

Finally, and perhaps most controversial to architects, Jameson compares Tafuri's stark and negative perspective to Robert Venturi's aesthetic of contradiction and fragmented chaos.

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## Architecture and the Critique of Ideology

Fredric Jameson

How can space be "ideological"? Only if such a question is possible and meaningful — leaving aside the problem of meaningful *answers* to it — can any conceptions or ideals of non-ideological, transfigured, utopian space be developed. The question has itself tended to be absorbed by naturalistic or anthropological perspectives, most often based on conceptions of the human body, notably in phenomenology. The body's limits but also its needs are then appealed to as ultimate standards against which to measure the relative alienation of older commercial or industrial spaces, of the overwhelming sculptural monuments of the International Style, or else of the postmodernist "megastructure." Yet arguments based on the human body are fundamentally ahistorical, and involve premises about some eternal "human nature" concealed within the seemingly "verifiable" and scientific data of physiological analysis. If the body is in reality a social body, if therefore there exists no pre-given human body as such, but rather the whole historical range of social experiences of the body, the whole variety of bodily norms projected by a series of distinct historical "modes of production" or social formations, then the "return" to some more "natural" vision of the body in space projected by phenomenology comes to seem ideological, when not nostalgic. But does this mean that there are no limits to what the body, socially and historically, can become, or to the kind of space to which it can be asked to "adapt"?

Yet if the body ceases to be the fundamental unit of spatial analysis, at once the very concept of space itself becomes problematic: what space? The space of rooms or individual buildings? Or the space of the very city fabric itself in which those buildings are inserted, and against whose perceptual background my experience of this or that local segment is organized? Yet the city, however it is construed, is space-in-totality; it is not given in advance as an object of study or analysis, after the fashion of the constructed building. (Perhaps even the latter is not given in this way, either, except to the already abstract sense of sight: individual buildings are then "objects" only in photographs.)

It is important to recognize (or to admit) that this second series of questions or problems remains essentially phenomenological in its orientation: indeed, it is possible that the vice of our initial question lies there, that it still insists on posing the problem of the relationship of the individual subject and of the subject's "lived experience" to the architectural or urban spatial object, however the latter is to be construed. What is loosely called "structuralism" is now generally understood as the repudiation of this phenomenological "problematic" of such presuppositions as "experience": it has generated a whole new counterproblematic of its own, in which space — the individual building or the city itself — is taken as a text in which a whole range of "signs" and "codes" is combined, whether in the organic unity of a shared code, or in "collage" systems of various kinds, in structures of allusion to the past, or of ironic commentary on the present, or of radical disjunctions, in which some radically new sign (the Seagram Building or the Radiant City) criticizes the older sign system into which it dramatically erupts. Yet in another perspective it is precisely this last possibility that has been called back into question, and that can be seen as a replication, in more modern "structuralist" language, of our initial question. In all the arts, the new "textual" strategies stubbornly smuggled back into their new problematic the coordinates of the older political question, and of the older unexamined opposition between "authentic" and "inauthentic": for a time, the newer mediations produced seemingly new versions of the older (false?) problem, in the form of concepts of "subversion," the breaking of codes, their radical interruption or contestation (along with their predictable dialectical opposite, the notion of "co-optation"). It is the viability of these new solutions that is today generally in doubt: they now come to be felt as more utopianism, only of a negative or "critical" variety. They seemed at first to have repudiated the older positive and nostalgic ideals of a new utopian — authentic, non-alienated — space or art: yet their claim to punctual negativity — far more modest at first glance — now seems equally utopian in the bad sense. For even the project of criticizing, subverting, delegitimizing, strategically interrupting, the established codes of a repressive social and spatial order has ultimately come to be understood as appealing to some conception of critical "self-consciousness," of critical distance, which today seems problematic; while on a more empirical level, it has been observed that the most subversive gesture itself hardens over into yet another form of being or positivity in its turn (just as the most negative *critical* stance loses its therapeutic and destructive shock value and slowly turns back into yet another critical ideology in

its own right).

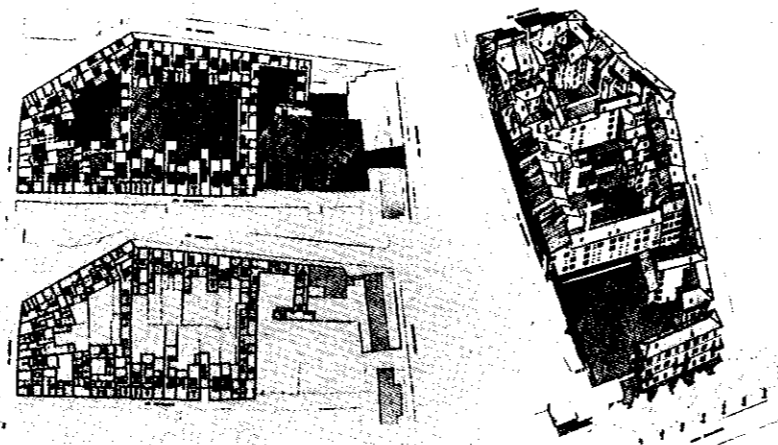
Is some third term beyond these two moments — the phenomenological and the structural — conceivable? Pierre Bourdieu, in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, explicitly attempts just such a dialectical move beyond these two "moments," both of which are for him indispensable, yet insufficient: the concept of "practice" — the social body's programming by its spatial text, now taken to be the "bottom line" both of everyday experience and of the legitimation of the social structure itself — while offered as just such a solution, has only been "tested" on the much simpler materials and problems of precapitalist space in the Kabyl village. Meanwhile, Henri Lefèbvre's conception of space as the fundamental category of politics and of the dialectic itself — the one great prophetic vision of these last years of discouragement and renunciation — has yet to be grasped in all its pathbreaking implications, let alone explored and implemented: although Lefèbvre's influential role as an ideologist and critic of French architecture today must be noted and meditated upon.

It is precisely a role of this kind that yet another logically possible position — faced with the dilemmas we have outlined above — explicitly repudiates: this is the position of Manfredo Tafuri, which in at least some of its more peremptory expressions has the merit of a stark and absolute simplicity. The position is stated most baldly in the note to the second Italian edition of *Theories and History of Architecture*: "one cannot 'anticipate' a class architecture (an architecture 'for a liberated society'); what is possible is the introduction of class criticism into architecture."<sup>1</sup> Although Tafuri's working judgments — in texts written over a number of years — are in fact far more nuanced and ambiguous than such a proposition might suggest, certain key elements can at once be isolated: 1) The architectural critic has no business being an "ideologist," that is, a visionary proponent of architectural styles of the future, "revolutionary" architecture, and the like: her role must be resolutely negative, the vigilant denunciation of existent or historical architectural ideologies. This position then tends to slip into a somewhat different one, namely that 2) the practicing architect, in *this* society and within the closure of capitalism as a system, cannot hope to devise a radically different, a revolutionary, or a "utopian" architecture or space either. 3) Without any conceivable normative conception of architectural space, of a space of radical difference from this one, the criticism

<sup>1</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, *Theories and History of Architecture*, trans. Giorgio Verrecchia (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), iii.



*Precapitalist space: Kabyl village*



*Commune of Bologna Technical Office, plan for the conservation of the historical center of Bologna, 1982*

of buildings tends to be conflated with the criticism of the ideologies of such buildings; the history and criticism of architecture thus tends to fold back into the history and criticism of the various ideologies of architecture, the manifestos and the verbal expressions of the great architects themselves. 4) Political action is not renounced in such a position, or not *necessarily* (although more "pessimistic" readings of Tafuri are certainly possible). What is, however, affirmed here is consonant with the Althusserian tradition of the "semi-autonomy" of the levels and practices of social life: politics is radically disjoined from aesthetic (in this case, architectural) practice. The former is still possible, but only on *its* level, and architectural or aesthetic production can never be immediately political, it takes place somewhere else. Architects can therefore be political, like other individuals, but their architecture today cannot be political (a restatement of proposition 2, above). It follows, then, that 5) an architecture of the future will be concretely and practically possible only when the future has arrived, that is to say, after a total social revolution, a systemic transformation of this mode of production into something else.

This position, which inevitably has something of the fascination of uncompromising intransigence and of all absolutes, must be understood, as I shall try to show below in more detail, first of all within the history of contemporary Marxism, as a repudiation of what the Althusserians called Marxist "humanism" (including very specifically its "utopian" component as symbolically represented by Marcuse or by Lefèbvre himself). Its refusal to entertain the possibility of some properly Marxian "ideology" (which would seek to project alternate futures), its commitment to a resolutely critical and analytical Marxian "science" — by way of a restriction to the operation of denouncing the ideologies of the past and of a closed present — all these features betray some kinship with Adorno's late and desperate concept of a purely "negative dialectic." The ambiguity of such a position lies in its very instability, and the way in which it can imperceptibly pass over into a post-Marxism of the type endorsed by the French *nouveaux philosophes* or by Tafuri's collaborator, Massimo Cacciari. This is to suggest that Tafuri's position is *also* an ideology, and that one does not get out of ideology by refusing it or by committing oneself to negative and critical "ideological analysis."

