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Contents

Location of Coney Island *vis à vis* Manhattan. Toward the end of the 19th century, Manhattan's new bridges and modern transportation technologies made Coney Island accessible to the masses. Visible on Coney: on the left, Sandy Hook, refuge for the criminal element of the Greater New York area; at right, the Synthetic Arcadia of the Grand Hotels; between them, the "middle zone" of the three great parks — an embryonic Manhattan.

Coney Island: The Technology of the Fantastic

The glare is everywhere, and nowhere a shadow.
— Maxim Gorky, "Boredom"

What a sight the poor make in the moonlight.
— James Huneker, *The New Cosmopolis*

Hell is very badly done.
— Maxim Gorky, "Boredom"

MODEL

"Now, where the waste was ... rise to the sky a thousand glittering towers and minarets, graceful, stately and imposing. The morning sun looks down on these as it might upon the magically realized dream of a poet or painter.

"At night, the radiance of the millions of electric lights which glow at every point and line and curve of the great play city's outlines lights up the sky and welcomes the home coming mariner thirty miles from the shore."[1]

Or:

"With the advent of night a fantastic city of fire suddenly rises from the ocean into the sky. Thousands of ruddy sparks glimmer in the darkness, limning in fine, sensitive outline on the black background of the sky shapely towers of miraculous castles, palaces and temples.

"Golden gossamer threads tremble in the air. They intertwine in transparent flaming patterns, which flutter and melt away, in love with their own beauty mirrored in the waters.

"Fabulous beyond conceiving, ineffably beautiful, is this fiery scintillation."[2]

Coney Island around 1905: it is no coincidence that the countless "impressions of Coney Island" — products of a hopelessly obstinate desire to record and preserve a mirage — can all be substituted not only for each other but also for the flood of later descriptions of Manhattan.
At the junction of the 19th and 20th centuries, Coney Island is the incubator for Manhattan's incipient themes and infant mythology. The strategies and mechanisms that later shape Manhattan are tested in the laboratory of Coney Island before they finally leap toward the larger island.
Coney Island is a fetal Manhattan.

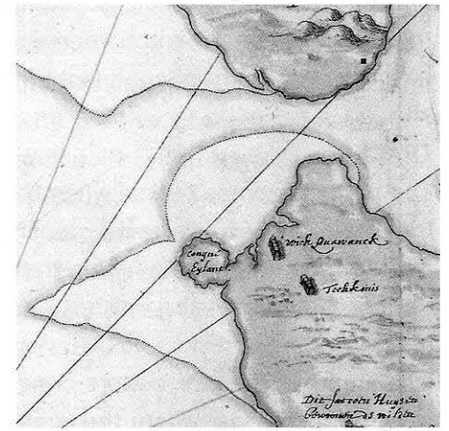
STRIP

Coney Island is discovered one day before Manhattan — in 1609, by Hudson — a clitoral appendage at the mouth of New York's natural harbor, a "strip of glistening sand, with the blue waves curling over its outer edge and the marsh creeks lazily lying at its back, tufted in summer by green sedge grass, frosted in winter by the pure white snow...."
The Canarsie Indians, the original inhabitants of the peninsula, have named it Narrioch — "Place Without Shadows" — an early recognition that it is to be a stage for certain unnatural phenomena.
In 1654 the Indian Guilaouch trades the peninsula, which he claims is his, for guns, gunpowder and beads in a scaled-down version of the "sale" of Manhattan. It then assumes a long sequence of names, none of which stick until it becomes famous for the unexplained density of *konijnen* (Dutch for "rabbits").
Between 1600 and 1800 the actual physical shape of Coney Island changes under the combined impact of human use and shifting sands, turning it, as if by design, into a miniature Manhattan.
In 1750 a canal cutting the peninsula loose from the mainland is "the last touch in fashioning what is now Coney Island..."

