

**Manfredo Tafuri** “**Toward a Critique of Architectural Ideology**” “Per una critica dell’ideologia architettonica,” *Contropiano* 1 (January-April 1969); translated for this anthology by Stephen Sartarelli

Contemporary architecture’s situation was never more radically theorized than by Manfredo Tafuri. Locating architecture’s intellectual project in the historical matrix of the bourgeois metropolis, Tafuri formulates the entire cycle of modernism (he refuses any periodization of a *postmodernism*) as a unitary development in which the avant-gardes’ visions of utopia come to be recognized as an idealization of capitalism, a transfiguration of the latter’s rationality into the rationality of autonomous form—architecture’s “plan,” its ideology. Gathering up the threads that link the sociology of Georg Simmel and Max Weber, the critical theory of Georg Lukacs, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno, the structuralism of Louis Althusser and Roland Barthes, and the negative thought of Massimo Cacciari, Tafuri identifies what for him is contemporary architecture’s only condition of possibility: to collapse into the very system that assures its demise or retreat into hypnotic solitude.

Substitute “bourgeois art” for “the individual,” and the first lines of Simmel’s “The Metropolis and Mental Life” disclose the same problematic as those of Tafuri’s essay reprinted here: how the subject—the individual or art—seeks to protect its internal integrity and, at the same time, accommodate itself to the shock of metropolitan experience. Simmel: “The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life.”<sup>1</sup> Tafuri: “To dispel anxiety by understanding and internalizing its causes: this would seem to be one of the principal ethical imperatives of bourgeois art. It matters little whether the conflicts, contradictions, and torments that create anxiety are absorbed into a comprehensive mechanism capable of reconciling those differences, or whether catharsis is achieved through contemplative sublimation.”

Following Simmel, Tafuri understands the metropolis as the general form assumed by the process of technical rationalization and objectification of social relations brought about by the monetary economy. This process dissolves individuality into a flow of weightless impressions, abstracts and levels down all particularity and quality, and restructures subjectivity as reason and calculation.<sup>2</sup> The result, at the level of the individual, is the metropolitan subject, what Simmel called the blase type: the neurasthenic who survives the increase in nervous life by becoming totally intellectualized and indifferent. (“There is perhaps no psychic phenomenon which has been so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as has the blase attitude,” wrote Simmel.)<sup>3</sup> The conflicted nature of the blase type fully reflects the metropolis’s structure of functional contradictions—contradictions that include a close confrontation with objects and people (shock) and an excessive distance from them (agoraphobia), stimulation as the cure for overstimulation, the ascendancy of the life of the intellect (*Verstand* or *Vergeistigung*) only through the life of the nerves (*Nervenleben*), the emergence of extreme individuality in the social totality and the simultaneous internalization of the social totality in the individual. All of which is to say that the blase type reflects the metropolis from the perspective of the subject’s negated autonomy.<sup>4</sup> As Tafuri puts it, “The problem now became that of teaching not

see Jameson (442 ff) and Cohen (508 ff)

compare 392–393 and Cacciari (397 ff)

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how one should ‘suffer’ that shock, but how one should absorb it and internalize it as an inevitable condition of existence.”

Like the blase personality, bourgeois art and architecture essentially and contradictorily register the very forces that assure their ineffectuality. Having first been exploded by the shock and distress of the metropolis (expressionism), and then, with a sardonic detachment, taken an inventory of its surrounding remains (dadaism), bourgeois architectural thought must conclude that the subject itself is the only impediment to the smooth development of the fully rationalized technocratic plan that was to become the total system of capital. One had to pass from Edvard Munch’s cathartic *Scream* to Ludwig Hilberseimer’s metropolitan machine — the ultimate architectural sign of self-liquidation through the autonomy of formal construction, its homeostatic regulation of urban form understood as the ideological training ground for life in the desacralized, distracted, posthumanist world. Tafuri again:

To remove the experience of shock from all automatism, to use that experience as the foundation for visual codes and codes of action borrowed from already established characteristics of the capitalist metropolis — rapidity of change and organization, simultaneity of communications, accelerated rhythms of use, eclecticism — to reduce the structure of artistic experience to the status of pure object (an obvious metaphor for the object-commodity), to involve the public, as a unified whole, in a declaredly interclass and therefore antibourgeois ideology: such are the tasks taken on, as a whole, by the avant-gardes of the twentieth century.

The problem, then, was to *plan* the disappearance of the subject, to dissolve architecture into the structure of the metropolis, wherein it turns into pure object. Thus does architectural ideology resolve the contradiction between the internal, subjective resistance to metropolitan shock and the external, structural totality of the production system: *this is its utopia*. For Tafuri, that utopianism — whatever other aims and local concrete effects it may have — ends up ushering into being the universal, systematic planification of capitalism, all the while concealing this fundamental function behind the rhetoric of its manifestos and within the purity of its forms. The struggle of architecture to rationalize itself through autonomous formal operations alerts us not to architecture’s success, but to the historical moment of modernity as a limiting condition, one that shuts down certain social functions that architecture had previously performed.

Tafuri’s theory takes ideology as its object (it is an ideology of ideologies), and, from his point of view, in modernity all aesthetic ideologies are equivalent if not interchangeable. As such they are equally useless for social production: *this is architecture’s destiny*. Such a thesis was received at the time of its first publication as the pronouncement of the death of architecture, to which Tafuri responded:

What is of interest here is the precise identification of those tasks which capitalist development has taken away from architecture. That is to say, what it has taken away in general from ideological

prefiguration. With this, one is led almost automatically to the discovery of what may well be the “drama” of architecture today: that is, to see architecture obliged to return to *pure architecture*, to form without utopia; in the best cases, to sublime uselessness. To the deceptive attempts to give architecture an ideological dress, I shall always prefer the sincerity of those who have the courage to speak of that silent and outdated “purity”; even if this, too, still harbors an ideological inspiration, pathetic in its anachronism.<sup>5</sup>

#### Notes

In its original form this essay had no section headings; as an aid to the reader, they have been added here following the Spanish version of the essay in *De la vanguardia a la metropoli: Crítica radical a la arquitectura* (Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1972).

Tafuri expanded the essay as *Progetto e Utopia* (Bari: Laterza & Figli, 1973), which appeared in English as *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, trans. Barbara Luiga La Penta (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976).

1. Georg Simmel, “Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben” (1903); translated as “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), p. 409.
2. “The essence of modernity as such is psychologism, the experiencing and interpretation of the world in terms of the reactions of our inner life and indeed as an inner world, the dissolution of fixed contents in the fluid element of the soul, from which all that is substantive is

Aldo Rossi,  
*L'architecture assassinée*, 1975



filtered and whose forms are merely forms of motion.” Georg Simmel, “Rodin,” in *Philosophische Kultur: Gesammelte Essays* (Leipzig: W. Klinkhardt, 1911), p. 196.

3. Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” p. 413.
4. “In the blase attitude the concentration of men and things stimulates the nervous system of the individual to its highest achievement so that it attains its peak. Through the mere quantitative intensification of the same conditioning factors this achievement is transformed into its opposite and appears in the peculiar adjustment of the blase attitude. In this phenomenon the nerves find in the refusal to react to their stimulation the last possibility of accommodating to the contents and forms of metropolitan life. The self-preservation of certain personalities is bought at the price of devaluing the whole objective world, a devaluation which in the end unavoidably drags one’s own personality down into a feeling of the same worthlessness.” Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” p. 415.  
 Simmel’s truth, for Tafuri and Massimo Cacciari, is the recognition of metropolitan experience as a form of negative thought. His mistake (the same as Lukacs’s) was his anachronistic humanism — “man’s ‘diabolical’ insistence on remaining man, on taking his place as an ‘imperfect machine’ in a social universe in which the only consistent behavior is that of pure silence.” Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, p. 74. Also see Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
5. Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, p. ix.

To dispel anxiety by understanding and internalizing its causes: this would seem to be one of the principal ethical imperatives of bourgeois art. It matters little whether the conflicts, contradictions and torments that create anxiety are absorbed into a comprehensive mechanism capable of reconciling those differences, or whether catharsis is achieved through contemplative sublimation. We recognize, in any case, the “necessity” of the bourgeois intellectual in the imperative significance his “social” mission assumes: in other words, there exists, between the avant-gardes of capital and the intellectual avant-gardes, a kind of tacit understanding, so tacit indeed that any attempt to bring it into the light elicits a chorus of indignant protest. Culture, in its intermediary role, has so defined its distinguishing features in ideological terms that in its shrewdness it has reached the point—beyond all intellectual good faith—of imposing forms of contestation and protest upon its own products. And the higher the formal level of the sublimation of conflicts, the more the structures confirming and validating that sublimation remain hidden.

If we are to confront the subject of the ideology of architecture from this perspective, we must attempt to shed light on how one of the most functional proposals for the reorganization of capital has come to suffer the most humiliating frustrations, to the point where it can be presented today as objective and transcending all connotations of class, or even as a question of alternatives, a terrain of direct confrontation between intellectuals and capital.

I must say straightaway that I do not believe it an accident that so many of the recent cultural theories in the architectural debate are devoted to a somber reexamination of the very origins of modern art. Assumed as an indication of a thorough, self-regarding uneasiness, architectural culture’s increasingly generalized interest in the Enlightenment has, for us, a precise significance, beyond the mystified manner in which it is explained. By returning to its origins—correctly identified in the period of strict correspondence between bourgeois ideologies and intellectual advances—one begins to see the whole course of modern architecture as a unitary development.

Accepting this approach, we can consider the formation of architectural ideologies comprehensively, particularly as regards their implications for the city.

Moreover, a systematic exploration of the Enlightenment debate will also enable us to grasp, on a purely ideological level, a great many of the contradictions that accompany the development of modern art.

### **Reason’s Adventures: Naturalism and the City in the Century of the Enlightenment**

The formation of the architect as ideologue of the “social”; the individuation of the proper area of intervention in the phenomenology of the city; the role of form as persuasion in regard to the public, and as self-criticism in regard to its own concerns; the dialectic—on the level of formal investigation—between the role of

the architectonic “object” and that of urban organization: On what level, and with what sort of awareness, do these abstract constants of the modern means of visual communication become concretized in the currents of Enlightenment thought?

When Laugier, in 1765, formulated his theories on the design of the city, officially inaugurating Enlightenment architectural theory, his words betrayed a twofold influence: on the one hand, the desire to reduce the city itself to a natural phenomenon, on the other, the wish to go beyond all *a priori* ideas of urban organization by extending, to the urban fabric, the formal dimensions associated with the aesthetics of the Picturesque.

“Anyone who knows how to design a park well,” writes Laugier in his *Observations*, “will draw up a plan according to which a City must be built in relation to its area and situation. There must be squares, intersections, streets. There must be regularity and whimsy, relationships and oppositions, chance elements that lend variety to the tableau, precise order in the details and confusion, chaos, and tumult in the whole.”<sup>1</sup>

Laugier’s words perceptively capture the formal reality of the eighteenth-century city. It is no longer a question of archetypal schemas of order, but of accepting the anti-perspective character of the urban space. Even the park, as reference point, has a new meaning: in its variety, the nature called upon to form part of the urban structure supplants the comforting rhetorical and didactic naturalism that had dominated the episodic narrativity of Baroque arrangements through the seventeenth century and for the first half of the eighteenth.

Thus Laugier’s appeal to naturalism implies, at once, an appeal to the original purity of the act of ordering the environment, and an understanding of the eminently *anti-organic* character typical of the city. But that is not all. The reduction of the city to a natural phenomenon clearly corresponds to the aesthetics of the Picturesque that English Empiricism had introduced in the first decades of the eighteenth century, for which Alexander Cozens, in 1759, had provided a very rich and important theoretical foundation.

