d'honneur differ in form. Despite some of the imprecisions resulting from the perspectival foreshortening, the viewer cannot help but notice that the design of the courtyard facade is more lavish. The flat roof of the building has stairs where the avant-corps are elevated. Considerant conceives this walk-on roof zone as another level of communication. The accessible roof is later again taken up by, among others, Le Corbusier in his unité.

Fourier's theoretical design and Considerant's graphic concept are nearly identical. Considerant placed greater weight on the technological developments of his time in terms of glass construction and further refined the system of heating and ventilation already planned by Fourier.

### 5. Paternalistic Fourierism in Guise

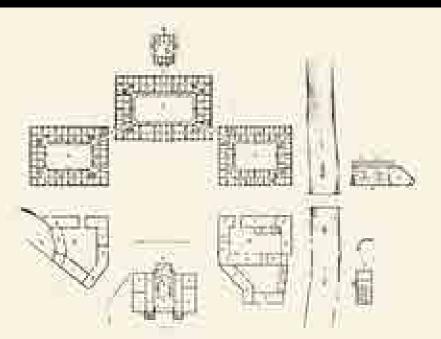
Just ten years after the revolution of 1848, the idea of the societal palace was realized in an experiment in France. From 1859 to 1885, the Fourierist and industrialist Jean-Baptiste-André Godin constructed a complex of housing and production facilities in Guise on the Oise.<sup>19</sup>

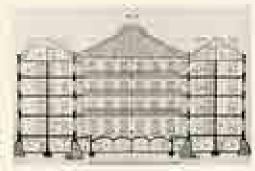
The complex known as the Familistère is subdivided into three self-contained blocks of buildings totaling 180 meters in length. (The facade of the largest Phalanstère by Fourier was 1,200 meters!) The interior courtyards of the three residential blocks are covered with glass in a wooden truss construction. These interior courtyards are accessed by galleries that lead to 465 housing units of different sizes (figs. 14, 15).

The social infrastructure (e.g., a nursery, a kindergarten, a school, a theater, restaurants, showers, and swimming pools) of Godin's Familistère overshadows other contemporaneous settlements based on the system of the single-family home (e.g., the Cité Ouvrière in Mulhouse). Compared to Fourier's ideal, however, the paternalist experiment lost a great deal of ground. Perhaps, however, it was precisely the securing of the seed of the nation—the family—that resulted in so much applause from the bourgeois side for the Fourierist experiment in Guise.

Owen and Fourier designed new forms of cohabitation for the masses. For the scientific socialists, their restlessness and theoretical anticipation of new social conditions downgraded them to utopian socialists. It is, however, precisely their lending concrete form to urbanist ideas-the flaw of the utopian-that makes them interesting for scholarship on the history of architecture. "Only where heterogeneity itself has an activating influence can a social life result and a socially autonomous form, in the sense of a settlement, a village, or a city, obtain content and structure. But that is the precondition for a society living together in a limited space."20 It is above all the social ambition and the integrative character of the designs by Owen and Fourier that produce fascination. But it was precisely the complexity of their planning, which is today interpreted as progressive, that condemned all pragmatic approaches to failure. The complexity was not planned for a restructured society but was supposed to contribute to the restructuring. Idealism operating in isolation failed because of its existence as a foreign body within the society.

1 fig. 14 Site plan of the Familistère: (A) Interior courtyard; (B) Nursery and day care; (C) School; (D) Farms and outbuildings; (E) Washroom, bathtubs, and swimming pool; (F) Gasworks.





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### 5. Paternalistischer Fourieriterus in Gerse

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#### **ENDNOTES**

1 The historical background could not be treated in detail here. On that, see F. Bollerey and K. Hartmann, "Beiträge zur urbanistischen Diskussion im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," PhD diss. FU [Freie Universität] Berlin, 1973.

2 Max Horkheimer, Anfänge der bürgerlichen Gesellschaftsphilosophie (Stuttgart, 1930), 87. [Max Horkheimer, "Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History," in Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 370.]

3 Friedrich Engels, *Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart, 1894), 274. [Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*, trans. Emile Burns, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 25 (New York, 1987), 246.]

4 August Bebel, *Charles Fourier* (Stuttgart, 1907), 23.

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6 A detailed list of the publications of Robert Owen can be found in J.F.C. Harrison, *Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (London, 1969).

7 All of the later reactions to the chaotic city precisely determined the territory to be built up and the number of residents. For example, in 1898 Howard planned 370 acres for 2,000 residents (6,000 acres for 32,000 people). The first German garden city, Hellerau, had 2,000 residents on 140 hectares (350 acres). 8 R. Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen, Written by Himself*, vol. 1A (London, 1858), 281.

9 See William Harvey, Pierson, Jr., "Notes on Early Industrial Architecture in England," *Journal of the Society* of Architectural Historians 8, 1–2 (1949).

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13 Charles Fourier, *Œuvres complètes d'association, 1880,* 12 vols. (Paris, 1966; reprint of Paris, 1841), 4:455ff.

14 Ibid., 4:465ff. [Charles Fourier, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu (Columbia, MO, 1983), 244. The final two sentences of this quotation are omitted in the published translation.] 15 Ibid., 4:462–63. [Fourier, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier*, 242–43.]

16 Victor Considerant, *Destinée sociale*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1847), 421.

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19 On Godin's Familistère, see, among others, J.-B.-A. Godin, *Solutions sociales* (Brussels and Paris, 1871); F. Bernardet, *Le Familistère de Guise: Étude faite au nom de la société du Familistère de Guise, ..., Exposition universelle de 1889* (Guise, 1889); *Le Familistère illustré: Résultat de vingt ans d'association, 1880–1900* (Paris, 1900); and Hans Honegger, "Godin und das Familistère von Guise: Ein praktischer Versuch der Verwirklichung von Fourier Utopie; Ein Beitrag zum Problem der industriellen Demokratie und zum Problem der Organisierung von Arbeitersiedlungen," Phil. diss. (Zurich, 1919).

20 Friedrich Spengelin, "Gedanken zum Wohnungsbau," *Bauen und Wohnen* [26], 9 (1972), 399.

«NEU-BABYLON» das New Yerk der Kwanzigerjahr und die Juch

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# "New Babylon"

### The New York of the 1920s and the Search for Americanism

Author: Manfredo Tafuri

Sources: archithese, 20 (1976): 12–24, 51 Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth*: *Avant-Gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 171–89 (EN)

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

Writing in Pencil Points in 1923, Corbett exalts—as he had already done in previous articles<sup>1</sup>-the new formal possibilities and the functional advantages of the New York Zoning Law. Corbett is not as interested in the structural significance of zoning, even though he points out in passing its effect on the stabilization of land prices.<sup>2</sup> as he is in the new scenic apparatus that it suggests: precisely in that article are reproduced the four famous schemes for setback skyscrapers, made emphatic in the perspective renderings by Hugh Ferriss that illustrate the results of Helmle & Corbett's zoning envelope studies. Corbett, while holding reservations of an economic and functional nature regarding the second scheme—with its upward thrusts arranged in levels of two floors in the tower on the right side, and with its tower of an indefinite height on the left-comments on it in a most significant way:

"with the vertical part inclining up to the top and with the tower that, like the ideal of the Biblical epoch, touches the sky: an authentic tower of Babel."<sup>3</sup>

