Collective Luxury: Architecture and Populism in Charles Fourier

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, French philosopher Charles Fourier had already foretold the consumer-driven, leisure urbanity of the twentieth-century postwar period. **Lukasz Stanek** recovers Fourier's theories and Henri Lefebvre's readings of them to consider how contemporary, populist environments of collective pleasure can be politicized.

In 1972 Henri Lefebvre published an introduction to the volume *Actualité de Fourier*, which followed a colloquium marking the two hundred years since Charles Fourier's birth (1772–1837).[1] The rediscovery of a socialist writer was part of a broad rethinking since the late 1960s of the relationship between architecture, city, and politics in France. This rethinking was possible only by fundamentally challenging the relationship between production and consumption and by redefining the concept of work. The rereading of Fourier, who argued that social change could be achieved by reforming the economic and political institutions rather than by a revolution, was an attempt to politicize the emerging subjectivity of the consumer, defined by the increasingly blurred borders between production and reproduction.

Lefebvre's discovery of Fourier coincided with the formulation of his theory of the production of space, which was published in six books between 1968 (*Right to the City*) and 1974 (*The Production of Space*). Developing a theory of space as produced by and productive in social practices, Lefebvre argued that Fourier's central idea is that each social group does not contain an inherent consistency except in its space and that to invent a group and a human (social) relation is to invent or produce a space.[2]

Developing a critique of postwar urbanism, Lefebvre noticed that the paradigmatic place for Fourier's project of a "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. In a television interview in 1972 Lefebvre argued that the Palais Royal, being a space for entertainment, socializing, commerce, work, leisure, and luxury, was the inspiration for the phalanstery–a building for 1,620 inhabitants envisaged by Fourier as the crucial node for the society to come.[3] Fourier conceived of architecture as a collective luxury, conveyed by his description of the phalanstery as a "palace," which was described in Silberling's *Dictionnaire de sociologie phalanstérienne* (1911) as a place where liberty is guaranteed "under the auspices of good morals and observation of etiquette, courtesy, and taste which naturally result from social life."[4] In Lefebvre's reading, Fourier opposed a century of asceticism in leftist thought and conceived of 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."[5]

Lefebvre's reading of Fourier avoids the gap between architecture and the city. This characterized much of the reception of Fourier's work, which was too often read either through the design of the phalanstery–considered a rural settlement or a center of a small industrial town–or through the urban designs of Fourier's "disciples."[6] They included the polytechnician Victor Considerant, the anonymous urbanist known as Perreymond, and the architect César Daly, all of whom were contributors to the debates about the urban development of Paris in the 1830s and 1840s.

Lefebvre's focus on the "Fourierist city" was a symptom of rethinking of the relationship between architecture and the city, inscribed into a general revision of the architectural avant-garde of the early twentieth century and functionalist urbanism. In this context, the rediscovery of

This article is based on a lecture presented at the Berlage Institute on June 26, 2008. The arguments are developed in the author's forthcoming publication, entitled *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*, to be released by the University of Minnesota Press in 2011.
–Ed.

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

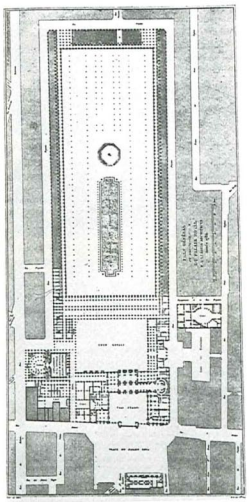
2
Lefebvre, introduction to *Actualité de Fourier*, 14.

3
Un certain regard: Charles Fourier, broadcasted on Chanal 1, 6 September 1972.

4
Edouard Silberling, *Dictionnaire de sociologie phalanstérienne: guide des oeuvres complètes de Charles Fourier* (Paris: Librairie des Sciences Politiques et Sociales, 1911), 326.

5
Charles Fourier, *Des modifications à introduire dans l'architecture des villes* (Paris: Librairie Phalanstérienne, 1849), 20.

6
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 by demonstrating that Fourier was attracted to urban architecture. In the 1790s he had 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: Nicholas Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Haussmann* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 171.