Yet at this stage, such an evaluation remains at the level of mere opinion and in that form has little if any interest: in what follows I shall try to give it more content by examining Tafuri's work — and most notably his short, widely read, but dense and

provocative *Architecture and Utopia*<sup>2</sup> —in three distinct perspectives. The first must be that of the Marxist context in which it was first produced, a context in which a series of significant but implicit moves may go unrecognized by the non-Marxist or American reader for want of the appropriate background. The second perspective (in no special order) will be that of the discursive form in which Tafuri works, namely historiography itself, and most particularly narrative history, whose formal dilemmas and problems today may be seen as determining (or at least overdetermining) certain of Tafuri's organizing concepts. Finally, it will be appropriate to reconsider this considerable body of work (now largely available in English) in the context of a more vast, contemporary event, which has its own specifically American equivalents (and which is by no means limited to the field of architecture, although the battle lines have been drawn more dramatically there than in any other art) — namely the critique of high modernism, the increasingly omnipresent feeling that the modern movement itself is henceforth extinct: a feeling that has often been accompanied by the sense that we may therefore now be in something else, sometimes called postmodernism. It is, incidentally, a matter of no small significance, to which we shall return, that this second theme — the dawning of some new post-modernist moment or even "age" — is utterly alien to Tafuri himself and plays no role in his periodizing framework or in his historical narrative.

I want to deal first with the second of my three topics, namely that which has to do with historiography, with the problem of writing history, and in this case of writing the history of a discipline, an art, a medium. That there has been a crisis in narrative or storytelling history since the end of the nineteenth century is well known, as is the relationship between this crisis and that other crisis in the realistic novel itself: narrative history and the realistic novel are indeed closely related and in the greatest nineteenth-century texts virtually interchangeable. In our own time, this ongoing crisis has been re-thematized in terms of the critique of representation, one of the fundamental slogans of poststructuralism: briefly, the narrative representation of history necessarily tends to suggest that history is something you can see, be a witness to, be present at — an obviously inadmissible proposition. On the other hand, as the word itself suggests, history is always fundamentally storytelling, and must always be narrative in its very structure.

<sup>2</sup> Manfredo Tafuri, *Architecture and Utopia*, trans. Barbara Luigia La Penta (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980).

This dilemma will not bother those for whom history-writing is not an essential task; if you are satisfied to do small-scale semiotic analyses of discrete or individual texts, or buildings, then presumably the problem of the writing of history, the telling of a historical story, will not unduly preoccupy you. I say "presumably" because I think that this problem also leaves its traces on such static analyses, and indeed it seems to be an empirical fact that the issues of history are returning everywhere today, not least within semiotics itself (the history of semiotics, the turn of semiotic analysis to the problem of genres, the problem of a semiotic of historical representation).

However, leaving other people to their concerns it will be clear that no issue is more central or more acute for those with some commitment to a dialectical tradition, since the dialectic has always for better or for worse been associated with some form or other of historical vision. For myself, I am much attracted by Louis Althusser's solution, which consists in proposing, in the midst of the crisis of historical representation and of narrative history, that the historian should conceive her task, not as that of producing a representation of history, but rather as that of producing the *concept* of history, a very different matter indeed.

But how is this to be done? Or rather, to be more modest about it, how has this actually been done in practice? From this perspective, it will be of interest to read *Architecture and Utopia* with a view toward determining the way in which it suggestively "produces the concept" of a dialectical history of architecture. But this is a rare enough achievement for one to want, initially, to juxtapose Tafuri's text with those very rare other realizations of this particular genre or form. I can think of only two contemporary dialectical histories of comparable intensity and intellectual energy: they are Adorno's *Philosophy of Modern Music* (a seminal text, on which Thomas Mann drew for his musical materials in *Doktor Faustus*) and, in the area of the history of literature, Roland Barthes's early and unequalled *Writing Degree Zero*. You will understand that this limited choice does not imply a lack of interest in the contributions that Lukács, Sartre, Asor Rosa, or Raymond Williams, among others, has made to the restructuring of traditional paradigms of literary history. What the three books I have mentioned have in common is not merely a new set of dialectical insights into literature, but the practice of a peculiar, condensed, allusive discursive form, a kind of textual *genre*, still exceedingly rare, which I shall call dialectical history.

Let me first single out a fundamental organizational feature which these three works share, and which I am tempted

to see as the ultimate precondition to which they must painfully submit in order to practice dialectical thinking: this is the sense of Necessity, of necessary failure, of closure, of ultimate unresolvable contradictions and the impossibility of the future, which cannot have failed to oppress any reader of these texts, particularly readers who as practicing artists — whether architects, composers, or writers — come to them for suggestions and encouragement as to the possibility of future cultural production.

Adorno's discussion of musical history culminates, for instance, in Schoenberg's extraordinary "solution" — the twelve-tone system — which solves all of the dilemmas outstanding in previous musical history so completely as to make musical composition after Schoenberg superfluous (or at least regressive) from Adorno's perspective, yet which at the same time ends up as a baleful replication or mirror image of that very totalitarian socio-economic system from which it sought to escape in the first place. In Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero* the well-known ideal of "white writing" — far from being what it often looks like today, namely a rather complacent account of postmodernist trends — stood in its initial historical context and situation as an equally impossible solution to a dilemma that rendered all earlier practices of writing or style ideological and intolerable. Tafuri's account, finally, of the increasing closure of late capitalism (beginning in 1931, and intensifying dialectically after World War II), by systematically shutting off one aesthetic possibility after another, ends up conveying a paralyzing and asphyxiating sense of the futility of any architectural or urbanistic innovation on this side of that equally inconceivable watershed, a total social revolution.

It would be silly, or even worse, frivolous, to discuss these positions in terms of optimism or pessimism. Later on I shall have some remarks to make about the political presuppositions that account for (or at least overdetermine) some of Tafuri's attitudes here; what I prefer to stress now is the formal origin of these somber visions of the total system, which, far worse than Max Weber's iron cage, here descends upon human life and human creative praxis. The strengths of the readings and insights of Adorno, Barthes, and Tafuri in these works are for one thing inextricably bound up with their vision of history as an increasingly total or closed system. In other words, their ability to interpret a given work of art as a provisional "solution" is absolutely dependent on a perspective that reads the artwork against a context reconstructed or rewritten as a situation and a contradiction.

More than this, I find confirmation in these books for an

intuition I have expressed elsewhere, namely that the dialectic, or powerful dialectical history, must somehow always involve a vision of Necessity, or, if you prefer, must always tell the story of failure. "The owl of Minerva takes its flight at dusk": dialectical interpretation is always retrospective, always tells the necessity of an event, why it *had* to happen the way it did; and to do that, the event must already have happened, the story must already have come to an end. Yet as this will sound like an indictment of the dialectic (or as yet one more post-Marxist "proof" of its irredeemable Hegelian character), it is important to add that such histories of necessity and of determinate failure are equally inseparable from some ultimate historical perspective of reconciliation, of achieved socialism, of Marx's "end of prehistory."

The restructuring of the history of an art in terms of a series of situations, dilemmas, contradictions, in terms of which individual works, styles, and forms can be seen as so many responses or determinate symbolic acts: this is then a first key feature of dialectical historiography. But there is another no less essential one that springs to mind, at least when one thinks in terms of historical materialism, and that is the reversal associated with the term *materialism* itself, the anti-idealistic thrust, the rebuke and therapeutic humiliation of consciousness forced to reground itself in a painful awareness of what Marx called its "social determination." This second requirement is of course that which sets off the present texts sharply from old-fashioned Hegelian spiritual historiography, but which in turn threatens to undermine the historiographic project altogether, as in Marx's grim reminder in *The German Ideology*:

We do not set out from what people say, imagine, or conceive, nor from people as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at people in the flesh. We set out from real, active human beings, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain their semblance of independence. They have no history, no development, in their own right; but it is rather human beings who, developing their material produc-

tion and relationships, alter, along with this, their real existence, their thinking, and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.<sup>3</sup>

Now the slogan of "materialism" has again become a very popular euphemism for Marxism: I have my own reasons for objecting to this particular ideological fashion on the left today: facile and dishonest as a kind of popular-front solution to the very real tensions between Marxism and feminism, the slogan also seems to me extraordinarily misleading as a synonym for "historical materialism" itself, since the very concept of "materialism" is a bourgeois Enlightenment (later positivist) concept, and fatally conveys the impression of a "determinism by the body" rather than, as in genuine dialectical Marxism, a "determination by the mode of production." At any rate, in the context that concerns us here — the description of "dialectical historiography" — the drawback of the word "materialism" is that it tends to suggest that only one form of dialectical reversal — the overthrow of idealism by materialism or a recall to matter — is at work in such books.