We do not know to what degree Cozens’s theory of “blots” may have influenced Laugier’s notion of the city. What is certain is that the French abbot’s urban invention and the English painter’s landscape theory share a method based on selection as a tool for critical intervention in a “natural” reality.<sup>2</sup>

Now, taking for granted that for the theorists of the eighteenth century, the city fell within the same formal domain as painting, selectivity and criticism implied the introduction, into urban planning, of a fragmentary approach that places not only Nature and Reason, but the natural fragment and the urban fragment, on the same level.

As a human creation, the city *tends* toward a natural condition, in the same way that the landscape, through the critical selection made by the painter, must necessarily bear the stamp of a social morality.

It is significant that while Laugier, like the English Enlightenment theorists, pointedly grasps the artificial character of the urban language, neither Ledoux nor Boullée, who were far more innovative in their works, are willing to relinquish a mythical, abstract view of Nature and its organic quality. Boullée's polemic against Perrault's perceptive insights into the artificial nature of the language of architecture is very revealing in this respect.

It may be that Laugier's *city as forest* was modeled on nothing more than the varied sequences of spaces that appear in Patte's plan of Paris, which brought together, in a single, comprehensive framework, the projects for the new royal squares. We shall therefore limit ourselves to noting Laugier's theoretical perceptions, which become all the more significant when we recall that Le Corbusier leaned on them in delineating the theoretical principles of his *Ville Radieuse*.<sup>3</sup>

What does it mean, on the ideological level, to liken the city to a natural object? On the one hand we find, in such an assumption, a sublimation of physiocratic theories: the city is not interpreted as a structure that, with its mechanisms of accumulation, transforms the processes of land exploitation and agricultural and property revenues. As a phenomenon likened to a "natural" process, ahistorical because it is universal, the city is freed from any structural considerations whatsoever. At first, formal "naturalism" served to advocate the objective necessity of the processes set in motion by the pre-Revolutionary bourgeoisie; later it was used to consolidate and protect these achievements from any further transformation.

On the other hand, this naturalism fulfills its function by ensuring artistic activity an ideological role in the strict sense. It is no accident that at the very moment in which the bourgeois economy began to discover and establish its own categories of action and judgment, assigning "values" contents directly measurable with the gauges dictated by the new methods of production and exchange, the crisis of the former systems of "values" was immediately covered up by new sublimations made artificially objective through an appeal to the universality of Nature.

This was why Reason and Nature now had to be unified. Enlightenment rationalism was unable to take upon itself full responsibility for the operations it was carrying out, and believed it necessary to avoid a direct confrontation with its own premises.

It is clear that, throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this ideological smokescreen played on the contradictions of the *ancien régime*. Nascent urban capitalism and the economic structures based on precapitalist exploitation of the land butted up against one another. It is significant that the theorists of the city, rather than emphasize this contradiction, attempt to hide it, or rather to resolve it by dissolving the city in the great sea of Nature and focusing their attentions entirely on the city's superstructural aspects.

Urban naturalism, the imposition of the Picturesque on the city and its architecture, and the emphasis on landscape in artistic ideology, all served to negate the now manifest dichotomy between urban and rural reality, to pretend that there was no gap between the valorization of nature and the valorization of the city as a machine for producing new forms of economic accumulation.

The rhetorical, Arcadian naturalism of seventeenth-century culture was now replaced by a different, but equally persuasive naturalism.

It is important, however, to point out that at first, the deliberate abstraction of Enlightenment theories of the city served to destroy the planning and development schemas of the Baroque city; it later became a way of avoiding, rather than conditioning, the formulation of new, consistent models of development.

Thus, in a manner entirely anomalous with the general trends in Enlightenment criticism, architectural culture played a predominantly destructive role in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries. Not having at its disposal a mature substratum of production techniques corresponding to the new conditions of bourgeois ideology and laissez-faire economics, architecture was forced to channel its self-critical efforts in two directions:

First of all, for polemical reasons, it tended to glorify everything that might assume an anti-European significance. Piranesi's fragmentationism is a product of the new bourgeois science of historical criticism, which is also, paradoxically, criticism of criticism. The whole fashion of invoking Gothic, Chinese, and Hindu architecture, and the Romantic naturalism of landscape gardens in which fantasies of exotic pavilions and false ruins are inserted without irony, is theoretically connected to the atmosphere of Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, Voltaire's *Ingenu*, and Leibniz's caustic anti-Western positions. To integrate rationalism and critical philosophy, one confronted the European myths with anything that might, by contradicting them, reconfirm their validity. In the English landscape garden, the annulment of historical perspective is consummated. But in that accumulation of little temples, pavilions and grottoes, which seem to summon together the most disparate testimonies of human history, it was not really an escape into a fairy-tale world that was sought. Rather, the "picturesque" of Brown, Kent, and Wood, and the "horrid" of Lequeu, pose a question: with the tools of an architecture that has already given up the making of "objects" in becoming a technique of organizing premade materials, they demand a verification extraneous to architecture.

With the utter detachment typical of the great Enlightenment critics, these architects began a systematic and fateful autopsy of architecture and all its conventions.

Secondly, even while bracketing its own formative role in regard to the city, architecture presented an alternative to the nihilistic prospect clearly discernible behind the hallucinatory fantasies of a Lequeu, a Belanger, or a Piranesi.

Renouncing a symbolic role, at least in the traditional sense, architecture—in order to avoid destroying itself—discovered its scientific vocation. On the one hand it could become an instrument of social equilibrium; in which case it would have to confront the question of types head-on—which Durand and Dubut in fact did. On the other hand it could become a science of sensations; and this is the direction in which Ledoux and, more systematically, Le Camus de Mezieres, would steer it. Typology, then, and *architecture parlante*: the same themes that Piranesi brought into conflict with each other, and which, instead of leading to solutions, would accentuate, throughout the nineteenth century, the internal crisis of architectural culture.

Architecture now accepted the task of "politicizing" its own handiwork. As agents of politics, architects had to take up the challenge of continuously inventing advanced solutions at the most generally applicable levels. Toward this end, ideology played a determinant part.

The utopianism that modern historiography has chosen to see in the works of Enlightenment architecture should therefore be precisely defined according to its authentic meanings. In fact, the architectural propositions of eighteenth-century Europe contain nothing that cannot be realized, and it is no accident that among all the theorizing of the *philosophes* of architecture one can find no social utopia in support of the urban reformism advocated at the purely formal level.

The very introduction to the entry under *Architecture*, written by Quatremere de Quincy for the second edition of the great *Encyclopedie*, is a masterpiece of realism, even in the abstract terms in which it is expressed.

"Among all the arts," writes Quatremere, "those children of pleasure and necessity in which man has participated to help him bear the trials of life and pass on his memory to future generations, one cannot deny that *architecture*



must hold a most eminent place. Even considered only from the point of usefulness, it surpasses all the other arts. It sees to the salubrity of cities, guards the health of men, protects their properties, and works only for the safety, repose and orderliness of civic life.”<sup>4</sup>

Nor is Enlightenment realism belied by the gigantic-scale architectural dreams of a Boullée or the pensioners of the Academie. The glorification of size, geometric distillation, and ostentatious primitivism that are the constants of those projects assume concrete meaning when read in the light of what they want to be: not so much dreams that can never be realized, but experimental models of a new method of design.

From the unbridled symbolism of Ledoux or Lequeu to the geometrical silence of Durand’s typology, the process followed by the architecture of the Enlightenment remains consistent with the new ideological role it has assumed. Architecture must redefine itself as it starts to become part of the structures of the bourgeois city, dissolving into the uniformity ensured by preconstituted typologies.

But this dissolution was not without its consequences. The one who took Laugier’s theoretical insights to their extreme limit was Piranesi: his ambiguous evocation of the *Iconographia Campi Martii* is a graphic monument to late Baroque culture’s openness to the late revolutionary ideologies, just as his *Parere sull’architettura* is its most pointed literary testimony.<sup>5</sup>

In Piranesi’s Campo Marzio there is no longer any loyalty to the late Baroque principle of variety. Since Roman antiquity is not only a reference charged with ideological nostalgia and revolutionary expectation, but a myth to be contested, every form of classicist derivation is treated as mere fragment, deformed symbol, broken hallucination of an “order” wasting away.

The order in the details does not, therefore, lead simply to *tumulte dans l’ensemble*, but indeed to a monstrous pullulation of symbols bereft of meaning. The Piranesian forest, like the sadistic atmospheres of his Prisons, shows that it is not only the “sleep of reason” that produces monsters; “reason awake” can also create deformity, even when the goal at which it aims is the Sublime.

There is a prophetic quality to the criticism implicit in Piranesi’s Campo Marzio. In it, the most advanced point of the Enlightenment imagination seems to warn, with sorrowful emphasis, of the danger lurking in the definitive loss of organic form: it is now the ideal of the Whole and the universal that has come into crisis.

Architecture, however, could also strive to preserve a fullness that would save it from total dissolution. Yet such an effort was undermined by all the pieces of architecture assembled in the city. These fragments, in the city, were pitilessly absorbed and deprived of all autonomy, despite their obstinate wish to assume articulated, composite configurations. In the *Iconographia Campi Martii* we witness an epic representation of the battle waged by architecture against itself. Typology is asserted as an instance of superior organization, yet the configuration of the individual types tends to destroy the very concept of typology; history is invoked as an inherent “value,” yet the paradoxical rejection of the archaeological reality casts its civilizing potential into doubt; formal invention seems to proclaim its own primacy, yet the obsessive repetition of the inventions seems to reduce the whole urban organism to a sort of gigantic “useless machine.”

Rationalism would seem thus to reveal its own irrationality. In attempting to absorb all of its own contradictions, architectural “reasoning” uses the technique of *shock* as its own foundation. The individual architectural fragments collide with one another, indifferent even to the clash, while their accumulation attests to the uselessness of the inventive effort made to define their form.

The city, here, remains an unknown quantity. Piranesi's *Campo Marzio* fools nobody as to its reality as an experimental design hidden behind an archaeological mask. Nor is it possible to define new constants of order through the act of designing. This colossal *bricolage* reveals only a single truth: that the rational and the irrational must cease to be mutually exclusive. Piranesi does not have the tools to translate the dialectics of contradiction into form; he must therefore limit himself to proclaiming, emphatically, that the great, new problem is that of balancing opposites, the appointed place for which must be the city, lest the very notion of architecture itself be destroyed.

Essentially, it is the struggle between architecture and the city that assumes an epic tone in Piranesi's *Campo Marzio*. Here the "dialectics of the Enlightenment" attains an unsurpassed potential, as well as an ideal tension so violent that contemporaries could not grasp it as such. Piranesian *excess*—like the excesses of libertine Enlightenment literature in other respects—became, as such, the revelation of a truth: a truth that the architectural culture and urban planning of the Enlightenment would hasten, as they developed, to cover up.

Nevertheless, the urban fragmentationism introduced on the ideological level by Laugier would make itself felt once again in the eclectic theorizations of Milizia, in his *Principi di architettura civile*. Milizia writes:

A city is like a forest, whence it follows that the organization of a city is like that of a park. One must have squares, intersections and broad, straight streets in great numbers. Yet this is not enough; the plan must be designed with taste and verve, so that order, whimsy, eurhythm and variety may coexist in equal measure: here the streets must radiate starlike, there like a goose-foot, on one side in herringbone pattern, on the other like a fan; farther on they should be parallel, with three-street and four-street crossroads everywhere and in different positions, and a multitude of squares of entirely different shape, size and decoration.<sup>6</sup>

It is impossible not to see the influence of a refined sensism in what Milizia says next:

He who knows not how to vary our pleasures, will never give us pleasure. [The city,] in short, should be a varied picture of an infinity of chance occurrences; with great order in the details, and confusion, chaos and tumult in the whole.<sup>7</sup>

He continues:

The city's plan must be so arranged that the magnificence of the whole will be subdivided into an infinity of beautiful details, each so different from the other that one never encounters the same objects, and that, covering it from one end to the other, one always finds something new, something singular and surprising, in each quarter. Order must reign, but amidst a kind of confusion . . . and this multitude of regular parts must create, in the whole, a certain sense of irregularity and chaos, of the sort that so befits great Cities.<sup>8</sup>

Order and chaos, regularity and irregularity, organic unity and inorganic disunity. This is a far cry from the late Baroque precept of *unity in variety*, which had taken on mystical resonances in Shaftesbury.

