PART I
Theoretical Tenets
In recent years, challenges have appeared regarding architecture and urbanism which require rethinking and overcoming strategies that were conceived of in the 20th century. In the last few decades, throughout the world, large and medium cities have formed, be it through tactics of necessity or the commodification of urban land and constructions, unified by reactive, segregating, frequently hostile infrastructures. The radicality and extent of this process of urban transformation have already been heralded as the end of cities, as a “post-urban” life or as the “post-metropolis” (Habermas, 1981/1998; Choay, 1970, 1992, 1994; Soja, 2000). Or even, in another sense, the complete urbanization of society, as put forth by Henri Lefebvre in the initial moments of this process, in which the possibility of historical realization of the creative, social potentials of the urban was first glimpsed (Lefebvre, 1970/2003, p. 1). The fact is that new technologies modulate global territory in a totalizing functionality, even if it is ultimately perceived as fragmentary, individual, and local. The significations of this new space seem to drift further and further away from the former notions of the city in the West, as explained by Weber (1921/1966). At the same time, collective spatial representations, other than phantasmagoria superimposed onto dystopian scenery, seem impossible.

This late cycle of productive and spatial mutations already suggests, in itself, a possible periodization, beyond the invariable and uninterrupted deterioration of urban life since the beginning of the urban revolution: a moment of celebratory apogee (the “golden years” of neoliberalism), the 2008 financial crisis (a clear inflexion of the collective wagers on space produced by market logic), and the very recent, dramatic sanitary crisis under which these reflections are carried out. The latter brought a significant impact on all of our representations of the urban, of collective life, of proximity and distance. Furthermore, in this social environment of increasing precariousness, the geography of contamination shifts according to its biological dynamics and becomes socially stratified, particularly in countries with increased spatial segregation.

The collective logic of sanitary strategies impinges upon the individual and individualistic strategies cultivated over the last few decades with rare immediateness. Statistic calculations and scientific information are immediately translated into simple operations that, like few other times in the past, directly affect daily life and social interactions. We observe an intensification of practices of sociability which were otherwise only rehearsed or minoritarian, such as telematic calls—intimate or collective—and online commerce. Communication through social networks becomes the exclusive channel of supra-individual expression, amplifying debates,
polemics, and new mythologies with great speed. If the robotized distribution of fake news has affected the legitimacy of elections in a number of countries in recent years, it now influences the scientific truth about COVID-19, impacting social-distancing policies, as has occurred in the United States and in Brazil.

We are in the midst of the rapid construction of new social, cultural, and productive strategies that will form global society in the following decades, strategies that start from already existing instruments that will be transformed and enhanced. The newly produced social space shall be progressively dislocated into virtual and immaterial environments. This mental intensification will increasingly trigger an operative rationality in detriment of other dimensions of sensibility, another stage of the “life of the spirit,” according to Simmel’s arrangement (1903/2010). The productive machine will not relinquish its driving force, but will probably regress it into cheaper, more primitive forms, as we have already observed regarding the circulation of commodities driven, in the pandemic, by basic transport services, such as bicycle-based delivery apps. At the same time, we catch glimpses of intensified tendencies in remotely organized individual labor, rendering centralized spaces of intellectual activity obsolete. The world of information will circulate at novel speed—even in relation to the wagers of the 1990s—territorializing in connected individual or domestic spaces, the physical survival of which will only be possible through the rudimentary flexibility of product delivery.

We can imagine, in a scenario in which this new productive logic is installed without friction, that cities and large urban agglomerations might abandon their last collective meanings, even those that preceded capitalism: the spaces of market and exchanges. Thus, the resulting “urban fabric” would be a hegemony of suburbanization and peripheralization that has already been rehearsed for decades with the aim of intensifying segregation and isolation, given the risks of violence, upheaval, and contamination existing in the traditional urban fabric. Only then would this aseptic idealization of intangible accumulation become possible, the ultimate rationality of the production of value. Physico-spatial activities that maintain life itself would be realized at a degree of extreme inequality and segregation, already well imagined in fictional films. In the space of nature, meditations would also be abbreviated toward the capture of its diversity, even given increasing risks, such as the pandemics of human territory.

This is the opposite scenario in relation to the one thought possible by the Lefebvrian method, based on the new historic centrality that large cities seemed to progressively reclaim given transformations in consumer society (and that were in fact reclaimed under globalization) after over a century of industrial society’s anti-urbanity. However, the urban hypothesis, the full realization of urban society, was not an inevitability but a “virtuality,” to be constructed theoretically and through praxis (Lefebvre, 1970/2003, p. 3). Following his method—that is, seeking out and unravelling the vectors of an ongoing, if not hegemonic, transformation—we must theoretically—and progressively—construct a possibility and, from this concrete-utopian place, focus on the reality in which we find ourselves. From the intellectual perspective, this is the task at hand, even if it seems we have entered into an opaque, incomprehensible, and indeterminate reality.

If we systematically move toward dystopian scenarios, in this moment of opacity, the counter-movements of the reformulation of the role of the state—in great motion during these times that demand universalist logics and financial aids—may pass unnoticed as may new insurgent forms of solidarity, in society and in social movements. In many Brazilian favelas, mechanisms were rapidly and autonomously (without support from public powers) put into action in order to promote social distancing and the distribution of food and hygiene items. In these places, where state presence is feeble and frequently violent, the population resists the advance of the pandemic, even if partially submitted to criminal organizations. In any case, the great
rationalizing schemes promoted by the state (in ideological decline since the apex of neoliberalism) and its tactics of appropriating daily life allow us to glimpse new dynamics that might structure the production of space in the near future—as a possibility.

This periodization of space under neoliberalism rapidly historicizes the phases of the confrontation between the systemic acceleration of capitalism’s financial and global accumulation, on the one hand, and the complex social reality to which it aims to give form and subordinate on the other. This “regressive” vantage point bears special interest for discussing the relations between the schemes of architecture and urbanism and the social production of space—that is, their ideological, utopian, or pragmatic conceptions regarding city space. A further occurrence is added to this recent history with the current conjuncture of the pandemic. Analyses of the fate of cities in the post-pandemic future multiply; only the impact on urban life and its spatial forms is certain: housing units, density, free areas, mobility, etc. A radical present alters the expectations hitherto formulated about the disciplinary possibilities which react to strategic planning, the fetishization of traditional forms of the city and iconic architecture.