Actually, however, the dialectical shock, the reversal of our habits of idealism, can take many forms; and it is evident that in the dialectical history of an art its privileged targets will be the idealistic habits we have inherited in thinking about such matters and, in particular, Hegelian notions of the history of forms and styles, but also empiricist or structuralist notions of isolated texts. Still, it is best to see how these reversal-effects have been achieved in practice, rather than deducing them a priori in some dogmatic manner. And since none of these works ever raises one key issue of concern to everyone today, it is appropriate to preface a discussion of them with the indication of a fundamental form of contemporary "reversal" which may not leave them unscathed either: namely the way in which contemporary feminist critiques cut across the whole inherited system of the histories of art and culture by demonstrating the glaring absence from them, not merely of women as such, but, in the architectural area, of any consideration of the relationship between women's work and interior space, and between the domination of women and the city plan itself. For male intellectuals, this is the most stunning materialist reversal of all, since it calls *us* effectively into question at the same time that it disturbingly seems to discredit the very foundations and institutional presuppositions of the

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International, 1947), 14–15.

disciplines in question.

Indeed, the lesson for us in criticism of this kind may well be, among other things, that: that a materialist or dialectical historiography does its work ultimately by undermining the very foundations, framework, constitutive presuppositions, of the specialized disciplines themselves by unexpectedly demonstrating the existence, not necessarily of "matter" in that limited sense, but rather in general of an *Other* of the discipline, an outside, a limit, the revelation of the *extrinsic*, which it is felt to be scandalous and unscholarly to introduce into a carefully regulated traditional debate.

Adorno's book perhaps goes least far in this direction: the *Philosophy of Modern Music* operates its particular reversal by shifting from the subject (the great composers and their styles and works) to the object, the raw material, the tonal system itself, which as a peculiar "logic of content" has its own dynamics and generates fresh problems with every new solution, setting absolute limits to the freedom of the composer at every historical moment, its objective contradictions increasing in intensity and complexity with each of those new moments, until Schoenberg's "final solution" — the unification of vertical and horizontal, of harmony and counterpoint — seems to produce an absolute that is a full stop, beyond which composition cannot go: a success that is also, in genuine dialectical fashion, an absolute failure.

Barthes's reversal is useful in that his problematic (which is essentially that of the Sartre of *What Is Literature?*) is the most distant from the rhetoric of materialism and materiality and consists rather in a vision of the nightmare of history as blood guilt, and as that necessary and inevitable violence of the relationship of any group to the others which we call class struggle. Both writers — Sartre and Barthes — reverse our placid conceptions of literary history by demonstrating how every individual text, by its institutionalized signals, necessarily selects a particular readership for itself and thereby symbolically endorses the inevitable blood guilt of that particular group or class. Only whereas Sartre proposed the full utopian solution of a literature of praxis that would address itself to a classless society, Barthes ingeniously imagines a different way of escaping from the "nightmare of history," a kind of neutral or zero term, the projection of a kind of work from which all group or class signals have been eliminated: white or bleached writing, an escape from group blood guilt to the other side of group formation (which in later Barthes will be reoriented around reception rather than production and become the escape from class struggle into an equally non-individual kind of *jouissance* or punctual schizophrenic or perverse ecstasy, as in

*The Pleasure of the Text*).

This is the moment to observe the temptation of the "zero degree" solution in Tafuri himself, where it constitutes one, but *only one*, of the provisional working possibilities very sparsely detectable in his pages. A Barthesian reading of Tafuri's account of Mies and the Seagram Building seems more plausible, as well as more historical, than a Heideggerian one, particularly if we attend to the content of Tafuri's proto-Mallarméan celebration of the glacial silence of this building, rather than to its rather Germanic language: "The 'almost nothing' has become a 'big glass' ... reflecting images of the urban chaos that surrounds the timeless Miesian purity.... It accepts [the shift and flux of phenomena], absorbs them to themselves in a perverse multi-duplication, like a Pop Art sculpture that obliges the American metropolis to look at itself reflected ... in the neutral mirror that breaks the city web. In this, architecture arrives at the ultimate limits of its own possibilities. Like the last notes sounded by the Doctor Faustus of Thomas Mann, alienation, having become absolute, testifies uniquely to its own presence, separating itself from the world to declare the world's incurable malady."<sup>4</sup> This is, however, less the endorsement of a Miesian aesthetic than a way of closing the historical narrative, and, as we shall see in a moment, of endowing the implacable and contradictory historical situation with an absolute power that such desperate non-solutions as Barthesian "bleached writing" or Miesian silence can only enhance.

Returning for the moment to the strategies of the materialist reversal, Tafuri's use of such strategies is original in that it includes an apologia for the primacy of architecture over all the other arts (and thereby of architectural theory and criticism as well): but the apologia is distinctly untraditional and, one would think, not terribly reassuring for people professionally committed to this field of specialization. Architecture is for Tafuri supreme among the arts simply because its other or exterior is coeval with history and society itself, and it is susceptible therefore to the most fundamental materialist or dialectical reversal of all. To put it most dramatically, if the outer limit of the individual building is the material city itself, with its opacity, complexity, and resistance, then the outer limit of some expanded conception of the architectural vocation as including urbanism and city planning is the economic itself, or capitalism in the most overt and naked expression of its implacable power. So the great Central Euro-

<sup>4</sup> Manfredo Tafuri and Francesco Dal Co, *Modern Architecture* (New York: Abrams, 1979), 342.



*Mies van der Rohe, Seagram Building, New York, 1954 - 1958*

pean urbanistic projects of the 1920s (the *Siedlungen*, or workers' housing, in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Vienna) touch their other in the seemingly "extrinsic" obstacle of financial speculation and the rise in land and property values that causes their absolute failure and spells an end to their utopian vocation. But where for some traditional history of forms this is an extrinsic and somehow accidental, extraneous fact, which essentially has "nothing to do" with the purely formal values of these designs, in Tafuri's practice of the dialectic, this seemingly extrinsic situation is then drawn back into the dialectical spiral itself, and passes an absolute judgment of history proper upon such utopian forms.

These two dialectical reversals — the judgment on the project of an individual building, text, or "work of art" by the preexisting reality of the city itself; the subsequent judgment on aesthetics of urban planning and ensembles by that vaster "totality" which is capitalism itself — these are only two of the modes of reversal among many in Tafuri's little book: and it is this very richness of the forms of an anti-idealist turn, the dialectical suppleness of Tafuri's use of varied thematic oppositions, which makes his text both so fascinating and exemplary, and so bewilderingly dense and difficult to read. Other modes of reversal could be enumerated: most notably the unpleasant reminder of the professional status of intellectuals themselves and the ideological and idealistic distortions that result from that status; as well as the thematics of a Keynesian management of the "future" — a kind of credit and planning system of human life — which is one of the more novel subthemes of this work, and of its staging of the critique of modernist utopianism.

What must be stressed at this point, however, is the way in which the principal "event" of such dialectical histories — the contradiction itself, the fatal reversal of this or that aesthetic solution as it comes to grief against its own material underside — necessarily determines the form of their narrative closure and the kind of "ending" they are led to project. In all three, the present is ultimately projected as the final and most absolute contradiction, the "situation" which has become a blank wall, beyond which history cannot pass. Such an "end of history," or abolition of the future, is most open in Adorno, where it is paid for by the tragic "blind spot" of the philosopher-composer, who must on the one hand systematically reject the "other" of his culture (including the movement of popular or mass culture — contemptuously dismissed by Adorno under the all-purpose term "jazz" or "easy music," and that whole movement of Third World history and culture, which is the "repressed" of his Eurocentrism); on the other hand he must refuse even the devel-

opment of advanced music beyond his "final stage," repudiating Stockhausen, electronic music, all of the developments of the fifties and sixties, with the same stubborn passion that leads him to bracket any conceivable *political* future in *Negative Dialectics*.

We have examined already the more ingenious conception of a "negative way" in Barthes's ideal of a zero degree of writing or in Tafuri's passing homage to Mies. What must now be underscored is the constitutive relationship between Tafuri's possibility of constructing dialectical history and his systematic refusal of what, in *Theories and History of Architecture*, is called "operative criticism"; that is, a criticism which, most strikingly in classical works like Giedion's *Space, Time and Architecture*, reads the past selectively and places an illusory historical analysis, the *appearance* of some "objective" historical narrative, in the service of what is in reality an architectural *manifesto*, the "normative" projection of some new style, the *project* of future work and future possibilities: "the planning of a precise poetical tendency, anticipated in its structures and derived from historical analyses programmatically distorted and finalized";<sup>5</sup> — in short, "ideological criticism [that] substitutes ready-made judgments of value (prepared for immediate use) for analytical rigor."<sup>6</sup> But this judgment on the spurious appropriation of the past in the service of an endorsement of aesthetic action in the present implies that "rigorous" analytical history must in turn be bought by a stoic renunciation of action and of value, and a well-nigh Hegelian renunciation of all possible futures, in order that the owl of Minerva be able to wing its flight into the past. Tafuri's "pessimism" is thus to be seen as a formal necessity of the generic structure of his text — dialectical historiography — rather than an "opinion" or a "position" in its own right.

Unfortunately, one also cannot help but read it as just such an opinion or position; and at this point a purely formal and textual necessity intersects with and is overdetermined by ideology, and becomes the vehicle for a whole set of ideological messages and signals that has real content and that can best be appreciated by way of the Marxian traditions from which it emerges.

