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# Architecture and Utopia Design and Capitalist Development

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## 4 The Dialectic of the Avant-Garde

The "downfall of reason" was felt persistently in one specific area: that of the metropolis. It is not merely coincidence that the subject of the *Grosstadt* dominates the thought of Simmel, Weber, and Benjamin, with obvious influence on architects and theorists such as August Endell, Karl Scheffler, and Ludwig Hilberseimer.<sup>49</sup>

The "loss" foretold by Piranesi has now become tragic reality. The experience of the "tragic" is the experience of the metropolis.

In face of such an inevitable experience, the intellectual is no longer even able to assume the *blasé* attitude of a Baudelaire.

As Ladislao Mittner has effectively written concerning Döblin, the "mysticism of passive resistance" characterizes the Expressionist protest: "he who reacts loses the world, he who wants to cling to it loses it just the same."<sup>50</sup>

It is important to note that in criticizing Engels' "moral reaction" to the city crowd, Benjamin uses

49 I refer here to the volumes by A. Endell, *Die Schönheit der Grosstadt*, Strecher und Schroder, Stuttgart 1908; K. Scheffler, *Die Architektur der Grosstadt*, Bruno Cassier, Berlin 1913; and L. Hilberseimer, *Grosstadtarchitektur*, Julius Hoffmann Verlag, Stuttgart 1927.

50 A. Döblin, *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-Lun*, 1915. See L. Mittner, *L'espressionismo*, Laterza, Bari 1965, p. 96.

Engels' own observations to introduce the subject of the general extension of working-class conditions in the urban structure. Benjamin writes:

In Engels the crowd has something alarming about it. It arouses a moral reaction in him. To this is added an aesthetic reaction: the rhythm in which the passersby encounter and pass each other is unpleasant to him. The fascination of his description lies precisely in the way his incorruptible critical nature is fused with a patriarchal tone. The author comes from a still-provincial Germany and perhaps the temptation to lose himself in a flood of human beings never crossed his mind.<sup>51</sup>

One may disagree with the partiality of Benjamin's reading of *The Situation of the Working Class in England*. What interests us, however, is the way in which he passes from Engels' description of the mass, of the crowd of the metropolis, to considerations of Baudelaire's relations with the mass itself. Considering Engels' and Hegel's reactions to be residues of an attitude of detachment from the new urban reality in its new qualitative and quantitative aspects, Benjamin notes that the facility and ease with which the Parisian *flâneur* moves in the crowd has become the natural behavior of the modern user of the metropolis.

No matter how great the distance he pretended to assume in respect to the crowd, [Baudelaire] was

51 W. Benjamin, *Schriften*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1955. On Benjamin's role in establishing the theories of "technological art" as ideology of integration, see the recent fundamental volume by C. Pasqualotto, *Avanguardia e tecnologia. Walter Benjamin, Max Bense e i problemi dell'estetica tecnologica*, Officina, Rome 1971. This work definitively destroys the interpretations that have accumulated on Benjamin's thought, exemplified by Perlini's studies (see T. Perlini, "Dall'Utopia alla teorica critica e critica del progresso," *Comunità*, 1969, nos. 159/160 and 165) and by the articles published in the magazine *Alternative* (Berlin 1968, no. 59/60).

thoroughly impregnated with it, and could not, like Engels, consider it from without. The mass is so intrinsic to Baudelaire that in his writings one looks in vain for a description of it . . . Baudelaire does not describe the population or the city. And it was precisely in avoiding this that he was able to evoke the one in the image of the other. His crowd is always that of the metropolis; his Paris is always overpopulated. This is what makes him so superior to Barbier, in whom—the procedure being description—the masses and the city are independent one from the other. In the *Tableaux parisiens*, one can almost always feel the secret presence of a mass.<sup>52</sup>

The presence, or rather immanence, of the real relationships of production in the behavior of the “public” who use the city, who are at the same time unconscious of being used by it, is similar to the presence of an observer such as Baudelaire. The observer-poet is forced to recognize his own unendurable position of participant in an always more general commercialization, in the very moment in which he discovers that the only inevitable necessity for the poet is by now his own prostitution.<sup>53</sup>

