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COLLECTIVE LUXURY:

Architecture and Populism in Charles Fourier

In 1972 Marxist philosopher, sociologist and the author of production of space theory, Henri Lefebvre published an introduction to the volume *Actualité de Fourier*, which followed a colloquium marking the 200 years of Charles Fourier's birth (1772 - 1837).¹ This rediscovery of a socialist writer dubbed by his political opponents "utopian" was inscribed into a broad rethinking of the relationship between architecture, city and politics since the late 1960s France. This rethinking was possible only by fundamentally challenging the relationship between production and consumption and by redefining the concept of work in the postwar Fordism.

Lefebvre's discovery of Fourier coincided with the formulation of his theory of production of space which was published in six books between 1968 (*Right to the City*) and 1974 (*The Production of Space*). Developing a theory

¹ See: H. Lefebvre, ed., *Actualité de Fourier: colloque d'Arc-et-Senans* (Paris: Éditions Anthropos, 1975.)

of space as produced and productive in social practices, Lefebvre argued that the central idea of Fourier was the conviction that new social relations required production of new spaces.²

Developing a critique of the post-war urbanism³, Lefebvre noticed that the paradigmatic place for Fourier's project of new space for a new society was the Palais-Royal, a space built for bliss, "space leading the discourse, stimulating pleasures, relating one to others and letting them reinforce each other"; a space of bad reputation hated by all moralists, both revolutionary and conservative.

⁴ In a television interview of 1972 Lefebvre argued that the Palais Royal, being a place

² Lefebvre, introduction to *Actualité de Fourier*, p. 14.

³ See: H. Lefebvre, *Les nouveaux ensembles urbains (un cas concret: Lacq-Mourenx et les problèmes urbain de la nouvelle classe ouvrière)*, "La Revue française de sociologie" 1960, nr. 1-2, s. 186-201; idem, *Utopie expérimentale: Pour un nouvel urbanisme*, "La Revue française de sociologie" 1961, nr 2, s. 191-198.

⁴ *Un certain regard: Charles Fourier*, broadcasted on Canal 1, 06.09.1972.

of theater, gallery, encounter, commerce, work, leisure and luxury, was the inspiration for the phalanstery – a building for 1620 inhabitants envisaged by Fourier as the crucial node for the society to come⁵. Fourier was conceiving an architecture as a collective luxury, conveyed by his description of the phalanstery as the "palace" which, in Silberling's *Dictionnaire de sociologie phalanstérienne* (1911) was described as a place liberty is guaranteed "under the

⁵ Ibidem.



Henri Lefebvre interviewed about Charles Fourier in the Palais Royal, Paris, 1972

auspices of good morals and observation of etiquette, courtesy and taste which naturally result from social life.”⁶ In Lefebvre’s reading, Fourier opposed a century of asceticism in leftists thought and conceived collective luxury as a political project. “These ideas—wrote Fourier—which appear as a calculation of luxury and superfluity, are, in fact, a theory of high politics, from which will be derived the fundamental principle of social happiness, the germ of association.”⁷

Lefebvre’s reading of Fourier avoids the gap between architecture and the city, which characterized much of the reception of Fourier’s work, too often read either through the design of the phalanstery, considered a rural settlement or a center of a small industrial town,⁸ or through the urban designs of Fourier’s “disciples.” They

⁶ E. Silberling, *Dictionnaire de sociologie phalanstérienne: guide des oeuvres complètes de Charles Fourier* (Paris: Librairie des Sciences Politiques et Sociales, 1911), p. 326.

⁷ Ch. Fourier, *Des modifications à introduire dans l’architecture des villes* (Paris: Librairie Phalanstérienne, 1849), p. 20.

⁸ According to Riasanovsky, Fourier neglected the world outside the phalanx, he delighted in rural life, and he offered “no counterbalancing enthusiasm for or interest in industry, urban life, technology, or science”. However, Jonathan Beecher, Fourier’s biographer, corrected this view that Fourier was attracted to urban architecture and in the 1790s has formulated some general principles concerning the ideal urban center. Fourier’s writings about the city, although not extensive, established a broad approach to urbanism which inspired his disciples to relate these principles to the planning of Paris. See: N. Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Haussmann* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 171.

included the polytechnicien Victor Considérant, the anonymous urbanist known as Perreymond, and the architect César Daly; all contributors to the debates about the urban development of Paris in the 1830s and 1840s.