It seems to me most convenient to decode these signals in the context of a current and general left appropriation of the older right-wing "end of ideology" slogans of the late 1950s. In the period of the Eisenhower era and the great American celebration, the "end of ideology" meant not merely the death of Marxism,

<sup>5</sup> *Theories and History*, 141.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.



but also the good news of the end of the classical capitalism anatomized by Marx, and the apparition of some new social order whose dynamics were no longer based on production and associated with social classes and their struggle, but rather on a new principle, which was therefore to be seen as in all those senses "beyond ideology." This new social system would then be named, by the ex-Marxist right-wing theorists of an "end of ideology," most notably Daniel Bell, "post-industrial society"<sup>7</sup> (others would call it consumer society, media society, consumer capitalism, and so forth); and its dynamic would be characterized by the primacy of knowledge, of scientific and technological know-how, and of a new social group (no longer a class in the Marxian sense), namely the technocrats.

For obvious reasons, the left repudiated this kind of analysis for a number of years, remaining intent on demonstrating that the classical analyses and concepts of Marx's *Capital* were still valid for the period that Bell and others were intent on describing as the dialectical mutation of "post-industrial society." It is clear that something of the force of Bell's theory derived from the optimism of the Eisenhower era, the period of American empire, and a global *pax americana*; and that history itself, better than any left countertheories or critiques, undertakes to pronounce judgment on the "end of ideology," "post-industrial society" thesis and to lay it to rest in our own moment of the return of more classical global economic crisis, worldwide depression, unemployment, and the like.

Paradoxically, however, it was precisely in the intervening years that the left itself caught up with the thesis of a new historical moment, a radical historical break, and produced its own version of the "end of ideology" thesis. This had something to do with changes in social atmosphere and temperature, and with the alteration of the quality of life in the advanced world; that is to say, with mutations in the appearance or surface of social life. It became clear to everyone, in other words, that with consumerism, with the enormous penetration and colonization of the apparatus of the media, with the release of new non-class social forces in the sixties — forces associated with race and gender, with nationalism and religion, with marginality (as in the case of students or the permanently unemployed) — something decisive had changed in the very "reality of the appearance" of capitalism. What the new Marxian version of this would do was

<sup>7</sup> See his two books, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

to explain the originality of the features of so-called post-industrial society as a new stage of capitalism proper, in which the old contradictions of capital were still at work, but in unexpectedly new forms. The features enumerated by people like Bell — for example, the primacy of science, the role of bureaucracy, and so forth — would be retained, but interpreted very differently in the light of a new moment that can be called "late capitalism" or the multinational world system (in the traditional Marxian periodization this would be a third moment of capitalism, after those of classical market capitalism and of imperialism and monopoly, and could be dated from the immediate postwar period in the United States and the late 1950s in Europe).<sup>8</sup> I do not have time to go into this extremely important new Marxian theory of the contemporary world, but must, before returning to Tafuri, underscore two of its significant features.

First, it is the theory of something like a total system, marked by a global deployment of capital around the world (even, on many accounts, reaching into the still far from autonomous economic dynamics of the nascent socialist countries), and effectively destroying the older coherence of the various national situations. The total system is marked also by the dynamism with which it now penetrates and colonizes the two last surviving enclaves of Nature within the older capitalism: the unconscious and the precapitalist agriculture of the Third World — the latter is now systematically undermined and reorganized by the Green Revolution, while the former is effectively mastered by what the Frankfurt School used to call the "culture industry," that is, the media, mass culture, and the various other techniques of the commodification of the mind. I should also add that this new quantum leap of capital now menaces that other precapitalist enclave within older capitalism, namely the non-paid labor of the older interior or home or family, thereby in contradictory fashion unbinding and liberating that enormous new social force of women, who immediately then pose an uncomfortable new threat to the new social order.

On the other hand, if the new expansion of multinational or late capitalism at once triggers various new forms of struggle and resistance, as in the great revolts of the 1960s, it also tends to be accompanied by the mood of pessimism and hopelessness that must naturally enough accompany the sense of a total system, with nothing outside itself, within which now local revolts and

<sup>8</sup> The most systematic and powerful exposition of this theory is found in Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975), on which I draw heavily here.

resistances come to be seen, not as the emergence of new forces and a new logic of a radically different future, but rather mere inversions within the system, punctual reversals of this or that systemic feature: no longer dialectical in their force, but merely structural(-ist). The Marxist response to this increasing windless closure of the system will be varied: it can take the form of a substitution of the time-scale of the prognosis of the *Grundrisse* for that, far more imminent, of Capital proper.<sup>9</sup> In the *Grundrisse*, indeed, Marx seems to project a far greater resiliency for capitalism than in *Capital* itself, one which better accommodates the unexpected new vitality and dynamism of the system after World War II. The key feature of this position will be the insistence on what is, after all, a classical notion of Marx, namely that a socialist revolution and a socialist society are not possible until capitalism has somehow exhausted all its possibilities, but also not until capitalism has become a worldwide and global fact, in which universal commodification is combined with a global proletarianization of the work force, a transformation of all humanity (including the peasants of the Third World) into wage workers. In that case, the chances for socialism are relegated into some far future, while the ominous nature of the current "total system" becomes rather positive again, since it marks precisely the quantum progression toward that final global state. But this means, in addition, that not only can there not be socialism in one country, there cannot be anything like socialism in one block of countries: socialist revolution here is by definition global revolution or it is nothing. And equally obviously, there can be no emergence of a different social system within the interstices of the old, within this or that sector of capitalism proper. Here, I think, you will have already recognized the perspective that is characteristic of Tafuri's work: there can be no qualitative change in any element of the older capitalist system — as, for instance, in architecture or urbanism — without beforehand a total revolutionary and systemic transformation. (Total systems theory can, of course, also be explained in terms of the kind of textual determinism already evoked above: the purpose of the theorist is to build as powerful a model of capital as possible, and as all-embracing, systemic, seamless, and self-perpetuating. Thus, if the theorist succeeds, he fails; since the more powerful the model constructed, the less possibility will be foreseen in it for any form of human resistance, any chance of structural transformation.)

Yet the meaning of this stark and absolute position, this

<sup>9</sup> See Martin Nicolaus, "The Unknown Marx," in Klare and Howard, *The Hidden Dimension*.

diagnosis of the total system of late or multinational capital, cannot be grasped fully without taking into account the alternative position of which it is the symbolic repudiation: and this is what may be called neo-Gramscianism, the more "optimistic" assessment of some possible "long march through the institutions," which counterposes a new conception of some gradualist "war of position" for the classical Leninist model of the "war of maneuver," the all-or-nothing seizure of power. There are, of course, many reasons why radical Italian intellectuals today should have become fatigued with the Gramscian vision, paradoxically at the very moment in which it has come to seem reinvigorating for the left in other national situations in Europe and elsewhere: most obvious of these reasons is the thirty-year institutionalization of Gramsci's thought within the Italian Communist Party (and the assimilation of Gramsci, in the Italian context, to that classical form of dialectical thought which is everywhere systematically repudiated by a Nietzschean post-Marxism). Nor should we forget to underscore the structural ambiguity or polysemousness of the basic Gramscian texts, which, written in a coded language beneath the eyes of the Fascist censor, can either be "translated back" into classical Leninism, or on the contrary read as a novel *inflection* of Leninism in a new direction, as a post-Leninism or stimulating new form of *neo-Marxism*. There are therefore "objectively" many distinct Gramscis, between which it would be frivolous to attempt to decide which is the "true" one. I want, however, to suggest that with some Gramscian alternative, the possibility of a very different perspective on architecture and urbanism today is also given: so that the implications of this further digression are not a matter of Marxist scholastics, nor are they limited to purely political consequences.

At least two plausible yet distinct readings of the Gramscian slogan, the struggle for "hegemony," must be proposed at this point. What is at stake is the meaning of that "counterhegemony" which oppositional forces are called upon to construct within the ongoing dominance of the "hegemony" of capital: and the interpretive dilemma here turns on the (false) problem of a materialist or an idealist reading. If the Gramscian struggle, in other words, aims essentially at the *preparation* of the working class for some eventual seizure of power, then "counterhegemony" is to be understood in purely superstructural terms, as the elaboration of a set of ideas, countervalues, cultural styles, that are virtual or *anticipatory*, in the sense that they "correspond" to a material, institutional base that has not yet "in reality" been secured by political revolution itself.