Architecture’s self-critical reconstruction and socially oriented critiques of recent years now shows two main vectors around which alternative themes and strategies are organized: 1) the character of the orientation of the state’s rationalizing action, which is now, during an emergency, required to carry out social and economic roles that have been largely discarded by neoliberal logic; and 2) the new forms of popular organization pressured by the forced conscience of collective (social and biological) meanings of protection and action. The criticisms directed at the minimal state and the wagers on new horizontal tactics of organization around the *commons*...
(in a more general sense that considers both common goods and common practices) must now be regulated by this rapidly accelerating conjunctural transformation. These poles (the appropriation of the state and of everyday life) can form a nucleus for reorganizing society toward greater autonomy in relation to globalization’s economic forces of disintegration. Around these poles turn the “ideologies” of architecture and urbanism. Their referent—the productive reality of late capitalism—will hardly realize systemic, qualitative changes, allowing for any semblance of greater social and environmental balance, as the American left proposes through the popularization of the Green New Deal (Chomsky, Ocasio-Cortez, etc.). A clearer environment of dispute between social forces (civil society and those present or not in the states pressured by the necessity of supra-sectorial productive rationality) and increasingly antisocial productive and financial logics become apparent. What interests us, at this moment, is only discussing the reorganization conditions for the theoretico-social foundations in the totalizing spatial imagination of a disciplinary field that has as a horizon enlightened, sensory, and programmatic intervention in the social environment—namely, architecture and urbanism.

Keeping with our disciplinary focus, here the problematic relation between architectural thought, in its hegemonic strategies and processes of urbanization since the Industrial Revolution, are taken up. In this wide cycle, we may observe two great declines: the homogenizing idealism in the age of the machine and the realisms of diversity in the age of consumers. Project strategies were elaborated upon these two socio-productive conditions that are revealed, contrary to the clearly formulated initial hypotheses, as schemes of productive rationalization, be it of territory itself or of its infrastructure; or even the symbolic schemes of the urban in the “society of the spectacle.” These formulations gave form to the two great ideological moments of the 20th century, that simultaneously reproduced both the systemic logics of industrial capitalism in its late “post-industrial” phase and its contradictions, therefore announcing its critiques as well—which are valid but uncompleted.

Let us see: the “radical architecture” of the 1920s constituted itself according to the standardization principles of ideological Fordism. A mass utopia that dislodged the systemic logic inherent to the production line into a counter-logic that resorts to the state for a social adjustment of this productive potentiality. This contradiction was explored to the limit in the “critique of ideology” that Tafuri directed at the modern movement (Tafuri, 1973/1976). An unfolding, or formalization, of the contradictions in social-democratic administration of the severe conflicts deep inside economic liberalism. Thus, the social dimension of the state—ideological or otherwise—was activated by territorial planning (productive rationality) and the supply of housing (social rationality), based on the technical neutrality of industrial logic. Triggering its emancipatory dimension was a technoscientific issue, dealing with the logical cleansing of the industrial procedures carried out by the artistic-architectural avant-garde.

This ideological critique, widely discussed in the architectural milieu, must be unfolded not only in relation to the “marginal role” or “sublime uselessness”—as Tafuri diagnoses the historical reality of the second post-war period (Tafuri, 1973/1976, p. ix, 161). Added to this “reality of the plan” (Tafuri, 1973/1976, p. 135) is an expansive strategy of productive functionality and colonization of everyday life carried out by architecture and urbanism in the years of planned economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s. Henri Lefebvre’s critiques of modern spatiality surpass its ideological character, associated with the “civilization of machines,” while simultaneously singling out its anti-urban logic, which impleads the logic of the traditional city form, reinforcing an achronic homogeneity and spatial segregation (explosion) that automate life, actualizing market abstractions and social domination in daily living. We are dealing with an emphasis on the fundamental role of space in the mechanisms of social reproduction (spatial turn), a displacement of the productive emphasis of the Industrial Revolution that accompanies
the transformation of capitalism in the 20th century. As much in its fully ideological moment in the period between the two world wars, in the political environment of German social democracy (the Siedlungen, Bauhaus), as in its operation and large-scale dissemination in urban planning following World War II, modern architecture can only be understood as an ideology that has its historical place in the environment of the state—whether contradictorily “social” or a contradictory agent of national productive planning.

Over this alienating mediation of territorial order carried out by the planning state are superimposed certain schemes specific to the “bureaucratic society of controlled consumption,” as Lefebvre names the most advanced stage of capitalism (Lefebvre, 1971/2017, p. 60). This is the passage from scarcity to abundance: “[s]uch is the predicament in which the ideology of production and the significance of creative activity have become an ideology of consumption” (Lefebvre, 1971/2017, p. 56). The new plan is now directed at organizing the meanings of the everyday and its system of values through communications and advertising. This new debased, pop universe rapidly influences the ideological reversal actualized by the theory of architecture and urbanism from the 1950s onward. Against the idealizing abstractions of the avant-garde, an attention to popular culture and modes of life is proposed. This transition corresponds to the linguistic turn and to the development of language mechanisms that rationalize the symbolic field: in our case that of urban and architectural forms. If, on the one hand, architectural culture investigates the emancipatory potential of new systems of signification, which appear as a critical turning point, on the other it retains management of the mechanisms of systemic rationalization, measuring these against the lifeworld.

We may quickly apprehend this general ideological conjuncture in relation to well-delineated concretions in the history of architecture: 1) an architectural logic that emulates the strategies
of communication and configures the urban according to vehicular movement and the communication-building perceived in motion (US: Venturi and Scott Brown); 2) a new architecture occupying an intermediate dimension between the building and the urban (clusters) that emulates a fragmented metropolitan style of street, multiplying them in height (streets-in-the-sky) in order to amplify the cultural identity associated with them, in low-income and suburban areas (UK: Alison and Peter Smithson); 3) a systematization, with an accentuated political orientation in the post–World War II context, of the vernacular constructive forms which in the 1960s were guided toward the study of urbanistic or architectural typologies of traditional cities as a basis for “the new” (Italy: Rossi); and 4) some localized experiences—especially in “combined and unequal” contexts—sought design and construction methodologies that would come nearer to popular constructive techniques and “spaces of representation” while reinforcing forms of social organization, seeking to break with the alienation resulting from the on-site division of labor. This last direction is the one most progressively distanced from disciplinary tradition, guided toward participatory political practices (self-management) critical of the state and of the foundational spatial ideologies of architecture and urbanism.

