

The Oblique Function

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If physical nature is characterized by periodicity, the historical world is defined by polarity.

Moreover different types of human groupings have been of major importance in the successive modes of urbanization and thus in the origin of architectural forms.

This process of polarization (whose development need not be complicated here by more specific analysis) has, up to this point, accommodated the addition of individual dwellings in the town, then the addition of dwelling units in the apartment block, this then multiplied in all the apartment blocks of the city—each of these successive entities undergoing a change in volume, followed by universalization.

But these different modifications have above all resulted from an element that for a long time has wrongly been considered the effect of the others: orientation in space.

If the village was characterized by horizontality—a conquest of the soil broken only by the vertical aspiration of the church or chateau—the city has been but a succession of verticalities aimed at social conquest, New York being a culmination of this spatial direction.

If all the attempts to arrive at a new type of urban entity have failed, the garden city of the nineteenth century as well as the satellite city, it is because those who have been responsible for them have disregarded the predominance of an original axis of elevation as motive force for the other components of the whole.

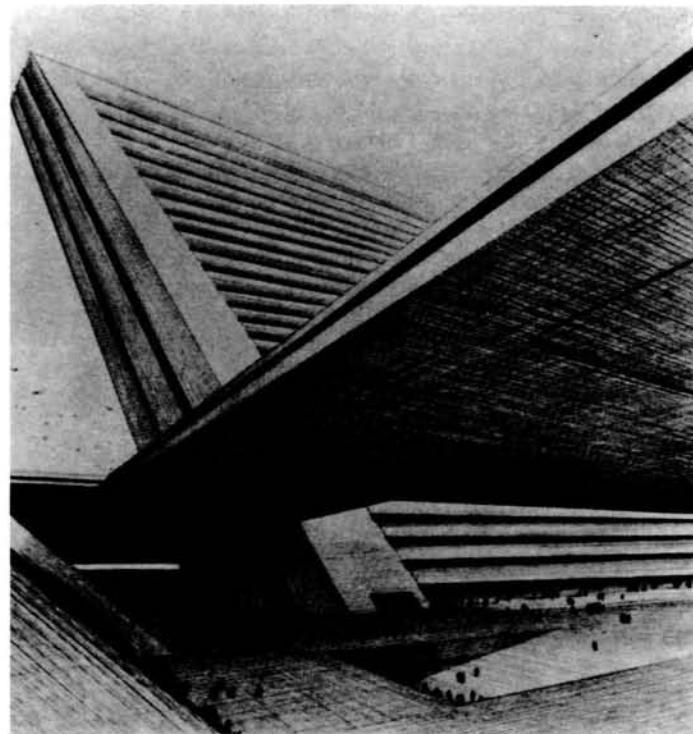
They have been fascinated by the additive aspect of human groupings, which is conditioned by the barbarism of industrial civilization in the process of coming into being.

Thus an urbanism of subjugation has succeeded an urbanism of reaction.

Important as are elements of number and type, it is now proven that they are powerless to realize a new mode of urbanization by themselves.

And we are now confronted by the overriding necessity to accept as a historical fact the end of the vertical as axis of elevation, the end of the horizontal as permanent plan, in order to defer to the oblique axis and the inclined plane, which realize all the necessary conditions for the creation of a new urban order and permit as well a total reinvention of the architectural vocabulary.

This tipping of the plane must be understood for what it is: the third spatial possibility of architecture.



Above: Interior detail. Below: Habitat on inclined plane.