The specter of the tower of Babel thus begins to circulate in New York architectural culture; the apocalyptic allusions perfectly coincide with the new optimism that in Manhattan, especially after 1925, follows the upsurge in building and the new boom in tertiary structures. It is not accidental that a few years after the publication of Corbett's article, Fritz Lang films, in his *Metropolis*, the very reconstruction of the myth of Babel.<sup>4</sup> The setback skyscrapers, determined by the zoning law, come to be read as carriers of two complementary symbolic meanings. The confusion of tongues resulting from the undertaking of Babel merges with the reference to the city as "New Babylon": the project for the system of roof gardens and bridges suspended over the streets in Rockefeller Center is only a belated result of this widespread identification.<sup>5</sup> But, meanwhile, it becomes necessary to compensate for such a disquieting reading with a cathartic interpretation. Babel is the prelude to new knowledge, to the division of language, the triumph of "difference"-but only as the premise of a new globality. If Claude Bragdon could interpret the renderings by Ferriss as Piranesian prisons, in which man is swallowed up by a machine that is infernal because it is irrational.<sup>6</sup> Helmle & Corbett do not hesitate to elaborate in 1925 an ideal restoration of King Solomon's Temple and Citadel, in a plan

sent, along with others, to the Berlin exhibition of American architecture opened in 1926 at the Akademie der Künste.<sup>7</sup>

It would be an error to consider the pastiche designed by Helmle & Corbett as simply a divertissement of kitsch derivation. The rationality of Solomon is not an antithesis to the "differences" institutionalized by the chaos of Babel; on the contrary, the latter is the very foundation of that rationality. The paroxysmal competition that invades mid-Manhattan along with the new commercial skyscrapers does not need to rationalize interventions coming from outside the market. The new laissez-faire has built into itself adequate potential for *self-planning*: this is the unexpressed ideology that makes the rounds of New York architectural culture during the 1920s. The zoning law, precisely for its "restrictive" characteristics, for its capacity to project the status quo into the future, for its use as an instrument for stabilizing the economy, can be accepted as a tranquilizing measure; the same does not apply, however, to the reports prepared by Henry Wright and Clarence Stein for Governor Al Smith, which were seen as destructive of a *self*-correcting equilibrium.

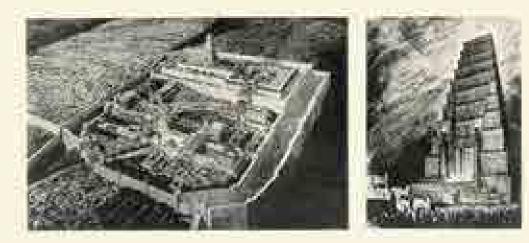
The orgy of forms deposited on the skyscrapers of New York, between the resumption of building activity after the First World War and the crash of 1929, cannot be interpreted monolithically as a simple optimistic merging of the influences of late-romantic European culture and Hollywood taste. That art deco, expressionist, Viennese, and Dutch influences had shaped this orgy of forms is indubitable, as has been recently underlined by Rosemarie Bletter. But nothing as yet has been said about the structural reasons that pushed for such a widespread adoption of the "jazz style," for such a deliberate mediation of mechanization and allegories that are immediately understandable, for such an indifference to matters of linguistic coherence (every language is permitted in the "great theatre" of the metropolis).

Certainly, the "New Babylon" is invited to participate joyously in the world of commerce: the commodities themselves, here, tend to hide the abstractions of their exchange value, to exalt the "gratuitous," to present themselves as pure use-value. The refined lobbies of the Chanin Building, the Chrysler Building, and the Film Center Building are composed as true and proper *boîtes à surprises* [surprise boxes]: the conventional naturalism of the exteriors (the decorated walls of the Chanin Building come to mind) or their fragmentariness are exalted in spaces that absorb into themselves the only "social" values possible in the new metropolis. Yet the fragment, isolated as it is, celebrates its own provisionality: the elevator lobby designed by Ely Jacques Kahn for the Film Center Building (1928–29) is merely an accumulation of plastic objects in syncopated rhythm, unstable, ready to change form in a mechanically controllable metamorphosis.

There is no celebration of the irrational in such an ostentatious fragmentation of objects. The cute remark that Benjamin made in "Zentralpark" is quite valid. Referring to Nietzsche's well-known metaphor, he writes:

"For the idea of eternal recurrence, most important is the fact that the bourgeoisie no longer dared to face the next phase in the development of the order of production which it had set into motion. Zarathustra's idea of an eternal recurrence and the motto on the antimacassars covering the cushions [of the divans of the bourgeois salon] 'Just a quarter hour' are complementary."<sup>8</sup>

Thus the unstable surfaces hollowed out and dotted with denticles and the graded, slanted ceilings of Ely J. Kahn's Film Center elevator lobby, and the spiral tangles of the radiator grills in the lobby of Sloan and Robertson's Chanin Building and the polychrome backgrounds of that building's elevators, though through different devices, express the same allegorical meaning: the exaltation of the temporary. "The eternal recurrence" is banalized, but rendered totally enjoyable; "the bad infinity of time" is exorcized in a triumph of the transitory, of the flowing without pause, of the "inessential" play of forms. "Just a quarter hour": the entire metropolis calls for the ceaseless acceleration of movement, of velocity, of exchange. Within the metropolis, it must be made impossible "to stop," impossible to perceive the laws of its own productive order. "The New Babylon" must present itself as a variety theatre, through which eccentricity becomes an institution. a mode of collective behavior.



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↓ fig. 3 Ely Jacques Kahn, Elevator lobby of the Film Center Building, New York, 1928/29.



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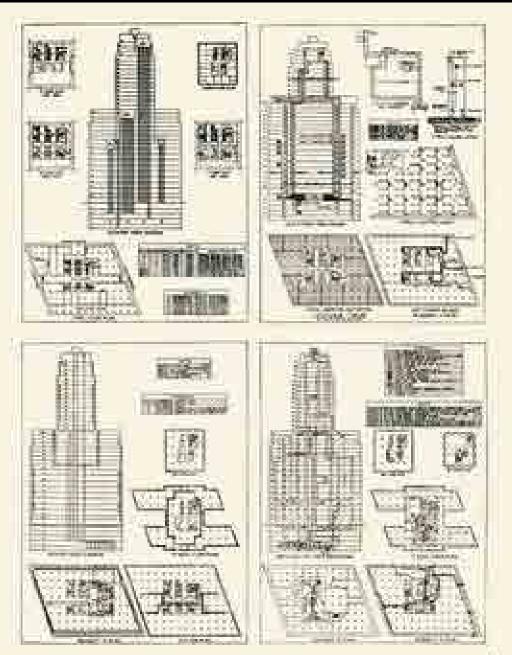
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↓ fig. 5 Barclay-Vesey Building, New York, partial view.