The temptation is therefore to argue for a "materialist"

reading of Gramsci on the basis of certain key figures or tropes in the classical Marxian texts. One recalls, for example, the "organic" formulations of the 1859 Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*: "New, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured within the womb of the old society ... productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of the antagonism [of all previous history as class conflict]." <sup>10</sup> There must also be noted the celebrated figure with which, in passing, the Marx of *Capital* characterizes the status of "commerce" within the quite different logic of the "ancient" mode of production: "existing in the interstices of the ancient world, like the gods of Epicurus in the *intermundia* or the Jews in the pores of Polish society." <sup>11</sup>

Such figures suggest something like an *enclave* theory of social transition, according to which the emergent future, the new and still nascent social relations that announce a mode of production that will ultimately displace and subsume the as yet still dominant one, is theorized in terms of small yet strategic pockets or beachheads within the older system. The essentially *spatial* nature of the characterization is no accident and conveys something like a historical tension between two radically different types of space, in which the emergent yet more powerful kind will gradually extend its influence and dynamism over the older form, fanning out from its initial implantations and gradually "colonizing" what persists around it. Nor is this a mere poetic vision: the political realities that have been taken as the "verification" and the concrete embodiment of "enclave theory" in contemporary society are the legendary "red communes" of Italy today, most notably Bologna, whose administration by the Communist Party has seemed to demarcate them radically from the corruption and inefficiency of the capitalist nation-state within which, like so many foreign bodies, they are embedded. Tafuri's assessment of such communes is particularly instructive:

The debate over the historical centers and the experience of Bologna have shown that architectural and urbanistic proposals cannot be put to the test outside definite political situations, and then only within improved public structures for control. This has effected a substantial modification in the role of the architectural profession,

<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (New York: International, 1970), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I (London: Penguin, 1976), 172.

even further redimensioned and characterized by an increasing change in the traditional forms of patronage and commissioning.... Although what [the new left city administrations] have inherited is in a desperate state and the financial difficulties are staggering, one can hope that from this new situation may come the realization of the reforms sought for decades. It is on this terrain that the Italian workers' movements are summoned to a historical test, whose repercussions may prove to be enormous, even outside Italy. <sup>12</sup>

These lines (written, to be sure, in the more favorable atmosphere of 1976) betray a rather different Tafuri than the somber historiographer of some "end of history" who predominates in the preceding pages.

What complicates this picture, however, is the discovery that it is precisely some such "enclave theory" that in Tafuri's analysis constitutes the utopianism of the modern movement in architecture; that, in other words, Tafuri's critique of the International Style, the informing center of all his works, is first and foremost a critique of the latter's enclave theory itself. Le Corbusier, for example, spoke of avoiding political revolutions, not because he was not committed to "revolution," but rather because he saw the construction and the constitution of new space as the most revolutionary act, and one that could "replace" the narrowly political revolution of the mere seizure of power (and if the experience of a new space is associated with a whole transformation of everyday life itself, Le Corbusier's seemingly antipolitical stance can be reread as an *enlargement* of the very conception of the political, and as having anticipatory kinship with conceptions of "cultural revolution," which are far more congenial to the spirit of the contemporary left). Still, the demiurgic hubris of high modernism is fatefully dramatized by such visions of the towers of the Plan Voisin, which stride across a fallen landscape like H. G. Wells's triumphant Martians, or of the gigantic symbolic structures of the Unités d'habitation, the Algiers plan, or Chandigarh, which are apocalyptically to sound the knell of the cramped and insalubrious hovels that lie dwarfed beneath their prophetic shadow. We shall enter shortly into the terms of Tafuri's critique of modernism itself: suffice it to say for the moment that its cardinal sin is precisely to identify (or conflate) the political and the aesthetic, and to foresee a political and

<sup>12</sup> *Modern Architecture*, 322.

social transformation that is henceforth at one with the formal processes of architectural production itself. All of which is easier to demonstrate on the level of empirical history, where the new enclaves of the International Style manifestly failed to regenerate anything around them; or where, when they did have the dynamic and radiating influence predicted for them by the masters, the results, if anything, were even more depressing, generating a whole series of dismal glass boxes in their own image, or a multiplication of pseudo-Corbusian towers in the desolation of parks that have become the battleground of an unending daily war of race and class. Even the great emblem of the "red communes" can from this perspective be read differently: for it can equally well be argued that they are not enclaves at all — not laboratories in which original social relations of the future are being worked out, but rather simply the administration of inherited capitalist relations, albeit conducted in a different spirit of social commitment than that of the Christian Democrats.

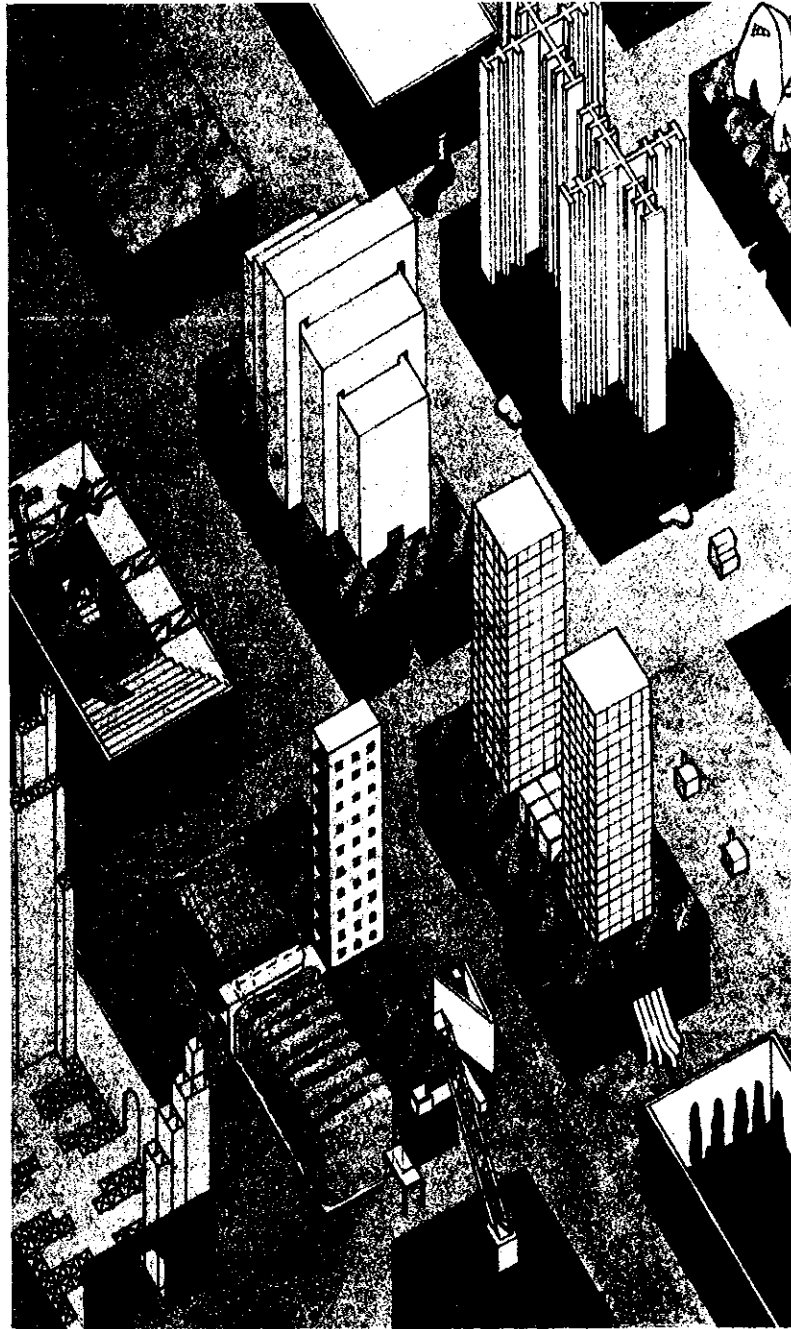
This uninspiring balance sheet would settle the fate of the Gramscian alternative, were the "enclave theory" its only plausible interpretation. The latter, however, may be seen as an overly reductive and rather defensively "materialist" conception of the politics of space; but it can equally well be argued that Gramsci's notion of hegemony (along with the later and related idea of cultural revolution) rather attempts to displace the whole distinction of materialism versus idealism (and along with it, of the traditional concept of base and superstructure). It will therefore no longer be "idealist" in the bad, old sense to suggest that counter-hegemony means producing and keeping alive a certain alternate "idea" of space, of urban, daily life, and the like. It would then no longer be so immediately significant (or so practically and historically crippling) that architects in the West do not — owing to the private property system — have the opportunity to project and construct collective ensembles that express and articulate original social relations (and needs and demands) of a collective type: the essential would rather be that they are able to form conceptions and utopian images of such projects, against which to develop a self-consciousness of their concrete activities in this society (it being understood, in Tafuri's spirit, that such collective projects would only practically and materially be possible after a systemic transformation of society). But such utopian ideas are as objective as material buildings: their possibilities — the possibility of conceiving such new space — have conditions of possibility as rigorous as any material artifact. Those conditions of possibility are to be found, first and foremost, in the uneven development of world history, and in the existence, elsewhere, in the Second and

Third Worlds, of projects and constructions that are not possible in the First: this concrete existence of radically different spaces elsewhere (of whatever unequal realization) is what objectively opens the possibility for the coming into being and development of "counterhegemonic values" here. A role is thereby secured for a more "positive" and Gramscian architectural criticism, over against Tafuri's stubbornly (and therapeutically) negative variety, his critical refusal of utopian speculation on what is not possible within the closure of the multinational system. In reality, both of these critical strategies are productive alternately according to the situation itself, and the public to which the ideological critic must address herself; and there is no particular reason to lay down either of these useful weapons. It is at any rate worth quoting yet another appreciation of Tafuri — this one, unexpectedly, of the Stalinallee — in order to show that his practical criticism is often a good deal more ambivalent than his theoretical slogans (and also further to dispel the feeling that the celebration of Mies's negative mysticism, quoted above, amounts to anything like a definitive position):

However, in the case [of the Stalinallee, in East Berlin] it would be wrong to regard what resulted as purely ideological or propagandistic; in reality, the Stalinallee is the fulcrum of a project of urban reorganization affecting an entire district, establishing an axis of development toward the Tiergarten different from that developed historically. In addition, this plan inverts the logical manner in which a bourgeois city expands by introducing into the heart of the metropolis the residence as a decisive factor. The monumental bombast of the Stalinallee — now renamed Karl Marx Allee — was conceived to put in a heroic light an urbanistic project that set out to be different. In fact, it succeeds perfectly in expressing the presupposition for the construction of the new socialist city, which rejects divisions between architecture and urbanism and aspires to impose itself as a unitary structure.<sup>13</sup>

Such a text can evidently be used to support either position: the negative one, that such a collective project, with its transcendence of the opposition building/city, is only possible *after* a revolutionary transformation of social relations as a whole; or the

<sup>13</sup> *Modern Architecture*, 322, 326.