The poetry of Baudelaire, like the products shown at the universal expositions, or like the transformation of the urban morphology set in motion by Hausmann, marks the new-found awareness of the indissoluble, dynamic interconnectedness existing between uniformity and diversity. Especially for the structure of the new bourgeois city, one can still not speak of tension between the exception and the rule, but one can speak

52 W. Benjamin, *op. cit.*

53 “With the rise of the metropolis, prostitution acquires new mysteries. One of these is above all the labyrinthine character of the city itself: the image of the labyrinth has entered the blood of the *flâneur*. One might say that prostitution gives it a different color” (*ibid.*).

of tension between the obligatory commercialization of the object and the subjective attempts to recover—falsely—its authenticity.

Now, however, there is no longer any way except to reduce the search for authenticity to the search for the eccentric. It is not only the poet who has to accept his condition of mime, but rather the entire city. Objectively structured like a machine for the extraction of surplus value, in its own conditioning mechanisms the city reproduces the reality of the ways of industrial production.

Benjamin closely relates the decline of *skill* and *practice* in industrial work—still operative in handwork—to the experience of shock typical of the urban condition.

The nonspecialized worker is the one most severely degraded by the apprenticeship of the machine. His work is impervious to experience. Skill no longer has any place there. What the amusement park realizes in its flying cages and other similar diversions is only a taste of the apprenticeship to which the nonspecialized worker is subjected in the factory. . . Poe’s text [Benjamin here refers to *The Man of the Crowd*, translated by Baudelaire] makes evident the relationship between unrestrained behavior and discipline. His passersby behave as if, become like automatons, they can no longer express themselves except automatically. Their behavior is a reaction to shock. “If jostled, they bowed profusely to the jostlers. . .”<sup>54</sup>

Between the code of behavior connected with the experience of shock and a gambling game there thus exists a strong affinity:

Each intervention on a machine is just as hermetically separated from the one that preceded it, as is a *coup* in

54 *Ibid.*



11 Botanischer Garten, Berlin. Photo by Gianni Longo.

gambling from the immediately preceding *coup*. And in a certain way the slavery of the salaried worker is pendant to that of the gambler. The work of the one and the other is equally devoid of any content.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the acuteness of Benjamin's observations, neither in his essays on Baudelaire, nor in "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" ("The Work of Art in the Era of Its Technical Reproducibility"), does he relate this invasion of the ways of production in the urban morphology to the response of the avant-garde movements to the subject of the city.

The arcades and department stores of Paris, like the great expositions, were certainly the places in which the crowd, itself become a spectacle, found the spatial and visual means for a self-education from the point of view of capital.<sup>56</sup> But throughout the nineteenth century this recreational-pedagogical experience, precisely in being concentrated in exceptional architectural types, still dangerously revealed its restricted scope. The ideology of the public is not, in fact, an end in itself. It is only a moment of the ideology of the city as a productive unity in the proper sense of the term and, simultaneously, as an instrument of coordination of the production-distribution-consumption cycle.

This is why the ideology of consumption, far from constituting an isolated or successive moment of the organization of production, must be offered to the

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> The relation between the rise of the *ideology of the public* and the program of the great expositions has been analyzed by A. Abruzzese in the essay "Spettacolo e alienazione." *Contropiano*, 1968, no. 2, pp. 379-421. On arcades see the recent and very well documented volume by J. F. Geist, *Passagen, ein Bautyp des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Bastei Verlag, Munich 1969.

public as the ideology of the correct use of the city. (It may be appropriate to recall here how much the problem of behavior influenced the experience of the European avant-garde, and the symptomatic example of Loos, who in 1903, upon his return from the United States, published two numbers of *Das Andere*, dedicated with a polemical and ironic tone to introducing into bourgeois Vienna the "modern" ways of the city-dweller.)