This focus of Lefebvre on the “Fourierist city” was a symptom of a rethinking of the relationship between architecture and the city, inscribed into a general revision of the architectural avant-garde of the early 20th century and functionalist urbanism. In this context, the rediscovery of Fourier sounds paradoxical because of his essential role in the self-constructed genealogy of the avant-gardes and their performative historiographies.⁹ This perception of Fourier was expressed, for example, in Walter Benjamin’s stress on Fourier’s discovery of glass in the Parisian arcades as a fundamental material for the architecture to come; in Tony Garnier’s project of the industrial city which refers to Fourier by a mediation of Emil Zola’s *Work*; or in Siegfried Giedion’s tracing the ideas of decentralisation in modern urbanism back to Fourier and developed by the postwar authors.¹⁰

⁹ P. Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

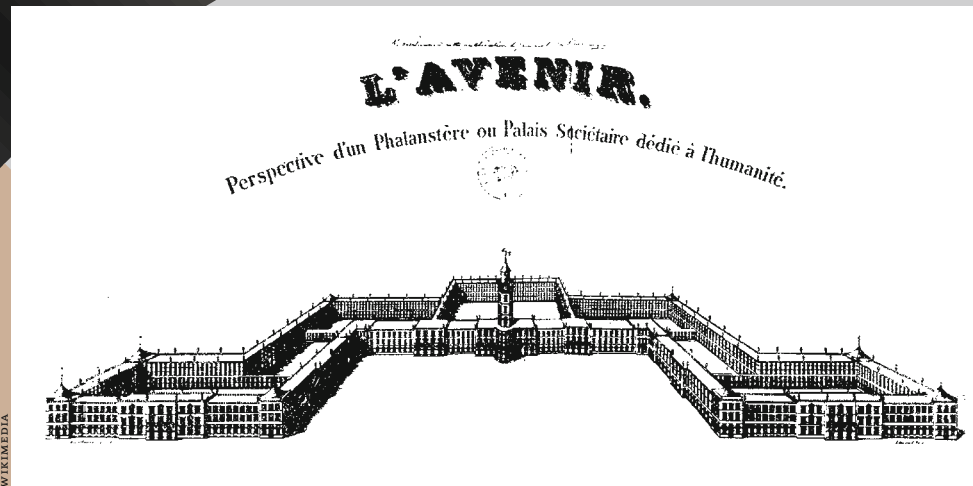
¹⁰ See: Tony Garnier, *Une cité industrielle: étude pour la construction des villes* (Paris: Vincent, 1917); Émile Zola, *Work* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901 [1901]); Siegfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 820.

Lefebvre was pursuing a very different reading of Fourier to the one inscribed into the tradition of the architectural modern movement and its association with the Keynesian welfare state. The inspiration for such reading came from Roland Barthes, Lefebvre’s close friend, and his 1970 book *Sade Fourier Loyola*. Barthes has shown all three - the libertine, the utopian socialist, and the founder of the Jesuit order - as logothetes, that is to say as founders of language. He noticed that what is specific for Fourier’s style is that he withholds the decisive utterance of the doctrine, giving only its examples, seductions, “appetizers”; “the message of this book is the announcement of a forthcoming message”; the signified of the book is stretching out of sight - it is the book’s future.¹¹ Fourier is an author of procrastination. Or, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “Fourier loves preambles, cisambles, transambles, postambles, introductions, extroductions, prologues, interludes, postludes, cismediants, mediants, transmediants, intermedes, notes, appendixes”.¹²

The same is true of Fourier’s architectural work: Fourier stresses that the buildings he describes are intermediary stages, which proliferate and multiply. They are essentially transitory objects, not unlike the “socialist objects” which Boris Arvatov, the Soviet theorist of constructivism produc-

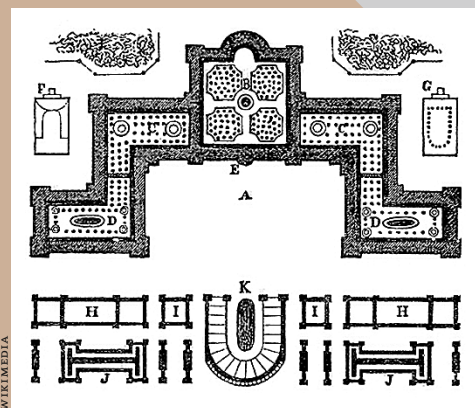
¹¹ R. Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976 [1970]), p. 90.

¹² W. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999 [1982]), p. 642.