What the writings of Laugier, Piranesi, Milizia, and—somewhat later, in a more moderate tone—Quatremere de Quincy contributed to the architectural debate was precisely this notion of control over a reality lacking organic structure. Such control was to be achieved by acting upon that very lack, not in order to change its structure, but to elicit from it a complex array of simultaneously present meanings.

Yet immediately the pressures of a rigorous traditionalism rose up against these hypotheses. Giovanni Antolini, in his commentary on Milizia's *Principi*, did not fail to launch a few salvos against the latter's theories, defending the authority of Vitruvius and the ideal example set by Galiani. And to counter the glorification of empiricism and the picturesque implicit in the Woods, in Palmer's Bath, in the Edinburgh crescents and in the 1803 plan for Milan, there was the strict rationalism of Muratti's Bari and the new plans for St. Petersburg, Helsinki, and Turku.

Of particular interest to our analysis is the intellectual opposition that occurred between Antolini and the members of the commission for the Napoleonic plan for Milan.

The commission had agreed to work dialectically with the city's structure, as it had evolved over the course of history. The problem was that in so doing, they implicitly cast judgment on it. As a product of forces and events determined by prejudice, myth, and the structures of feudalism and the Counter-Reformation, the complex historical fabric of the Lombard capital was, for them, something to be rationalized and clarified in terms of its functions and its form. It was also something to be appraised in such a way that from the clash between the ancient, preexisting parts—centers of obscurantism—and the new demolitions and interventions—centers of *clarte* and *lumieres*—there would emerge an obvious and valid choice corresponding to a clear and unequivocal hypothesis of the city's destiny and physical structure.

It is no accident that Antolini was among those opposed to the Napoleonic plan. While the Napoleonic commission in some fashion was open to a dialogue with the historical city and managed to dilute, in the city's fabric, the ideology informing their interventions, Antolini was against such a dialogue. His project for the Foro Bonaparte is, at once, a radical alternative to the history of the city, a symbol loaded with absolute ideological values, and an urban *locus* which, as a totalizing presence, sets itself the goal of transforming the entire urban structure while giving back to architecture a communicative role of a peremptory nature.<sup>9</sup>

The antithesis is not incidental: indeed, it involves every aspect of the city's communicative role. For the 1803 commission, the protagonist of the new intellectual and functional message was the urban structure in and of itself.

For Antolini, on the other hand, the restructuring of the city must be achieved by introducing a disruptive urban locus, capable of radiating induced effects that resist all contamination, into the network of its contradictory values. The city as a universe of discourse or system of communications can be summed up, for Antolini, in an absolute, peremptory "message."

Thus we see the two paths of modern art and architecture already delineated. The dialectic is the same as that inherent in all of modern art over the course of its history, which pits those attempting to dig down into the very bowels of reality in order to know and assimilate its values and shortcomings, against those who want to push beyond reality, to construct, *ex novo*, new realities, new values, new public symbols.

The difference between the Napoleonic commission and Antolini is the same as that which will later distinguish Monet from Cezanne, Munch from Braque, Schwitters from Mondrian, Haring from Gropius, Rauschenberg from Vasarely.

Between Laugier's "forest" and Antolini's aristocratic reserve, however, there was a third way, and it was destined to become the main force behind a new way of intervening in and controlling urban morphology. L'Enfant's plan for Washington and William Penn's for Philadelphia, for example, use new tools compared to European models.

The relationship between these pragmatic schemas of development and the value structure typical of American society from its very beginnings has already been analyzed on several different occasions, and this is clearly not the place to reexamine this subject.<sup>10</sup>

The great historical merit of the urban planning adopted by American cities since the mid-1700s is to have explicitly sided with the forces that spurred the morphological transformation of the cities, controlling these forces with a pragmatic approach entirely foreign to European culture.

Using a regular grid of arteries as the simple, flexible support for an urban structure whose perpetual changeability is to be safeguarded, allowed the Americans to achieve a goal that the Europeans had been unable to realize. In the United States, absolute freedom is granted to the single architectural fragment, which is situated in a context that is not formally conditioned by it. The American city gives maximum articulation to the secondary elements that shape it, while the laws governing the whole are strictly upheld.

Here urban planning and architecture are finally separated from each other. The geometric design of the plan does not seek—in Washington, Philadelphia, and later, New York—an architectural counterpart in the forms of the individual buildings. Unlike what happened in St. Petersburg or Berlin, here the architecture was free to explore the most diverse and remote areas of communication. The urban system was given only the task of asserting to what degree this freedom of figuration could be exploited, or rather, of ensuring, through its formal rigidity, a stable frame of reference. In this way the urban structure spurred the incredible wealth of expression that, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century and thereafter, found its way into the open grids of US cities. Free-trade ethics thus met up with the pioneer myth.

### **Form as Regressive Utopia**

Thus far, what emerges most clearly from our summary analysis of the experiences and expectations of eighteenth-century architectural culture is the crisis of the traditional concept of *form*. This arises from an awareness of the problem of the city as an autonomous field of communicative experiences.

From the very beginnings, the architecture of the Enlightenment had already managed to formulate one of the principles that the path of contemporary art would follow: the disarticulation of form and the inorganic nature of structure. And it is not insignificant that the perception of these new formal values was linked from the start to the problem of the new city that was soon to become the institutional site of modern bourgeois society.

Yet the theorists' calls for a revision of formal principles led not so much to a true revolution of meaning, as to an acute crisis of values. The new dimensions presented by the problems of the industrial city over the course of the nineteenth century would only aggravate the crisis, in the face of which art struggled to find the proper paths by which it might follow the developments of urban reality.

On the other hand, the fragmentation of organic form occurred predominantly in architectural activity, without managing to find an outlet in the urban dimension. When, looking at a "piece" of Victorian architecture, we are struck by the exasperation of the "object" there before us, we rarely take into consideration that eclecticism and linguistic pluralism, for nineteenth-century architects, represented the proper response to the multiple disruptive stimuli produced by the new environment that technology's "universe of precision" had created.

The fact that architects were unable to respond to that "universe of precision" with anything more than a confused "more or less" should not come

as a surprise. In actuality it was the urban structure—precisely insofar as it registered the conflicts that witnessed the victory of technological progress—that violently changed dimension, becoming an open structure in which any search for a point of equilibrium became a utopian proposition.

Architecture, however, at least according to the traditional notion, is a stable structure, which gives form to permanent values and consolidates an urban morphology.

Those who may wish to shatter this traditional notion and link architecture with the destiny of the city, can only conceive of the city itself as the specific site of technological production and as a technological product in itself, thereby reducing architecture to a mere moment in the chain of production. And yet in some way, Piranesi's prophecy of the bourgeois city as an "absurd machine" comes true in the nineteenth-century metropolises, which were organized as primary structures of capitalist economy.

The "zoning" that presided over the growth of those metropolises did not trouble, at first, to mask its own class character. Ideologies of radical or humanitarian derivation might well shed light on the irrationality of the industrial city, but they forgot (not coincidentally) that such a world appeared irrational only to the observer who entertained the illusion of being *au dessus de la realite*. Humanitarian utopianism and radical critiques had one unexpected result: they convinced the progressive elements of the bourgeoisie themselves to pose the question of reconciling rationality and irrationality.

For all of the reasons elaborated thus far, this question would appear to be intrinsic to the formation of urban ideology. Taken in the abstract, it is also familiar to the figurative arts of the nineteenth century in general, since the very origin of Romantic eclecticism was a reassertion of ambiguity as a critical value in and of itself—the very same ambiguity that Piranesi had taken to its highest level.

What had allowed Piranesi to give voice, through primitivistic nostalgias and flights into the Sublime, to the terrifying prophecy of the eclipse of the sacred, is the same thing that allowed Romantic eclecticism to become the mouthpiece of the merciless concreteness of the commodified human environment, filling it with particles of already entirely worn-out values presented as such: as voiceless, false, bent in two, as if to show that no subjective force would ever again succeed in recovering an authenticity forever lost.

Nineteenth-century ambiguity lies entirely in the unrestrained exhibition of a false conscience that strives for final ethical redemption by displaying its own inauthenticity. If the mania for collection is the sign and tool of this ambiguity, then the city is its specific field of application: Impressionist painting, in attempting to redeem this ambiguity, will have to place itself at an observation point immersed in the urban structure but far removed from its meanings by the subtle distortions of lenses imitating an objective, scientific detachment.

While the first political responses to this situation had their roots in a recovery of the traditional utopianism that the Enlightenment seemed to have eclipsed, the specific responses of visual communication methods introduced a new type of utopia: that implicit in realized events, in the concreteness of constructed, verifiable "things." For this reason, the relationships between the whole current of nineteenth-century political utopianism and the ideas of the "modern movement," though plentiful, would remain very indirect. Indeed, we must consider the links normally established by modern historians between the utopias of Fourier, Owen, and Cabet, and the theoretical models of Unwin, Geddes, Howard, and Stein, on the one hand, and those of the Garnier–Le Corbusier current on the other, as hypotheses in need of

careful verification. In all likelihood, they will eventually be recognized as dependent upon and integral to the very phenomena they are supposed to explain.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear, in any case, that the specific responses given by Marxist scholarship to the problem around which utopian thought is forever condemned to revolve, had two immediate effects on the formation of the new urban ideologies:

(1) By bringing the general questions back into a strictly structural framework, it made evident the concrete failure to which utopias condemn themselves, revealing as well the secret desire for ruin implicit in the very birth of the utopian notion;

(2) by annulling the Romantic dream of subjective action's having any direct effect on social destiny, it made it clear to bourgeois thinkers that the very concept of *destiny* was a creation linked to the new relations of production; as a sublimation of real phenomena, the virile acceptance of destiny—a cornerstone of bourgeois ethics—could redeem the misery and impoverishment that this same “destiny” had produced at all levels of social life and above all in its quintessential form: the city.

The end of utopianism and the birth of realism are not automatic moments in the formative development of the ideology of the “modern movement.” On the contrary, around the 1830s, realist utopianism and utopian realism begin to overlap and complement each other. The decline of social utopianism confirmed ideology's surrender to the *politics of things* created by the laws of profit. Architectural ideology, in both its artistic and urban forms, was left with the utopia of form as a project for recuperating the human Totality in the ideal Synthesis, as a way of mastering Disorder through Order.

Architecture, therefore, insofar as it was directly linked to the reality of production, was not only the first discipline to accept, with rigorous lucidity, the consequences of its already realized commodification. Starting from problems specific to itself, modern architecture, as a whole, was able to create, even before the mechanisms and theories of Political Economy had created the instruments for it, an ideological climate for fully integrating design, at all levels, into a comprehensive Project aimed at the reorganization of production, distribution and consumption within the capitalist city.

Analyzing the course of the modern movement as an ideological instrument of capital (from around 1901, the year of Tony Garnier's “industrial city” project, to around 1939, the year in which its crisis became palpable at all levels and in all sectors), thus implies tracing a history that can be broken down into three successive phases:

(1) the first, which witnesses the formation of an urban ideology as a way of overcoming architectural Romanticism;

(2) the second, which witnesses the rise of the artistic avant-gardes as ideological projects and foregroundings of “unsatisfied needs” that are then handed over in that form—that is, as advanced goals that painting, poetry, music and sculpture can realize only on an ideal level—to architecture and urban planning, the only disciplines capable of realizing them in concrete form;

(3) the third, in which architectural ideology becomes the *ideology of the Plan*. This phase was, in turn, put into crisis and surpassed when, after the crash of 1929, with the formulation of anticyclical theories and the international reorganization of capital, the ideological function of architecture began to appear superfluous, or at least limited to fulfilling rearguard tasks of marginal importance.