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Writing in 1930 in The Architectural Forum, Paul Robertson, President of the National Association of Building Owners and Managers, reaffirms the tenacious bond between the development of the skyscraper and the American way of life, contesting, with the usual arguments addressed to the forces governing the financial speculation of the epoch, the relation between congestion and tertiary concentrations. The real enemies that Robertson intends to strike are the restrictive regulations conceived, as he writes, by the same mentality that in the good old days would have been frightened by the thought of trains proceeding at the speed of fifteen to twenty miles per hour. Robertson, having taken into account the values of the lands and buildings, does not hesitate to affirm that the total investment in the commercial building sector is in excess of seven billion dollars, making the skyscraper, at least in terms of invested capital, into an industry larger than the auto, steel, and railroad industries.9 Moreover, he expresses disappointment on behalf of his own group in the system of taxation that hits the buildings of the central business districts: in his analysis, the inflationary effects provoked, on an urban scale, by the proliferation of skyscrapers are made to disappear, along with any consideration of the paradoxical situation of the building market in New York City-afflicted already around 1926 by an overproduction of office spaces, according to investigations by Frederick A. Delano and confirmed (note well) by the New York chapter of the Building Owners and Managers Association.<sup>10</sup>

While even during the depression, the skyscraper, against all evidence, could be reaffirmed as an ineluctable component of an urban "destiny" already marked out, the initial

stages of the economic cycle that reshapes the face of the tertiary aspects of New York were experienced in an exactly opposite manner by the architects. To begin the chapter on New York art deco-as is usually done-with the Barclay-Vesey Building (1923–26) by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, with Ralph Walker as designer, can, from the viewpoint of the previous sentence, send us off in the wrong direction. If we examine the structure of this skyscraper. which was constructed for the New York Telephone Company, we find that its base takes the form of a parallelogram, coinciding with the shape of its lot. The building rises compactly to the tenth floor, where it assumes the planimetric form of an H, with the short sides still determined by the basic shape of the parallelogram. Independent of this structure, however, the central core of the building rises for another nineteen stories, culminating in three large triumphal arches and a series of recessions in the form of parallelepipeds descending in tiers against the sky "à la manière de Saarinen." The typology of the skyscraper with an open courtyard—introduced by Post in 1880—is thus replaced by one with a single tower. And since we are dealing with an assemblage, what is emphasized is the effect of torsion, produced by the divergent orientation of the geometric coordinates of the central core and of the volume articulated by the form of the parallelogram. The dramatization of structure is further accentuated by the prevalence of the continuous vertical bands of brickwork that "liberate" themselves from their functional constrictions once they reach the level of the crown with its varying heights: a "liberation" that is underlined by, among other things, the heightened density of the decorative motifs-interwoven plants and exotic animals-at the levels of the shopping arcade and the upper stories.

Louis Sullivan had perceived correctly; Eliel Saarinen's project for the *Chicago Tribune* concluded a formal experiment that Sullivan had left incomplete. The Barclay-Vesey Building is entirely within such a tradition. The struggle of structure to reaffirm its own coherence assumes here an epic tone: only formal distortion guarantees to the tension of volumes an organicity regained by means of a dialectic. Thus the tragic quality inherent in the very condition of the skyscraper—a typological event sundered from every morphological support on the urban level—is assumed and sublimated: the organicity of the building is not guaranteed by the givens upon which it is based but by their deformation, by the imposition of a structurality obtained by means of "heroic" disarticulations. The distance from the fragmentariness of the Film Center Building could not be greater.

Nevertheless, three years after its opening, the Barclay-Vesey Building would be hailed by Mujica as a work marking the triumph of the Modern School, as opposed less to the neo-Gothic already in decline than to the classicism advocated by Hastings.<sup>11</sup> Yet even Lewis Mumford, writing in 1928 his first article dedicated to the review of new tendencies in American architecture,<sup>12</sup> having argued against every connection between the zoning envelope and the aesthetic treatment of the skyscraper, cites the Barclay Vesey Building as one of the signs of a cultural renaissance, placing it alongside Hood's Radiator Building, the Graybar Building, and the Alabama Power Company Building. Mumford, however, sees the work of Ralph Walker not as a unified organism. but rather as a split, dualistic structure:

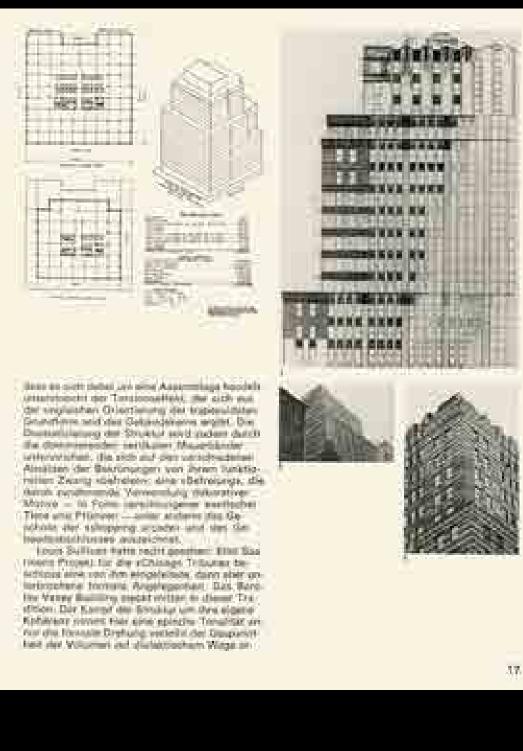
"The building as a whole has a feeling of dark strength, but in the stone work of the lower stories and in the interior the designer introduces a delicate, naturalistic carving, heightened within by the use of gold. When one enters the main hall, one almost forgets its purpose: it is as gaily lighted and decorated as a village street in a strawberry festival. Mr. Walker, in other words, accepts the contrast between structure and feeling: he does not attempt to reconcile them... In Mr. Walker's design decoration is an audacious compensation for the rigor and mechanical fidelity of the rest of the building; like jazz, it interrupts and relieves the tedium of too strenuous mechanical activity."<sup>13</sup>

It is significant that Mumford does not comprehend the structural aspects of the Barclay-Vesey Building, which, with its shopping arcade on Vesey Street, among other things, takes into account the principle of multilevel traffic, even though it is confined to the restricted ambit of a single passage. What interests the American critic is the juxtaposing of the elementaristic terrorism of the European avant-gardes against the principle of synthesis at the heart of the tradition of Sullivan and Wright; to Walker's work, he opposes the Park Avenue Building by Ely Jacques Kahn, which he interprets as a reconciliation of the two poles that, in his opinion, the Barclay-Vesey Building keeps apart.

And yet, from the structural point of view, Raymond Hood, Corbett, and Kahn are in accord in advancing proposals antithetical to the regionalism that was advocated by the RPAA and that Mumford himself will defend against the bland hypotheses of decentralization suggested by the Regional Plan of New York drawn up by Thomas Adams. Hood and Corbett more explicitly, and Kahn more generally, propose concentrations of high density in the large areas of the central business district to create a vertical integration of residences, services, offices, industries, and social spaces, in single and completely equipped blocks.14 However, Kahn arrives at the solution of the Park Avenue Building only after a Beaux-Arts education, an experience as a painter, researches in vernacular style, buildings in New York that are still ambiguous, such as the John Thorpe Building (1921), the Arsenal Building (1925), the 550 Seventh Avenue Building (1925), the International Telephone and Telegraph Building (1927). Only with the triad of skyscrapers built in 1927—the Insurance Building, the Park Avenue Building, the Broadway and Thirtyseventh Street Building does a Kahnian "style" become definitive: exactly the personal style that triumphs in the Film Center discussed above, in the Allied Arts Building of 1929, and in the Bricken Casino Building of 1931.

It is evident that Mumford praises the formal continuity of the Park Avenue Building for its vague resemblance to some of Wright's formulas. But the decomposition of Buchman & Kahn's skyscraper, on the whole a traditional organism, effected by its ornamental and colored projections, designed in collaboration with Leon Solon, belongs to a composite poetics, which departs from European experiments only to confront them critically with openly anti-European traditions. The abstract silhouettes that torment the surfaces of the Park Avenue Building alternate, and enter into dialogue, with a gamut of colors and materials ranging from masonry, to terracotta, to ochre, to magenta red, to blue, with gradations dimensioned according to their distance from the observer's eye. Presenting the building in 1928, Leon Solon speaks of a scientific approach to

↓ fig. 6 Buchmann & Kahn, Park Avenue Building, New York, 1926. Floor plan and volume computation. ↓ fig. 7 Park Avenue Building, New York. Detail study of the upper part of the building, taking into account the choice of colors and materials.