A perspective view of Charles Fourier's phalanstery, 1834

Below: a plan of phalanstery published in *Le nouveau monde industriel*, 1829



tivism, postulated to become “comrades”; and which were publicized by the “critical advertisements” by Aleksandr Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakovsky linking the pre-revolutionary visual habits with an imaginary of an post-revolutionary organization of consumption.¹³ Thus, the phalanstery is preceded by *tourbillon* and a *tribustery*; and an experimental, or testing, phalanstery. These different buildings are associated with various stages of human development, including the period, called *garantisme* which imme-

¹³ Ch. Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

diately follows the period contemporary to Fourier, which he calls *civilization*, and which prepares next period, called the *serialism*.¹⁴ The *garantisme* is characterized by a series of institutions which guarantee solidarity and collaboration between the members of the society. Fourier writes that *garantisme* realizes the wishes and dreams of the civilization, but it did not manage to shed the kernel of evil – the nonassociated family, which will be resolved only in the serialism period. In that sense, *garantisme* is a reformist period, and architecture and urbanism can become tools for this reform: “A men of taste, a political architect, could transform civilization by a mere reform of architectural practice [...]”.¹⁵ At the time when Manfredo Tafuri and other Marxist theoreticians argued the impossibility of architectural practise to change its role in the capitalist distribution of work, Lefebvre was reading Fourier in order to argue for a possibility of an “revolutionary reform” in which architecture was assigned an important role.¹⁶

¹⁴ Fourier, *Des modifications*, p. 7.

¹⁵ Fourier, *Des modifications*, 17.

¹⁶ L. Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space : Architecture, Urban Research and the Production of Theory*, Minneapolis 2011.

Fourier drew a plan for an ideal city in the 1820s and published in 1841 in a section of his *Théorie de l'unité universelle* and in 1849 in a pamphlet *Cités ouvrières: Des modifications à introduire dans l'architecture des villes*.¹⁷ The city of Fourier was designed in four rings: the central city; the suburbs; the rural annexes; and the roads. These parts were distinguished by a gradation in ornamentation—a “luxury” aimed a collective pleasures—and by a differentiation in density and height. Every house was required to have a free ground around in order to prevent speculation and secure the circulation of air; the more central the house, the smaller the free area which, however, was not allowed to be smaller than the whole surface of the house. The distances between the houses were proscribed in a similarly gradual way. For the bourgeoisie one would build big houses for 20 – 30 families, differing in wealth. These structures would have common services and places for meeting connected by galleries which Benjamin argued to have been inspired by the first Parisian arcades.

Many of these ideas were developed by the followers by Fourier: Victor Considerant, Perreymond and César Daly in their publications and in their contributions to the journal *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics* founded in 1839 and edited by Daly. Like the Saint-Simonians, the Fourier-

¹⁷ Ch. Fourier, *Oeuvres complètes*, 5 vols (Paris: Anthropos, 1971 [1846]).

ists stressed the importance of the railway system, supported public works as a means of development, and argued for a foundation of a new type of financial institutions necessary to finance the urban development, in that sense preparing the ground for Haussmann's development of Paris under Napoleon III. These authors conceived a development of Paris focused on circulation of people, commodities and money; and the relationships between the vital urban center of public services, attractions, and the rest of the city. In that sense, the plans for Paris proposed by the Fourierists were inscribed in the new understanding of urban design developed since the late 18th century in France which Michel Foucault in his lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s discussed with the term *biopolitics*: that is to say a series of techniques which exert control over the circulation of people, commodities, and capital according to an empirically identified statistical average rather than by a subjugation each subject to disciplinary measures.¹⁸

Foucault explained the emergence of the biopolitical regime by discussing late 18th century urban designs such as the Rousseau plan of Nantes (1760). Perreymond's projects for Paris published in 1842 and 1843 in the *Revue générale* built upon this experi-

¹⁸ M. Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

The City of the 6th Period (*guaratism*) according Charles Fourier, 1822

ence. The project depicts the center of the city but in fact it addresses the whole urban territory in order to tackle a series of problems, such as urban sprawl, economic development, hygiene, representation, and unemployment. The project of Perreymont introduces, basically, three decisions. Firstly, it unites the Île de Cité and the Île Saint Louis into an administrative and cultural center, giving it a public façade open to the new square which was envisaged over the filled southern arm of the Seine. Secondly, it introduces six arteries to connect this center with other parts of the city, the territory of the country and the overseas. The idea behind these arteries is, clearly, that of circulation and of flows, and this is best revealed in the way the monuments are treated, as objects which either modify the flows or which the flows swim round: a layout contrasting with the later geometry of Haussmannian Paris. Thirdly, the project suggested introducing a new market. Perreymond's project changes the scale in which the city is imagined and designed, and this is best revealed when his project is juxtaposed with the de Laborde plan to