In these four great axes that structure the debate in the last few decades of the 20th century, we encounter the same conceptual displacement, going from the sharpness of the rational object, aesthetically conceived of according to its internal laws, to a conflicting, relational system between architecture (its exchange and use value) and all that involves it, socially. Each cultural conjuncture defined its architectural other, all pointing in the direction of the diversity of forms of living, of popular culture, opposed to the abstract forms of modernity’s schemes of objective rationality. These abstract forms, professing their own rationality, ended up revealing the abstractions of economic equivalences and their “systemic functionality”—an undue overload, according to Habermas (1981/1998, p. 423), that led to the crisis, or collapse, of architectural modernity in the second half of the 20th century. A perspective directed at “lifeworld” or to “everyday life” intended to revert the framework of totalizing—and totalitarian—abstractions of industrial society, leading humanity and its spaces into unforeseen stages of social alienation.

This disciplinary movement was in tune with the cultural movement forming around new subjective expressions in mass culture, whose main characteristic would be a critique of
modernity’s institutions, such as the state and politics, the bourgeois family, erudite art, etc. Just as in the case of the historical avant-garde and radical architecture (the experiences with housing and the urban of the late 1920s), the 1960s and 1970s present a theoretical radicalization that sought to institute alternative disciplinary strategies to those disseminated by high modernism.

An eruption of signs communicated strongly with the great urban masses that prefigured changes in social order. Forms of architecture and of the city (gathered in a vast, socially extroverted repertoire) eschewed in a freer, more intense relation between the population and its space, even if this was done through very different strategies, which were sometimes antagonistic (history and consumption, for example). Their interlocutors would be the memorative-individual, constructor-individual, the imaginative-individual, consumer-individual, and bodily-individual, as opposed to the Corbusian type-individuals. Signs, then, that are clearly attached to well-identified social contents, whose creative manipulation would allow for the genesis of relations and large-scale changes.

However, this linguistic operation, arising from the techniques of the avant-garde, dealt with a supposed double liberation: of the signified and of signifiers, taking into account the inextricable relation between the two. The displacement toward language and communication that the second post-war period took up was at the same time the negation of contents in a process of commodification that broke with the contours of industrial commodity. In this sense, postmodernity can be understood as the “random play of signifiers . . . [that] ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of pre-existing texts, the building blocks of cultural order and social production,” according to Fredric Jameson’s synthesis (1991, p. 95). A reifying specialization of social relations would expedite and expand the production of images, whose sense is given by the circulation of the values of global financialization.

The process that led from the more or less engaged research of the 1960s (all of which are certainly critical of high modernism) toward a process of integration into the logics of financial globalization is widely disputed, especially after the 2008 economic crisis, even if it predates it (Jameson, 1991, p. 96). It is, however, more interesting and explanatory to avoid the diagnosis of systemic cooptation of a well-intentioned nucleus of critical propositions about the exterior (whether social, historical, or trivial) determinations of architecture and urbanism, which at another time had imagined itself as functional, technical, and therefore autonomous. Surely there are experimentation and reflections of the 1960s and 1970s, before the generalization of postmodern style, that still await the unravelling of its social and aesthetic radicality. However, the development of the critical dynamics reacting to the normalization of architectural modernism should be considered within an “ideological” dialectics of the modern cultural process, that is, the fact that our antagonistic critical capacity does not escape the permanent capitalist productive revolution in search of new frontiers of value. A dialectic of architectural reason, simultaneously involved in actual social (and productive) processes, extracting from them utopian, totalizing perspectives. This dialectical reason was in fact a contradictory unitary movement that required analyses seeking to identify critical edges, in the set of proposals, that could not be smoothed out in the process of actualization or concretization.

Thus, almost all critical content can be incorporated into a new phase of accumulation, given that they single out social impasses that pressure the productive order, and can therefore suggest ways to renovate it. In the specific case of architecture and urbanism, a disposition of important strategies toward forms of life in their variety and historicity, as we have already pointed out, can be identified since at least the 1960s. It is worth noting now that this plethora of signs and forms that mediate social experiences of space, elaborated by architectural culture, have created the urban as images that could be managed in myriad manners by consumer-oriented productive reorganization. This is something quite similar, apparently, to the process described by
Fredric Jameson (1984), with ample validity in his 1960s periodization. In this case, it is better to resort to the author’s own words:

Yet this sense of freedom and possibility—which is for the course of the 60s a momentarily objective reality, as well as (from the hindsight of the 80s) a historical illusion—may perhaps be best explained in terms of the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another.

(Jameson, 1984, p. 208)

This “freeing or unbinding of social energies” corresponds to the impulse of globalization. Following a new profusion of images and behaviors came an ordering, mitigation, and accretion of value, reproducing the infinitely varied surface of new cultural commodities counterposed to its essence of abstract, economic equivalence. Architecture, the hollowed-out emblem of content in the process of social modernization, made its powerful communicative apparatus available in order to compose, in a privileged manner, the imaginary of the particular moment. So much so that the historicism and provocative pastiche of the 1980 Venice Biennale (“La Presenza del Passato” and especially the “Strada Novissima” exhibition) went beyond architectural debates and became a mark in the philosophical argument represented by the controversy between Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard (Lyotard, 1979/1984; Habermas, 1980/1983).

The confluence between the strategies of architecture and financial globalization, however, became more profound when large cities became not only the locus of social production and reproduction but also mechanisms of accumulation in and of themselves. If, in modernity, the metropolis was represented as a “total machine,” equating society and industrial production, in the economic order of the cultural turn it becomes a corporation-city, as has been widely interpreted by critics and supporters of the current process alike. Managed as an organization, it becomes simultaneously a product to be commercialized, in competition with other cities for a role in globalization.