The observations that follow do not pretend to any exhaustive treatment of this process; my intention was only to highlight a few of its salient points, in the hope of providing a methodological framework for future investigations and more detailed analyses.

### The Dialectic of the Avant-Garde

It is very important to underscore that in criticizing Engels's "moral reaction" to the urban crowd, Benjamin used the latter's observations as a way of introducing the subject of the spread of working-class conditions into the general urban structure.<sup>12</sup>

One may disagree with the partiality with which Benjamin reads *The Situation of the Working Class in England*. What interests us is the way in which he moves from Engels's description of the masses to his thoughts on Baudelaire's relationship with the masses themselves. In judging Engels's and Hegel's reactions to be vestiges of a detachment from the new qualitative and quantitative aspects of urban reality, Benjamin notes that the ease and nonchalance with which the Parisian *flâneur* moves through the crowd have become natural modes of conduct for the modern user of the metropolis.

No matter how great the distance which [Baudelaire] cared to keep from it, he still was colored by it and, unlike Engels, was not able to view it from without. . . . The masses had become so much a part of Baudelaire that it is rare to find a description of them in his works. . . . Baudelaire describes neither the Parisians nor their city. Forgoing such descriptions enables him to invoke the ones in the form of the other. His crowd is always the crowd of a big city, his Paris is invariably overpopulated. It is this that makes him so superior to Barbier, whose descriptive method caused a rift between the masses and the city. In [Baudelaire's] *Tableaux parisiens* the secret presence of a crowd is demonstrable almost everywhere.<sup>13</sup>

This presence—or rather, this immanence—of the real relations of production in the conduct of the "public," who use the city while being unknowingly used by it, can be identified in the very presence of an observer, like Baudelaire, who is forced to recognize his own untenable position as participant in an ever more generalized commodification at the very moment in which he discovers, through his own production, that the only unavoidable necessity for the poet henceforth is prostitution.<sup>14</sup>

The poetry of Baudelaire, like the products exhibited at the universal expositions or the transformation of the urban morphology set in motion by Haussmann, marks a newly discovered awareness of the indissoluble dialectic existing between uniformity and diversity. It is still too early yet to speak of a tension between the exception and the rule, especially as regards the structure of the new bourgeois city. But one may speak of the tension between the forced commodification of the object and the subjective attempts to recuperate—falsely—its authenticity.

The problem is that now the only way left in the search for the authentic is the search for the eccentric. It is not only the poet who must accept his lot as mime—and this, incidentally, may explain why all the art of the time presents itself simultaneously as a deliberately "heroic" act and as a bluff, conscious of its own self-mystification—but the city itself, objectively structured as a machine for extracting social surplus value, reproduces, in its own conditioning mechanisms, the reality of the industrial modes of production.

Benjamin closely links the decline, in industrial labor, of skill and experience—still operative in handicrafts—to the experience of *shock* typical of the urban condition. He writes:

The unskilled worker is the one most deeply degraded by the drill of the machines. His work has been sealed off from experience; practice counts for nothing there. What the Fun Fair achieves with its Dodgem cars and other similar amusements is nothing but a taste of the drill to which the unskilled laborer is subjected in the factory—a sample which at times was for

him the entire menu; for the art of being off center, in which the little man could acquire training in places like the Fun Fair, flourished concomitantly with unemployment. Poe's text [Benjamin here is referring to *The Man of the Crowd*, translated by Baudelaire] makes us understand the true connection between wildness and discipline. His pedestrians act as if they had adapted themselves to the machines and could express themselves only automatically. Their behavior is a reaction to shocks. "If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers."<sup>15</sup>

There is, therefore, a profound affinity between the code of conduct connected to the experience of shock and the technique of the game of chance. "Since each operation at the machine is just as screened off from the preceding operation as a *coup* in a game of chance is from the one that preceded it, the drudgery of the laborer is, in its own way, a counterpart to the drudgery of the gambler. The work of both is equally devoid of substance."<sup>16</sup>

Despite the pointedness of his observations, Benjamin does not link—either in his essays on Baudelaire or in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"—this invasion of the urban morphological structure by the modes of production with the response of the avant-garde movements to the question of the city.

The arcades and large department stores of Paris, like the universal expositions, were clearly places in which the crowd, in becoming its own spectacle, found a spatial and visual instrument for self-education from the point of view of capital. But throughout the nineteenth century, such recreational-pedagogical experiences, being centered around exceptional architectural typologies, continued to reveal the partiality of their propositions. The ideology of the public is not, in fact, an end in itself. It is but one aspect of the ideology of the city as a productive unit in the proper sense of the term, and as an instrument for coordinating the cycle of production-distribution-consumption.

This is why the ideology of consumption, far from constituting an isolated or subsequent moment of the organization of production, must offer itself to the public as an ideology of the *correct* use of the city. (It might be pertinent to recall here how important the question of conduct was to the European avant-gardes, and to the symptomatic example of Loos, who in 1903, upon his return from the United States, published two issues of the review *Das Andere* devoted to introducing, in an ironic, polemical tone, new, "modern" modes of urban conduct into the Viennese bourgeoisie.)

Until the moment the experience of the crowd was translated—as in Baudelaire—into a painful awareness of participation, it served to generalize an operative reality, but did not contribute to its advancement. It was at this moment, and only at this moment, that the linguistic revolution of modern art was summoned to make its own contribution.

To remove the experience of shock from all automatism, to use that experience as the foundation for visual codes and codes of action borrowed from already established characteristics of the capitalist metropolis—rapidity of change and organization, simultaneity of communications, accelerated rhythms of use, eclecticism—to reduce the structure of artistic experience to the status of pure object (an obvious metaphor for the object-commodity), to involve the public, as a unified whole, in a declaredly interclass and therefore antibourgeois ideology: such are the tasks taken on, as a whole, by the avant-gardes of the twentieth century.

To repeat: as a whole—that is, beyond any distinction between constructivism and protest art. Cubism, Futurism, Dada, De Stijl, all the historic avant-gardes arose and followed one another according to the laws typical of industrial production: continuous technical revolution is their very essence. For all the



avant-gardes—and not just in painting—the law of assemblage was fundamental. And since assembled objects belong to the real world, the painting became the neutral field into which the *experience of shock*, suffered in the city, was projected. Indeed, the problem now became that of teaching not how one should “suffer” that shock, but how one should absorb it and internalize it as an inevitable condition of existence.

The laws of production thus came to form part of a new universe of conventions explicitly posited as “natural.” Herein lies the reason why the avant-gardes did not raise the question of appealing to the public. Indeed, the question could not even be raised: since they were interpreting something necessary and universal, the avant-gardes could easily accept being temporarily unpopular, knowing full well that their break with the past was the fundamental condition for their worth as models for action.

Art as model for action: this was the great guiding principle of the artistic uprising of the modern bourgeoisie, but at the same time it was the absolute that gave rise to new, irrepressible contradictions. Life and art having proved antithetical, one had to seek either instruments of mediation—and thus all artistic production had to accept problematics as the new ethical horizon—or ways by which art might pass into life, even at the cost of realizing Hegel’s prophecy of the death of art.

It is here that the links holding the great tradition of bourgeois art together in a single whole become more concretely manifest. We can now see how our initial consideration of Piranesi as both theorist and critic of the conditions of an art *no longer universalizing and not yet bourgeois* serves to shed light on the problem. Criticism, problematics, programmatic: such are the pillars on which was founded the “modern movement,” which as a program for modeling the “bourgeois man” as an absolute “type” undoubtedly had its own internal consistency (even if this is not the same consistency recognized by current historians).

Both Piranesi’s *Campo Marzio* and Picasso’s *Dame au violon* are “programs,” even though the first organizes an architectural dimension and the second a mode of human behavior. Both use the technique of shock, even though Piranesi’s etching uses preformed historical materials and Picasso’s painting, artificial materials (as later Duchamp, with greater rigor, would also do). Both discover the reality of a machine-universe, even though the eighteenth-century urban project makes that universe abstract and recoils in horror from its discovery, while Picasso’s canvas works entirely within it.

More importantly, however, both Piranesi and Picasso “universalize,” through an excess of truth attained with the tools of a profoundly critical elaboration of form, a reality that could still have been considered wholly particular. But the “program” inherent in the Cubist painting goes well beyond the canvas itself. The “ready-made” objects introduced in 1912 by Braque and Picasso, and codified as new means of communication by Duchamp, ratify the self-sufficiency of reality and the definitive repudiation, by reality itself, of all representation. The painter can only analyze this reality. His supposed dominion over form merely covers up something that he does not want to accept: that henceforth it is form that dominates the painter.

Except that now “form” has to be understood as the logic of subjective reactions within the objective universe of production. Cubism, as a whole, tends to define the laws of these reactions: it is symptomatic that Cubism began with the subjective and led to an absolute rejection of it (as Apollinaire would realize, with apprehension). As a “program,” what Cubism wanted to create was a mode of behavior. Its antinaturalism, however, contained nothing that might persuade the

public; we persuade someone only when we maintain that the object of persuasion is outside of and superimposed upon the one to whom we are addressing ourselves. Cubism's intention was instead to demonstrate the reality of the "new nature" created by capital, and its necessary, universal character, in which necessity and freedom coincide.

This is why the canvases of Braque, Picasso, and to an even greater extent Juan Gris adopt the technique of assemblage: to give absolute form to the linguistic universe of the *civilisation machiniste*. Primitivism and antihistoricism are consequences, not causes, of their fundamental choices.

As techniques for analyzing a totalizing universe, both Cubism and De Stijl are explicit invitations to action. In writing about their artistic products, one could easily speak of the *fetishization of the art object and its mystery*.

The public had to be provoked. That was the only way people could be inserted actively into the universe of precision dominated by the laws of production. The passivity of Baudelaire's *flâneur* must be overcome and translated into active participation in the urban scene. The city itself is the object to which neither the Cubist paintings, nor the Futurist "slaps," nor the nihilism of Dada referred specifically, but which remained—precisely because it was continually presupposed—the reference value to which the avant-gardes tried to measure up. Mondrian would later have the courage to "name" the city as the final object at which Neoplasticist composition aimed; yet he would be forced to acknowledge that once it was translated into the urban structure, painting—now reduced to a mere model of behavior—would have to die.

Baudelaire discovered that the commodification of the poetic product could be accentuated by the poet's very attempt to free himself from his objective conditions: the prostitution of the artist follows the moment of his greatest human sincerity. De Stijl and, to an even greater extent, Dada, discovered that there were two paths for the suicide of art: silent immersion in the structures of the city through the idealizing of its contradictions, or the violent insertion of the irrational—it, too, idealized, and drawn from the city—into the structures of artistic communication.

De Stijl became a mode of formal control of production, while Dada wanted to give apocalyptic expression to its inherent absurdity. The nihilist critique formulated by Dada, however, ended up becoming a tool for controlling design. It should come as no surprise when one encounters, even in a philological context, the many points of tangency between this most destructive of twentieth-century movements and the more "constructive" ones.

Indeed what are Dada's ferocious dismantling of linguistic materials and its anti-programmatic position, if not sublimations, in spite of everything, of the automatism and commodification of "values" now spread to all levels of existence by capitalist advancements? De Stijl and Bauhaus—the former in a sectarian manner, the latter in eclectic fashion—introduced the *ideology of the plan* into a design method that was ever more deeply linked to the city as a productive structure. Dada, through absurdity, demonstrated the necessity of the plan without ever naming it.

All the historic avant-gardes, moreover, adopted the political parties' model of action as their own. While Dada and Surrealism can be seen as particular expressions of the anarchic spirit, De Stijl and Bauhaus did not hesitate to present themselves as global alternatives to political praxis. Alternatives that, it should be noted, assumed all the characteristics of an ethical choice.