Madelon Vriesendorp, "The City of the Captive Globe," from *Delirious New York*, 1978

more Gramscian one outlined above, that the very existence of such an ensemble in some other space of the world creates a new force field that cannot but have its influence even over those architects for whom such a project is scarcely a "realistic" possibility.

Still, until now we have not considered what kind of "total system" it is that sets limits to the practical transformation of space in our time; nor have we drawn the other obvious consequence from the Marxian theorization of "consumer society" or of the new moment of late capitalism, namely, that to such a new moment there very well may correspond a new type of culture or cultural dynamic. This is therefore the time to introduce our third theme or problem, namely that of postmodernism and of the critique of classical or high modernism itself. For the economic periodization of capital into three rather than two stages (that of "late" or multinational capitalism being now added to the more traditional moments of "classical" capitalism and of the "monopoly stage" or "state of imperialism") suggests the possibility of a new periodization on the level of culture as well: from this perspective, the moment of "high" modernism, of the International Style, and of the classical modern movement in all the arts — with their great *auteurs* and their utopian monuments, Mallarméan "Books of the World," fully as much as Corbusian Radiant Cities — would "correspond" to that second stage of monopoly and imperialist capitalism that came to an end with the Second World War. Its "critique" therefore coincides with its extinction, its passing into history, as well as with the emergence, in the third stage of "consumer capital," of some properly postmodernist practice of pastiche, of a new free play of styles and historicist allusions now willing to "learn from Las Vegas," a moment of surface rather than of depth, of the "death" of the old individual subject or bourgeois ego, and of the schizophrenic celebration of the commodity fetishism of the image, of a now "delirious New York" and a countercultural California, a moment in which the logic of media capitalism penetrates the logic of advanced cultural production itself and transforms the latter to the point where such distinctions as those between high and mass culture lose their significance (and where the older notions of a "critical" or "negative" value of advanced or modernist art may also no longer be appropriate or operative).

As I have observed, Tafuri refuses this periodization, and we shall observe him positioning his critique of the postmoderns beneath the general category of a still high modernist utopianism, of which they are seen merely as so many epigones. Still, in this country and for this public, the thrust of his critique of utopian

architecture will inevitably be associated with the generalized reaction here against the older hegemonic values and norms of the International Style, about which we must attempt to take an ambivalent and nuanced position. It is certain, for instance — as books like Tom Wolfe's recent *From Bauhaus to Our House* readily testify — that the critique of high modernism can spring from reactionary and "philistine" impulses (in both the aesthetic and the political sense) and can be belatedly nourished by all the old middle-class resistances that the modern movement met and aroused while it was still fresh. Nor does it seem implausible that in certain national situations, most notably in those of the former fascist countries, the antimodernist position is still essentially and unambiguously at one, as Habermas has suggested,<sup>14</sup> with political reaction: if so, this would explain Tafuri's decision to uncouple a reasoned critique of modernism from the adoption or exposition of any more "positive" aesthetic ideology. In the United States, however, whatever the ultimate wisdom of applying a similar strategy, the cultural pull and attractiveness of the concept of postmodernism clearly complicates the situation in ways that need to be clarified.

It will therefore be useful to retrace our steps for the moment and, however briefly, to work through the terms of Tafuri's critique of modernism as he outlines it for us in *Architecture and Utopia*, where we meet a left-wing version of the "end of ideology" roughly consistent with the periodizations of some new stage of capital that have just been evoked. In this view, ideas as such — ideology in the more formal sense of a whole system of legitimizing beliefs — are no longer significant elements in the social reproduction of late capitalism, something that was obviously not the case in its earlier stages. Thus the great bourgeois revolutionary ideology of "liberty, equality, and fraternity" was supremely important in securing the universal consent of a variety of social classes to the new political and economic order: this ideology was thus also, in Tafuri's use of the term, a utopia, or rather, its ideologizing and legitimizing function was concealed behind a universalizing and utopian rhetoric. In the late nineteenth century — particularly in the French Third Republic (the "Republic of the Professors") — positivism, with its militant anticlericalism and its ideal of a lay or secular education, suggests the degree to which official philosophy was still felt to be a crucial terrain of ideological struggle and a supreme weapon

<sup>14</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," in *New German Critique*, no. 22 (winter 1981), 3-18. (The whole issue, which centers on a discussion of Habermas's theses, is of great interest.)

for securing the unity of the state; while in our own time, until recently, what is generally called New Deal liberalism (or in Europe, the social democracy of the welfare states) performed an analogous function.

It is all this that would seem to be in question today. We shall want, Adorno says somewhere, to take into account the possibility that in our time the commodity is its own ideology: the practices of consumption and consumerism, on that view, themselves are then enough to reproduce and legitimate the system, no matter what "ideology" you happen to be committed to. In that case, not abstract ideas, beliefs, ideologies, or philosophical systems, but rather the immanent practices of daily life now occupy the functional position of "ideology" in its other larger systemic sense. And if so, this development can serve clearly as one explanation for the waning power of the utopian ideologies of high modernism as well. Indeed, Tafuri explicitly associates the demiurgic value of architectural planning in the modern masters with the Keynesian ideal of the control of the future. In both versions, utopia is the dream of "a 'rational' domination of the future, the elimination of the risk it brings with it":<sup>15</sup> "Even for Le Corbusier the absolute of form is the complete realization of a constant victory over the uncertainty of the future."<sup>16</sup> It is therefore logical enough that both these ultimate middle-class ideologies or utopias should disappear together, and that their concrete "critique" should be less a matter of intellectual self-consciousness, than simply a working out of history itself.

But "ideology" has a somewhat different focus in Tafuri's schematic overview of bourgeois architectural thinking, from the dissolution of the baroque to our own time, where these varied aesthetic utopias are analyzed in terms of something closer to a Hegelian "ruse of reason" or of history itself. Their utopian form thus proves to be an instrument in the edification of a business system and the new dynamism of capital. Whatever content they claimed in themselves, their concrete effects, their more fundamental function, lay in the systematic destruction of the past. Thus the emergence of secular conceptions of the city in the eighteenth century is first and foremost to be read as a way of clearing away the older culture: "The deliberate abstraction of Enlightenment theories of the city served ... to destroy baroque schemes of city planning and development."<sup>17</sup> In much the same way, the dawn of modernism proper — the moment in which ideology is overtly transformed into utopia, in which "ideology

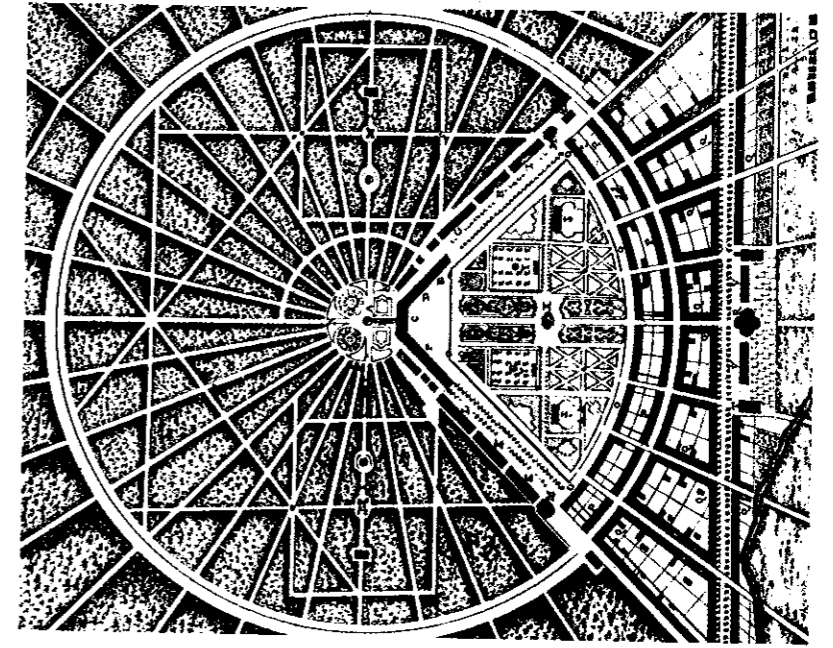
<sup>15</sup> *Architecture and Utopia*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

had to negate itself as such, break its own crystallized forms and throw itself entirely into the "construction of the future,"<sup>18</sup> this supreme moment of Freud and Nietzsche, of Weber and Simmel, and of the birth of high modernism in all the arts — was in reality for Tafuri a purely destructive operation in which residual ideologies and archaic social forms were systematically dissolved. The new utopianism of high modernism thus unwittingly and against the very spirit of its revolutionary and utopian affirmations prepared the terrain for the omnipotence of the fully "rationalized" technocratic plan, for the universal planification of what was to become the total system of multinational capital: "The unmasking of the idols that obstructed the way to a global rationalization of the productive universe and its social dominion became the new historical task of the intellectual."<sup>19</sup> It also became the historic mission of the various cultural avant-gardes themselves, for which, in reality, although not according to their own manifestos, "the autonomy of formal construction" as its deepest practical function has "to plan the disappearance of the subject, to cancel the anguish caused by the pathetic (or ridiculous) resistance of the individual to the structures of domination that close in upon him or her."<sup>20</sup> Therefore whatever avant-garde or architectural aesthetic utopias thought they were intent on achieving, in the real world of capital and in their effective practice, those ends are dialectically reversed, and serve essentially to reinforce the technocratic total control of the new system of the bureaucratic society of planned consumption.