CONNECTION

In 1823 the Coney Island Bridge Company constructs "the first artificial connection between the mainland and the island,"[3] allowing it to consummate its relationship with Manhattan, where humans have by now congregated in densities as unprecedented as that of Coney's rabbits.
Coney is the logical choice for Manhattan's resort: the nearest zone of virgin nature that can counteract the enervations of urban civilization.
A resort implies the presence, not too far away, of a reservoir of people existing under conditions that require them to escape occasionally

"Where the waste was..."



Coney Island: a clitoral appendage at the entrance to New York Harbor.

to recover their equilibrium.
Access must be carefully calculated: the channels from reservoir to resort must be wide enough to feed the resort with a continuous flow of visitors, yet narrow enough to keep a majority of urban inmates in place. Otherwise the reservoir will engulf the resort. Coney Island can be reached by an increasing number of artificial connections, but not too easily; at least two consecutive modes of transport are required.
Between 1823 and around 1860, as Manhattan changes from a city into a metropolis, the need for escape becomes more urgent. The cosmopolites who love Coney's scenery and its isolation construct, on its eastern end — the part furthest from Manhattan — a civilized Arcadia of large resort hotels full of brand-new 19th-century comforts, planted on unspoiled grounds that restore them to their senses.
At the opposite end of the island, that same isolation attracts another community of fugitives: criminals, misfits, corrupt politicians, united by their common dislike for law and order. For them the island is unspoiled by the law.
These two parties are now locked in an unspoken battle for the island — the threat of more corruption emanating from the western end competes with the puritanism of good taste in the east.

TRACKS

The battle becomes critical when the first railroad reaches the middle of the island in 1865, its tracks stopping dead at the surf line. The trains put the oceanfront finally within the reach of the new metropolitan masses; the beach becomes the finish line for a weekly exodus that has the urgency of a jailbreak.
Like an army, the new visitors bring a parasitic infrastructure in their wake: bath houses (where the largest number can change in the smallest possible space in the shortest possible time), food supplies (1871: the hot dog is invented on Coney Island) and primitive accommodation (Peter Tilyou builds Surf House, a tavern/hot dog stand, next to the railroad's abrupt terminus).
But the need for pleasure dominates; the middle zone develops its own magnetism, attracting a range of special facilities to provide entertainment on a scale commensurate with the demand of the masses.
In a laughing mirror-image of the seriousness with which the rest of the world is obsessed with Progress, Coney Island attacks the problem of Pleasure, often with the same technological means.

TOWER

The campaign to step up the production of pleasure generates its own instruments.
In 1876 a 300-foot tower — centerpiece of the Centennial Celebration in Philadelphia — is dismantled in anticipation of re-erection elsewhere. Sites all over the States are considered and rejected; suddenly, after two years of disassembly, it stands reassembled in the middle zone of Coney. From its top the whole island is visible and telescopes can be focused on Manhattan. Like the Latting Observatory, the Centennial Tower is an architectural device that provokes self-consciousness, offering that bird's-eye inspection of a common domain that can trigger a sudden spurt of collective energy and ambition.
It also offers an additional direction of escape: mass ascension.

FLOTSAM

The journey of the vagrant tower from Philadelphia to Coney Island establishes a precedent for the subsequent journeys to Coney of other remnants of Exhibitions and World's Fairs.
The island becomes the final resting place of futuristic fragments, mechanical flotsam and technological litter whose migration across the United States toward Coney coincides with the trek of tribes from Africa, Asia and Micronesia to the same destination. They too have been on display at the fairs, as a new form of educational entertainment.
This totemic machinery, a small army of midgets and other freaks who retire to Coney after a life of hectic traveling, some residual Red Indians who have nowhere else to go and the foreign tribes constitute the permanent population of this narrow beach.