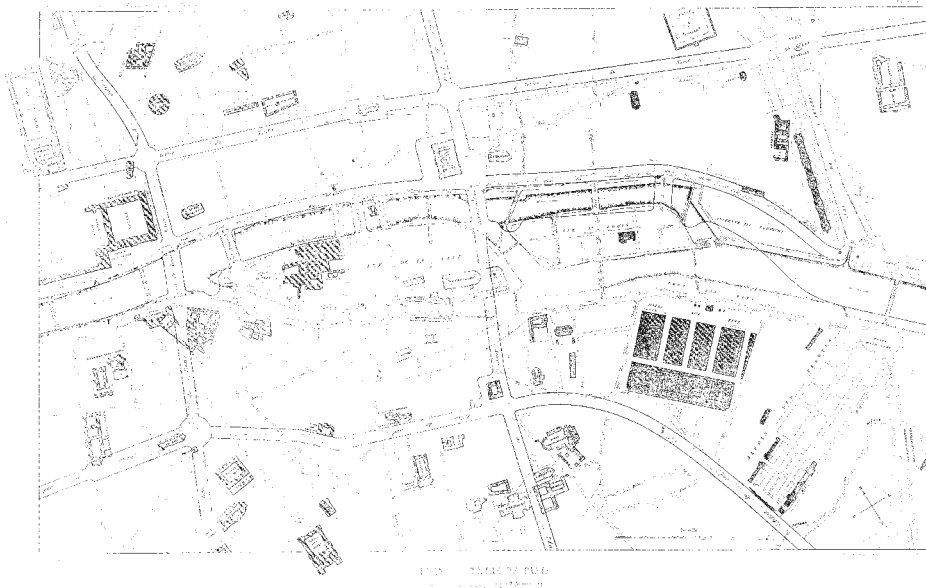
which it was conceived as an alternative.¹⁹ In order to pass to this new scale of urban reality, new technologies of construction and transport were necessary, but also new modes of administration and new financial instruments, which conditioned Haussmann's restructuring of Paris during the Second Empire.²⁰

One of the essential aims of Perreymond's project was to tackle unemployment by stimulating economic development. This theme was very much in the air in the debates in the 1840s Paris, and culminated in the February revolution of 1848 whose socialist postulates included the "right to work". The centrality of work is the premise of Perreymond's project, and the urbanist writes: "Work is the center of life. [...] Work is life, and life can only exist on conditions that it renew itself, that it propagate itself without ceasing, without

¹⁹ Perreymond, "Études sur la ville de Paris," *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics* 3 (December 1842): cols. 540–4, 570–9; 4 (January 1843): vols 25–37; 4 (February 1843): 72–88; 4 (September 1843): cols. 413–29; 4 (October 1843): cols. 449–69; 4 (November 1843): cols. 517–28.

²⁰ D. Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).





Proposal of the development of the center of Paris by the Fourierist urbanist known as Perreymond. Published in *Revue Générale de l'Architecture et des Travaux Publics*, 1843

stopping”.²¹ Perreymond argued that the first task of the society is to organize work and the system of work has a spatial counterpart in city which secures the circulatory network of work and capital. What is specific for his political position is the priority to socially useful work - for example of public work – as opposed to speculation.

This question of work was essential for Lefebvre’s reading of Fourier. However, for Fourier, work can be thought as central for the society only if the concept of work is radically changed. That is to say, work should be understood by means of the concept of passion which is the foundation of Fourier’s general theory of association. Fascinated with Newton, Fourier conceived passion as the force of attraction between subjects, just like gravitation is the force of attraction between material objects. This concept transforms the character of work

²¹ Perreymond, quoted in Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Haussmann*, p. 187.

as based on passions and pleasure, and thus the difference between work and consumption becomes challenged.

Fourier, he argued that rather than changing human nature, the thing which can make men happy is to base social order on the combinatorics of man’s passions and desires:

“I am the only reformer who has rallied round human nature by accepting it as it is and devising the means of utilizing it with all the defects which are inseparable from man. All the sophists who pretend to change men are working in denial of man, and what is more, in denial of God since they want to change or stifle the passions which God has bestowed on us as our fundamental drives...”²²

²² Fourier, quoted in Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), p. 207.