A digression can now be made with the objective of situating with greater precision the movement of privatization in the logic of architecture and urbanism, seeking to historically (and spatially) identify the fundamental elements at play, their systemic relations, and what equations are possible for the coming future. Or, better yet, identify the problems posed by these historical elements, indicating possibilities. Bearing in mind, always, that all of these issues of complex social dimensions are here schematically cut out in order to discuss their relations to the disciplinary field of architecture and urbanism.

The condition that dissipates the complexity of social life and expands its dimension of “exchange value” (resorting to Lefebvre’s urban dialectic) reaches a paroxysm in the last two decades of the 20th century and in the first decade of the 21st century, in what we may call the apex of neoliberalism. The twofold determination of cities (the space of second nature) as œuvre and produit gives them a dynamic, unstable constitution. The fact is, however, that we may imagine a capitalist historical circuit whose origin point is the city that negates feudal order. Its apex is reached when this phenomenon (the urban) inoculated with new forms of division of labor and intensification of commerce destroys the hegemony of its original pole, the rural. In the budding cities of the late medieval era, the contents in representations of social and community values that were configured in the urban form are unified under the rationalizing impulses of nascent capitalism, under a great social oppression, creator of great œuvres. The extraordinary
art of the period was in and for the city, an affirmation of the cultural force of the commercial bourgeoisie.

An unstable equilibrium rapidly played out: to the extent that the network of cities as autonomous political units proved insufficient for the great task of the ongoing productive revolution. A centralizing of power becomes necessary, and the nation state grows stronger in a territory overseen by a capital. However, according to Lefebvre’s brief and instigating itinerary: “when exploitation replaces oppression, creative capacity disappears” (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 67). Cities thus lose the great representations of “lived space,” and a new spatial order is eschewed, in the transition from commercial to industrial capitalism. Philosophy is reencountered in rationalism and constitutes the state–individual dichotomy. From its roots in expropriation and violence, the capitalist state acquires a universal dimension and becomes the vanishing point of a rational society. The city and the metropolis lose their leading role in collective representations and become a subsidiary phenomenon of the productive process, a place for consumption. Factories and workers alike are displaced toward the periphery, and the representations of the productive unit that is the large city (production, distribution, consumption) are fragmented and, most of all, reveal their apparent chaos. In this moment, the imploding of the meaning of the city is actualized dialectically in the generalization of the urban, of urban society (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 71).

As we have seen, a resuming of the significations of the city occurred in a moment of productive modifications internal to industrial capitalism, in the 1960s, with movement since the end of World War II. The architectural and urbanistic debate discussed earlier may now acquire a new outline: the centrality of large cities in the new management of globalization. Lefebvre is one of the first to pick up on this change, in its initial stages. This critical moment is at the base of social virtualities and the wager on the right to the city. Capitalism repositions large cities as administrative, financial, and consumer centers, while the contradictions arising therefrom eventually explode in the revolts of the late 1960s. An expectation of urban revolution was critically revisited in the preface to the new edition of The Production of Space, in 1985 (Lefebvre, 1974/2000, pp. xvi–xxviii), when the political and economic framework allowed for no more great expectations of change and neoliberal globalization became hegemonic.

If the capitalist city has its origins in the intensity of the spatial representations of a developing modern society, in which “exchange value” and “use value” balance each other out in fleeting, mutual enhancement, we are spectators of, at least since the 1980s, an unemancipated return to origins. That is, if financial capitalism returns to cities as the commercial capitalism that originally belonged to them, this globalized return does not reproduce the social expectations that were, and still are, possible in urban environments (simultaneity and heterogeneity). However, if the spatial and social constructive aspects of capitalism were annihilated in this process, its negative, destructive dimensions, which were also original, may have prevailed. A sort of dialectics of the urban that, as far as we can tell, stagnates now in the dilution of all preceding socio-spatial forms. The indicated circuit, or short-circuit, closes, perhaps momentarily, in this brutal remission, amplified by apparatuses of control and communication—an oppressive, non-creative exploitation. A remission to the city as simulation, reification, and spectacle. The ideological reunification of the volatile signifiers of the city, operated by the “logic” of financial capitalism, produced, in extremis, colossal phantasmagoria, as we may observe in the East Asian frontiers of globalization.4

The same must have occurred in regard to the state, as the maximal institution of the modern world, to which is assigned fully rational action. This fable, that also has its own dialectic, was already constructed in the 20th century: the irruption of irrationality in the very inside of the
ideal form of modern rationality (this Hegelian moment is exactly the dialectical moment as such). The capitalist state also returns to its violent origins, taking its bourgeois universality as exhausted. Or, better yet, operates on two different levels: exercising a universal power in which justice is no longer the rule but the exception to it. This device, as discussed by Agamben (2003/2005), closes out the ideological cycle of the state, at least in the original sense of the term.

It is of interest, however, to draw a specific and fairly schematic relation between this ideological moment and architecture/urbanism. That is, a reconstruction of its set of ideals after the city’s loss of “organic quality of form” (Tafuri, 1973/1976, p. 14) that followed the crisis of the ancien régime. Not in order to retell it, which seems unnecessary, but in order to emphasize the spatial bases over which architecture and urbanism will develop in industrial society, or better yet, as Lefebvre advises, in urban society.

The absolute state, agent of mercantilism, begins after the bourgeois revolutions to play a leading ideological role, to the extent that the structuring action of industrial society becomes increasingly determined by economic forces. Contradictions arise from this fact, of which the Communist Manifesto is the greater symptom. Social division—into classes—demands from this “universal” institution a different sort of reaction: coercion, maintained as the strong arm of the market and its logic; or mediation, creating mechanisms of social protection and politics allowing for economic advances, in a wide sense. It is a nationally possible equation, which increasingly creates conflicts, given the unequal condition of international markets. That is, from the second half of the 19th century onwards, capitalism will engender the wars and revolutions of the first decades of the 20th century, the environment of the modern avant-garde (itself a self-proclaimed alternative to capitalist chaos).