BRIDGE

In 1883 the Brooklyn Bridge removes the last obstacle that has kept the new masses on Manhattan: on summer Sundays Coney Island's beach becomes the most densely occupied place in the world.
This invasion finally invalidates whatever remains of the original formula for Coney Island's performance as a resort, the provision of Nature to the citizens of the Artificial.
To survive as a resort — a place offering *contrast* — Coney Island is forced to mutate: it must turn itself into the total opposite of Nature, it has no choice but to counteract the artificiality of the new metropolis with its own Super-Natural.
Instead of suspension of urban pressure, it offers intensification.

TRAJECTORY

The reconstituted Centennial Tower is the first manifestation of an obsession that will eventually turn the entire island into a launching pad of the proletariat.

In 1883 the antigravitational theme it has initiated is elaborated in the Loop-the-Loop, a railroad that loops around itself so that a small vehicle will cling to an upside-down surface, provided it travels at a certain speed. As a piece of research, it is costly; it claims several lives each season. Only four customers at a time can experience the momentary weightlessness it affords, and only a limited number of vehicles can complete the inverted trajectory in an hour. These constraints alone doom the Loop-the-Loop as an instrument of mass exhilaration. Its offspring is the Roller Coaster, patented and built the very next season, 1884: its track parodies the curves, hills and valleys of a regular railway trajectory. Whole trainloads of people tear up and down its slope with such violence that they undergo the magic sensation of liftoff at the peaks; it easily supplants the Loop-the-Loop. The wriggly tracks multiply on their shaky supports, within a few seasons turning the entire middle zone into a vibrating mountain range of steel.

In 1895 Captain Boyton, a professional diver and pioneer of underwater living, introduces a crypto-Freudian complication into the battle against gravity with his Shoot-the-Chutes, a toboggan hoisted mechanically to the top of a tower from which a diagonal slide descends toward a body of water. Anxiety as to whether the board will stay on top of the water or slip under the surface provides the suspense as the rider slides downward.

A steady flow of visitors climbs the tower for the descent toward the muddy water, which is otherwise inhabited by 40 sea lions. By 1890 "the thing that is furthest from reason, that laughs loudest at the laws of gravitation, is the thing that takes with the Coney Island crowd...."[4] Even before the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge, one venture has indicated the future direction of the island's pursuit of irrational ends by entirely rational means: the first "natural" element to be conquered and appropriated in the quest for the New Pleasure is an elephant "as big as a church" that is also a hotel.

"Its legs were 60 feet in circumference. In one front leg was a cigar store, in the other a diorama; patrons walked up circular steps in one hind leg and down the other."[5] Rooms can be had in thigh, shoulder, hip or trunk. Searchlights flash erratically from its eyes, illuminating anyone within range who has decided to spend the night on the beach.

A second annexation of nature is achieved with the creation of the Inexhaustible Cow, a machine constructed to satisfy the insatiable thirst of the visitors, then disguised as a cow.

Its milk is superior to the natural product in the regularity and predictability of its flow, its hygienic quality and its controllable temperature.

ELECTRICITY

Similar adaptations follow at a constantly accelerating rate.

The inordinate number of people assembling on the inadequate acreage, ostensibly seeking confrontation with the reality of the elements (sun, wind, sand, water) *demands* the systematic conversion of nature into a technical service.

Since the total surface area of the beach and the total length of surf line are finite, it follows with mathematical certainty that the hundreds of thousands of visitors will not each find a place to spread out on the sand, let alone reach the water, within a single day.

Toward 1890, the introduction of electricity makes it possible to create a second daytime. Bright lights are placed at regular intervals along the surf line, so that now the sea can be enjoyed on a truly metropolitan shift-system, giving those unable to reach the water in the daytime a man-made, 12-hour extension.

What is unique in Coney Island — and this syndrome of the Irresistible Synthetic prefigures later events in Manhattan — is that this false daytime is not regarded as second-rate.

Its very artificiality becomes an attraction: "Electric Bathing."

CYLINDERS

Even the most intimate aspects of human nature are subjected to experiment. If life in the metropolis creates loneliness and alienation, Coney Island counterattacks with the Barrels of Love. Two horizontal cylinders — mounted in line — revolve slowly in opposite directions. At either end a small staircase leads up to an entrance.