← figs. 8–9 Ely Jacques Kahn, 2 Park Avenue Building, New York. Partial views. aurrenten Chronitae, Den bedeutel, Bors Ida magische Mureett, durch des Woltssoinstnie neiset bedrogt als ein son der nurphologischen Umgehausg der Staet unsthörigiges repologitohen Plactemen, aufgeschrieten und schlichten ührt sicht er den Ausgengebeiteningergen, om dem o duren Defermation Segnischet, im Aufanten einer durch sberoriches Arbitukenungen erweisten Strochte. Der Alsbard ihrer Prägmerlastens des Führt Gerter Baltilleg Körtete mörb artest des Führt Gerter Baltilleg Körtete mörb

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#### ↓ fig. 10 Helmle / Corbett & Harrison and Sugarman & Berger, Master Building, New York, 1928–29.

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↓ fig. 11 Francisco Mujica, Reconstruction of the pyramids of Papantla, Mexico.



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Thus the color and the texture of materials come to be exalted as new formal instruments. Kahn also writes in 1928:

"The dream of a colored city, buildings in harmonious tones making great masses of beautiful patterns, may be less of a vision if the enterprising city developer suspects the result. There is evident economy of effort in the application of color in lieu of carved decoration that cannot be seen and the novelty of a structure that can be distinguished from its nondescriptive neighbors has a practical value that must appeal without question to the designer and his public."<sup>18</sup>

The "colored city" is therefore a selfadvertising structure, a system intended to involve the metropolitan public, and, as in the case of the new skyscrapers on 42nd Street and on Park Avenue, the efficient instrument of a speculation perceived as pioneering, an attack upon and conquest of new areas for the "adventure" sung by the skyscrapers themselves. It is not coincidental that the professional organization of Kahn's studio is ironbound: the firm can offer its clients not only new forms of publicity but also accurate advice on the suitability of locations, thanks to a scientifically kept up-to-date archive monitoring the state of land prices on the chessboard of Manhattan.<sup>19</sup>

It is upon such a relation between design and speculation that a poetics aimed at a search for the autochthonous values of "American Civilization" is based. Kahn possessed, not by chance, a library containing texts on classical, Egyptian, and Oriental archaeology and a collection of objects, majolica, and porcelains from ancient Persia that were unique in New York. His interests in Chinese primitive decorations, Mayan architecture, Persian art, Moorish styles directly influenced his work, but they also have a deeper ideological meaning: Kahn saw the ascendancy of the Turkish Empire and the decadence of the Byzantine and European civilizations as consequences of the definite deterioration of an obsolete tradition, whereas his recourse to pre-Columbian art belongs to a "cult for roots" that places him close to the free wanderings of Wright in search of the red thread that was broken, in the American continent, by the "corrupting" rationality of Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Besides, had not Rose Henderson, already in 1923, exalted the colonies of painters who had installed themselves after 1903 at Taos and Santa Fe, in New Mexico, near the anthropological sites of the Indians and the remaining Pueblo tribes, affirming that "the Indians were the first Cubists in this country"?<sup>21</sup>

The unitary masses of Kahn's skyscrapers, commented upon by a fragmentism that becomes appeased only in the Squibb Building (1930), are not as remote from Helmle & Corbett's reconstruction of Solomon's Temple as appears at first sight. The Park Avenue Building, the Allied Arts Building, and the Holland Plaza Building (1930) are also monuments to "knowledge": even if in them the cult of the archaic merges with a celebration of the "monumentality of the eccentric and the transitory," unknown to the formal disjointedness—by now lacking any will to reintegration—of a skyscraper like the Master Building (1928–29) by Helmle & Corbett.

The immediately consumable image, despite its articulation by dynamic trajectories (one thinks immediately of the flagrant virtuosity exhibited by Kahn in the ultimate designs for the Bricken Casino Building), seeks roots in a culture that ignores the historicity of the European tradition. In the quest for the autochthonous, Kahn encounters neither Emerson nor Whitman, but rather arts and cultures apparently "ahistorical," stable, capable of being absorbed as new "Sources of Inspiration," in a context that makes the transitory into a monster to be exorcized but to which, nevertheless, sacrifices must be dedicated.

Note well: whether for Richardson, Kahn, or Wright, the "roots" sought for a new American culture are embedded in the *other*. What counts is the equation between the archaic-symbol, and only symbol, of an uncontaminated truth -and the victory over the atavistic inferiority complex vis-à-vis Europe. But with a new feature, which emerges alongside the neoromanticism of the Golden Age: now, at the end of the twenties, the enemy to defeat appears to be the organicity of language. In fact, being neither able nor willing to offer themselves as complete "syntheses," the skyscrapers of the "new" Manhattan pose as spectators at a gigantic collective ballet. The subjectivity that the system of big business transfers to the molecules of the crowd-the individuals -it dominates is thus recuperated, in a sort of propitiatory rite, by the "new subjects" of the city, who advance joyously to the front of the stage of the metropolis transformed into a music hall. The ludic installs itself in the metropolis with masks that lack thickness: the vitalism that emanates from it knows not the desperation of Fitzgerald, but rather the "foolish" vanities of Zelda.

Yet the vitalism of the parade, denounced by critics like Croly or Murchison,<sup>22</sup> is deeply characteristic of the search for the Americanism of which we are attempting to reconnect the threads. The "New Babel" is the innocence that accepts every language, but also the ability to single out collective myths to follow, conscious of their provisionality. It is not surprising that one of the first systematic histories of the skyscraper—that of the Chilean Francisco Mujica—works out organically some of the hypotheses that Ely Kahn had formulated empirically and with the taste of a collector.

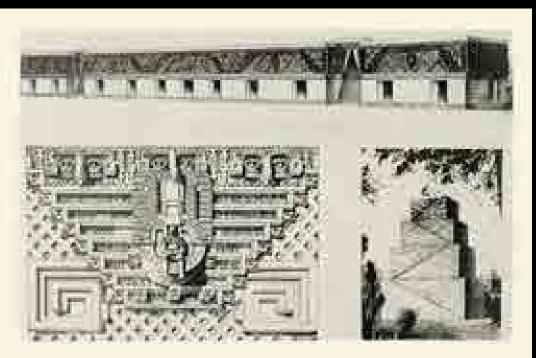
The binding together of the search for a truly American architecture and the "American" typology par excellence, that of the skyscraper, is for Mujica a straightforward operation. In this sense, his interpretation of the reasons for the "downfall" of the so-called Chicago School, after the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, is symptomatic: the neoromanticism of Root and Sullivan was "un-American."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the search for "roots," obstinately pursued by Mujica, is the legacy of the tradition of the American Renaissance. That compounding of transcendental subjectivity and the naturalistic refounding of civil society had as its objective a "frontier" folded back on itself: the metropolis of the skyscrapers was an instrument at the national level, the brain of a complex organization, that, especially in the twenties, aspired to a self-control, to an automatic healing of its institutional wounds. (In fact, such an aspiration to capitalist self-planning, in the absence of interventions by the public administrators was the goal of the regional plan for New York financed and organized by the Russell Sage Foundation, from 1923 onward.)