It is in this context of modernity—and urban society—that the capitalist state restructures itself in order to (at the same time in which it drives the conditions of production) administer society as a whole, aligning it to this end. We bring up this well-known fact in order to reinforce that the disciplinary reorganization of architecture, as much as the creation of the discipline of urbanism, are both given in this context—reinforcing, then, Tafuri’s analysis of the cycle of “architectural ideology,” through a different emphasis. This becomes necessary given that, in a different manner than that of the Italian architect, it is important at the moment to bring into focus the contradictions of this ideological state (the political superstructure dealing with the infrastructural conditions of capital’s production and reproduction) and the aforementioned disciplinary reorganization. This, considering that the relation between ideological (technoscientific) superstructure and modern art and architecture, in the context of the industrial, Fordist revolution, is already established by the tradition of critical theory, to which Tafuri is indebted at least in part.

Architecture and urbanism accomplished a crucial ideological task: that of giving form to the social in the precise moment that liberalism progressively eliminated the contents of the social sphere, in favor of emphases on the individual and his free market agency. The representation of the spaces of “society” became increasingly abstract, as did the economic forces that began to rule over the bonds between individuals. The same is true of the new discipline, urbanism, and its defining ideological character, of representing unity for the increasingly fragmented reality of the 19th-century industrial metropolis. The life and cities of the past allowed for finite and sensitive knowledge, a world enmeshed in an absolute, unknown infinity; the space of the metropolis, on the other hand, is infinite, and totality (universal knowledge) are now volatile, inapprehensible. Giving social and spatial sense to the industrial world was the primary ideological task of European architecture after the Enlightenment.
The contradictions of industrial society erupt in the space of large cities while a desire for order intensifies. In them, liberal principles encounter their imminent limits: precarious housing, congestion, epidemics, fires, and so many spatially revealed inconveniences that plague early-19th-century metropolises. In his book, itself an inflexion of the gaze directed at the city and its living conditions, Engels writes:

A town, such as London, where a man may wander for hours together without reaching the beginning of the end, without meeting the slightest hint which could lead to the inference that there is open country within reach, is a strange thing . . . all this is so vast, so impressive, that a man cannot collect himself, but is lost in the marvel of England’s greatness before he sets foot upon English soil.

(Engels, 1845/1993, p. 36)

Chaos and order compose a binome that runs throughout “urban society” and sits at the base of realist (chaos) and utopian (order) representations of the large city. Social order, in utopian socialism, was imagined outside of the space of the metropolis, in isolated regions such as the Sai phalanstère in Santa Catarina, Brazil, and the New Harmony Community, in Indiana, U.S.A. Engels himself analyses these experiences:

It was necessary, then, to discover a new and more perfect system of social order and to impose this upon society. . . . These new social systems were foredoomed as utopian.

(Engels, 1878/1987, p. 246)

This desire for order, however, precedes the eruption of chaos in large cities and initiates an ideological confrontation already present in liberalism’s first revolutionary moments. The 18th century then would observe a formal “loss of order” that would guarantee unity between exceptional objects (buildings, squares, gardens, etc.) and the whole of the city. New requirements are presented to architecture: geometric systematization, typologies, constructive rationalities and, most importantly, giving form to the “social” (Tafuri, 1973/1976). With the Enlightenment and with industrial society appear vectors of formal extroversion, regularly multiplying autonomous forms which tended toward pure geometry. This means that new formal and spatial strategies pressure architecture toward the whole of the city (nascent urbanism). The representations of the urban in early liberalism tended to fracture into a unitary totality (which increasingly conflicts with the growing disorder of the industrial city) and a heterogeneous whole that acquires its virtue in the free actualization of fragments of space.

We may now see clearly the ideological function of this new “social architecture”: to the extent that the urban form fractures and is distended, urbanism and architecture acquire the task of unifying space and giving it meaning (modern society itself). This impulse of spatial organization has, in practice, two main components—namely, the organization of productive territory (pieces of space) and the social utopias which bear a social significance allowed for by new technologies of production (general space). These unfold into techniques of extensibility—or, in the 20th century, of reproduction—and techniques of communication in the new contents, now no longer self-evident, given that they are jettisoned by the totalizing sense of tradition.

Manfredo Tafuri, again, best interprets the crisis of “organicity” in the formal unity of the European Baroque, the world of the ancien régime. The Jesuit abbot Laugier suggests, in his 1753 Essay on Architecture, regarding “the city like a forest” (Tafuri, 1973/1976, p. 6). He takes
up the idea again in his book *Observations on Architecture*, from 1756, stating that cities must be built with “squares, crossroads, streets. There must be regularity and fantasy, relationships and oppositions, and casual, unexpected elements that vary the scene; great order in the details, confusion, uproar, and tumult in the whole” (Tafuri, 1973/1976, p. 4).

These observations are, for Tafuri, “the acceptance of the anti-perspective character of urban space” (Tafuri, 1973/1976, p. 4). The logical counterpoint to this picturesque aesthetic applied to the spaces of cities (“the tumult in the whole”) is the naturalization of unity. The well-known fable of the primitive hut as the origin of architecture is also attributed to the abbot. Contrary to Vitruvius, who lived in the last century BC, Laugier describes a primordial scene in which man, alone in nature and in imitation of it, constructs the first house that is the origin of all construction (columns, entablatures, frontispieces, etc.). It precedes the (social) construction of temples, serving otherwise as their model. This elaboration has its origins in the Renaissance interpretations of the Vitruvian Treaty that describes the original house.

This lone man, who ultimately seeks shelter from the elements, deals exclusively with nature. The creative impulse is, therefore, individual. It is not far removed from the solitude of another original being, that possessing something in greater quantity than is needed, exchanges it for something that someone else has left over. In “Origin and Use of Money” in his 1776 *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith (1776/2000) similarly seeks out the creative impulse underlying the complex mercantile operations of the modern world. Accordingly, an “invisible hand” allows for the transformation of individual action into collective virtues: a heterogenous whole resulting from the isolated actions of individual exchanges and their objective of maximizing profit.

The liberal city, however, will announce its limits early on. Individualized action, at least in its relations to the spaces of cities, did not reach collective virtue. Macro-interventions, following Haussmann’s Paris model, spread throughout Europe. As the opposing pole to liberal beliefs,
these interventions were conceived of by centralizing states, who ripped the traditional urban fabric imposing new typologies for new centers of consumption.