De Stijl opposed Chaos, the empirical, and the everyday with the principle of Form. Theirs was a Form that takes into account the thing that concretely renders reality

formless, chaotic and impoverished. The horizon of industrial production, which spiritually impoverishes the world, was dismissed as a value in itself, but subsequently transformed into a new value through its sublimation. The Neoplasticist dismantling of elementary forms corresponded to the discovery that the “new wealth” of the Spirit could no longer be sought outside of the “new poverty” subsumed by the civilization of the machine; the disjointed recomposition of those elementary forms then sublimated the mechanical universe, demonstrating that there can no longer be any form of recovery of the whole (of being as of art) that does not derive from the problematics of form itself.

Dada, on the other hand, plunged into Chaos. Representing chaos confirmed its reality; by mocking it, they posited a need and decried the fact that it was unfulfilled. This need was the very same control of the Formless that De Stijl, all the various European constructivist currents, and even nineteenth-century formalist aesthetics—from *Sichtarbeit* on—had embraced as the new frontier of visual communications. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Dada’s Anarchy and De Stijl’s Order should have met and converged, in a theoretical context, in the review *Mecano*, and in an operative context, in the formulation of the instruments of a new syntax.

Chaos and Order were thus sanctioned by the historic avant-gardes as the “values,” in the proper sense of the term, of the new city of capital.

Chaos, of course, is a given, while Order is a goal. Yet Form henceforth should not be sought beyond Chaos, but within it: it is Order that confers meaning on Chaos and translates it into value, into “freedom.” To redeem the formlessness of the city of profit-ruled consumption, one must draw upon all its progressive valences. And it is the Plan that the avant-gardes called upon to carry out this maieutic task, before discovering at once that they were incapable of giving it any concrete form.

It was at this point that architecture was able to enter the scene, by absorbing and overcoming all the demands of the historic avant-gardes—and indeed by throwing them into crisis, since architecture alone was in a position to provide real answers to the demands made by Cubism, Futurism, Dada, De Stijl, and all the various Constructivisms and Productivisms.

The Bauhaus, as the decantation chamber of the avant-gardes, fulfilled this historic task: it selected from among all the contributions of the avant-gardes, testing them against the demands of the reality of industrial production. Design, as a method of organizing production more than of configuring objects, did away with the utopian vestiges inherent in the poetics of the avant-gardes. Ideology was no longer superimposed on activity—which was now concrete because it was connected to real cycles of production—but was inherent in the activity itself.

But design too, despite its realism, presented unsatisfied demands; and in the impetus it gave to the organization of enterprises and production, it too contained a hint of utopianism. (This utopia, however, served the goal of reorganizing production, a goal its promoters fully intended to achieve.) The Plan embraced by the leading architectural movements (the term “avant-garde” is no longer applicable), starting with Le Corbusier’s *Plan Voisin* (1925) and the stabilization of the Bauhaus (around 1921), contained the following contradiction: starting from the building sector, architectural culture discovered that only by linking that sector to the reorganization of the city could preestablished goals be satisfactorily met. But this was equivalent to saying that, just as the demands presented by the avant-gardes had pointed to the visual communications sector most directly entrenched in the economic process (i.e., architecture and industrial design), so the planning formulated by architectural and urban theorists likewise pointed toward something other than itself: to wit, toward a restructuring of production and consumption in general—toward a *plan for capital*, in other words. In this sense, architecture—starting with it-

self—mediated between realism and utopia. The utopia lay in stubbornly continuing to hide the fact that the ideology of planning could be realized in building production only by making clear that the true Plan could only take shape beyond this sector; and that, indeed, once the Plan came within the scope of the general reorganization of production, architecture and urban planning would become its objects, not its subjects.

Architectural culture, in the 1920s, was not ready to accept such consequences. What it understood most clearly was its own “political” task. It was a question of architecture (read: the planned reorganization of building production and the city as a productive organism) over Revolution. Le Corbusier articulated this choice very clearly, and it is also implicit in the writings of others such as Mondrian and Gropius.

In the meanwhile, starting with the most politically engaged circles—from the Novembergruppe, to the review *G*, to the Berlin Ring—architectural culture defined itself technically. Accepting with lucid objectivity all the avant-garde’s apocalyptic conclusions as to the “death of art” and the purely “technical” role of the intellectual, the Central European *Neue Sachlichkeit* adapted the very method of design to the idealized structure of the assembly line. The forms and methods of industrial labor became part of the organization of design and were reflected in the proposed use of the object.

From the standardized part and the cell to the single block, the *Siedlung*, and finally to the city: such is the assembly line that architectural culture devised between the wars with exceptional clarity and consistency. Each “piece” in the line is fully resolved and tends to disappear or, better yet, to dissolve formally in the assembly.

The result of all this was the revolutionization of the aesthetic experience itself. No longer is it objects that presented themselves for appraisal, but an entire process, to be experienced and used as such. The user, called upon to fill the “open” spaces of Mies van der Rohe or Gropius, is the central element in this process. Architecture, in calling upon the public to participate in the design—since the new forms were no longer individualistic absolutes but proposals for organizing community life, as in Gropius’s *integrated architecture*—forced the ideology of the public to make a leap forward. The dream of Morris’s romantic socialism—an art made by all for all—here takes ideological form within the ironclad laws of profit. In this respect, too, the ultimate test for the theoretical hypothesis would be the city.

### “Radical” Architecture and the City

In his fundamental work *Grossstadtarchitektur*, Ludwig Hilberseimer writes:

The architecture of the large city depends essentially on the solution given to two factors: the elementary cell and the urban organism as a whole. The single room, as the constitutive element of the dwelling, will determine its appearance, and since the dwellings in turn form blocks, the room will become a factor in the urban configuration, representing architecture’s true goal. Likewise the planimetric structure of the city will have a substantial influence on the design of the dwelling and the room.<sup>17</sup>

The large city is, therefore, a true unity. Reading beyond the author’s actual intentions, we may translate his assertions as follows: It is the whole modern city itself which has structurally become an enormous “social machine.” This is the aspect of urban economics that Hilberseimer, like almost all the German theorists of the twenties and thirties, chose to isolate in order to analyze and resolve its component parts separately. What he writes on the relationship between the cell

and the urban organism is exemplary for its lucidity of exposition and for its skillful reduction of problems to their essential aspects. The cell is not only the first element in the continuous production line whose ultimate product is the city; it is also the element that determines the dynamics of building aggregations. Its value as *type* allows it to be analyzed and resolved in the abstract: the building unit, in this sense, represents the foundational structure of a production program from which all further typological components have been excluded. The single building [*unita edilizia*] is no longer an “object” now. It is only the place in which the individual cells, through elementary assembly, assume physical form. As infinitely reproducible elements, these units conceptually embody the primary structures of a production line that dispenses with the ancient concepts of “place” and “space.” In keeping with his own assumptions, Hilberseimer posits the entire city organism as the second term of his theorem. The shape of the cell predetermines the planning coordinates of the urban whole; the city’s structure may then alter, by dictating the rules of its assemblage, the typology of the cell.<sup>18</sup>

In the rigid articulation of the production plan, the specific dimension of architecture, in the traditional sense of the term, disappears. As an “exception” to the homogeneity of the city, the architectural object has been completely dissolved. Hilberseimer writes:

As great masses have to be shaped according to a general law, dominated by multiplicity, . . . the general case, the rule, is emphasized while the exception is set aside, the nuance obliterated. Measure reigns, forcing chaos to become form, logical, univocal, mathematical form.<sup>19</sup>

And again:

The need to shape a heterogeneous and often gigantic mass of materials in accordance with a formal law equally valid for each element implies a reduction of architectural form to its most formal, necessary, general need: a reduction, that is, to cubic, geometrical forms, which represent the basic elements of all architecture.<sup>20</sup>

This is not a “purist” manifesto, but a logical conclusion drawn from hypotheses that hew stubbornly to the scientific method in their conceptual elaboration. By not offering “models” for design, but rather presenting the coordinates and dimensions of the design at the most abstract (because the most general) level possible, Hilberseimer reveals—more than do Gropius, Mies, or Bruno Taut around the same time—to what new tasks the capitalistic reorganization of Europe was summoning its architects.

In the face of modernized production techniques and the expansion and rationalization of the market, the architect, as producer of “objects,” became an incongruous figure. It was no longer a question of giving form to single elements of the urban fabric, nor even to simple prototypes. Once the true unity of the production cycle has been identified in the city, the only task the architect can have is to *organize* that cycle. Taking the proposition to its extreme conclusion, Hilberseimer insists on the role of elaborating “organizational models” as the only one that fully reflects the need for Taylorizing building production and the new task of the technician, who is now completely integrated into this process.

On the basis of this position, Hilberseimer was able to avoid involvement in the “crisis of the object” so anxiously articulated by such architects as Loos or Taut. For Hilberseimer, the “object” was not in crisis because it had already disappeared from his spectrum of considerations. The only emerging imperative was that dictated by the laws of organization, and therein lies what has been correctly seen as Hilberseimer’s greatest contribution.

What, on the other hand, has not been appreciated is Hilberseimer's utter refusal to consider architecture as an instrument of knowledge. Even Mies van der Rohe was divided on this issue. In the houses on the Afrikanische Strasse in Berlin, he is rather close to Hilberseimer's positions, while in the *Weissenhofsiedlung* of Stuttgart, he wavers in his approach. In the project for the curvilinear, glass and steel skyscraper, however, and in the monument to Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, the 1935 housing project, and finally even in the Tugendhat house, he explores what margins of the reflective approach still remained to the architect.

It is of little interest to us, here, to follow the inner workings of this dialectic, which was rife throughout the modern movement. We should, however, note that a good number of the contradictions and obstacles that the movement found in its path arose from the attempt to separate technical propositions and cognitive aims.

Ernst May's plan for Frankfurt, Martin Wagner's Berlin, Fritz Schumacher's Hamburg, and Cornelis van Eesteren's Amsterdam are the most important chapters in the history of modern urban planning. Yet beside the oases of order that were the *Siedlungen*—true constructed utopias, on the margins of an urban reality little affected by them—the old cities continued to accumulate and multiply their contradictions. And for the most part, these contradictions would soon appear more vital than the tools established by the architectural milieu to control them.

The architecture of Expressionism succeeded in absorbing the ambiguous vitality of these contradictions. The Viennese *Höfe* and the public buildings of Poelzig or Mendelsohn were clearly foreign to the new methodologies of urban intervention of the avant-garde movements. These experiences refused in numerous ways to be situated within the new horizons discovered by an art that accepted its own "mechanical reproduction" as a means toward bearing upon human behavior. Still, like such art, they seemed to assume a critical value, specifically in regard to the growth of the modern industrial cities.

Works such as Poelzig's Schauspieltheater in Berlin, Fritz Höger's Chilehaus and other Hamburg buildings, and the Berlin buildings of Hans Hertlein and Ernst and Gunther Paulus, certainly did not constitute a new urban reality. But by exasperating already existing forms through an excess of pathos, they commented on the contradictions of the operative reality.

The two poles of Expressionism and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* once again symbolized the inherent rift in European culture.

Between the destruction of the *object*, its replacement by a *process* intended to be experienced as such (a transformation effected by the artistic revolution brought about by the Bauhaus and the Constructivist currents) and the exasperation of the object (typical of the lacerating but ambiguous eclecticism of the Expressionists), there could be no real dialogue.

Yet let us not be deceived by appearances. This was a clash between intellectuals who reduced their own ideological potential to the orchestration of up-to-date programs for a production system in the process of reorganization, and intellectuals whose work involved exploiting the backwardness of European capitalism. The subjectivism of Haring or Mendelsohn, in this sense, assumes a critical import in regard to the Taylorism of Hilberseimer or Gropius; but objectively speaking, it is a critique made from a rearward position that is therefore incapable, by its very nature, of proposing universal alternatives.