It is exactly to such a "miraculous" compounding of irrepressible differences that the search for the roots of a "pure" Americanism, liberated from the mortgages fixed by European culture and founded on a neo Rousseauean naturalism of the "noble savage," attempts to offer a contribution. Mujica writes:

"In these latter days a new tendency has appeared that does not accept the preconceived patterns of the classical and the Gothic styles, but strives to express spontaneously a rational and sincere decoration of the structure employing for this purpose the most modern lines.... The characteristic gualities of these new lines and proportions present great resemblance with the elements of primitive American architecture. As to cornices it has not been possible to apply to skyscrapers any of the hitherto known proportions. The new architecture has had to find an element which only marked the limit of the wall-surface. By this quality and by the fact that its principal decorative elements are brought out in large surfaces, the new style strikingly recalls the Pre-Columbian architecture with its palaces and pyramids with small cornices, and magnificent decorations carved in big dominating surfaces."24

That the first illustrations in Mujica's book are ideal reconstructions of the Mexican pyramids of Papantla and Teopantepec and that of Tikal, in Guatemala, has therefore a polemical significance. The "new" draws its guarantees of validity by fastening itself to the primitive —even though the examples used by Mujica do not appear innovative with respect to the practice of designing within the circle of the Architectural League of New York. But let us allow the author to continue:

"After a profound study of the ruins it is possible to conceive a *new* line in which only the sentiment of the American forms subsists. It appears to me correct to call this new type of architecture Neo-American. ↓ fig. 13 Francisco Mujica, top and left: Reconstruction of the House of the Governor, Uxmal, Mexico; lower right: Reconstruction of the pyramid of Teopantepec, Mexico.



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# 1 fig. 15 Sequence from the film *Gold Diggers of 1935*, by Busby Berkeley, 1935.

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<sup>14</sup> Lander Bhatmand, additionant deproteitigen Tauling, Va-Australitiker, 1922a und Cyble, A. M. E. 1971. (196), Main Sartauta, dens eine Journe, den Presses Austream Marreterien new Parkenet, augene aus Presses aufer Metrice & Cambrid Math. 2010. (2010). Income constructions into Metrice & Cambrid Math. 2010. (2010). Income constructions into the construction registration function. Income the sector of a sector data registration function. Income the sector of a sector data registration function in the sector of the sector data registration functions and France Mergel Weights assessing the sector function. The function of the sector of the sector mergentic function. The sector of the sector of the sector registration. The function of the sector Mergel Weights assessing the sector of the sector.

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<sup>14</sup> Ci. Etti Languitta Kohn, «On Nave Tank, Yawi, Franzen and Furturas (1920), vol. Artikus Transves Martha and S. 600 Annual Transves, New York (2 million, 1920), 201–201, Annual Photos vol. Cry product a Solghe Book, Marthani a Bernares, 1923, n. 12, 53, 58, 59 (2016), 108 - 18, 40 (2018), addenia 2020, n. 52, 5 (2016).

7 Siller V. Barn, ePa Yan Ayaine Galiling, New York Server, Plan Architecture Hanned, 1958, no. 23, p. 6 5, 2465–251.

v. 11. E. I. Correl, distinuity of Europia and American Description of Art point Antonion, Americ Yark, M.S.S. & FT2 and 2018. Env. Annue presentative consolitation backway and failed and Americanization of the Art and American American Antonio American Americanization of the Art and American American American American American Interpret and probability and American Information American Interpret and probability and and american Environment American Interpret and probability and and american Environment American American american American American Environment American American American American American Environment American American American American Environment American Amer The difference between the Renaissance and the Neo-American architecture is fundamental: The Renaissance worked with a model before it. The Neo-American architecture is a new creative work which requires profound study of the primitive American architecture and of the geometrical and mechanical elements of the regional nature. When all the forms peculiar to us have germinated in our minds and can follow the summons of our imagination we will be prepared to create this new architecture and to produce designs and plans embodying reminiscences of their primitive origin, but at the same time revealing their modern character clearly and powerfully."<sup>25</sup>

As you can see, Mujica manages merely to rationalize the ideas widely circulating in the New York milieu. Beyond the subjective mysticism of a Frank Lloyd Wright, it is very clear that the appeals to a "Neo-American architecture," to the art deco style, to a domesticated machinism tending toward kitsch-I am thinking of the Chrysler Building, but also of the residential skyscraper by the Chanin firm-are merely instruments to seize a general consensus for an urban structure that is paradoxical and increasingly shackled by its own laws of growth.26 The opinion poll of New York architects that addressed the convenience of the skyscraper system, which Mujica published in the fifth chapter of his book, is indicative. The opinion of Thomas Hasting, who is absolutely opposed to the tall commercial building, is coupled with that of Mayor Henry Curran, who, in his speech delivered at the meeting in 1927 of the Civic Development Department of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, confirms the uneconomicalness of the tertiary concentrations, posing these auestions:

"Is it good sense not to have a dollar for any other city need, to pour it all into more traffic facilities to take care of a coagulated bunch of skyscrapers, is that sense? Is that city planning? Is that good business? Is it good for your individual business? That is where we are headed."<sup>27</sup>

But John Sloan, Wiley Corbett, and Mujica himself are ready to demonstrate that the skyscraper can be an instrument of good business: the problem is to limit the central business district, possible because of the high tertiary concentration; to apply taxes compatible with the market; to use the resulting fiscal yield for a reconstruction of the streets, supervised by a public administration capable of taking into account the proposals for the separation of traffic advanced since the first years of the century; and to adopt Le Corbusier's model for the *ville radieuse*.<sup>28</sup> Here utopia extends its hand to professional optimism: Corbett, Sloan, Hood, Mujica merely put into the form of their own discipline the demands of Paul Robertson.

If, going beyond such considerations-with which American big business will not come to terms even after the Great Depression-we attempt to consider the effects the "New Babel" had upon the collective consciousness of the 1920s, we must place, alongside documents like the film Madam Satan, cited by Bletter,29 one more illuminating cinematic sequence. In the film Gold Diggers of 1935, Busby Berkeley inserts a practically independent segment, a film within the film: Broadway Lullaby.30 The camera begins with a long shot of the singer Wini Shaw, isolating her face against a black background. While Wini performs her song, the camera executes a perpendicular movement, framing the protagonist from above. After a dissolve, Wini's face remains only in profile, within which appears an aerial view of Manhattan. The metropolis of the skyscrapers is completely contained in the unconscious of the individual, as it were: the whole and its parts are no longer distinguishable, bound as they are in a relationship of complete correspondence. But here we are dealing with a mortal relationship. After an exceptional representation of "urban chorality" - a musical sequence that assembles a hundred dancers in a gigantic nightclub—Wini falls from the top of a skyscraper, while the camera moves within a Manhattan that continues indifferently its own existence. Once again, the metropolis is superimposed upon the face of Wini.

In this way, Berkeley demonstrates that the loved-hated big city requires concrete reform in order for the collective festival of the musical to be experienced "authentically"; but he also shows that the entire search for "roots," which we have attempted to characterize by isolating some examples from the 1920s, is completely superfluous. The individual has already internalized the "values" of the urban machine and they are mortal. The dream will survive: the dance and the choral song of the musical. We are no longer dealing with the gaiety of the Chrysler and Park Avenue buildings. The hopes raised by Roosevelt's New Deal remain as yet unfulfilled; the "Dinosaur City" will see to their destruction all too soon, reaffirming its own indissoluble connection with the triumphal march of urban-industrial America toward imperialist expansion, the destiny of which—in spite of everything—the Americanist ideology of Helmle & Corbett, of Ely Kahn, of Mujica had celebrated.