Thus, in most cases, rigorous design and control of the collective dimensions of cities was guaranteed, through typologies inherited from traditional cities, from the Middle Ages through the Baroque period. In the exemplary case of the Cerdà plan in Barcelona (1860), the expansion of the urban grid (ensanche) freed up the overpopulated and unhealthy old city (which, nonetheless, kept existing). Ensured by royal power, these transformations guaranteed the profit interests of the local bourgeoisie, who rapidly built homes in newly urbanized areas. The plan composed a rigorous general structure that created the characteristic manzanas (quadrate blocks with beveled corners), later subdivided into private lots. This was a result of liberal capitalism. That is, of its incapacity to propose general urban hypotheses resulting from the entrepreneurial impulses of the individual capitalist alone. Private exploitation of land required certain formal or legal parameters in order to function, even if this was never quite understood on these terms.

A pragmatic, less inspired, albeit more economically successful version of this was the tracing of the New York grid in the early 19th century, the basic arrangement of which guaranteed functional aspects of circulation (large streets and orthogonal avenues) and allowed for maximal occupation of the lots composing each block, impelled even further through widespread use of the elevator from the late 19th century onward. This simple, constructively permissive urban arrangement allowed for the creation of a new constructive typology, the multifunctional skyscraper.

FIGURE 1.5 Aerial view of Barcelona in the region of the city’s expansion with the morphology defined by Ildefonso Cerdà’s project (1859). Photo taken in 2007.
The New York scheme applies simple, clear rules, with minimal interference, in order to guarantee that individual agents create their best possible business opportunities. This “whole,” contrary to Laugier’s, no longer seeks spontaneous variety but programmed regularity. Variety is restricted to lots and their implausible skyscrapers, especially between the late 19th century and the Great Depression in the 1930s. Beyond this restriction to lots, variety can be counterproductive and must be controlled, even if it runs contrary to the autonomous impulses of capital. The public virtues of private action, that dictum of revolutionary liberalism, were no longer a guarantee nor even a necessity, given the acceleration of monopolist accumulation.

The “European” arrangement, still tied to certain emblems of civilization and to a supposedly universalist rationality, bore the increasingly heavy load of being the regulating force of nation states. This presence is related to the efforts of late industrialization in continental Europe, the very condition of unequal capitalist modernization. Rationalizing productive stimuli hovered ideologically above the immediate profit evaluations of private capitalists. This rationality was increasingly required, especially given the most evident conflict: metropolitan chaos in conflict with the remaining historical city (order).

The growing political influence of the working class in this context of metropolization—be it in revolutionary struggle or the rise of worker’s parties—incited directly on schemes of spatial representation. Thus, the failure of the metropolis would also be superseded by a spatiality understood as proletarian. Berlage, in the early 20th century, defined the “residential block” in opposition to the “degeneration of form he saw being applied by architects to each house separately” (Grinberg, 1982, p. 44). This situation of spatial—and social—unravelling could be overcome by a new formation: “standardized, repeated dwelling units would be a valid and representative aesthetic of the working class” (Grinberg, 1982, p. 48). This new rationalized urban order, in which traditional urban structures still remain (streets, squares, blocks, etc.), organizes

![São Paulo skyline. At the center of the image is Copan, designed by Oscar Niemeyer (1966). Photo taken in 2011.](image-url)
the variety and homogeneity of the city of the future, the socialist city. Thus, economic chaos (liberalism), social chaos (class struggle), and spatial chaos (metropolis) funnel social imagination toward a rationality already far removed from the real city. The rupture, in a general sense, depersonalized social agents around the absolute homogenization of types which, contradictorily, deepened the domination of mental schemes of economic value. Proletarian and industrial aesthetics—both imaginary—became fused pari passu with the rationality of the social process.

The convergence of the principles, strategies, and solutions devised by the historical avant-garde in the second half of the 1920s culminates in a radical synthesis carried out by architecture. These radical vectors were mostly concentrated in central Europe and in the experiences of a roaming Le Corbusier. Germany and Austria host the most advanced processes, regarding the great problem, generalized after the first World War, of workers’ housing. To configure this type of housing became modern architects’ main urbanistic strategy, as we may observe in the German hegemony at the second CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne), the object of which was the minimum housing unit, in 1929.

The advance of the crises of liberalism, felt most of all in Europe because of the war effort, began to set off “desires for order,” which were repressed by liberal ideologies. Tafuri then defines the daring urban and architectural (in this case there is no difference between the terms) projects of the late 1920s: the ideology of the Plan. The productive and social disorganization of liberal capitalism was reaching its limit, and prefigurations of the programmed rationality were constructed mainly through a functional architecture.

This contradiction between the rational order of the factory and the social disorder of the city was confronted most immediately by social democracy (both German and Austrian). The consolidation of German industry was a well-articulated state strategy for overcoming the structural deficiencies of its late industrialization. This strategy involved developing and teaching industrial design, which culminated in the foundation of the Bauhaus in 1919. During the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), architects participated intensely in public administration, developing admirable housing policies. Various housing complexes—Siedlungen—were rapidly built through the development of the civil construction industry.

Located in the unoccupied outskirts of large German cities, these complexes were, according to Tafuri, an “oasis of order,” of spatial and social rationality (Tafuri, 1973/1976, p. 119). They could be counterposed, without interference, in metropolitan “disorganicity,” for which radical architecture had found no answer. The empty lots of the outskirts provided no resistance to the new plan, contrary to cities, those spaces governed by the most direct productive logic of industrial capital. This contradiction reproduces that of social democracy, responsible for administering the social unbalance generated by an unaltered productive process.

This culminates in the radical proposals of Ludwig Hilberseimer, a teacher at the Bauhaus before its deactivation by the Nazi government. In his book Metropolisarchitecture (1927/2014), he proposed the quintessential ideology of the Plan, of the Fordist-Taylorist logic which drove architectural rationality. The housing unit is built through components that form cells, which in turn form buildings, which then form the totality of the territory made available through a rational (industrial) imperative.

At that moment, the ideological formulation of state-sponsored planning, as much as the actual political struggle between the Weimar Republic and the National Socialist party, arrived at a final confrontation. From then on, coinciding with the general crisis of the early 1930s, planning was actualized, as always, as its very opposite: the economic and military planning that ushered in a new stage of capitalism, the first chapter of which was global totalitarianism and authoritarianism.