We may now return to the beginnings of Tafuri's story in the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment attempt to think of urbanism in some new and more fully rational way generates two irreconcilable alternatives: one path is that of architecture as the "instrument of social equilibrium," the "geometric silence of Durand's formally codified building types," "the uniformity ensured by preconstituted formal systems."<sup>21</sup> The other is that of a "science of sensations,"<sup>22</sup> a kind of "excessive symbolism"<sup>23</sup> which we may interpret as the conception of a libidinal resistance within the system, the breakthrough of desire into the grids of power and control. These two great utopian antitheses, Saint-Simon versus Fourier, if you like, or Lenin versus Marcuse, are

<sup>17</sup> *Architecture and Utopia*, 8.  
<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.  
<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.  
<sup>20</sup> *Architecture and Utopia*, 73.  
<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.  
<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.  
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



Plan of Karlsruhe, mid-eighteenth century



Plan of Washington, D.C., 1800, based on Pierre Charles L'Enfant's plan of 1791

then for Tafuri the ideological double-bind of a thinking imprisoned in capitalist relations. They are at once then unmasked in Piranesi's contemporary and nightmarish synthesis of the Campo Marzio, and also, unexpectedly, given a longer lease on life in the New World, where, in the absence of feudalism and in the presence of the open frontier, the new urban synthesis of Washington, D.C., will have a vitality that European efforts are forbidden.

Interestingly enough, in our present context, these two alternatives also correspond roughly to the analyses of Adorno and Barthes respectively. The first utopian alternative, that of rationalization, will little by little formulate its program in terms of overcoming the opposition between whole and part, between urban plan and individual architectural monument, between the molar and the molecular, between the "urban organism as a whole" and the "elementary cell" or building blocks of the individual building (Hilberseimer). But it is precisely this "unified field theory" of the macro- and the micro- toward which the work of a Corbusier strives, which is projected, in Adorno's book, by Schoenberg's twelve-tone system, the ultimate abolition of the gap between counterpoint and harmony, between overall form and the dynamics of the individual musical "parole" or theme. But Schoenberg's extraordinary synthesis is sterile, and in architecture the "unified field theory" destroys the individual work or building as such: "The single building is no longer an 'object'; it is only the place in which the elementary assemblage of single cells assumes physical form; since these cells are elements reproducible *ad infinitum*, they conceptually embody the prime structures of a production line that excludes the old concepts of 'place' or 'space.'" <sup>24</sup> This utopian impulse has then ended up rationalizing the object world more extensively and ferociously than anything Ford or Taylor might have done on his own momentum.

Yet the second, or libidinal, strategy is no less "ideological" in its ultimate results: Barthes's intellectual trajectory is a complicated one, and I will not take the time here to insert him neatly back into this scheme (although I think something like this could be done). Suffice it to observe that, following Benjamin, Tafuri sees this second libidinal strategy in its emergence in Baudelaire as having unexpected subjective consequences that harmonize with the objective external planification achieved above: "Baudelaire had discovered that the commercialization of the poetic product can be accentuated by the poet's very attempt to free himself from his objective conditions." <sup>25</sup> The new vanguard subjectivity, in other words, ends up training the

<sup>24</sup> *Architecture and Utopia*, 105.

consumer for life in the industrial city, teaching "the ideology of the correct use of the city," <sup>26</sup> freeing the aesthetic consumer from "objects that were offered to judgment" and substituting "a process to be lived and used as such." <sup>27</sup> This particular strategy now prolongs itself into, revitalizes itself in the postmodernist ideologies and aesthetics of the present period, denounced by Tafuri in a memorable page:

Thus the city is considered in terms of a suprastructure. Indeed art is now called upon to give the city a suprastructural guise. Pop art, op art, analysis of the urban "imageability," and the "prospective aesthetic" converge in this objective. The contradictions of the contemporary city are resolved in multivalent images, and by figuratively exalting that formal complexity they are dissimulated. If read with adequate standards of judgment this formal complexity is nothing other than the explosion of the irremediable dissonances that escape the plan of advanced capital. The recovery of the concept of art thus serves this new cover-up role. It is true that whereas industrial design takes a lead position in technological production and conditions its quality in view of an increase in consumption, pop art, reutilizing the residues and castoffs of that production, takes its place in the rear guard. But this is the exact reflection of the twofold request now made to the techniques of visual communication. Art which refuses to take its place in the vanguard of the production cycle actually demonstrates that the process of consumption tends to the infinite. Indeed even the rejects, sublimated into useless or nihilist objects which bear a new *value of use*, enter into the production-consumption cycle, if only through the back door. This art that deliberately places itself in the rear guard is also indicative of the refusal to come to terms with the contradictions of the city and resolve them completely; to transform the city into a totally organized machine without useless squanderings of an archaic character or generalized dysfunction. In

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>26</sup> *Architecture and Utopia*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> *Architecture and Utopia*, 101.



this 'phase it is necessary to persuade the public that the contradiction, imbalances, and chaos typical of the contemporary city are inevitable. Indeed the public must be convinced that this chaos contains an *unexplored richness*, unlimited utilizable possibilities, and qualities of the "game" now made into new fetishes for society.

The power of such negative critiques of ideology (which construe ideology exclusively in terms of "false consciousness") lies in the assumption that everything that does not effectively disrupt the social reproduction of the system may be considered as part and parcel of the reproduction of that system. The anxieties provoked in almost everyone by such an implacable and absolute position are probably healthy and therapeutic in one way or another. As I have begun to suggest before, however, the real problem in such an analysis lies elsewhere, in the assumption that "social reproduction" in late capitalism takes much the same form as in the earlier period of high modernism, and that what some of us call the "postmoderns" simply replicate the old modernist solutions at lower levels of intensity and originality. Thus Philip Johnson's "ambiguous eclecticism ends up as mere jugglery";<sup>28</sup> "the works of Louis Kahn and the British architect James Stirling represent two opposite attempts to breathe life into a seemingly moribund art";<sup>30</sup> Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* flattens out the New Critical concepts of ambiguity and contradiction, dehistoricizing them and emptying them of all their tragic (and properly high modernist) tension, with a view toward "justifying personal planning choices rather more equivocal than ambiguous."<sup>31</sup>

Yet there would seem to be a certain inconsistency in the reproach that the newer architects fail to achieve even that tragic tension that was itself considered to be utopian and ideological in the masters. The other face of this inconsistency can then be detected in the consonance and profound historical kinship between Tafuri's analysis of modernism and the onslaughts of the postmodernists, most notably Venturi himself, a critique that goes well beyond the usual themes of the hubris of central planning,<sup>32</sup> the single-function conception of space, and the puritanism of the streamlining abhorrence of ornament. Venturi's analysis, particularly in *Learning from Las Vegas*, centers specifically on

<sup>28</sup> *Architecture and Utopia*, 137, 139.

<sup>29</sup> *Modern Architecture*, 397.