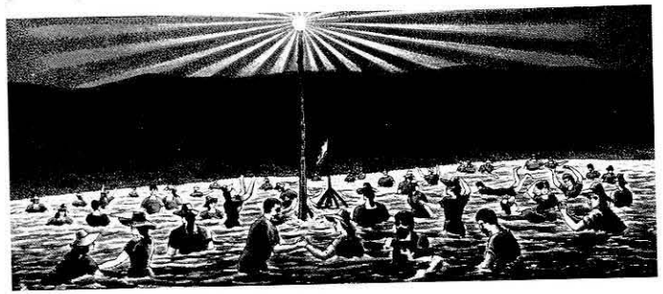
One feeds men into the machine, the other women.

It is impossible to remain standing.

Men and women fall on top of each other.

The unrelenting rotation of the machine fabricates synthetic intimacy between people who would never otherwise have met.

This intimacy can be further processed in the Tunnels of Love, an artificial mountain constructed next to the Barrels of Love. Outside the mountain the newly formed couples board a small boat that disappears



Metropolitan shift-systems (1): Electric Bathing—
the Synthetic becomes Irresistible.

Barrels of Love—anti-alienation apparatus.

Metropolitan shift-systems (2): Steeplechase
horsemen riding through the night.

inside a dark tunnel leading to an interior lake. Inside the tunnel complete obscurity ensures at least visual privacy; from the muffled noises it is impossible to guess how many couples are crossing the lake at any one time. The rocking of the small boats on the shallow water reinforces the sensuality of the experience.

HORSES

The favorite activity of the cosmopolites who enjoyed the island in its virgin state was horseback riding. But the ability to ride a horse is a form of sophistication not available to the people who have replaced the original visitors. And real horses can never coexist in adequate numbers on the same island with the new visitors.

In the mid-nineties George Tilyou—son of Peter Tilyou, the Surf House pioneer—lays out a mechanized track that extends over a large part of the island, a course that leads through a number of natural landscapes, along the oceanfront, and crosses a series of man-made obstacles.

Over this track moves a herd of mechanical horses that can be ridden with instant confidence by anyone. The Steeplechase is an "automatic racetrack with gravitation as its motive power"; its "horses resemble in size and model the track racer. Staunchly built, they are to a certain extent under the control of the rider, who can accelerate the speed by the manner in which he utilizes his weight and the position on the descending and ascending grades, making each contest an actual race."[6]

The horses operate 24 hours a day and are an unprecedented success. Financial investment in the track is recouped after three weeks of operation.

Inspired by the Midway Plaisance, which connected the two halves of the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Tilyou collects additional facilities—including a Ferris wheel from the same fair—along and around the mechanical course, gradually staking out a discrete amusement area that is formalized when in 1897 he erects a wall around it and channels his visitors through entrances marked by triumphal arches of plaster accumulations of the iconography of laughter—clowns, pierrots, masks. With the act of enclosure, Tilyou has established an aggressive opposition between what he names Steeplechase *Park* and the rest of the island.

FORMULA

Coney Island's reputation has plummeted even as its popularity has risen. The formula of innocent pleasures inside versus corruption outside—implied by Tilyou's enclave—is a first step toward possible rehabilitation. Such a compact oasis can be the planning module

for a gradual reclamation of the island's otherwise lost territory. It would clearly be counterproductive for the various intramural facilities to compete by offering identical or incompatible pleasures. A process originates within the walls that generates a spectrum of coordinated facilities. The concept of the park is the architectural equivalent of an empty canvas. Tilyou's wall defines a territory that can — theoretically — be shaped and controlled by a single individual and is thereby invested with a thematic potential; but he fails to exploit fully his breakthrough. He limits his activities to extending the tracks, perfecting the realism of his horses and adding such obstacles as the "water jump," inventing only one more device to alienate further his park from the reality of the island: his entrances now lead directly to the Earthquake floor, where the natural skin of the earth is replaced by a hidden mechanical graft that shakes. The randomness and violence of the tremors demand surrender. To earn the right to enter Steeplechase, the visitor must participate in an involuntary ballet.