#### ENDNOTES

See Harvey Wiley Corbett, "The Influence of Zoning in New York's Skyline," The American Architect and the Architectural Review 123, 2410 (1923): 1-4, in which Corbett recalls the proposals formulated in 1908 by David Knickerbocker Boyd (The American Architect, November 18, 1908); and "Zoning and the Envelope of the Building," Pencil Points 6, 3 (1923): 15-18. See also Corbett, "Effect of the New York Zoning Resolution on Commercial Buildings," The American Architect 125, 2448 (1920): 547-51; and Carol Willis, "Zoning and Zeitgeist: The Skyscraper City in the 1920s," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians 45, 1 (1986): 47ff.

2 On the structural significance of the Zoning Law, see Franco Mancuso's well documented essay, "Lo zoning: L'esperienza di New York," in *L'urbanistica del riformismo: Usa, 1890–1940*, ed. Pier Luigi Crosta (Milan, 1975), 89 ff.; and Willis, "Zoning and Zeitgeist."

3 Corbett, "Zoning," 18.

4 See Giusi Rapisarda, "Die Stadt und ihr Doppelgänger: Von 'Metropolis' zu 'King Kong,'" *archithese* 17 (1976): 29–35.

5 See "The Rockefeller Building Project in Mid-town New York," *Pencil Points* 12,10 (1931): 776–77; William H. Jordy, *American Buildings and Their Architects*, vol. 4: *The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-twentieth Century* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 1–85; and Tafuri, "La montagna disincantata," 496ff.

6 Claude Bragdon, "Skyscrapers," in *The Arch Lectures* (1940) (New York, 1942), 103–15.

7 See "Dr. John Wesley Kelchner's Restoration of King Solomon's Temple and Citadel, Helmle & Corbett Architects," *Pencil Points* 6, 11 (November 1925): 69–86; and Robinson and Haag Bletter, *Skyscraper Style*, 11–12. Helmle and Corbett's project was also exhibited at the forty-first show of the Architectural League of New York. See *The American Architect*, February 20, 1926. 8 Walter Benjamin, "Zentralpark," in Gesammelte Schriften (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), vol. 1, pt. 2, 677. The passage by Benjamin has been justly compared to aphorism 105 of Adorno's Minima Moralia: "Man's life becomes a moment, not by suspending duration but by lapsing into nothingness, waking to its own futility in face of the bad eternity of time itself. In the clock's over-loud ticking we hear the mockery of light-years for the span of our existence. The hours that are past as seconds before the inner sense has registered them, and sweep it away in their cataract, proclaim that like all memory our inner experience is doomed to oblivion in cosmic night. Of this people are today made forcibly aware." Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life (London: Verso, 1974), 165. See Elvio Facchinelli, "Minima (im)moralia," L'Erba voglio 26 (1974): 16–17.

9 Paul Robertson, "The Skyscraper Office Building," *The Architectural Forum* 2, 6 (1930): 879–80.

10 See Delano, "Skyscrapers"; and the Journal of the Real Estate Board of New York, August 1930. An outline of the historical reconstruction of the economic significance of the skyscraper in relation to the phenomena of concentration of financial capital can be found in Heinz Ronner's article, "Skyscraper: A propos Oekonomie," archithese 18 (1976): 44–49, 55.

Mujica, History of the Skyscraper, 11 33. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that Hastings himself, cited by Mujica (ibid.), identifies in his Modem Architecture artistic socialism and avant-gardes, totally rejecting both: "Surely modern architecture should not be constituted by the deplorable creations of aspiring inventors of styles, the socialists who have penetrated the world of art more than that of politics, who are more interested in promulgating some innovation or other than in achieving a concrete improvement, the so-called futurists, the new thinkers, the cubists, the followers of art nouveau, all of them lacking in ties with the past. without any knowledge of tradition."

12 Lewis Mumford, "American Architecture To-day, I," Architecture 58, 4 (1928): 181-88. Note that Mumford's entire essay refutes the above-mentioned theses of Helmle and Corbett as well as Ferriss's rendering; his main hypothesis is that, after the dormant period from 1890 to 1920, the new experiments were linked to the great tradition of J.W. Root, Louis Sullivan, and Frank Lloyd Wright. Perceptive passages on Mumford's position with respect to the "original values" of the American experience are contained in Francesco Dal Co's essay, "La forza della tradizione," the introduction to the Italian edition of L. Mumford's The Brown Decades (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), entitled Architettura e cultura in America dalla guerra civile all'ultima frontiera (Venice, 1977), 7-21.

13 Mumford, "American Architecture To-day," 185.

14 See Ely Jacques Kahn, "On New York: Past, Present and Future (1926)," in Arthur Tappan North, *Ely Jacques Kahn* (New York and London: McGraw-Hill, 1931), 25–27; Raymond Hood, "A City under a Single Roof," *Nation's Business* 12 (1929): 18–20, 206–9; and H. W. Corbett, "Design in Office Building," *The Architectural Forum*, 52 (June 1930): 779.

15 Leon V. Solon, "The Park Avenue Building, New York City," *The Architectural Record* 63, 4 (1928): 289–97.

16 See E.J. Kahn's essay, "Schools of Europe and America," in Design in Art and Industry (New York, 1925), in which the author examines the contribution of the Paris Exposition of 1900 and that held in Turin in 1902, and the research of the Wiener Werkstätte, of Otto Wagner, Hoffmann, Klimt, Behrens, the Werkbund, and the Dessau Bauhaus. According to his later recollections, Kahn, as a youth in Paris, had learned to appreciate Leon Bakst's Russian ballets and the collections of paintings of Matisse and Picasso, by striking up a friendship with Gertrude Stein. See the unpublished manuscript by E. Kahn in the Avery Library of Columbia University, New York, ch.3.

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17 See the above-cited unpublished manuscript by Kahn, ch. 2, 4–5.

18 E.J. Kahn, "On the Use of Color (1928)," in North, *Ely Jacques Kahn*, 24.

19 See Henry H. Saylor, "Ely Jacques Kahn," *Architecture* 64, 2 (1931).

20 See E.J. Kahn, "Sources of Inspiration," *Architecture* 9, 5 (1929): 249–56; and ch. 11 of Kahn's unpublished manuscript.

21 Rose Henderson, "A Primitive Basis for Modern Architecture," *The Architectural Record* 54, 2 (1923): 189–96 (the citation is on p. 189).

22 See H. Croly, "The Scenic Function of the Skyscraper," *The Architectural Record* 63, 4 (1928): 77–78; and Kenneth M. Murchison, "The Spires of Gotham," *The Architectural Forum* 52 (1930): 786, 878. The "scenic function" of the skyscraper was carried to its extreme at the ball at the Astor Hotel in New York on 23 January 1931, at which the most prominent architects of the city represented "The New York Skyline," with costumes and headgear evoking their own works: Leonard Schultze appeared dressed as the New Waldorf Astoria, Ely J. Kahn as the Squibb Building, William Van Alen as the Chrysler Building, Ralph Walker as One Wall Street, and so forth. Architecture expresses itself as theatre; its creators unconsciously close the cycle opened by the expressionist and Dadaist cabarets. On the 1931 ball, see Rem Koolhaas, "The Architect's Ball: A Vignette, 1931," Oppositions 3 (1974): 92–96. Two symbolic interpretations of the American skyscraper are presented in the articles by Diana Agrest, "Le ciel est la limite," L'architecture d'aujourd'hui 178 (1975): 55-64; and by Dolores Hayden,

"Skyscraper Seduction, Skyscraper Rape," *Heresies* 2 (1977): 108–15.

23 Mujica, History of the Skyscraper, 32.

24 Ibid., 19.

25 Ibid., 20.

26 Cf. M. Tafuri, "La dialectique de l'absurde: Europa – USA: les avatars du gratte-ciel (1918–1974)," *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui* 178 (1975): 1–19.