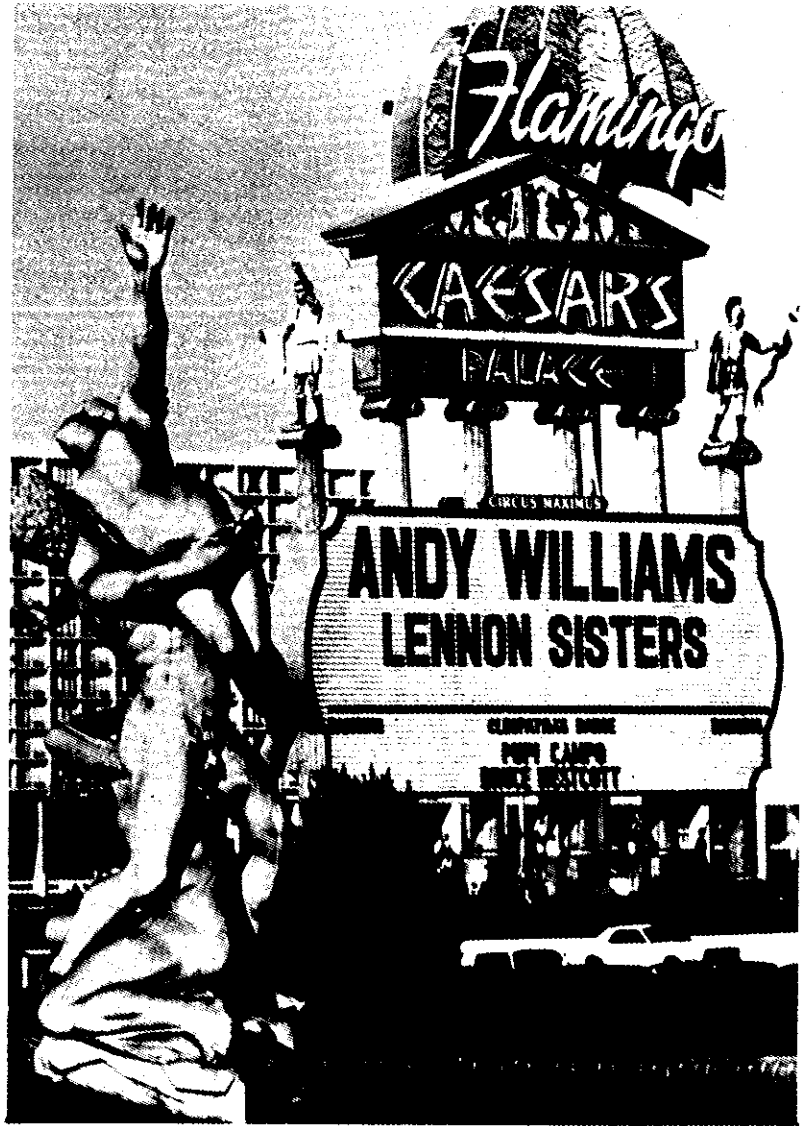
<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 400.

<sup>31</sup> *Theories and History*, 213.

the dialectic (and the contradiction) between the building and the city, between architecture and urbanism, which also forms one of the major strands in the historiography of the Italian theorist. The monumental duck of the International Style, it will be recalled — like Mallarmé's *Livre*, like Bayreuth, like *Finnegans Wake* or Kandinsky's mystical painting — proposes itself, as we have already suggested, as a radically different, revolutionary, or subversive enclave from which little by little the whole surrounding fabric of fallen social relations is to be regenerated and transformed. Yet in order to stage itself as a *foyer* of this kind, the "duck" must first radically separate itself from that environment in which it stands: it thereby comes slowly, by virtue of that very inaugural disjunction, that constitutive self-definition and isolation, to be not a building but a *sculpture*: after the fashion of Barthes's concept of connotation, it ends up — far from emitting a message with a radically new content — simply designating itself and signifying itself, celebrating its own disconnection as a message in its own right.

Whatever else may be said about the architecture of postmodernism — and however it is to be judged politically and historically — it seems important to recognize that it does not seek to do *that* but rather something very different. It may no longer embody the utopian ideology of high modernism, may indeed in that sense be vacuous of any utopian or protopolitical

<sup>32</sup> The critique of central planning, as in Peter Blake, as powerful and persuasive as it is, seems to me extremely ambiguous for the following reason. A perfectly correct and well-documented thesis of this kind can *also* be the occasion for the production of, or investment by, a whole ideology or metaphysics: most notably in the binary opposition between intention or plan and tradition or organic growth. (This ideology is already present in Christopher Alexander's "A City Is Not a Tree," but its full-blown transformation into a metaphysic can most dramatically be observed in Deleuze and Guattari's "Rhizome" (in *Mille Plateaux*). In this form, of course, it recapitulates the oldest counterrevolutionary position of all, that of Edmund Burke in the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, where Jacobin hubris is counterposed against the slow and organic growth of social life. On the political level, the left traditions include a number of counterpositions that work against the emergence of such a stark and ideological opposition: most notably in concepts of federation and the "withering away of the state" (the Paris Commune), of *autogestion* or workers' self-management, and of council communism. But in the area of architecture or urbanism it is rather hard to see what form such counterpositions might take: least persuasive, to my mind, is the idea that people will rebuild their own dwellings as they go along (see for example Philippe Boudon, *Lived-In Architecture* [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1972], where the idea that Le Corbusier would have approved of all this, let alone intended it to happen that way, seems most disingenuous indeed). I have been attracted by Rem Koolhaas's *Delirious New York* for a rather different (and highly idiosyncratic) way of cutting through this ideological double-bind: he *historicizes* the dilemma by transforming "planning" into the unique and historical decision, in 1811, to impose the "grid" on Manhattan: from this single "centralized" decision, then, both the anarchy and the urban classicism (streets and blocks) at once develop.



*Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, Caesar's Palace signs and statuary, from Learning from Las Vegas, 1972*



*Aldo Rossi, Il San Carlone, 1977*

impulse, while still, as the suspicious prefix "post-" suggests, remaining in some kind of parasitical relationship with the extinct high modernism it repudiates; yet what must be explored is the possibility that with postmodernism a whole new *aesthetic* is in the process of emerging which is significantly distinct from that of the previous era.

The latter can perhaps most effectively be characterized (following Althusser's notion of "expressive causality") as an aesthetic of identity or of organic unification. To demarcate the postmodernist aesthetic from this one, two familiar themes may serve as points of reference: the dialectic of inside and outside and the question of ornament or decoration. For Le Corbusier, as is well known, "the plan proceeds from within to without, the exterior is the result of an interior" in such a way that the outside of the building expresses its interior: stylistic homogeneity is achieved thus here by unifying these two opposites, or better still, by assimilating one of them — the exterior — to the other. As for ornament, its "contradiction" with the reality of the wall itself is overcome by the hygienic *exclusion* of the offending term.<sup>33</sup> What may be observed briefly now is that Robert Venturi's conception of the "decorated shed" seeks on the contrary to reinforce these oppositions and thereby to valorize *contradiction* itself (in a stronger way than his earlier terminology of "complexity" or "ambiguity" might suggest). The philosophical formulation of this very different aesthetic move might be found in the (properly poststructural or postmodernist) idea that "difference relates." An aesthetic of homogeneity is here displaced, less in the name of a random heterogeneity, a set of inert differences coexisting, than in the service of a new kind of perception for which tension, contradiction, the registering of the incompatible and the clashing, is in and of itself a strong mode of relating two incommensurable elements, poles, or realities. If, as I believe, something like this characterizes the specific internal logic of postmodernism, it must be seen at the very least as constituting an original aesthetic and one quite distinct from the high modernism from which it seeks to disengage itself.

It will no doubt be observed that the symbolic act of high modernism, which seeks to resolve contradiction by stylistic fiat (even though its resolution may remain a merely symbolic one), is of a very different order and quality from that of a postmodernism which simply ratifies the contradictions and fragmented chaos all around it by way of an intensified perception, or a mes-

<sup>33</sup> A somewhat different example of such homogenizing repression can be found in Venturi's account of Frank Lloyd Wright's exclusion of the *diagonal*, in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 52.

merized and well-nigh hallucinogenic fascination with, those very contradictions themselves (contenting itself with eliminating the affective charge of pathos, of the tragic, or of anxiety, which characterized the modern movement). In this sense, no doubt, Marx's early critique of Hegel's theory of religion retains its force for postmodernism: "self-conscious man, insofar as he has recognized and superseded the spiritual world ... then confirms it again in this alienated form and presents it as his true existence; he reestablishes it and claims to *be at home in his other being*."<sup>34</sup>

I must add to this juxtaposition my feeling that *moralizing* judgments on either of these aesthetics are always the most unsatisfactory way to reach some ultimate evaluation of them; my own perspective here is a historicist one, for which any position on postmodernism must begin by being a self-critique and a judgment on *ourselves*, since this is the moment in which we find ourselves and, like it or not, this aesthetic is a part of us.

That is, however, not the most important point to be made in the present context. One of the more annoying and scandalous habits of dialectical thought is indeed its identification of opposites, and its tendency to send off back to back seemingly opposed positions on the grounds that they share and are determined and limited by a common problematic, or, to use a more familiar language, represent the two intolerable options of a single double-bind. One is tempted to see something of the sort at work here, in the opposition between Tafuri's cultural pessimism, with all its rigor and ideological asceticism, and the complacent free-play of a postmodernism content to juggle the pre-given tokens of contemporary social reality, from which even the nostalgic memory of earlier commitments to radical change has vanished without a trace.

Is it possible that these two positions are in fact the same, and that as different as they may seem at first, both rest on the conviction that nothing new can be done, no fundamental changes can be made, within the massive being of late capitalism? What is different is that Tafuri's thought lives this situation in a rigorous and self-conscious stoicism, while the practitioners and ideologues of postmodernism relax within it, inventing new modes of perception in order to "be at home" in the same impossible extremity: changes of valence, the substitution of a plus sign for a minus, on the same equation.

Perhaps, in that case, something is to be said after all for Lefebvre's call for a politics of space and for the search for a properly Gramscian architecture.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 210.