Exhausted by his inventions, Tilyou writes poetry and captures in a moment of lucid euphoria the significance of what he has helped create: *"If Paris is France, Coney Island, between June and September, is the World."*[7]

ASTRONAUTS

In 1903, the year the new Williamsburg Bridge injects even more visitors into Coney Island's already overtaxed system, Frederic Thompson and Elmer Dundy open a second park — Luna.

Dundy is a financial genius and an entertainment professional; he has experience with fairs, attractions and concessions. Thompson is Coney's first important outsider: he has no previous experience with any form of amusement. At 26, he has dropped out of architectural school, frustrated by the irrelevance of the Beaux-Arts system to the new age.

He is the first professional designer active on the island.

Borrowing Tilyou's park-enclave model, Thompson invests it with systematic intellectual rigor and a degree of deliberation that puts its planning once and for all on a conscious and architectural basis.

Steeplechase isolated itself from its surrounding mess on the most literal level: with a wall.

Thompson doubles the isolation of Luna Park by imposing a theme that embraces the entire site in a system of metaphorical meaning: its surface is to be "not of this earth" but part of the Moon. On entering, Luna Park's masses are turned into astronauts in a conceptual airlock

through which they all have to pass:

"The Trip to the Moon on the airship Luna IV ... Once on board of the great airship, her huge wings rise and fall, the trip is really begun and the ship is soon 100 feet in the air. A wonderful, widespread panorama of the surrounding sea, Manhattan and Long Island seems to be receding as the ship mounts upward.

"Houses recede from view until the earth fades from sight, while the Moon grows larger and larger. Passing over the Lunar satellite the barren and desolate nature of its surface is seen.

"The airship gently settles, the landing made, and the passengers enter the cool caverns of the Moon..."[8]

In one gesture, the whole structure of mutually reinforcing realities on earth — its laws, expectations, inhibitions — is suspended to create a moral weightlessness that complements the literal weightlessness that has been generated on the trip to the Moon.

THEORY

The center of Luna Park is a large lake, an echo of the lagoon at the Chicago Fair. At one end of it stands the Shoot-the-Chutes; in this formal position it more strongly invites descent into the regions of collective unconscious.

The lake is lined by a forest of needlelike structures, specimens of Moon architecture. Thompson's own comments indicate the acuteness of his private rebellion against Beaux-Arts repression.

Traced by a reporter "in the midst of this planetary upheaval ... the arch-plotter of this embryonic paradise ... [was] seated over an extinct volcano of his own making and conjuring airy shapes out of the formless void around him."

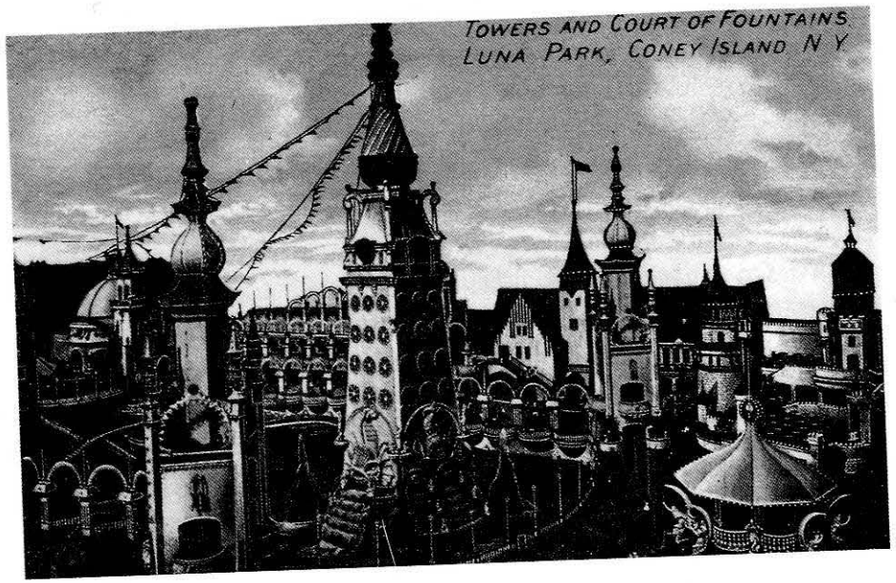
For Thompson, Luna Park is a manifesto:

"You see, I have built Luna Park on a definite architectural plan. As it is a place of amusement, I have eliminated all classical conventional forms from its structure and taken a sort of free renaissance and Oriental type for my model, using spires and minarets wherever I could, in order to get the restive, joyous effect to be derived always from the graceful lines given in this style of architecture.

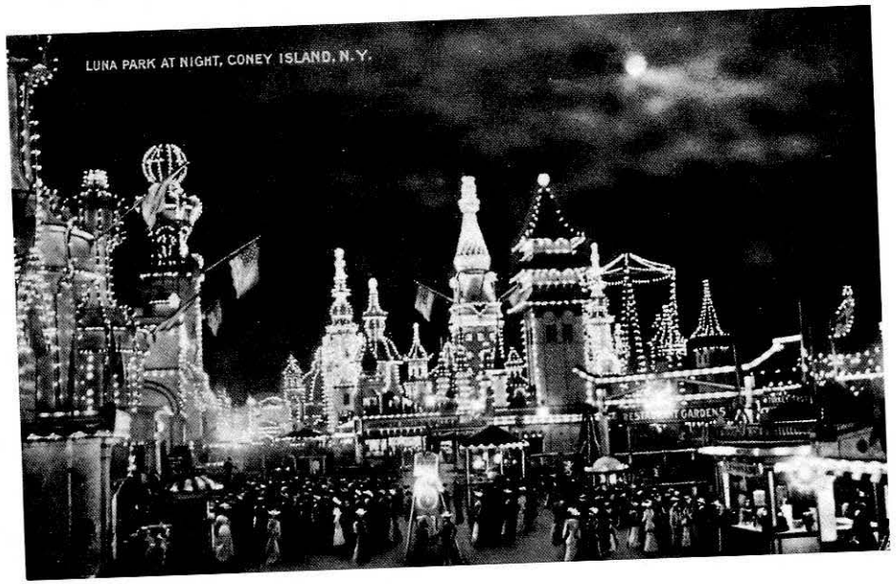
"It is marvelous what you can do in the way of arousing human emotions by the use you can make architecturally, of simple lines. Luna Park is built on that theory — and the result has proven that theory's worth."

This is 1903.

Thompson's pride is Luna's skyline, "an ensemble of snow-white



Luna Park skyline by day ...



... and by night.

pinnacles and towers limned against the blue firmament [that] is wonderfully pleasing to thousands of eyes heartily tired of the brick, mortar and stone of the Great City."

Before Thompson, single towers have often acted at fairs as lone climaxes of elaborate Beaux-Arts complexes, exclamation marks within carefully coordinated overall designs, deriving their dignity and impact from their singleness.

Thompson's genius is to let these needles proliferate at random, to create an architectural spectacle out of the drama of their frenzied scramble for individuality and to identify this battle of the spires as the definitive sign of otherworldliness, the mark of another condition.

This forest of towers, instead of Coney's virgin nature, now provides an antidote to the grimness of the city.

Season after season Thompson adds towers to his park. After three years he boasts: "Then, for our skyline we have just 1,221 towers, minarets and domes — a great increase over what we had last year." The growth of this architectural plantation becomes the compulsive measure of Luna's vitality: "You see, this being the Moon, it is always changing.

"A stationary Luna Park would be an anomaly."[9]

Even if on the Moon, Thompson has created the first City of Towers: functionless, except to overstimulate the imagination and keep any recognizable earthly realities at a distance. Now he uses electricity — the essential ingredient of the new paraphernalia of illusion — as an architectural duplicator.