When the experience of the crowd became—as in Baudelaire—an endured consciousness of participation, it served to make general an operative reality, but did not contribute to its advancement. It was instead at this point, and only at this point, that the linguistic revolution of contemporary art was called upon to offer its contribution.

Free the experience of shock from any automatism; found, on the basis of that experience, visual codes and codes of action transformed by the already consolidated characteristics of the capitalist metropolis (rapidity of transformation, organization and simultaneousness of communications, accelerated tempo of use, eclecticism); reduce the artistic experience to a pure object (obvious metaphor for object-merchandise); involve the public, unified in an avowed interclass and therefore anti-bourgeois ideology: these are the tasks that all together were assumed by the avant-garde of the twentieth century.

And I must repeat, all together, and without any distinction between Constructivism and the art of protest. Cubism, Futurism, Dada, all the historical avant-garde movements arose and succeeded each other according



12 E. R. Graham (of D. Burnham & Co.), Equitable Life Insurance Building, New York, 1913–1915.

to the typical law of industrial production, the essence of which is the continual technical revolution. For all the avant-garde movements—and not only in the field of painting—the law of assemblage was fundamental. And since the assembled objects belonged to the real world, the picture became a neutral field on which to project the *experience of the shock* suffered in the city. The problem now was that of teaching that one is not to “suffer” that shock, but to absorb it as an inevitable condition of existence.

A passage from Georg Simmel is very illuminating in this regard. Examining the characteristics of what he called “the metropolitan man,” Simmel analyzed the new behavior assumed by the individual-mass within the metropolis, identified as the seat of the “money economy.” The “intensification of nervous stimulation” induced by the “rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions,” were interpreted by Simmel as the new conditions that generate the *blasé* attitude of the individual of the metropolis: of the “man without quality,” by definition indifferent to value. Simmel observed:

The essence of the *blasé* attitude consists of the blunting of discrimination. This does not mean that the objects are not perceived, as is the case with the half-wit, but rather, that the meaning and differing values of things, and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial. They appear to the *blasé* person in an evenly flat and grey tone; no one object deserves preference over any other. This mood is the faithful subjective reflection of a completely internalized money economy. . . . *All things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of*



13 Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, *Women in the Potsdamerplatz*, etching, 1914–1915. Civic Art Institute, Frankfurt a. M.

money. All things lie on the same level and differ from one another only in the size of the area which they cover.<sup>57</sup>

Massimo Cacciari has penetratingly analyzed the specific sense of Simmel's sociology.<sup>58</sup> For us now it is of interest to note that Simmel's considerations on the great metropolis, written between 1900 and 1903, contained *in nuce* the problems that were to be at the center of concern of the historical avant-garde movements. The objects all floating on the same plane, with the same specific gravity, in the constant movement of the money economy: does it not seem that we are reading here a literary comment on a Schwitter *Merzbild*? (It should not be forgotten that the very word *Merz* is but a part of the word *Commerz*.) The problem was, in fact, how to render active the intensification of nervous

57 G. Simmel, *Die Grossstadt und das Geistesleben*, Dresden 1903 (Eng. trans., "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff, Free Press, New York 1950, pp. 409-424). Emphasis supplied.

58 M. Cacciari, "Note sulla dialettica del negativo nell'epoca della metropoli (Saggio su Georg Simmel)," in *Angelus Novus*, 1971, no. 21, p. 1 ff. Cacciari writes: "The process of internalization of the money economy marks the conclusive and fundamental point of Simmel's analysis. It is at this point that the realization of the dialectic process takes place concretely and the preceding determinants cease to count 'in general'. When the intellectualized multiplicity of the stimuli becomes behavior, then and only then the *Vergeistigung* is complete, then and only then is it certain that no individual autonomy exists outside of it. And in order that the proof of this be completely valid, the domination of the form, derived from the abstraction and calculation native to the metropolis, must be demonstrated in the most apparently 'eccentric' behavior. . . . The *blase* attitude defines the *illusiveness of the differences*. Its constant nervous stimulation and the search for pleasure prove to be experiences completely abstract from the specific individuality of their object: 'no object deserves preference over any other' (Simmel, *loc. cit.*) Cacciari continues: "Intellectualization, *Vergeistigung*, and commercialization are all brought together in the *blase* attitude, with it the metropolis finally creates its 'type', its structure 'in general' finally becomes a social reality and a cultural fact. It is money that has here found its most authentic bearer." See, also by Cacciari: *Metropolis. Saggi sulla grande città di Sombart, Endell, Scheffler, Simmel*, Officina, Rome 1973, as well as his introductory essay to G. Simmel, *Saggi di estetica*, Livinia, Padua 1970.