27 Mujica, History of the Skyscraper, 47.

28 Ibid., 49-53.

29 R.H. Bletter, "Metropolis réduite," archithese 18 (1976): 26–27.

30 See Tony Thomas and Jim Terry, *The Busby Berkeley Book* (New York: A&W Visual Library, 1975), 88–90.

# Roxy, Noah, and Radio City Music Hall

# The New York of the 1920s and the Search for Americanism

Author: Rem Koolhaas

Sources: archithese, 18 (1976): 37–43 Rem Koolhaas, Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 170–71; 177–87 (EN)

Translated by: Steven Lindberg

"I grow so sentimental when I see how perfect perfection can be ..." Top Hat

"What are those little mice doing on the stage?" — "Those aren't mice. Those are horses!"

Visitors to Radio City Music Hall

## Dream

"I didn't conceive of the idea, I dreamed it. I believe in creative dreams. The picture of Radio City Music Hall was complete and practically perfect in my mind before architects and artists put pen on the drawing paper." *Roxy* 

In the congestion of hyperbole that is Manhattan, it is relatively reasonable for Roxy, the animator of Radio City Music Hall, to claim a crypto-religious revelation as inspiration for his amazing theater. The parthenogenesis of architecture—that is, the creation of buildings without the assistance or intervention of architects—is one leitmotiv in the history of the architecture of Manhattan.

Roxy—real name Samuel Lionel Rothafel of Stillwater, Minnesota—is the most brilliant showbiz expert in the hysterical New York of the twenties. After abandoning the ideal of the new Metropolitan Opera as cultural epicenter of his complex, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., buys Roxy away from Paramount and gives him carte blanche to create instead a "Showplace of the Nation" at the Center.

## **Five Layers**

Against the background of an unwritten theory of Manhattanism, the conceptual organization of Rockefeller Center (and the secret of its success) would have to be traced back to the overlapping of five layers, each of which embodies a different architectural philosophy. Indeed, Rockefeller Center consists of five different projects that somehow coexist at the same address, provisionally held together by such infrastructure as elevators, heating and ventilation shafts, and so on.

The O level of the present Rockefeller Center, dominated by the RCA lobby and Radio City Music Hall, is a drastically reduced version of much more daring alternatives that were projected and even almost built. Although plans for the new Metropolitan Opera had been discarded, the Associated Architects continue to consider theaters. They design versions of a fantastic ground floor entirely occupied by more and more theaters: a three-block ocean Frankers

# ROXY, NOAH UND DIE RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

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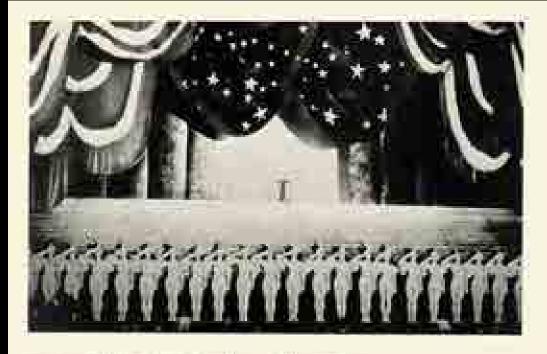
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## Antecedents

The model for such a carpet of installations capable of achieving a constant theatrical operation lies in the history of Coney Island. Since 1890, no fewer than three parks (Steeplechase, Luna Park, and Dreamland) had been created there using a special form of Fantastic Technology-that is, by means of a technology that serves to reach and support the human imagination; that is, to produce synthetic spectacles. With audiovisual and kinetic means and with the aid of currents of air, scents, and gases of all kinds, the audience of these performances was transported to another world. The planned O level of Rockefeller Center and its theatrical carpet represents the effort to transplant an entire fragment of Coney Island into the heart of Manhattan. An amusement landscape was to be created – and it was to be situated in the center of the metropolis itself, which had awakened the hunger for relaxation. Even if the scale of this carpet was reduced in the process of its realization, Radio City Music Hall offers a measure of its original ambition.

## New York-Moscow

In this venture—"the greatest theatrical adventure the World has ever known"—Roxy cannot expect much enthusiasm from the Center's Associated Architects, who want to be sober and modern; as far as the traditions of Fantastic Technology that fascinate Roxy are concerned, they remain virtually without effect on the architects. They even convince Roxy to join them on a study tour of Europe, where they want him to see with his own eyes the advances modern architecture has made in theater construction.

Summer 1931: the consummate showman Roxy, two businessmen-architects, Harrison and Reinhard, and a delegation of technical experts make the transatlantic journey. The mission opposes Roxy, expert in the production of illusions in sufficient quantity and density to satisfy the metropolitan masses, to the European architects, puritanical enemies of the tradition of showbiz that Roxy embodies. In fact, the European architects move in a direction precisely opposed to Roxy's interests. They are interested in how theatrical processes can be placed in objective envelopes; traditional theater, by contrast, represents for them an unacceptable form of mass production by which a bad audience is fed trivial acting.

Roxy is bored in France, Belgium, Germany, and Holland; his architects even force him to take the train to Moscow so that he can inspect and experience firsthand the Constructivist clubs and theaters built there since the mid-twenties. Somewhere in mid-ocean during his return to New York, a revelation strikes a melancholy Roxy. Staring at a sunset. he receives the "Annunciation" of his theater: it is to be an incarnation of this sunset.

Back in New York, this quasi-pregnancy is then translated by the team of architects and designers of Radio City Music Hall into one of those fusions of opposites that characterize the history of Manhattan; the stage becomes a completely mechanized artificial environment, the auditorium becomes the largest visual metaphor in the world.

## Sunrise and Sunset

From the beginning, Roxy insists on the literalness of his metaphor. Within the rectangular section and plan of the Hall's external envelope, the sunset theme is established through a series of consecutive plaster semicircles that diminish toward the stage to create a vaguely uterine hemisphere whose only exit is the stage itself.

This exit is "masked by the beautiful contour curtain" made of a specially developed synthetic fabric whose reflectivity makes it an acceptable substitute for the sun. The "rays" from the curtain continue along the plaster arches, reaching around the entire auditorium. The arches are covered in gold to better reflect the purple of the setting sun and the glow of the red velvet which Roxy insists on for the chairs.

The consequence of Roxy's dream is that, while the effect of a sunset is successfully achieved when the lights of his auditorium are dimmed, the return of electricity in the intermissions and at the end of each performance corresponds to a sunrise. In other words, the twenty-four-hour cycle of day and night is repeated several times during a single performance at Radio City Music Hall. Day and night are drastically reduced, time accelerated. experience intensified, life—potentially doubled, tripled ...

## Chill

Roxy's understanding of Fantastic Technology inspires a further intensification of his metaphor: questioning the conventional use of the air-conditioning system-ventilation and cooling—he realizes that this would only add chill to the sunset. With the same maniacal logic that characterized his earlier visions, Roxy then considers adding hallucinogenic gases to the atmosphere of his theater, so that synthetic ecstasy can reinforce the fabricated sunset. A small dose of laughing gas would put the 6,200 visitors in a euphoric mood, hyper-receptive to the activity on the stage. His lawyers dissuade him, but for a short period Roxy actually injects ozone—the therapeutic O<sub>3</sub> molecule with its "pungent refreshing odor" and "exhilarating influence"-into the air-conditioning system of his theater.

Combining super-time with super-health, Roxy defines the definitive formula of the metropolitan resort with his slogan

"A visit to Radio City Music Hall is as good as a month in the Country."