The Palais Royal in Paris, after the modification of 1784

Charles Fourier, first drawing of the phalanstery, 1829

Fourier sounds paradoxical because of his essential role in the self-constructed genealogy of the avant-gardists and their performative historiographies.[7] This perception on 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 Emile Zola's *Work*; or in Siegfried Giedion's tracing the ideas of decentralization in modern urbanism back to Fourier.[8] This was developed by postwar scholars, evident in Peter Serenyi's link between the phalanstery, the monastery of Ema, and the Unité d'Habitation by Le Corbusier; in Roger-Henri Guerrand who saw the phalanstery as a "machine for dwelling" and a predecessor of the social program of modern architecture; and in Franziska Bollerey's persistent uncovering of the multifaceted relationships between Fourier and the architectural avant-garde of the early twentieth century.[9] For his part, Anthony Vidler linked Fourier's work to Le Corbusier's urban forms and, in a later text, discussed Fourier's theory as taking the procedures of rationalism to their ultimate conclusion, "thereby anticipating a century or more of social functionalism in architecture."[10]

Lefebvre, at that time developing a critique of the avant-garde and of functionalist urbanism, was pursuing a very different reading of Fourier from the one inscribed into the tradition of the architectural modern movement and its association with the Keynesian welfare state. The inspiration for such a reading came from Roland Barthes, Lefebvre's close friend, and his 1970 book *Sade Fourier Loyola*. Barthes had shown that all three–the libertine, the utopian socialist, and the founder of the Jesuit order–were *logothetes*, founders of language. He noticed that Fourier's style of writing 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" that Boris Arvatov, the Soviet theorist of constructivist productivism, postulated to become "comrades"; and which were publicized by the "critical advertisements" of Aleksandr Rodchenko and Vladimir Mayakovsky linking the prerevolutionary visual habits with an image of a postrevolutionary organization of consumption.[13] Thus, the phalanstery is preceded by *tourbillon* and a *tribustery*–an experimental, or testing, phalanstery. These different buildings are associated with various stages of human development, which he names: Fourier's own time is called *civilization*, the next is called *garantisme* which prepares the period he called *serialism*.[14] Fourier writes that *garantisme* is characterized by a series of institutions that guarantee solidarity and collaboration between members of the society; *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

7
Panayotis Tournikiotis, *The Historiography of Modern Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

8
See: Tony Garnier, *Une cité industrielle: étude pour la construction des villes* (Paris: Vincent, 1917); Emile Zola, *Work* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901); Sigfried Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture: The Growth of a New Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 820.

9
Peter Serenyi, "Le Corbusier, Fourier and the monastery of Ema," The Art Bulletin 49 (1967): 227-86; Roger-Henri Guerrand, "Aux origines de la cité radieuse: l'architecture phalanstérienne," *AMC, Architecture mouvement continuité* 12 (1968): 18-24; Franziska Bollerey, Architekturkonzeptionen der utopischen Sozialisten: alternative Planung und Architektur für den gesellschaftlichen Prozess (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1991).

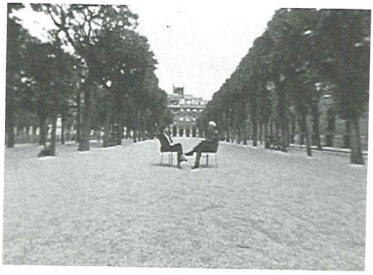
10
Anthony Vidler, "The Idea of Unity and Le Corbusier's Urban Form," *Architects' Yearbook* 12 (1968): 225-35; Anthony Vidler, "Asylums of Libertinage: Sade, Fourier, Ledoux," *Lotus International* 44 (1984): 28–9.

11
Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1976), 90.

12
Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 642.

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

14
Fourier, *Des modifications*, 7.



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

By the early nineteenth century, when Fourier was writing, "taste" had already established itself as one of the dominant topics of intellectual discourse throughout Europe. From Hume to Kant to Voltaire, it seemed that every major intellectual had written a major treatise on taste, beauty, and the arts. On the subject of a "men of taste" and the relation of tastemakers to a public, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu writes in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*:

> Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes...Aesthetic intolerance can be terribly violent. Aversion to different lifestyles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between classes: class endogamy is evidence of this.