stimulation (*Nervenleben*); how to absorb the shock provoked by the metropolis by transforming it into a new principle of dynamic development; how to "utilize" to the limit the anguish which "indifference to value" continually provokes and nourishes in the metropolitan experience. It was necessary to pass from Munch's *Scream* to El Lissitzky's *Story of Two Squares*: from the anguished discovery of the nullification of values, to the use of a language of pure signs, perceptible by a mass that had completely absorbed the universe without quality of the money economy.

The laws of production thus became part of a new universe of conventions, explicitly put forth as "natural." This is the reason why the avant-garde movements did not concern themselves with the problem of a *rapprochement* with the public. On the contrary, this was a problem that could not even be posed. Doing nothing other than interpreting something necessary and universal, the avant-garde could accept temporary unpopularity, well knowing that their break with the past was the fundamental condition for their value as models for action.

Art as a model of action. This was the great guiding principle of the artistic redemption of the modern bourgeoisie. But it was at the same time an absolute which gave rise to new and irrepressible contradictions. Life and art having been revealed antithetical, there had to be found, either means of mediation—following this road the entire artistic production accepted the problematic as its new ethical horizon—or ways by which art could pass into life, even if the Hegelian prophecy of the *death of art* thus became a reality.

It is here that the relationships bringing together the great tradition of bourgeois art in a single whole are most concretely exposed. The illumination offered by our initial reference to Piranesi as both theoretician and critic of an art *no longer universalizing and not yet bourgeois* can now be fully appreciated. Criticism, problematality, and the drama of utopia: these were the basic elements forming the tradition of the "modern movement." And inasmuch as it was a project for modelling the "bourgeois man" as an absolute type, the "modern movement" had its own undeniable, internal coherence (even if this is not the coherence recognized in it by current historical study).

Both Piranesi's *Campo Marzio* and Picasso's *Dame au violon* are "projects," though the former organizes an architectural dimension and the latter a human mode of behavior. Both use the technique of shock, even if Piranesi's etching adopts preformed historical material and Picasso's painting artificial material (just as later Duchamp, Hausmann and Schwitter were to do even more pointedly). Both discover the reality of a machine-universe: even if the eighteenth century urban project renders that universe as an abstraction and reacts to the discovery with terror, and the Picasso painting is conceived completely within this reality.

But more importantly, both Piranesi and Picasso, by means of the excess of truth acquired through their intensely critical formal elaborations, make "universal" a reality which could otherwise be considered completely particular. The "project" inherent in the Cubist painting, however, goes beyond the painting itself. Ready-made objects, introduced in 1912 by Braque and Picasso

and codified as new means of communication by Duchamp, sanctioned the self-sufficiency of reality and the definitive rejection, by reality itself, of any representation. The painter could only analyze this reality. His asserted dominion over form was but a cover for something he could still not accept: that is, that by now it was form which dominated the painter.

Except that now form had to be understood as the logic of subjective reactions to the objective universe of production. Cubism as a whole tended to define the laws of such reactions. It is symptomatic that Cubism began from the subjective and ended in the most absolute rejection of it (as was to be noticed by Apollinaire, with uneasiness). What Cubism as a "project" wanted to realize was a mode of behavior. Its antinaturalism, however, contained no persuasive element for the public. Instead, the intention of Cubism was to demonstrate the reality of the "new nature" created by the new capitalist metropolis and its necessary and universal character, in which necessity and liberty coincide.