## Mutations

The perfection and metaphorical stringency of Roxy's artificial paradise—the "ultimate countryside"—sets off a chain reaction of further, unforeseen cultural mutations. On the night of the official opening of Radio City, the exhausted remnants of a stale and spent vaudeville tradition—a tradition that peaked 20 years earlier in Coney Island—fall flat into Roxy's sparkling new apparatus. The old histrionics do not survive the test. People sitting 200 feet from the footlights cannot follow the grimaces on the comedians' faces as they embark on their tired routines; the size of the theater alone precludes reliance on conventional use of the human voice or even the human body; the gigantic stage—wide as a city block—denies the meaning of mise-en-scène, where suggested vastness can always rely on actual intimacy. On this stage, "atmosphere" is atomized.

"In grandeur of conception, in glory of planning, in perfection of fulfillment nothing like Radio City has ever been dreamed,"

### claims its creator, with justice; but the container is so perfect that it ridicules its imperfect contents.

"Much of it [writes a critic on the first night] seemed sadly second-rate stuff, out of place amid such triumphs of architecture and mechanics."

Unintentionally, Radio City represents a more radical break with the past than any consciously revolutionary theater has managed so far. Light years separate the technology of Roxy's theater from the actual activity on its stage: it is-still-a space without a performance.

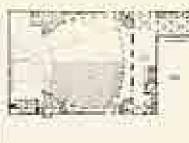
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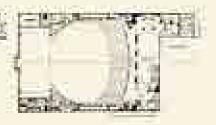
In the early thirties only Hollywood is producing the kind of scenarios that equal Roxy's fantastic landscape in anti-authenticity. Hollywood has developed a new dramatic formula—*isolated human particles floating weightlessly through a magnetic field of fabricated pleasure, occasionally colliding*—that can match the artificiality of Radio City Music Hall and fill it with abstracted, formalized emotions of sufficient density. The production of the Dream Factory is nowhere more at home than in Roxy's brainchild.

### Noah

After the first-night fiasco, humanity—in the form of superannuated vaudeville—is abandoned, and the Music Hall becomes a movie ↓ fig. 3 RKO Building; entrance to Radio City Music Hall. ↓ figs. 4–5 Radio City Music Hall; plans of the main floor (4) and of the balcony level (5).



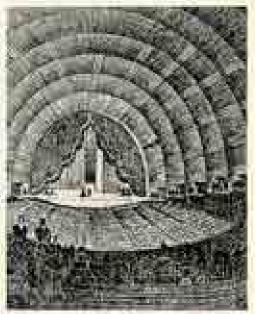




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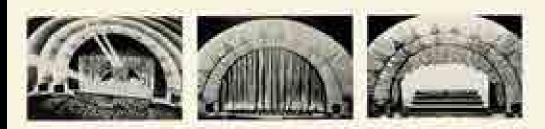
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# ↓ fig. 7 Radio City Music Hall, view.

↓ figs. 8–9 Model of the proscenium. With curtain closed (8) and with a view of the separately mobile parts of the stage (9).



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Excert det Darisierung ist des simultere rometgen des weiblichen Seruerlegten, eine Eintedung zu deren Ingektiss, Aber das tott raht sich is amme Neustak, der den Spektiste den Churalese einer zwaren Protestation nimmt, Advesar ist hier allemsichelben eine endere recht nocht existemende Gestung von Liebrestan. Die Rocheme erscheitert ist rebe theater. A movie theater needs only a projection booth, an auditorium, and a screen; but behind Radio City's screen still exists another realm, "a perfectly organized entity of 700 souls" backstage. Its elaborate facilities include dormitories, a small hospital, rehearsal rooms, a gymnasium, an art department, costume workshops. There is Radio City Symphony and a permanent troupe of 64 female dancers-the Roxyettes, all between 5' 4" and 5' 7"-a scriptless chorus line without any action to sustain. Furthermore, there is a menagerie-horses, cows, goats, and other animals. They live in ultramodern stables, artificially lit and ventilated; an animal elevator-dimensioned to carry even elephants-not only deposits them on the stage but also on a special grazing ground on Radio City's roof. And, finally, Roxy can be found here too—Noah, in a sense—in an apartment fitted in between the steel roof trusses bearing his sunset. Now it seems, after repurposing the music hall into a cinema, as if that entire extravagant domain were condemned to uselessness. But the idea that it could disappear forever behind the hymen of the projection screen was unacceptable.

Under the multiple pressures of the frenetic sunsets and daybreaks, combined with the vaudeville disaster and the inactivity of the "most complete mechanical installation in the world," in view of the permanent availability of the Roxyettes and the cosmopolitan livestock, and in view of Roxy himself, helpless in his egg, there is only one thing to do: a new show has to be launched that can exploit in the shortest possible time the maximum capacities of this top-heavy infrastructure of illusion.

Under these critical conditions Roxy, general director of production Leon Leonidoff, and the director of the Roxyettes (their name soon streamlined to Rockettes) invent a stunning ritual: a new routine that is, in a sense, a record of the crisis: a systematization of the concept of "lack of inspiration"; variations on the theme of "no content," founded on a *process*, a display of inhuman coordination that relies on frenzied synchronization, an exhilarating surrender of individuality to the automatism of a synthetic year-round rite of spring.

The essence of this performance is a mass high-kick: a simultaneous display of sexual

regions, inviting inspection but on a scale that transcends personal provocation. The Rockettes are a new race, exhibiting their superior charms to the old one. Thus Roxy's Theater, itself the fruit of an immaculate conception, produced its own race.

Only the Rockettes' abstract movement can generate completely plotless theatrical energy commensurate with the theater Roxy has created. The Rockettes = the chorus line as main protagonist, the *lead*, a single personage made up of 64 individuals, filling the gigantic stage, dressed in Suprematist costumes: flesh-colored bodystockings marked with a series of black rectangles that shrink toward the waist to end in a small black triangle—living abstract art that denies the human body.

With the development of its own race, its own mythology, its own time, its own rituals, the container of Radio City Music Hall has finally generated a worthy content.

## Ark

"Rockefeller Center itself, (is) the New Jerusalem, within whose walls Radio City is but the broadcasting and dramatic Ark." FORTUNE

Roxy, the dancers, and the animals are the only residents of Rockefeller Center. The fact that Radio City Music Hall contains ultrasophisticated accommodation for selected wild animals and the apparatus to dispatch them throughout the structure; the fact that, in the Rockettes, the Music Hall has its own race. luxuriating in its mirror-clad dorm-a kind of gigantic maternity ward whose inmates reproduce ad infinitum without sex, strictly through the effects of architecture-and, finally, the fact that in Roxy the Music Hall has a planner whose vision is the laughing stock of his fellow men, or at least of his architects: all of that supports the thesis that, in the completeness of its equipment, every block of Manhattan was conceived, designed, and built to survive the Flood—or its modern equivalent. Every block harbors a Noah's Ark.

If a Flood-like disaster should indeed befall humanity, and if only a single block, a single center were spared, both the animal kingdom and civilization could indeed be revived simply by reproducing its contents. In view of the glamorous crew of Radio City, such an interpretation seems inevitable; it testifies to the constant expectation of the Apocalypse as the basic underlying theme of all of Manhattan's enterprises. Radio City Music Hall is the most fanatic institution ever conceived to cope with this expectation. To cite Roxy again:

"In Radio City Music Hall the fun never sets."





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"In North City Music Holt the fur name non?"

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← fig. 13 The Rockettes in their "Suprematist" costumes.

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