Thus, Fourier’s critique of civilization and of capitalism was based on the fact that they restrain the fulfillment of passions of man by producing indigence, competition, boredom, deceit, adultery. At the core of his thinking lie the twelve passions of men, which are his fundamental instinctive drives. Fourier distinguished between the luxurious passions (desires of the five senses); the four group passions (respect, friendship, love, and parenthood); and the three serial passions – the passion to make arrangements, concordant or compromise; the passion to intrigue; and the passion to variety.

Fourier stressed that the main principle for achieving pleasure was to combine passions. This is also the main principle of his urbanism: he writes that to isolate the passions and operate separately with them will fail in respect to each of them.²³ He argues that the architects should not simply take care of the utility because “one occupied only by the utility does achieve neither the useful nor the pleasant”. And he adds: “to search for them in isolation is to operate within the system of the civilization, while we have seen that the pleasant is in the twelve branches inseparable from utility”; in other words: “the complex is always true; the simple is always false”.²⁴ These statements coincide with Lefebvre’s arguments against functionalist urbanism:

²³ Fourier, *Des modifications*, p. 23.

²⁴ Fourier, quoted in Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris*, 240.

to conceive the city in term of the useful, the needed, and the necessary rather than on the basis of the pleasant and passionate; and classify the needs aiming at satisfying them one after the other rather than focusing on the relationships between them – this was the main point in Lefebvre’s writings in urban sociology since the late 1950s.²⁵

Thus, Fourier argued that the “unitary architecture” was the productive relationship of all senses. He wrote that: “the senses are thus reliable guides for social progress” and argued that one should think progress as a product of sensual pleasures which are composed, collective and integral and application to the mass of people.²⁶ For example – describing the common dinner rooms – Fourier shows how the sense of taste is composed (combined with spiritual pleasure of a conversation); collective (developed in the community of the tribe); and integral (embracing all branches and relations). The production of composed, collective and integral pleasure is thus the main aim of architecture. In other words, architecture is theorized as an art of association and putting together of senses, forms, bodies, and ideas.

²⁵ H. Lefebvre, “Les nouveaux ensembles urbains (un cas concret: Lacq-Mourenx et les problèmes urbains de la nouvelle classe ouvrière),” *La Revue française de sociologie* 1, no. 1–2 (1960): 186–201; Henri Lefebvre, “Utopie expérimentale: Pour un nouvel urbanisme,” *Revue française de sociologie* 2, no. 3 (1961): p. 191–198.

²⁶ Fourier, *Des modifications*, p. 38.

This idea of architecture of association is the engine of Fourier’s vision of the phalanstery. The phalanstery was conceived as an assembly of dissimilar people; types and ages; and their novel combinations. As it was noticed by Roland Barthes, Fourier’s principle of combination was that of a formal and arbitrary correspondence; thus, an association is not a humanist principle (bringing together everyone with the same mania) but rather of contrast; neither was it a liberal principle which aims at “understanding” or “admitting” passions, but rather of their enjoyment.²⁷

These comments make it clear that, when read in the early 1970s by Barthes and Lefebvre, both authors tracing the emergence of the post-war society of consumption, Fourier’s writings gained a new type of actuality. While for Benjamin the main metaphor of Fourier’s understanding of the society was the machine, for Barthes and Lefebvre this metaphor in Fourier’s texts was, clearly, information. And information was not only the paradigm for social development in the 1960s Western societies, but also, under the influence of structuralism, the dominant model for theorizing consumption. In the writings of Barthes and Jean Baudrillard, an object of consumption was theorized not as an answer to a need, but rather as a sign which obtains its meaning within a system of signs in a system of

²⁷ Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, p. 99.

differences.²⁸ This theorizing of consumption was strikingly similar to Fourier’s combinatorics of passions which bases on the differences between the people and activities involved. This was confirmed by the fact that the essential question of Fourier – and indeed one of the main reasons for his strategy of procrastination – was the problem essential to consumption, namely: how to prevent a boredom stemming from an excess of pleasures.

This is why, introducing *Actualité de Fourier*, Lefebvre hesitates whether Fourier’s work is topical as a utopian socialist or a “dystopian” socialist; that is to say whether he is an author of a project of architecture of pleasure and spontaneity; or rather a prophet of the society of consumption and socialized worker. In this reading, Fourier’s work comes close to such projects as Archizoom’s *No-Stop city*, or *Exodus* by Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis: what decides, for Lefebvre, about the actuality in Fourier’s work in the cultural and political condition of the 1970s is a state of undecidability between utopia and dystopia.

The text above is a revised version of an essay published originally in the “Hunch” magazine (No. 14, ed. Salomon Frausto, NAI Publishers / Berlage Institute, 2010).

²⁸ R. Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 [1967]); J. Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 2005 [1968]).