For this reason Braque and Picasso, and still more Gris, adopted the technique of assemblage, which gave absolute form to the universe of the *civilization machiniste*. Primitivism and antihistoricism were the consequences and not the causes of their fundamental choices.

As techniques of analysis of a totalizing universe, both Cubism and *De Stijl* were explicit invitations to action. For their artistic products one could well speak of *the fetishization of the artistic object and its mystery*.

The public had to be provoked. Only in this way could it be actively introduced into the universe of



precision dominated by the laws of production. The passivity of the *flâneur* sung by Baudelaire had to be conquered. The *blasé* attitude had to be transformed into effective participation in the urban scene. The city was the object to which neither Cubist painting, nor the Futurist "cuffings," nor Dadaist nihilism refer specifically, but which—precisely because continually presupposed—was the benchmark of the avant-garde movements. Mondrian was to have the courage to "name" the city as the final object toward which neoplastic composition tended. But he was to be forced to recognize that, once it had been translated into urban structures, painting—by now reduced to a pure model of behavior—would have to die.<sup>59</sup>

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. The prostitution of the artist immediately follows his moment of maximum human sincerity.<sup>60</sup> *De Stijl*, and still more Dada, discovered that there are two roads to the suicide of art: silent immersion in the structure of the city by the idealization of its contradictions, or violent insertion into the structures of artistic communication of the irrational—this, too, idealized—as transformed by the city.

*De Stijl* became a method of formal control of the technological universe. Dada wanted to enunciate apocalyptically its immanent absurdity. And yet the

<sup>59</sup> See P. Mondrian, *De Stijl*, I and III. See also the essay by Mondrian, "L'homme, la rue, la ville", *Vouloir*, 1927, no. 25.

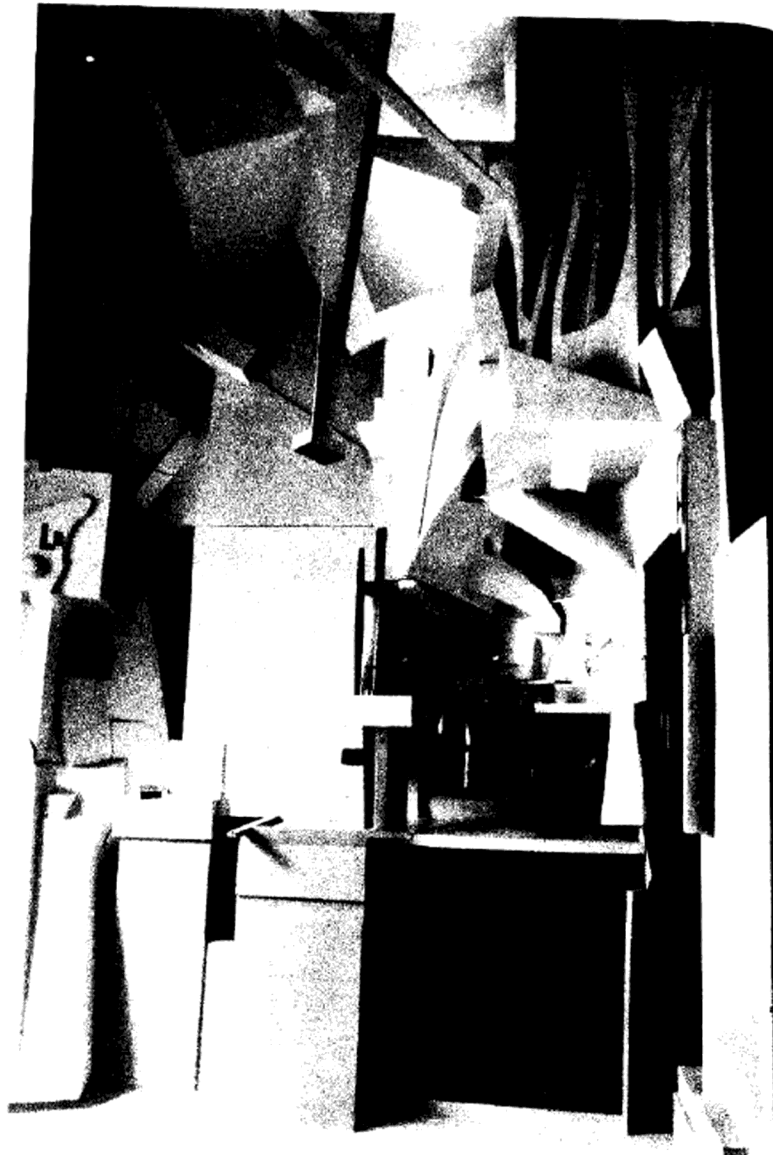
<sup>60</sup> This is very evident in Hugo Ball's attitude: see H. Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, Lucern 1946. On Ball see the recent monograph by L. Valeriani, *Ball e il Cabaret Voltaire*, Martano, Turin 1971.