Mendelsohn's self-publicizing architecture involved the creation of persuasive "monuments" in the service of commercial capital, while Haring's intimism played on the late Romantic tendencies of the German bourgeoisie. Still, to

present the dialectic of twentieth-century architecture as a unitary cycle is not entirely off the mark, even if such a point of view is tenable only from within this cycle.

The rejection of contradiction as a premise for objectivity and the rationalization of planning revealed its own partiality at the very moment when architecture came closest to the political power structures. The very goal of the social democratic architects of central Europe was the unification of administrative power and the intellectual project. In this sense, it is no accident that May, Wagner, and Taut should have assumed political offices in the administrations of social democratic cities. If the entire city was now to assume the structure of an industrial machine, different categories of problems should find their solutions in it: first and foremost the conflict between parasitic mechanisms of ground rent, which impeded the expansion and technological revolutionization of the building market, and the need to organize, comprehensively, the machine-city by giving it a role in stimulating its own functions.

The architectural project, the urban model it spawned, and the economic and technological premises on which it was based—public ownership of the land and systems of industrialized construction modeled on production cycles programmed within the urban sphere—were indissolubly interconnected. Architectural science became fully integrated into the ideology of the plan, while formal choices themselves were only variables dependent on it. All of May's work in Frankfurt can be read as the highest expression of this concrete "politicization" of architecture. The industrialization of the construction site conformed to the minimum unit of production identified in the *Siedlung*. The primary element of the industrial cycle within this system was centered around the service nucleus (the *Frankfurter Küche*). The modeling of the *Siedlungen* and their displacement within the city to lands directly administered by the city government were made possible by city policies. It was at this point that the formal model of the *Siedlung*, because of its flexibility, granted cultural approval to, and made "real," the political objectives wholly embraced by architects.

Nazi propaganda would later speak of the Frankfurt quarters as *constructed socialism*. We, instead, should read them as realized social democracy. It must be noted, however, that the task befalling this concurrence of political and intellectual authority was merely that of mediating between structures and superstructures. This was clearly reflected in the structure of the city itself: the closed economy of the *Siedlung* was mirrored in the fragmented nature of the intervention, which left intact the contradictions of a city that had not been regulated or restructured as an organic system.

The utopianism of the Central European architectural culture of the 1920s lay precisely in the fiduciary relationship established between leftist intellectuals, advanced sectors of capital, and political administrations. While solutions restricted to specific areas tended, in this relationship, to present themselves as highly generalized models—policies of eminent domain and expropriation, technological experiments, formal elaborations of the *Siedlung* typology—they revealed their limited efficacy when put to the test.

May's Frankfurt, like Machler's and Wagner's Berlin, certainly tended to reproduce the factory model at the social level, to give the city the "shape" of a production machine, and to produce the appearance of universal proletarianization within the urban structure and the mechanisms of distribution and consumption. (The interclassism of central European urban planning projects was a goal continually proposed by theorists.)

But the unity of the urban image, a formal metaphor of the proposed "new synthesis" and an obvious sign of the thrilling collective dominion over nature and those means of production confined within the sphere of a new "human"

utopia, was never realized by the German and Dutch intellectuals. Strictly integrated into specific urban and regional planning policies, they fashioned models of intervention to be applied universally. The model of the *Siedlung* is one such example. Yet a theoretical constant of this sort reproduced in the city the disaggregate form of the early technological production line: the city remained an aggregate of parts functionally unified at the lowest level, and even within each single “piece”—the working-class quarter—the unification of methods soon proved to be a rather uncertain tool.

The crisis, in the specific area of architecture, came to a head in 1930, in Berlin’s Siemensstadt. It is quite incredible that modern historians have not yet acknowledged the famous Berlin *Siedlung*, planned by Scharoun, as a crucial historical moment in which one of the most serious ruptures within the “modern movement” occurred.

Siemensstadt revealed the utopian character of the premise that design, in its different dimensional scales, could possess methodological unity. On the basis of an urban design that some, perhaps correctly, have ascribed to the ironic deformations of Klee, such architects as Bartning, Gropius, Scharoun, Haring, and Forbat showed that the dissolution of the architectural object within the formative process of the whole reflects the contradictions of the modern movement itself. In contrast to Gropius and Bartning, who remained loyal to the conception of the *Siedlung* as an *assembly line*, there are the allusive ironies of Scharoun and the ostentatious organicism of Haring. If, to use Benjamin’s terminology, “the destruction of the aura” traditionally associated with the “piece” of architecture was consummated in the ideology of the *Siedlung*, Scharoun’s and Haring’s “objects” aimed instead at recuperating an “aura,” however much this aura might be conditioned by the new modes of production and formal structures.

The Siemensstadt episode, moreover, was merely the most clamorous of its kind. In fact, with the exception of Cornelis van Eesteren’s plan for Amsterdam, between 1930 and 1940 the ideal of the European constructivist movements—that of founding a city of a *single tendency*—decidedly entered a state of crisis.

All the contradictory aspects assumed by the modern capitalist city—improbability, polyfunctionality, multiplicity and lack of organic structure—remained outside the analytical rationalization pursued by central European architecture.

### **The Crisis of Utopia: Le Corbusier at Algiers**

To absorb that multiplicity, to temper the improbable with the certainty of the plan, to reconcile organic structure and disorganization by exacerbating the dialectical relationship between them, to demonstrate that the highest level of productive planning coincides with the maximum “productivity of the spirit”: such were the objectives that Le Corbusier delineated, with a lucidity unparalleled within progressive European architectural culture at the time, ever aware of the triple front on which modern architecture had to fight. If architecture was now synonymous with organization of production, it was also true that distribution and use were also determinant factors of the cycle, in addition to production itself. *The architect is an organizer*, not a designer of objects. This statement of Le Corbusier’s was not a slogan, but an imperative linking intellectual initiative and *la civilisation machiniste*. As the advance guard of this *civilisation*, architects, in anticipating and determining its plans (however limited to specific sectors), must articulate their activity in three different directions: (1) by addressing an *appel aux industriels*, and a choice of building typologies, to business and industry; (2) by pursuing the search for an *authority* capable of reconciling construction and urban planning with civil reorganization programs through the institution of the CIAM; (3) by exploiting the articulation of form at its highest level in order to make the public an active and conscious user of the architectural product.



To be more precise: form assumed the task of making the unnatural world of technological precision *authentic and natural*. And since this world tended to subjugate nature as a whole in an ongoing process of transformation, the entire anthropogeographic landscape became, for Le Corbusier, the living subject on which the reorganized cycle of building production must lay its emphasis.

But Le Corbusier also discovered that financial prudence, individualism in enterprise, and the persistence of archaic income mechanisms such as ground rent, perilously obstructed the development of civilization, the expression and appraisal of production, and the “human” yield of this expansion.

With the typological formulation of the Dom-ino unit, the *Immeuble-villa*, the City for Three Million Inhabitants, and the *Plan Voisin* for Paris, Le Corbusier, in a “patient search” conducted between 1919 and 1929, arrived at precise scales and tools of intervention, tested general hypotheses in partial realizations—seen as laboratory experiments—and went beyond the models of German “rationalism,” intuiting the correct dimension in which the urban question must be considered.

Between 1929 and 1931, with the plans for Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, and Rio, and finally with the Obus plan for Algiers, Le Corbusier formulated the most advanced theoretical hypothesis of modern urbanism, which to this day remains unsurpassed on both the ideological and formal levels.

In contrast to Taut, May, and Gropius, Le Corbusier broke the unbroken associative chain of architecture-neighborhood-city. The urban structure in itself, as a physical and functional unity, became the repository of a new scale of values; it was to the dimension of the landscape itself that one should look for the meaning of its communications.

At Algiers, Corbusier took the old Casbah, the hills of Fort-l’Empereur, and the coastal inlets as raw materials to be reused, veritable, gigantic ready-made objects to which the new structure redefining them would offer a previously nonexistent unity, overturning their original significations. Yet this maximum conditioning must be accompanied by a maximum of freedom and flexibility. The economic premise of the entire operation was clear: the Obus plan would not limit itself to demanding a new “territorial statute” that, by overcoming the early capitalist anarchy of land accumulation, would make the whole area available for the unitary, organic reorganization of what would thereby become an urban system in the proper sense of the term.

The industrial object does not presuppose any univocal situation in space. Underlying the concept of mass production is the radical notion of overcoming all spatial hierarchy. The technological universe does not distinguish between the *here* and the *there*; its natural sphere of operations is the whole human environment—a purely topological field (as the Cubists, Futurists, and Elementarists well understood). In the reorganization of the city, the full availability of the terrain is no longer enough: it is now the whole three-dimensional space that must become available to be shaped by a planned technologization. Thus two levels of intervention within the unified city must be distinguished: the cycles of production and consumption.

The restructuring of the entire urban space and surrounding landscape thus corresponds to the need to rationalize the total organization of the urban *machine*: on this scale, technological structures and transportation systems must constitute a unitary “image” in which the antinaturalism of the *terrains artificiels* laid out at various levels, and the exceptional nature of the road network—the superhighway running at the highest level of the serpentine block designed for the workers’ residences—take on a symbolic meaning. The housing blocks of Fort-l’Empereur, in their formal freedom, assume the values emblematic of the Surrealist *avant-garde*;

the rounded buildings—like the free forms inside the Villa Savoye or the ironic assemblages of the Beistegui attic on the Champs-Élysées—are enormous objects that enact an abstract, sublimated “dance of contradictions.”<sup>21</sup>

Even at the level of the urban structure—here finally resolved into an organic unity—what emerges is the positive nature of the contradictions, the reconciliation of the problematic with the rational, and the “heroic” resolution of violent tensions. Only through the structure of the image, and in no other way, can the reign of necessity merge with the reign of freedom—even though the former is identified with the rigor of the plan and latter with the recuperation, within the plan, of a higher human consciousness.

Le Corbusier, too, uses the technique of shock: the *objets à réaction poétique*, however, are now connected with one another within a dialectical, organic whole. The formal and functional dynamic is inescapable: at every level of use and interpretation, Le Corbusier’s Algiers entails the total involvement of the public. It is worth noting, however, that here this involvement is predicated on a critical, reflective, intellectual participation. An “inattentive reading” of the urban images would in fact produce an obscure result—although there is certainly no saying that Le Corbusier did not perhaps intend this secondary effect as well, as a necessary moment of indirect stimulus.<sup>22</sup>

Le Corbusier’s point, however, cannot be reduced to “dispelling anxiety by internalizing its causes.” At the lowest level of production—that of the single residential cell—the goal is to gain a maximum flexibility, interchangeability, and possibility of rapid use. The broadest freedom of insertion of preformed residential elements is made possible within the meshes of the larger structures, which are made up of superimposed *terrains artificiels*. To the public, this is an invitation to become active planners of the city: in one illustrative sketch, Le Corbusier actually goes so far as to imagine the insertion of eccentric, eclectic elements within the meshes of fixed structures. The “freedom” granted to the public must be pushed so far that it will allow this same public—the proletariat, in the case of the serpentine edifice, uncoiling itself along the sea, and the bourgeoisie, up on the hills of Fort-l’Empereur—to express its own “bad taste.” Architecture thus becomes both a pedagogical act and a tool of collective integration.

For industry, on the other hand, this freedom assumes even greater significance. Unlike May in his *Frankfurter Küche*, Le Corbusier does not crystallize the minimum production unit in standard functional elements. On the level of the individual object, one must consider the need for continuous technological revolution, styling, and rapid use—needs dictated by an active capitalism in the process of expansion. The residential cell, theoretically usable in a very short time, can be replaced with every change that occurs in individual needs—the needs, that is, created by the renovation of the residential models and standards dictated by production.<sup>23</sup>

In this light, the significance of the project becomes quite clear. The subject of the urban reorganization is a public that is called upon and made a critical participant in its own creative role. Through theoretically homogeneous functions, the vanguard of industry, the “authorities,” and the users of the city become involved in the impetuous, “exalting” process of continuous development and transformation. From the reality of production to the image and the use of the image, the whole urban machine pushes the “social” potential of the *civilisation machiniste* to the most extreme of its implicit possibilities.