15
Fourier, *Des modifications*, 17.

16
Lukasz Stanek, *Henri Lefebvre on Space: Architecture, Urban Research, and the Production of Theory*, unpublished.

17
Charles Fourier, *Oeuvres complètes*, 5 vols (Paris: Anthropos, 1971).

18
Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.

19
Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

Portrait of Charles Fourier

this reform: "A man of taste, a political architect, could transform civilization by a mere reform of architectural practice."[15] At the time when Manfredo Tafuri restated Le Corbusier's alternative–"architecture or revolution"–to conclude that architecture must be avoided, Lefebvre was reading Fourier in order to argue for a possibility of an "revolutionary reform" in which architecture was assigned an important role.[16]

Fourier drew a plan for an ideal city in the 1820s and published it 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 at collective pleasures–and by a differentiation in density and height. Every house was required to have empty space around it in order to prevent speculation and secure the circulation of air; the more central the house, the smaller the free area. However, the free space was not allowed to be smaller than the whole surface of the house. The distances between the houses were prescribed in a similarly gradual way, so that only the very rich people would be able to build small houses, which would require a big allotment in order to comply with the rules of isolation. For the bourgeoisie one would build big houses for twenty to thirty 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.[18]

Many of these ideas were developed by the followers by Fourier, especially 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 Fourierists stressed the importance of the railway system, supported public works as a means of development, and argued for the foundation of a new type of financial institution necessary to finance urban development, preparing the ground for Haussmann's development of Paris under Napoleon III. These authors conceived of a development of Paris focused on circulation of people, commodities, money, and the relationships between the vital urban center of public services and attractions to 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 eighteenth century in France, which Michel Foucault in his lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s discussed with the term "biopolitics": 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 of each subject to disciplinary measures.[19]

Foucault explained the emergence of the biopolitical regime by discussing late eighteenth 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 experience. 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 Perreymond basically introduces three decisions. First, it unites the Île de Cité and the Île Saint Louis into an administrative and cultural center,

giving it a public facade that opens to the new square, which was envisaged over the filled southern arm of the Seine. Second, it introduces six arteries to connect this center with other parts of the city, the territory of the country, and overseas. The idea behind these arteries is that of circulation and of flow, and this is best revealed in the way the monuments are treated: as objects which either modify the flow or which the flow swims around–a layout in contrast to the later geometry of Haussmannian Paris. Third, the project suggests the introduction of a new market. Perreymond's project changes the scale in which the city is imagined and designed. This becomes especially clear when his project is juxtaposed with the de Laborde plan against which it was conceived as an alternative.[20] In order to pass to this new scale of urban reality, not only were new technologies of construction and transport necessary, but also new modes of administration and new financial instruments, which conditioned Hausmann's restructuring of Paris during the Second Empire.[21]

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 during 1840s Paris, culminating in the February revolution of 1848, the socialist postulates of which 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 stopping."[22] Perreymond argued that the first task of the society is to organize work, and that the system of work has a spatial counterpart in the city which secures the circulatory network of work and capital. What is specific for his political position is the priority given to socially useful work–for example, public work–as opposed to speculation.

This question of work was essential to Lefebvre's reading of Fourier. However, for Fourier work can be thought of 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 of passion as the force of attraction between subjects, just like gravity is the force of attraction between material objects. This concept transforms the character of work into one based on passions and pleasure. Thus the difference between work and consumption becomes challenged.

Fourier criticized the Saint-Simonians precisely on this ground. He argued that, rather than changing human nature, the only thing that can make men happy is to base social order on the synthesizing 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...[23]

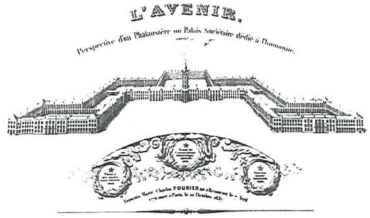
Fourier's notion has roots in St. Augustine's position on love as the metaphysical force that directs subjects through the world. Augustine wrote, "My love is my weight; it carries me wheresoever I go." Embarking from the Aristotelian notion of weight as the force of attraction that leads matter to where it naturally wants to go (the weight of fire pulls it upwards), Augustine considered love as the weight that directs the subject to either salvation or sin. For the former, love of God is operative, and for the latter, a love of the world or *amor mundi*. With its moralistic character tempered, morphing from *caritas* to *eros*, Augustine's love is functionally analogous to Fourier's passion: an existential motive force for the individual in society. In Hannah Arendt's reading of Augustine, a lifelong interest that began in her doctoral dissertation *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* (Love and Saint Augustine), she attempts to see how *amor mundi* could be the public bond, or the very foundation for a public realm grounded in morality. In this position, the love of the world, a deeply rooted desire to better humanity and the world, inspires the moral will, the "spring of action."