nihilist criticism formulated by Dada ended by becoming a means of control for planning. As we shall see, there is nothing surprising in encountering many points of tangency between the most "constructive" and the most destructive avant-garde movements of the Twentieth century.

Dada's ferocious decomposition of the linguistic material and its opposition to prefiguration: what were these, after all, if not the sublimation of automatism and commercialization of "values" now spread through all levels of existence by the advance of capitalism? *De Stijl* and the Bauhaus introduced the *ideology of the plan* into a design method that was always closely related to the city as a productive structure. Dada, by means of the absurd, demonstrated—without naming it—the necessity of a plan.

Furthermore, all the avant-garde movements adopted political parties as models of action. Dada and Surrealism can surely be seen as particular expressions of the anarchic spirit. And indeed *De Stijl*, the Bauhaus, and the Soviet avant-garde movements did not hesitate to set themselves up explicitly as global alternatives to political practices; alternatives that assumed all the characteristics of ethical choices.

*De Stijl*—and for that matter Russian Futurism and the Constructivist currents—opposed Chaos, the empirical, and the commonplace, with the principle of Form. And it was a form which took account of that which concretely impoverishes reality, rendering it formless and chaotic. The panorama of industrial production, which spiritually impoverishes the world, was dismissed as a universe "without quality," as nonvalue.



14 Kurt Schwitters, view of the *Merzbau* in Hanover, 1920-1936 (destroyed).

But it was taken up again after being transformed into new value through its sublimation. The *De Stijl* technique of the decomposition of complex into elementary forms corresponded to the discovery that the "new richness" of spirit could not be sought outside the "new poverty" assumed by mechanical civilization. The disarticulated recomposition of those elementary forms exalted the mechanical universe by demonstrating that no form can be given to the recovery of totality (of being, as of art) except form derived from the problematic nature of form itself.

Dada instead plunged into chaos. By representing chaos, it confirmed its reality; by treating it with irony, it exposed a necessity that had been lacking. This unprovided necessity was precisely that control of formlessness and chaos that *De Stijl*, all the European Constructivist currents, and even the formalist aesthetic of the nineteenth century—from *Sichtbarkeit* on—posed as the new frontier of visual communications. Thus it is not surprising that Dadaist anarchy and *De Stijl* order converged and mingled from 1922 on, from the aspect of theory as well as that of practice, in which the main concern was that of working out the means of a new synthesis.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Indeed the subject of the unification of the contributions of the avant-garde movements appears to have been an urgent one, at least from 1922 on. In this the efforts of such figures as El Lissitzky, Moholy-Nagy, Van Doesburg, and Hans Richter were prominent. A first synthesis of Dada and Constructivism took place with the manifesto of Raoul Hausmann, Hans Arp, Ivan Puni (Jean Pougny), and László Moholy-Nagy, "Aufruf zur Elementaren Kunst," *De Stijl*, IV, 1921, no. 10, p. 156. Fundamental were the two conventions of the avant-garde held in Dusseldorf and Weimar in 1922: see *De Stijl*, V, 1922, no. 4, for the concluding manifesto of the Dusseldorf convention (May 30, 1922), and T. Van Doesburg, H. Richter, K. Maes, Max Burchartz, and El Lissitzky, "Konstruktivistische internationale schöpferische Arbeitsgemeinschaft," *De Stijl*, V, 1922, no. 8, pp. 113-115. The magazines *Mecano*, *G*, and *Merz* resulted from this synthesis.