The economic planning that characterized the hegemonic social state in Europe after World War II also involved constructing collective housing solutions for workers on a massive scale.
However, the large-scale housing projects built after 1945 created working-class ghettoes that had little in common with the original schemes of modern architecture, universals. During those years, Fordism was effectively applied to industry, leaving behind the mass utopias that inspired architects in the interwar period. Translated into mass housing, road-based transportation, and zoning, modern architecture and urbanism began to play the role of vehicles in capitalism’s global expansion.

The spaces reserved for the working classes were based, in these European experiences of the 1950s and 1960s, on the homogenous, regular extensibility associated with a life-flattening functionality. In the cities, however, these vectors of extensibility were constricted by the limits of the lot. In this operative moment of modern ideology, freed from social utopias, vectors of formal extroversion crash against those of formal introversion. The glass tower, proposed by the so-called international style, which eventually became the symbol of big corporations, combines the centripetal rotation of skyscrapers with the requirements of reproducibility and expansion that erupt within the formal, constructive logic of the building itself. An analysis of the Seagram Building, completed in 1958 in New York, allows us to understand the sophisticated aesthetic strategies in which this contradictory unification (of universality and particularity) was formally resolved. The same tower was, incidentally, designed by a great master of modern architecture, Mies van der Rohe, the Bauhaus’s final director before its deactivation in 1933.

This is a well-known contradiction between technical advances, allowing for large-scale reproduction and multiple social restrictions, such as property relations. The Seagram Building achieves a complex formal synthesis, becoming the symbolic and constructive paradigm for capitalism’s new phase of planetary expansion. To do this, the building required the potential representations of modern space, as both homogeneous and infinite, even if it was in part restricted to the unit of a lot on the New York grid.

This particular example, with its promising future as corporate architecture-image, serves to mark the end, in big cities, of the distinction between building form and exterior form (block, city, or plan). Not even the pragmatism of the New York grid can condition the internal constitutive vectors of the building as a unit. The recent constructive boom in supertall skyscrapers already confuses the Manhattan skyline with that of any other postmodern city built anywhere else: random units are juxtaposed according to random urbanism, acquiring meaning that directly associates the image of financial capitalism with a hallucinatory sensibility.

According to our argument, the fragile structures of urban form vanish. Specifically, those that had conditioned a mediating social arrangement, between abstract rationality and the intimate life of everyday, producing the meaning of “society” (“there’s no such thing as society,” said Margaret Thatcher). Contemporary big cities offer, in place of this mediation, a planned, alienating estrangement. This process occurs according to the movement of fragilization of the political ideologies of the state, which became accentuated and globalized (save for some well-known exceptions) in the 1980s. If neoliberalism is the “new way of the world,” as Dardot and Laval (2009/2013) argue, it is not enough to identify the economic processes behind the buildings and the spectacular urban interventions of private initiatives (mainly through corporation-states) but rather to identify the extensive production of new subjectivities. With this in mind, the schizophrenic space that Jameson (1991, p. 25) writes of becomes the fundamental inductor/induced (Lefebvre, 1968/1996, p. 65) of this process.

We identify, thus, political ideologies (the state) with the structuring forces of urban form that would order and direct the economic processes of industrial capitalism. Therefore, subordinated to autonomous economic processes and subject to cyclical crises, urban ideologies
remain the twofold character of ideology: making the expansion of accumulation viable while attributing to it a universal meaning. That is to say, the internal laws of liberal economy (competing individuals) possess social value and form both society and the city. The greater the crisis and economic uncertainty (crises of liberal ideologies), the greater the representations of order and spatial rationality of architecture and urbanism become. In these moments the state becomes reinforced, as does (spatial, economic, military, sanitary) planning.

The neoliberal assault on states and planning is, therefore, much more of an attack on their political ideologies, to the extent to which the various state functions and capacities are summoned for an economic project, such as military power and investment in communication infrastructures. Urban planning has been all but eliminated from the state’s collection of social strategies, and urban space is now managed and appropriated by corporate logic or precarious occupation. If, at the height of social democracy, the block and planning carried out the mediation between profit and general urban logic, in the last few decades this state-sponsored mediation resides in its financial, bureaucratic corporatization, which allows for the attribution of value. The spatial dimension becomes de-territorialized, and urban territory becomes the representation of an other (spectacular) order, not a mirage of the social.

This somewhat erratic itinerary had as its objective the establishment, as we said, of beacons and conditioning principles for rethinking the disciplinary strategies of architecture and urbanism. We know this discipline is historically constituted in vast theoretical formulations (treaties, manifestos, theories, etc.), which in turn are incessantly confronted with social and constructive practices. It cannot remain in the field of conceptual constructs, isolated or ignorant of a perspective of spatial intervention. This is its specificity among fields of knowledge. Only the permanent critique of its underlying principles and actualizations can promote socially desirable transformations. A first task consists in comprehending the historical processes leading to a systemic crisis in a determined time and place, identifying the structuring elements of a phenomenon and projecting, through rearrangement, new possibilities. In other words, as Lefebvre says, scientific truth is conditioned by the projection of a concrete utopia, a virtuality within reality (Lefebvre, 1970/2003, p. 5).

The crisis of neoliberalism, the historical mark of which takes us back to 2008, is currently undergoing its paroxysm. We stand before terrifying possibilities. However, the radical nature of the process set off by the ongoing global pandemic allows for values which had been submerged in the “new way of the world” to rise to the surface. In keeping with the interests of this discussion, we observe a double signification: the urgency of the everyday, with its practice and vital necessities and scientific/rational knowledge, universal and socially constructed (the latu sensu modern). Modernity was an attempt to unify these poles of social existence, an integral functional rationalization of life, which encountered limits and provoked regressions and dehumanization.