An obvious question now arises: Why is it that the Algiers project, the subsequent plans for European and African cities, and even the smaller projects advanced by Le Corbusier, remain a dead letter? Is there not perhaps a contradiction between what

we have said—that is, that these projects should be seen as the most advanced and formally elevated hypothesis of bourgeois culture in the field of design and urban planning to this day—and the failures experienced firsthand by Le Corbusier?

Many answers may be given to this question, all of them valid and complementary. Above all, however, we should remember that Le Corbusier worked as an “intellectual” in the strict sense. He did not become associated—like Taut, May, or Wagner—with local government powers. His hypotheses start from specific realities (the physical geography and historical stratification of Algiers are, of course, exceptions, and the form of the plan taking these into account is unique to those circumstances); but the method guiding them is broadly applicable on a general scale. From the particular to the universal: the exact opposite of the method followed by the intellectuals of the Weimar social democracy. Nor is it coincidental that in Algiers, Le Corbusier worked without a commission and without pay for more than four years. He “invented” his commission and made it universal, ever willing to finance his own active and creative role.

As a result, his models have all the characteristics of laboratory experiments: and in no case can a laboratory model be translated *tout court* into reality. But that is not all. In this case, the universal applicability of the hypothesis clashed with the backward structures that it was supposed to stimulate. When what is needed is a revolutionization of architecture in keeping with the most advanced functions of an economic and technological reality still incapable of giving it coherent, organic form, it should hardly come as a surprise if realistic hypotheses are seen as utopian.

But the failure of Algiers, and Le Corbusier’s “failure” in general, cannot only be correctly understood when seen in the context of the international crisis of modern architecture.

### **Capitalist Development Confronts Ideology**

It is interesting to look at how modern historians have attempted to explain the crisis of modern architecture. They place the beginnings of the crisis in the years around 1930, and generally consider its exacerbation to continue to this day. Nearly all the initial “blame” for the crisis they lay at the feet of the Fascisms of Europe on the one hand, and Stalinism on the other. In so doing, they systematically ignore the introduction, throughout the world, immediately after the economic crisis of 1929, of a new and decisive factor: the international reorganization of capital and the establishment of anti-cyclical planning systems.

It is significant that almost all the economic objectives formulated by Keynes in his *General Theory* can be found, in purely ideological form, at the basis of the poetics of modern architecture. The foundation of Keynesian interventionism is the same as that of the poetics of all modern art: “To free oneself from the fear of the future by eyeing that future as present” (Negri). And in a strictly political sense, this also underlies the urban planning theories of Le Corbusier. Keynes comes to terms with the “party of catastrophe,” and aims at coopting its threat by absorbing it at ever new levels;<sup>24</sup> Le Corbusier notes the reality of class in the modern city and takes its conflicts to a higher level, giving shape to the most advanced plan for integrating the public, whom he involves as operator and active user of the urban mechanism of development, now rendered organically “human.”

Thus is our initial hypothesis confirmed. Architecture as the *ideology of the Plan* is swept away by the *reality of the Plan* the moment the plan came down from the utopian level and became an operant mechanism.

The crisis of modern architecture begins at the precise moment when its natural target—large industrial capital—makes architecture’s underlying ideology its own, setting aside the superstructures. As of that moment, architectural ideology has exhausted its own functions: its obstinate insistence on seeing its

hypotheses realized will become either a springboard for going beyond backward conditions, or a troublesome disturbance.

The regression and anxious struggles of the modern movement from 1935 to the present day can be read in this light. The most general demands for the rationalization of cities and outlying areas remain unmet, continuing to act as indirect stimuli for realizations compatible with the partial goals established along the way by the system.

At this point something inexplicable, at least at first glance, occurs. The ideology of form seems to abandon its own vocation to realism, turning to the second pole inherent in the dialectic of bourgeois culture. Although the “utopia of the project” is not abandoned, an attempt is made to counteract the processes that have concretely risen above the ideological level by recuperating Chaos, by contemplating the very same anxiety that Constructivism seemed to have forever overcome, and by sublimating Disorder.

Having arrived at an undeniable impasse due to the inherent contradictions of capitalist development, architectural ideology gives up its role as stimulus to the structures of production and hides behind ambiguous slogans contesting the “technological civilization.”

Incapable of analyzing the real causes of the crisis of design, and concentrating all its attention on the internal problems of design itself, contemporary criticism has been accumulating symptomatic ideological inventions in an attempt to give new substance to the alliance between techniques of visual communication and industrial production. It is no accident that the area singled out for the redemption of this alliance—now postulated in terms of an ambiguous “neo-humanism” which, compared to the *Neue Sachlichkeit* of the 1920s, has the serious drawback of mystifying its own role as mediator between Utopia and Production—is the image of the city itself.

City as superstructure, then. Actually, art is now called upon to give the city a superstructural face. Pop Art, Op Art, analyses of the city’s *imageability*, and *esthetique prospective*, all these things converge toward a single objective: that of dissimulating the contradictions of the contemporary city, resolving them in polyvalent images, figuratively glorifying that formal complexity which, when read with the proper parameters, proves to be nothing more than the explosion of the incurable conflicts that elude the plans of advanced capitalism. The recuperation of the concept of art is thus useful to this new task of covering up. Just when industrial design assumes the lead in technological production, influencing its quality for the purpose of increasing consumption, Pop Art, by recycling its residues, places itself at its rear guard. This, however, corresponds precisely to the twofold demand now made of the technologies of visual communication. An art that refuses to place itself in the vanguard of the cycles of production, demonstrates, well beyond all verbal challenges, that the consumption process extends to infinity, and that even rubbish, when sublimated into useless or nihilistic objects, can assume a new *use value*, thus reentering, if only by the back door, the cycle of production and consumption.

Yet this rear guard is also an indication of the capitalist plan’s refusal—perhaps only temporary—to fully resolve the contradictions of the city and transform the city into a totally organized machine without archaic forms of waste or generalized dysfunctions.

In such a phase as this, one must act to convince the public that the contradictions, imbalances, and chaos typical of the contemporary city are inevitable—that such chaos in itself, in fact, contains unexplored riches, unlimited possibilities to be turned to account, bright and shining values to be presented as new social fetishes.

Carnaby Street and the new utopianism are thus different aspects of one phenomenon. Architectural and supertechnological utopianism; the rediscovery of the *game* as a condition for the public's involvement; the prophecies of "aesthetic societies"; invitations to establish the *primacy of the imagination*: such are the proposals of the new urban ideologies.<sup>25</sup>

There is one text in particular that manages to synthesize and balance all the different exhortations for art to assume a new, persuasive rather than operative role. And it is significant that this book, the *Livre blanc de l'art total*, by Pierre Restany, explicitly brings up all the same themes that arise from a concerned awareness that the objectives pursued until now have been eroding. The result of such erosion is that the "new" proposals for rescuing art have taken on the very same connotations, in different words, as those of the early-century avant-gardes, without possessing any of the clarity or self-confidence that the latter could quite justifiably flaunt. Restany writes:

The metamorphosis of languages is but the reflection of the structural changes of society. Technology, by increasingly reducing the gap between art (the synthesis of new languages) and nature (modern, technical, urban reality), plays a determinant role as catalyst of a sufficient, necessary process.

Beyond its vast potential and the limitless worlds it opens up, technology also displays a flexibility indispensable in a period of transition: it allows the conscious artist to act not upon the formal effects of communication, as before, but upon its very terms: the human imagination. *Contemporary technology, in short, allows the imagination to take power.* Freed of all normative impediments, of all questions of realization or production, the creative imagination can identify itself with global consciousness. *Prospective aesthetics is the vehicle of man's greatest hope: the collective liberation of humanity.* The socialization of art represents the convergence of the forces of creation and production toward a goal of dynamic synthesis and technical metamorphosis: it is through such restructuring that man and reality find their true, modern face, that they become *natural* again, having overcome all alienation.<sup>26</sup>

Thus the circle closes. Marcusean mythology is used to demonstrate that it is possible to achieve a vaguely defined "collective freedom" within the current relations of production, and not through their subversion. One need only "socialize art" and put it at the head of technological "progress": never mind that the entire course of modern art demonstrates the utopianism—perhaps understandable yesterday, merely backward today—of such a proposition. Thus it actually becomes legitimate to assimilate even the most ambiguous slogans of May 1968. *L'imagination au pouvoir* sanctions the reconciliation between revolt and conservation, between symbolic metaphor and productive process, between diversion and *Realpolitik*.

And that is not all. With the reassertion of art's role as mediator one may again assign it the *naturalistic* attributes that Enlightenment culture had given it. The avant-garde critique thus reveals its role as ideological tool of the current critical phase of the capitalist world. Indeed, it is even imprecise to call it a "critique" any longer, since its function, in this sense, is entirely obvious: the confusion and ambiguity that it advocates for art—using all the conclusions of semantic analysis to this end—are only sublimated metaphors for the crisis and ambiguity informing the structures of the present-day city. The critique's refusal to stand outside the circle of planning-production-consumption is therefore symptomatic. Restany goes on:

The critical method must contribute to a generalization of aesthetics: superseding the work and multiple production; making a fundamental distinction between the two complementary orders of creation and production; systematizing operational research and technical cooperation in every domain experimenting with synthesis; structuring the notion of game and

spectacle in psycho-sensorial fashion; organizing ambient space with a view to mass communications; inserting the individual environment into the collective space of urban well-being.<sup>27</sup>

Criticism must therefore function within the cycles of production; it must, by becoming *operative*, serve as stimulus in order to shift the Plan to increasingly advanced levels.

But what real novelty is there in all this with respect to the historic avant-gardes? It would not be difficult to demonstrate, through technical analysis, that aside from a relaunching of ideology, the novel elements are extremely limited. Indeed, in propositions of this sort—once we have set aside the Marcusian utopia of redeeming the future dimension through the Great Refusal enacted by the imagination—there is clearly something less with respect to the coherence of the historic avant-gardes.

So how does one explain all this insistence on the waste of form and the recovery of a specific dimension of artistic themes, in the light of the need for increasing integration of formal elaboration into the cycle of production?

There is no denying that we are faced with two concurrent phenomena. On the one hand, the fact that building production remains confined to broad, comprehensive plans continues to reduce the functionality of architecture's ideological role. On the other, the economic and social conflicts exploding with ever greater frequency within urban and outlying areas seem to be imposing a pause on capitalism's Plan. Faced with the notion of the rationalization of the urban milieu—a central, determinant theme—capital seems, for the moment, unable to find within itself the strength and means necessary to fulfill the tasks rightly pointed out by the ideologies of the modern movement.

This has forced a return to activism—to strategies of stimulus, critique, and struggle—on the part of the intellectual opposition, and even of class organizations, which to this day have assumed the task of fighting to resolve such problems and conflicts. The harshness of the struggle over urban-planning laws (in Italy as well as the US), over the reorganization of the building industry, over urban renewal, may have given many the illusion that the fight for planning could actually constitute a moment in the class struggle.

Architects now work in a climate of anxiety, owing to the discovery of their decline as active ideologues, the realization of the vast potential of technology in the rationalization of the city and outlying areas together with the daily awareness of its waste, and the obsolescence of specific planning methods even before they have had a chance to be tested. All this points to a concrete development on the horizon, feared as the worst of all evils: the proletarianization of the architect, and his insertion—with no more neo-humanistic delays—within the planning programs of production.

When this new professional situation—already realized in advanced capitalist countries like the US or in countries of socialized capital such as the USSR—is feared by architects and avoided with the most neurotic sorts of formal and ideological contortions, it shows only the political backwardness of that particular intellectual group.