Chaos and order were thus sanctioned by the historical avant-garde movements as the "values," in the proper sense of the term, of the new capitalist city.

Of course, chaos is a datum and order an objective. But from now on form is not sought outside of chaos; it is sought within it. It is order that confers significance upon chaos and transforms it into value, into "liberty." Even Dadaist destructiveness has a "positive" aim—particularly in America and Berlin. Indeed, historically speaking, Dadaist nihilism, in the hands of a Hausmann or a Haertfield, became the expression of a new technique of communication. The systematic use of the unexpected and the technique of assemblage were brought together to form the premises of a new nonverbal language, based on improbability and what Russian formalism called "semantic distortion." It was therefore precisely with Dadaism that the theory of information became an instrument of visual communications.

But the real place of the improbable is the city. The formlessness and chaos of the city is therefore to be redeemed by extracting from within it all its progressive virtues. The necessity of a programed control of the new forces released by technology was very clearly pointed out by the avant-garde movements, who immediately after discovered they were not capable of giving concrete form to this entreaty of Reason.

It was at this point that architecture could enter the scene, absorbing and going beyond all the entreaties of the avant-garde movements. And architecture alone being in a position to really respond to the needs indicated by Cubism, Futurism, Dada, *De Stijl*, and international



15 Georg Grosz, *Friedrichstrasse*, lithograph, 1918.

Constructivism, these movements were thrown into crisis.

The Bauhaus, as the decantation chamber of the avant-garde, fulfilled the historic task of selecting from all the contributions of the avant-garde by testing them in terms of the needs of productive reality.<sup>62</sup> Industrial design, a method of organizing production even before it is a method of configuring objects, did away with the residue of utopia inherent in the artistic expression of the avant-garde. Ideology now was not superimposed on artistic operations—the latter were now concrete because they were connected to the real production cycle—but had become an internal part of the operations themselves.

Despite its realism, however, even industrial design left certain needs unsatisfied; and in the impetus it gave to the organization of individual enterprises and the organization of production it contained a margin of utopia. But this was now a utopia serving the objectives of the reorganization of production. The plan common to the spearhead architectural movements—the term avant-garde is here no longer adequate—from the for-

62 Since the publication of the volume by H.M. Wingler, *Der Bauhaus 1919-1933*, Verlag Gebr. Rasch & Co., Braunschweig 1962; 2nd ed., 1968 (Eng. trans. of the 2nd ed., *The Bauhaus*, translated by W. Aabs and B. Gilbert, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1969) containing a great deal (if not all) the unpublished documentation, the revision of the historical significance of the Bauhaus has continually occupied scholars of modern architecture. Among the most recent contributions may be cited: W. Scheidig, *Le Bauhaus de Weimar*, Bernard Laville, Leipzig 1966; the whole issue of *Controspazio*, 1971, nos. 4/5; *Bauhaus 1919-1929*, catalogue of the exhibition held at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris 1969; and, principally, F. Dal Co, "Hannes Meyer e la 'venerabile scuola' di Dessau," introduction to the Italian edition of the collected writings of H. Meyer, entitled *Architettura o rivoluzione*, Marsilio, Padua 1969. In addition, see the fundamental work by M. Franciscano, *Walter Gropius and the Creation of the Bauhaus in Weimar. The Ideals and Artistic Theories of its Founding Years*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana 1971.



