

STRUCTURE AND SOCIETY

Under such a system, there's bound to be plenty of everything, and, as everything is divided equally among the entire population, there obviously can't be any poor people or beggars. Each town, you remember, sends three representatives to the annual Lietaik, or Parliament, at Aircastle. There they collect details of the year's production, and as soon as it's clear which products are plentiful in each area, and which are in short supply, they arrange for a series of transfers to equalise distribution. These transfers are one-way transactions, requiring nothing in return – but in practice the free gifts that Town A makes to Town B are balanced by the free gifts that it receives from Town C. So the whole island is like one big household.

Utopia by Thomas More

Architecture and utopia have a long and difficult relationship. Early speculation about how the conditions of the worker in industrial society could be improved were made by businessmen like Jean-Baptiste Godin who in the tradition of industrial paternalism and influenced by the utopian political philosophy of Charles Fourier established his Familistère in Guise (1859), a remarkable experiment that was a social and economic success well into the 20th century. Another important attempt to give spatial quality came from Hansard clerk Ebenezer Howard. Inspired by his exposure to debates about social reform that were taking place in the British parliament and by the utopian science fiction of his day, for example by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* (1888), Howard wrote his *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1898), an enormously influential book whose ideas of functional segregations and the green city would provide the conceptual foundations for both the arts and crafts garden city, as well as visions of the modernist metropolis. These reactions to the excesses of industrial society were in equal measure economic, political, and spatial, making the reasonable assumption that it was only by intervening in all of these areas could a more balanced relationship between the demands of capitalism and more humane living conditions for workers be achieved. Consequently, many of the proposed measures were practical and concerned with issues of hygiene, better space standards, with leisure and self-improvement.

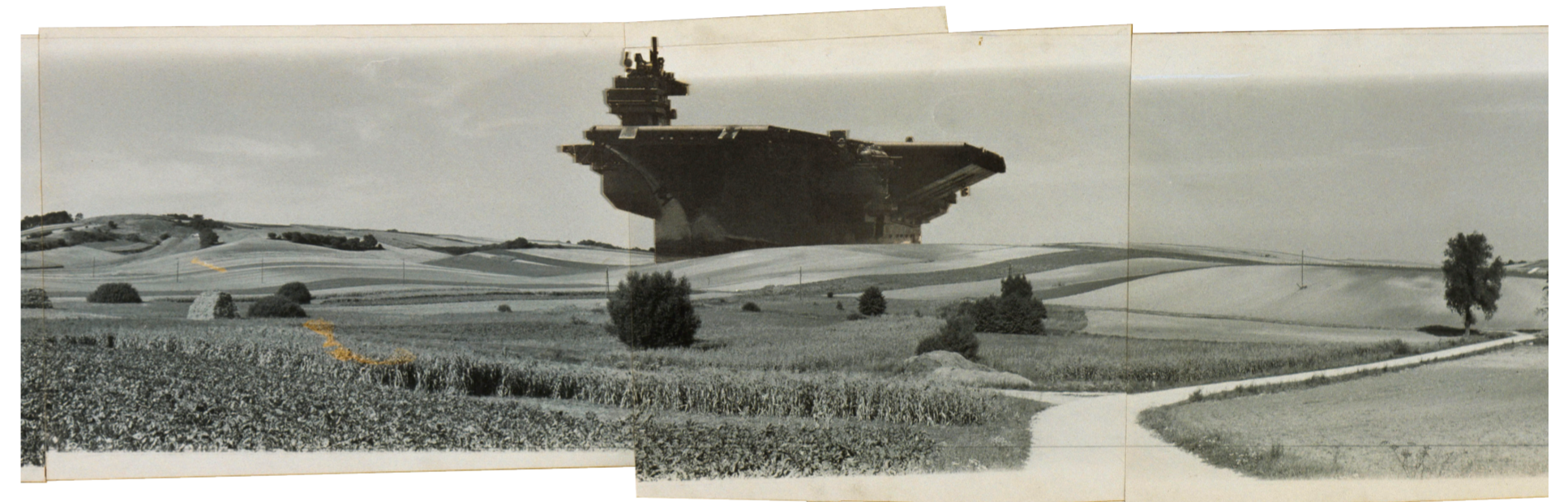
At the beginning of the twentieth century, with industrialisation fomenting political revolt, these matters became an urgent topic that spilled over from politics into the emerging culture of modernism. Spatial practice, at the scale of the building and of the city, would no longer simply be the facilitator of progressive social goals, but could itself be revolutionary. Some utopian projects, like the collective housing projects of the Soviet Union and the urbanism of Neue Frankfurt, were indelibly connected to revolutionary politics. The Narkomfin designed by Ginzburg and Milinis is a clear example of social engineering where building supports a wider project of perfecting communist humankind. Other work, while also revolutionary in form was more politically equivocal. The large buildings of Le Corbusier's Ville Contemporaine, and his later Unité d'habitation explicitly make reference to the grand hotel and the ocean liner and in his descriptions of this work Le Corbusier is enthusiastic about the heroic values of the capitalist bourgeois hierarchies that underlie his references.

We will start this semester by making a close study of utopian, and other kinds of programmatically driven projects from the distant to the recent past. We will reconstruct and analyse their formal and spatial characteristics at the same time as trying to understand as fully as possible the social, economic and political narratives that underlie their designs. Where the connection between programme and form does not seem altogether convincing we will attempt to extend this narrative so that the vision becomes more fully realised. With this knowledge about the possible relationship between programme and form we will go on to make proposals for very large buildings on four sites within the Limmattal, as a means of deepening our research and as a polemic against the never-ending extensions of the agglomeration between Zurich and Baden.

Introduction: 21 February 2017, 10 am, HIL F 61

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Hans Hollein, Aircraft Carrier City in Landscape, Exterior perspective, 1964