20
Perreymond, "Études sur la ville de Paris," *Revue générale de l'architecture et des travaux publics* 3 (December 1842): cols. 540–544, 570–579; 4 (January 1843): vols 25–37; 4 (February 1843): 72–88; 4 (September 1843): cols. 413–429; 4 (October 1843): cols. 449–469; 4 (November 1843): cols. 517–528.

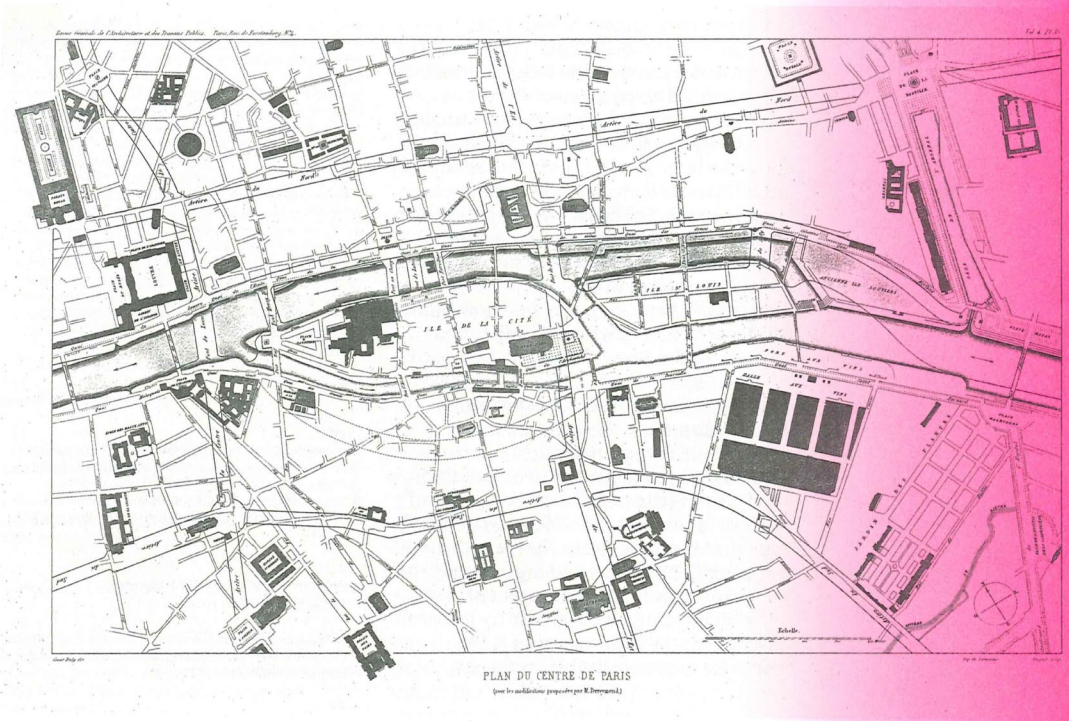
21
David Harvey, Paris, *Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

22
Perreymond, quoted in Papayanis, *Planning Paris before Haussmann*, 187.

23
Fourier, quoted in Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1962), 207.



Charles Fourier, perspective view of a phalanstery, 1834



A proposal for the development of the Paris city center by the urbanist Perreymond

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, and adultery. At the core of his thinking lay 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 (compromise, intrigue, and variety).