16 Walther Ruttmann, "Berlin: die Symphonie der Grosstadt," 1927. Film Stills Archive, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

mation of Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin* (1925) and the transformation of the Bauhaus (1923), contained this contradiction: starting from the particular sector of building production, architecture discovered that the preestablished objectives could be reached only by relating that sector to the reorganization of the city. Thus, just as the necessities singled out by the avant-garde had referred to the sectors of visual communication most directly related to the economic process—architecture and industrial design—so the planning enunciated by architectural and urban theories referred to something other than itself. In this case the something other was a restructuring of production and consumption in general; in other words, the planned coordination of production. In this sense architecture—beginning with itself—mediated realism and utopia. The utopia consisted in obstinately hiding the fact that the ideology of planning could be realized in building production only by indicating that it is beyond it that the true plan can take form; rather, that once come within the sphere of the reorganization of production in general, architecture and urbanism would have to be the objects and not the subjects of the Plan.

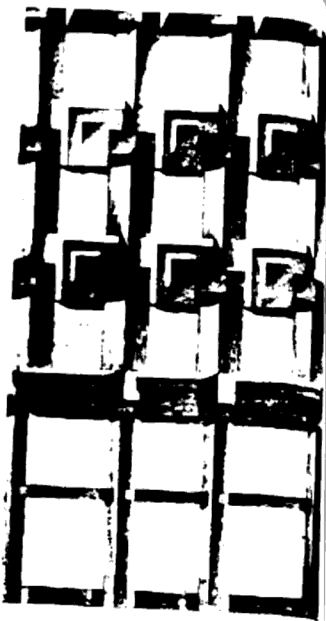
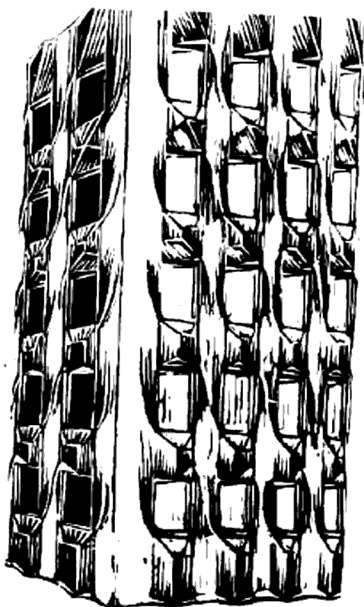
Architecture between 1920 and 1930 was not ready to accept such consequences. What was clear was its "political" role. Architecture (read: programing and planned reorganization of building production and of the city as a productive organism) rather than revolution. Le Corbusier clearly enunciated this alternative.

In the meantime, and beginning with just the most politically committed circles—from the *November-*

*gruppe* to the magazines *MA* and *Vesč* and the Berlin *Ring*—architectural ideology was defined technically. Accepting with lucid objectivity all the conclusions on the "death of the aura" and on the purely "technical" function of the intellectual apocalyptically announced by the avant-garde movements, the central European *Neue Sachlichkeit* adapted the method of designing to the idealized structure of the assembly line. The forms and methods of industrial work became part of the organization of the design and were reflected even in the ways proposed for the consumption of the object.

From the standardized element, to the cell, the single block, the housing project and finally the city: architecture between the two wars imposed this assembly line with an exceptional clarity and coherence. Each "piece" on the line, being completely resolved in itself, tended to disappear or, better, to formally dissolve in the assemblage.

The result of all this was that the aesthetic experience itself was revolutionized. Now it was no longer objects that were offered to judgment, but a process to be lived and used as such. The user, summoned to complete Mies van der Rohe's or Gropius' "open" spaces, was the central element of this process. Since the new forms were no longer meant to be absolute values but instead proposals for the organization of collective life—the integrated architecture of Gropius—architecture summoned the public to participate in its work of design. Thus through architecture the ideology of the public took a great step forward. Morris's romantic socialist dream of an art of all for all took ideological form



17 *Top left*, Vlastislav Hofman, study for an apartment house, 1914. *Top right*, Pavel Janak, study for a facade, 1913–1914. *Bottom*, Vlastislav Hofman, architectural study, 1913.

within the iron-clad laws of profit. Even in this, the ultimate test of the theoretical hypotheses was the confrontation with the city.