In broad daylight Luna's small towers have a pathetic dimension, an aura of cheapness, but by superimposing over its skyline a network of wires and light bulbs, Thompson describes a second, illusory skyline, even more impressive than the first, a separate *city of night.*

"In the wilderness of the sky and ocean rises the magic picture of a flaming city," and "with the advent of night a fantastic city all of fire suddenly rises from the ocean into the sky.... Fabulous beyond conceiving, ineffably beautiful, is this fiery scintillation."

For the price of one, Thompson has created two distinct cities, each with its own character, its own life, its own inhabitants. Now the city *itself* is to be lived in shifts; the electric city, phantom offspring of the "real" city, is an even more powerful instrument for the fulfillment of fantasy.

INFRASTRUCTURE

To perform this miracle in three years, Thompson has compacted on the 38 acres of his park an infrastructure that makes it square inch for

square inch the most *modern* fragment of the world. Luna's infrastructure and communications network are more complex, elaborate, sophisticated and energy-consuming than those of most contemporary American cities.

"A few brief facts and figures will give an idea of the immensity of Luna. 1,700 persons are employed during the summer season. It has its own telegraph office, cable office, wireless office and local and long distance telephone service. 1,300,000 electric lights are used for illumination. Throughout its acreage ... are suitable accommodations for 500 head of animals.... The Towers, spires and minarets number 1,326 [1907].... The admissions at the front gates since the opening of Old Luna Park have totalled over 60,000,000...."[10]

If this infrastructure supports a largely cardboard reality, that is exactly the point. Luna Park is the first manifestation of a curse that is to haunt the architectural profession for the rest of its life, the formula: technology + cardboard (or any other flimsy material) = reality.

APPEARANCE

Thompson has designed and built the *appearance*, the exterior, of a magic city. But most of his needles are too narrow to have an interior, not hollow enough to accommodate function. Like Tilyou he is finally unable or unwilling to use his private realm, with all its metaphorical potential, for the design of culture. He is still an architectural Frankenstein whose talent for creating the new far exceeds his ability to control its contents. Luna's astronauts may be stranded on another planet, in a magic city, but they discover in the skyscraper forest the over-familiar instruments of pleasure — the Bunny Hug, the Burros, the Circus, the German Village, the Fall of Port Arthur, the Gates of Hell, the Great Train Robbery, the Whirl-the-Whirl.

Luna Park suffers from the self-defeating laws that govern entertainment: it can only skirt the surface of myth, only hint at the anxieties accumulated in the collective unconscious.

If there is a development beyond Steeplechase, it is in the explicit ambition of the new devices to turn the provincialism of the masses into cosmopolitanism.

In the Tango, for instance: "The principle of the famous dances that have monopolized society has been utilized in the more modern rides. One need not be adept in the terpsichorean arts to be up-to-date. Convenient cars in which one comfortably reclines *go through the motions of the dance.*

"They also wind through the wilds of South America, where the Tango originated.... This ride is a feast and a cure for all digestive ills...."[11]

From the mere imitation of a single experience such as horseback riding, the Irresistible Synthetic has progressed to the fusion of previously separate categories. The Tango combines technical emancipation — a machine performing cultivated rituals; an educational experience — a journey through the tropical jungle; and a medical benefit.

In the Fishing Pond, "live and mechanical" fish cohabit in a new round of Darwinian evolution.

For the 1906 season, Thompson injects the myth of Babylon's Hanging Gardens almost casually into Manhattan's bloodstream, growing 160,000 plants on the roofs of his enclave. This green carpet introduces a strategy of "layering" Luna, of improving its performance by superimposing an artificial plane on its original surface: "By the erection of an extremely ingenious and picturesque roof garden that will be known as the Babylonian Hanging Gardens, the capacity of Luna Park has been increased seventy thousand, while at the same time these gardens will afford protection for an even greater number of people in case of rain."[12]

ROOF

Tilyou, upstaged by Luna Park, retaliates with a gesture that anticipates the dilemmas of Modernism; if he encloses all his facilities in a single glass shed not unlike the Crystal Palace and advertises it as "the largest fireproof Amusement Building in the World," the utilitarian iconography of the glass box clashes with the entertainment inside.