Fourier stressed that the main principle for achieving pleasure was to combine passions. This is also the main principle of his urbanism. He wrote that to isolate the passions and operate separately from them will fail in respect to each of them.[24] He argues that the architects should not simply take care of utility, because "one occupied only by the utility does achieve neither the useful nor the pleasant." 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."[25] These statements coincide with Lefebvre's arguments against functionalist urbanism: to conceive of the city in term of the useful, the needed, and the necessary rather than the pleasant and passionate, and to classify the needs aiming at satisfying them one after the other rather than focusing on the relationships between them. These formed the main point in Lefebvre's writings in urban sociology since the late 1950s.[26]

Thus, Fourier argued that the "unitary architecture" was the productive relationship of all senses. He wrote, "the senses are thus reliable guides for social progress," and he argued that one should think of progress as a product of sensual pleasures which are composed, collective, integral, and applicable to the public mass.[27] For example, describing the common dining 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 the art of association and putting together senses, forms, bodies, and ideas.

This idea of architecture of association is the engine of Fourier's vision of the phalanstery. The phalanstery was designed as a meeting place for diverse types who would realize a multiplicity of relationships of love and labor.[28] The phalanstery was thus conceived as an assembly of dissimilar people, of all types and ages, and their novel combinations. As Roland Barthes noticed, Fourier's principle of combination was that of a formal and arbitrary correspondence. His idea of association is not a humanist principle, bringing together everyone with the same mania, but rather one of contrast. Neither is it a liberal principle that aims at "understanding" or "admitting" passions, but rather of their enjoyment.[29]

When read in the early 1970s by Barthes and Lefebvre, who trace the emergence of the postwar 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 the main metaphor was *information*. And information was not only the paradigm for social development during the 1960s in Western societies, but also, under the influence of structuralism, the dominant

24
Fourier, *Des modifications*, 23.

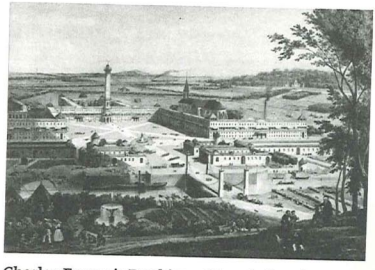
25
Fourier, quoted in Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris*, 240.

26
Henri 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): 191–198.

27
Fourier, *Des modifications*, 38.

28
Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris*, 225.

29
Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 99.