Having ideologically anticipated the iron law of the Plan, architects, unable to interpret historically the distance traveled, are now rebelling against the extreme consequences of processes that they themselves helped to set in motion. What's worse, they are attempting pathetically to relaunch modern architecture "ethically," assigning it political tasks suitable only for temporarily calming abstract, unjustified frenzies.

We must realize one thing: that the entire course of modern architecture and the new systems of visual communication was born, developed and brought into crisis in a grandiose attempt—the last of bourgeois culture—to resolve, on the level of an ideology all the more insidious because it lies entirely within concrete activities and real production cycles, the imbalances, contradictions and delays typical of the capitalistic reorganization of the world market.

Order and disorder, in this light, cease to be in opposition to each other. If we interpret them according to their true historical significance, it becomes clear that there is no contradiction between constructivism and “protest art,” between the rationalism of building production and informal subjectivism or Pop irony, between the capitalist plan and the urban chaos, between the ideology of planning and the poetics of the object.

The destiny of capitalist society, in this interpretation, is not at all extraneous to the *project*. The ideology of the project is as essential to the integration of modern capitalism, with all its structures and superstructures, into human existence, as is the illusion of being able to oppose that *project* with the tools of a *different* project or with those of a radical “anti-project.”

It may even be that many marginal and rearguard roles exist for architecture and planning. Of primary interest to us, however, is the question of why, until now, Marxist-oriented culture has very carefully, and with an obstinacy worthy of better causes, denied or concealed the simple truth that, just as there can be no such thing as a political economics of class, but only a class critique of political economics, likewise there can never be an aesthetics, art or architecture of class, but only a class critique of aesthetics, art, architecture and the city.

A coherent Marxist critique of architectural and urbanistic ideology can only demystify the contingent, historical—and in no way objective or universal—realities that lie hidden behind the unifying categories of the terms “art,” “architecture,” and “city.”

In assuming its historic, objective role as class critique, architectural criticism must become a critique of urban ideology, and avoid in every way the danger of entering into “progressive” dialogue with the techniques for rationalizing the contradictions of capital.

And first among the intellectual illusions to be dispelled is that which strives to anticipate, through mere imagery, the conditions of an architecture “for a liberated society.” Anyone who proffers such a slogan avoids the question of whether, even leaving aside its manifest utopianism, such an objective could ever be sought without a linguistic, methodological and structural revolution reaching well beyond the simple subjective will or the simple updating of a syntax.

Modern architecture has marked the paths of its own destiny by becoming the bearer of ideals of progress and rationalization to which the working class is extraneous, or in which it is included only in a social democratic perspective. One might well recognize the historical inevitability of this phenomenon; yet having done so, one may no longer hide the ultimate reality that makes the choices of “leftist” architects so uselessly anguished.

Uselessly anguished because it is useless to struggle when one is trapped inside a capsule with no exit. The crisis of modern architecture does not issue from “weariness” or “dissipation.” Rather, it is a crisis of the ideological function of architecture. The “fall” of modern art is the ultimate testimony of bourgeois ambiguity, poised as it is between “positive” goals—the reconciliation of contradictions—and the merciless exploration of its own objective commodification. There is no more “salvation” to be found within it: neither by wandering restlessly through

“labyrinths” of images so polyvalent that they remain mute, nor by shutting oneself up in the sullen silence of geometries content with their own perfection.

This is why there can be no proposals of architectural “anti-spaces”:<sup>28</sup> any search for an alternative within the structures determining the mystification of planning is an obvious contradiction in terms.

Reflection on architecture, as a critique of the concrete ideology “realized” by architecture itself, can only push further, and strive for a specifically concrete dimension in which the systematic destruction of the mythologies sustaining its development is only one of the objectives. But only the future conditions of the class struggle will tell us whether the task we are setting ourselves is that of an avant-garde or a rearguard.

#### Notes

1. M. A. Laugier, *Observations sur l'architecture* (The Hague, 1765), pp. 312–313.
2. Alexander Cozens, *A New Method of Assisting the Invention Drawing Original Compositions of Landscape* (London, 1786). The words of Alexander Pope, cited by Cozens at the start of his treatise, assume particular importance in this context: “Those rules which are discovered, not devised / are Nature still, but Nature methodized: / Nature, like Monarchy, is but restrained / by the same Laws which first herself ordained.” Cf. G. C. Argan, *La pittura dell'Illuminismo in Inghilterra da Reynolds a Constable* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1965), pp. 153 ff. The civic significance attributed to Nature—the subject and object of ethical and pedagogical action—comes to replace the traditional principles of authority which rationalism and sensism were in the process of destroying.
3. Cf. Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Cres, 1925).
4. M. Quatremere de Quincy, “Architecture” entry in the *Encyclopédie methodique*, vol. I, p. 109.
5. Cf. G. B. Piranesi, *Iconographia Campi Martii* (1761–1762); idem, *Parere su l'architettura*, included in the *Osservazioni* (Rome, 1765); Werner Korte, “G. B. Piranesi als praktischer Architekt,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 2 (1933); R. Wittkower, “Piranesi's *Parere su l'architettura*,” *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 3 (1938), p. 2.
6. Francesco Milizia, *Principj di architettura civile* (Bassano, 1813), vol. II, pp. 26–27.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
9. Cf. G. Antolini, *Descrizione del Foro Bonaparte, presentato coi disegni al comitato di governo della Repubblica Cisalpina . . .* (Milan, 1802); A. Rossi, “Il concetto di tradizione nell'architettura neoclassica milanese,” *Società* 12, no. 2 (1956), pp. 474–493; G. Mezzanotte, *L'architettura neoclassica in Lombardia* (Naples: Esi, 1966).
10. Cf. L. Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (Bari: Laterza, 1960); M. Manieri-Elia, *L'architettura del dopoguerra in U.S.A.* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1966). “On the urbanistic level,” writes Manieri about the 1807 plan for the city of New York, “it seems clear that the Puritan, ‘antiarchitectural’ attitude well coincides with the sense of Jeffersonian libertarian individualism, according to which the system, as is quite evident in the Declaration of Independence . . . , consists of the least cumbersome sort of functional support possible: if the government should only be a flexible and alterable instrument at all times in the service of inalienable human rights, then that is all the more reason why an urban plan should provide a maximum guarantee of flexibility and present a minimum of resistance to productive initiative” (pp. 64–65). Cf. also the exceptional documentation of the formation of American cities in J. W. Reys, *The Making of Urban America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).
11. The historical period of utopian socialism and its proposals for urban reorganization cannot be regarded with the same criteria as the formation of the ideologies of the modern movement. One can only hint at the alternative role utopian Romanticism played as compared to those ideologies. Its development, however, particularly in Anglo-Saxon planning practices, should be compared with the models formulated by the New Deal. But such an analysis would well surpass the limits of the present essay.
12. Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968). “Engels is dismayed



by the crowd,” writes Benjamin; “he responds with a moral reaction, and an aesthetic one as well; the speed with which people rush past one another unsettles him. The charm of his description lies in the intersecting of unshakable critical integrity with an old-fashioned attitude. The writer came from a Germany that was still provincial; he may never have faced the temptation to lose himself in a stream of people” (p. 169).

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 169–170.
14. “With the rise of the great cities prostitution came into possession of new secrets. One of these is the labyrinthine character of the city itself. The labyrinth, whose image had passed into flesh and blood in the *flâneur*, is at the same time colorfully framed by prostitution.” Walter Benjamin, “Central Park,” *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985), p. 53.
15. Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” p. 178.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
17. Ludwig Hilberseimer, *Grossstadtarchitektur* (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann Verlag, 1927), p. 100.
18. From this derived the model of the “vertical city” which, according to Grassi (introduction to *Un’idea di piano*, a translation of Hilberseimer’s *Entfaltung einer Planungs-idee* [Padua: Marsilio, 1967], p. 10), was presented as a theoretical alternative to the “city for three million inhabitants” presented by Le Corbusier at the 1922 Salon d’Automne. It should also be noted that despite his detached rigor, Hilbersheimer—who, not coincidentally, was a member of the 1919 Novembergruppe and of all the “radical” intellectual groups thereafter—would come close, after the self-critique he carried out after his transfer to the U.S., to the communitarian and naturalistic myths that were to figure among the ideological ingredients of the New Deal.
19. Hilbersheimer, *Grossstadtarchitektur*, p. 103.
20. *Ibid.*
21. The drawings in the *Poème de l’angle droit* (Paris: Verve Editions, 1955) clarify the significance Le Corbusier gave to the journey of the intellect through the labyrinth. As for Klee—to whose graphic style these drawings are very close—Order is not a totality external to the human activity that creates it. As much as the search for synthesis is enriched by the uncertainties of memory, by the tension of doubt, even by paths leading elsewhere than to the final destination, such a destination is actually reached in the fullness of an authentic experience. For Le Corbusier, too, the absolute of form lies in the full realization of a constant victory over the uncertainty of the future, achieved through the assumption of the problematic position as the only guarantee of collective salvation.
22. Among Le Corbusier’s many written testimonies in which architectural intervention is explicitly foregrounded as an instrument of class integration, his passage on the Van Nelle factory in Holland is particularly revealing: “The Van Nelle tobacco factory in Rotterdam,” writes Le Corbusier, “a creation of the modern age, redeems the word *proletarian* of its desperate signification. This diversion of the sentiment of egotistical property toward a sentiment of collective action leads us to the felicitous phenomenon of *personal intervention* at every stage of human endeavor. The work remains such as it is in its material state, but the spirit illuminates it. I repeat: everything lies in the words: *proof of love*.  
“It is to this point that, through a new form of administration, one should lead, purify and amplify the contemporary event. Tell us what we are, in what way we may be of use, why we work. Give us plans, show us the plans, explain your plans. *Make us united*. . . . If you show us the plans and explain them to us, the propertied classes and the hopeless proletariat will cease to exist. In their place will be a society of belief and action. At this present moment of strict rationalism, the question is one of consciousness.” Le Corbusier, *Spectacle de la vie moderne*, in *La ville radieuse* (Paris: Vincent Freal, 1933), p. 177.
23. On the basis of these considerations, one could rebut Banham’s thesis, which criticizes, from a point of view based within technological development, the typological stasis of the “modern movement’s” masters. “In opting for stabilised types or norms,” he writes, “architects opted for the pauses when the normal processes of technology were interrupted, those processes of change and renovation that, as far as we can see, can only be halted by abandoning technology as we know it today, and bringing both research and mass-production to a stop.” Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London:

The Architectural Press, 1962), p. 325. It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that all the architectural science fiction that has proliferated from 1960 to this day by redeeming the “image” dimension of the processes of technology, is, compared to Le Corbusier’s Obus plan, quite disturbingly backward.

24. Cf. A. Negri, “La teoria capitalista dello stato nel '29: John M. Keynes,” *Contropiano*, no. 1 (1968), pp. 3 ff.
25. Cf., as texts symptomatic of the phenomenon: G. C. Argan, *Relazione introduttiva al convegno sulle “strutture ambientali”* (Rimini, September 1968); L. Quaroni, *La Torre di Babele* (Padua: Marsilio, 1967); M. Ragon, *Les visionnaires de l’architecture* (Paris, 1965); A. Boatto, *Pop Art in U.S.A.* (Milan: Lerici, 1967); F. Menna, *Profezia di una società estetica* (Milan: Lerici, 1968). It should not be necessary to point out that this grouping of these texts has nothing to do with their inherent rigor or the quality of their individual contributions.
26. Pierre Restany, “Le livre blanc de l’art total; pour une esthétique prospective,” *Domus*, no. 269 (1968), p. 50. Italics mine.
27. Ibid. Obviously I am using Restany’s text merely to exemplify a very widespread mythology among the protagonists of the new avant-garde. Moreover, many of my assertions may also hold true for far more serious “disciplinary” attempts at redemption through utopia.
28. The Italian word here is *contros pazi*—in the original, an obvious polemical reference to the polemical contemporary architectural journal, *Contros pazio*. [Translator’s note.]

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