All of a sudden, in a few weeks, the global world began to depend on this polarity of existence, faced with the risk of immeasurable tragedy. This critical conscience of neoliberal undoing (of individual and collective life) is an unquestionable social energy of the moment, which is not to say that positive transformations will necessarily derive from it. However, we are dealing with an unexpected conjuncture as well as a rare reaction of self-preservation that actually gets the prognostic right (society and collaboration). Scientific knowledge and daily practices become realigned as survival strategies, whether individual or collective. Of course this energy does not necessarily have political form, to the extent that, in this logic of social management, these no longer have sense or effectiveness. The question is: what form will it assume? Will it dissipate?
These answers cannot be given through a partial strategy, as is the case with what we discuss here. However, the emergence of this resignified polarity (between the state/society and everyday life) puts into question the foundations of disciplines that have the city (the mediation of these poles) as its main object of knowledge and transformation. The modern disciplinary formation of architecture and urbanism can be directly associated with liberal ideology, as Manfredo Tafuri realized, or with political ideology (qua instrument of the state) as our own argument suggests. Thus, we can imagine that little remains of it under this perspective, especially after being at the front of the spatial hallucinations of economic financialization. A problem considered here in a restricted manner, but which serves as a counterpoint to a crucial social question, is the role of the state in the next cycle. To it is attached the possibility of disciplinary reorganization, to the extent that the socially required rationalizing mechanisms have, in our case, a fundamental role to carry out. Thus, we depend also on the meaning of this necessary rationalization: a less economic, more creative appropriation of the city or the deepening of the cybernetic panopticon already under way.

The proposed debate should consider, however, a modification that is as important as it is problematic: a reorientation toward daily life, which has been severely impacted and transformed by the current moment. Initially identified with “hard” superstructures—a “systemic functionality,” which for Habermas meant a “categorial error” (Habermas, 1981/1998, p. 423)—architecture and urbanism rehearsed a number of possible approaches to this subjective, bodily aspect of space: from vernacular research and tradition to the dimension of labor and material production of low-income housing (which was believed to bear emancipatory qualities). A considerable amount of these approaches ended up contributing to disciplinary dilution, which, in the terms of our argument, implies the negation of state ideologies and, therefore, of the more general possible representations of urban space in a rationalized society. At least in regards to the social potentials of urban life, which are historically constituted through continuities and ruptures. The political conjuncture of the 1960s allowed for wagers on self-management as the advanced social form of the social state and its achievements, which seemed irreversible. In central countries, this meant the possible changes in the democratic, advanced social organization of some or all of state functions, in a consolidated urban environment. In peripheral countries, however, experiences in self-management remained in many cases closer to survival tactics or to an administration of precariousness. One question remained unanswered: what to do with territory, collective spaces, infrastructure, or the right to the city, especially in places with no assistance from these dimensions, precisely because of the absence of the social state (and the presence of the political state).

The suggestion is that there exists, underway, in the best possible hypothesis concerning the immediate future, a reconfiguring of social life which might require a new order of relations between the social state and the processes of popular antinomy. Since the mediation between abstract social structures and daily life was historically actualized by the city and urban experience, a critical reformulation of architecture and urbanism as disciplines must follow and explore this possibility. What urban spaces catalyze this new configuration? It is no longer about the fact that this shift should be preceded by another, broader one, but about helping to create the spaces in which these shifts, constant and always humanizing, may appear. Homogeneity and segregation, two favorite topics of modern strategies, led society to unforeseen levels of alienation and individualism. Counter-hegemonic spaces, however, do not appear outside of a direct, intense relationship with the processes and initiatives of automatization that exist and may be manipulated in the coming years. Therefore, it is a synthesis between disciplinary strategies and popular tactics that does not consider these polarities in a positive way, but as contradictory, fluent realities.

The state, doubtless the most problematic dimension of this configuration, should not be considered a unified monolith, with unidirectional actions. The “state-finance” nexus, deepened in
recent years by these states becoming indebted (Harvey, 2014, p. 46), determines all other functions that are under the controlled budget of the economic nucleus. This does not occur, however, without conflicts and instability between the different parts and activities that form what we call “government.” This is the sense behind our insistence on the ideological dimension of architectural action; let it be in this environment that we might produce friction between those actions, those unkept promises. In them are the representations of a rational, human society, that can serve as a basis, for lack of a better one, for reorganizing everyone’s efforts. This was a difficult horizon to glimpse in recent years. An actual possibility opens up, at the moment when rational and human procedures flow into each other, even if these conflict with an also-dominant irrationality. There is no doubt that irrational processes of the instrumentalization of life around economically destructive objectives is hegemonic. We must think of possible schemes for confronting them.

Notes
1. Class and race trace the dissemination of the virus. Black people are four times more likely to be contaminated than whites, followed by Pakistanis, Indians, Chinese, etc. (see Booth & Barr, 2020, May 7). In Brazil, the pandemic started in the upper classes and in the Southeast. Its development, however, soon shifted to the peripheries and to more unequal states and cities. Seeking to calm investors by saying that the pandemic in the country “is fine,” the president of a major bank said that “The peak of the disease [of COVID-19] is over when we look at the middle class or upper middle class. The challenge is that Brazil
is a country with a lot of poor communities, a lot of slums, which ends up making the whole process difficult” (see Mendonça, 2020, May 7).

2. The work of architect Hassan Fathy on Gourna, in Egypt, was published in 1969 with the title *Gourna: A Tale of Two Villages*. It became known throughout the world with a new American edition (Fathy, 1973). Architect John Turner's research about social housing and community participation began between 1957 and 1965 in Peru. This experience with precarious settlements led him to develop and publish theories about housing quality and popular participation in the project (Turner, 1972, 1976).

The most eminent Brazilian case is the work of architect Sérgio Ferro. His studies on the civil construction industry led him to a critique of site organization and division of labor. The proposal for reorganizing housing construction work, with its autonomy as an objective, was the theoretical basis for most of the task forces constructing housing in São Paulo since the 1970s (Ferro, 1969/2006, 1976/2006).

3. In Brazil, the most prominent case is the work of Otília Arantes, who, since the 1990s, has been analyzing both urban and architectural processes, identifying the regressive forces present in the most celebrated works of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a dissonant voice at a time when most critics were excited about the partnerships between the market and the state (Arantes, 1998, 2000, 2011).


5. The Saï phanalster was built in the state of Santa Catarina, in the southern region of Brazil, by 100 French families in 1841, according to the theories of Charles Fourier (1772–1837). New Harmony, in the state of Louisiana, in the USA, was built by Robert Owen (1771–1858) in 1824.