Charles-Francois Daubigny, *View of a French Phalanstery*, 1847

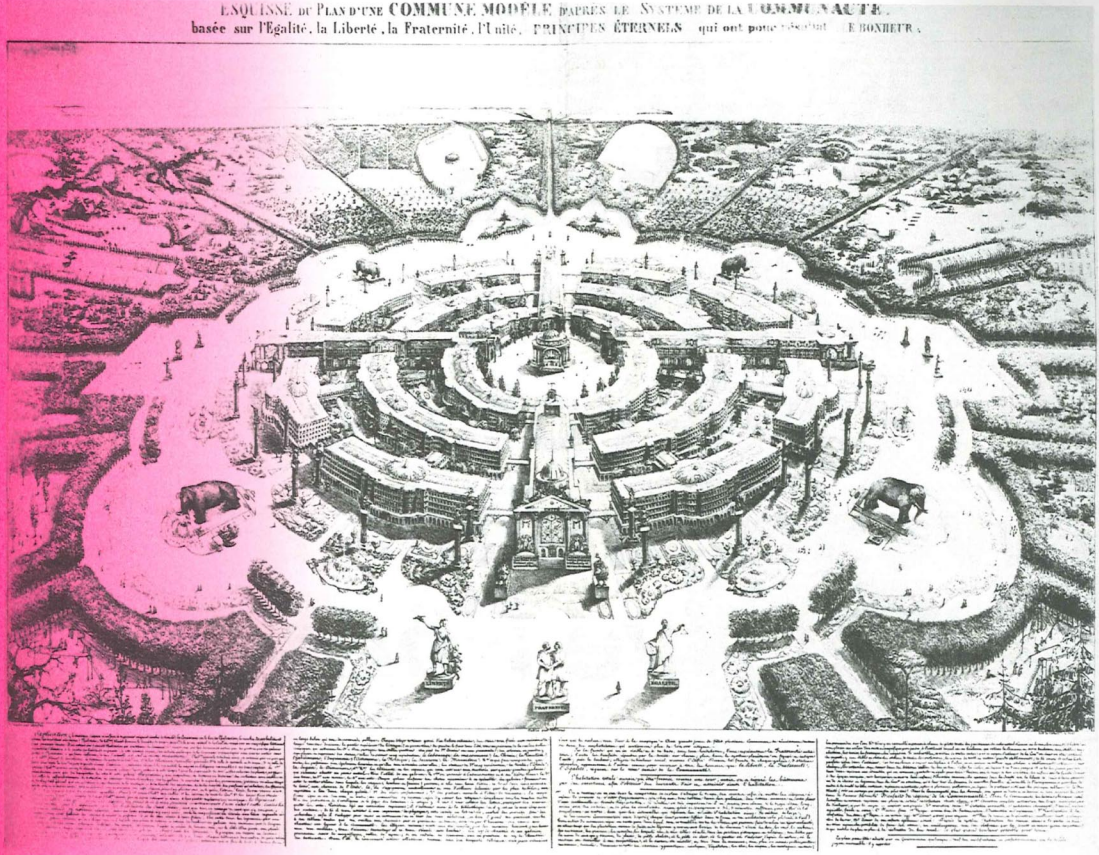
model for theorizing consumption. Both Barthes and Jean Baudrillard theorized an object of consumption was not an answer to a need, but rather a sign which obtains its meaning within a system of signs in a system of differences.[30] These theories of consumption were strikingly similar to Fourier's combinations of passions based on the differences between the people and activities involved. This connection is confirmed by the fact that Fourier's essential question–indeed one of the main reasons for his strategy of procrastination–was the essential problem of consumption: how to prevent a boredom stemming from an excess of pleasures. The populism of Fourier's writings only reinforces these links with the postwar consumer culture; his descriptions of copulating planets and oceans of lemonade were techniques that the early advertising industry later used to draw the attention of the general public. This is why, introducing *Actualité de Fourier*, Lefebvre hesitates over Fourier's work is topical as a utopian socialist or a "dystopian" socialist–or whether he is an author of a project of architecture of pleasure and spontaneity, or rather a prophet of the society of consumption and the socialized worker. In this reading, Fourier's work comes close to such projects as Archizoom's *No-Stop City*, or *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* by Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghelis. For Lefebvre, what places the actuality in Fourier's work in the cultural and political condition of the 1970s is a state of indecision between utopia and dystopia.

Contemporaneous with Fourier's projects inspired by the leisure space of the Palais Royal were the writings of the Marquis de Sade, whose vision of a sexual utopia emerged in *Philosophy of the Boudoir* (1795). The boudoir was a hermetic zone of self-gratification, exploration, and cruelty that, once sealed from all external connections, enabled liberation and endless pleasure. The Marquis de Sade writes: "Madame de Saint-Ange: Then let's go into my boudoir, where we will be more at our ease. I have already spoken to the servants. You may be certain no one else shall take it into his head to interrupt us. (*They enter the boudoir, linked arm in arm.*)"

Manfredo Tafuri, in his essay "L'Architecture dans le Boudoir: The Language of Criticism and the Criticism of Language," famously used this image of the self-gratifying utopia as a metaphor to criticize the hermeticism of the linguistic project in architecture:

> In the face of such products, the task of criticism is to begin from within the work only to escape from it as soon as possible so as not to be caught in the vicious circle of a language that speaks only of itself. Obviously the problems of criticism lie elsewhere. We do not believe in the artificial "New Trends" within contemporary architecture. Yet there is little doubt that there exists a widespread attitude that is intent on repossessing the unique character of the object by removing it from its economic and functional contexts and highlighting it as an exceptional event—and hence a surrealistic one—by placing it in parentheses with the flux of objects generated by the production system. It is possible to speak of these acts as an "*architecture dans le boudoir*." And not only because we find ourselves faced with an "architecture of cruelty," as the works of Stirling and Rossi have demonstrated with their cruelty of language-as-a-system-of-exclusions, but also because the magic circle drawn around linguistic experimentation reveals a pregnant affinity with the structural rigor of the literature of the Marquis de Sade. "There, where the stake is sex, everything must speak of sex." That is, the utopia of Eros in Sade—resolved within the discovery that the maximum freedom springs forth from maximum terror—where the whole is inscribed within the supreme constraint of a geometric structure in the narrative.

30
Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London: Verso, 2005).



Charles Fourier, a plan for a city appropriate for the sixth period, 1822