The single roof drastically reduces the opportunities for individual facilities to display their own characters; now that they do not have to develop their own skins, they blur together like many molluscs in one gigantic shell in which the public is lost.

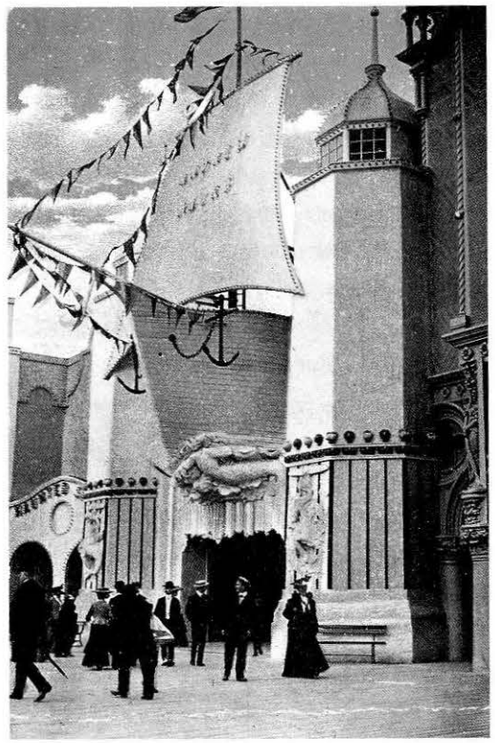
Outside, the naked facades repress all signs of pleasure; only one of the mechanical horses jumps through the frigid membrane of this early curtain wall to escape the fun factory.

LEAP

After two years of staggering success, Thompson finally zeroes in on his real target: Manhattan.

The isolation of Luna Park within Coney makes it an ideal architectural testing ground, but also insulates the results of any tests from direct confrontation with reality.

Sen. William H. Reynolds — real-estate promoter and president of Dreamland.



Metaphoric entrance to Dreamland — entire park is "underwater."

In 1904 Thompson buys part of a Manhattan block on Sixth Avenue between 43rd and 44th streets so that he can apply his multiple talents to a more critical test of his theories.

DESK

As Thompson plans the conquest of Manhattan from the confinement of his lunar Reich on Coney, Sen. William H. Reynolds plots *the park to end all parks* from behind his desk on the top floor of Manhattan's brand-new Flatiron Building. It is to be the conclusion of a sequence that has begun with Steeplechase and Luna.

Reynolds is a former Republican state senator and real-estate promoter, "always promoting himself into trouble";[13] after rejecting "Wonderland" as too inexact, he chooses the name "Dreamland" for his venture.

The triad of personalities and professions that Tilyou, Thompson and Reynolds represent — amusement expert/professional architect/developer-politician — is reflected in the character of the three parks:

Steeplechase, where the park format is invented almost by accident under the pressure of a hysterical demand for entertainment;

Luna, where this format is invested with thematic and architectural coherence; and finally

Dreamland, where the preceding breakthroughs are elevated to an ideological plane by a professional politician.

Reynolds realizes that to succeed, Dreamland must transcend its compromised origins and become a post-proletarian park, "the first time in the History of Coney Island Amusement that an effort has been made to provide a place of Amusement that appeals to all classes."[14]

Reynolds lifts many of Dreamland's components from the typology of pleasure established by its predecessors but arranges them in a single programmatic composition in which the presence of each attraction is indispensable to the impact of the others.

Dreamland is located on the sea. Instead of the shapeless pond or would-be lagoon that is the center of Luna, Dreamland is planned around an actual inlet of the Atlantic, a genuine reservoir of the Oceanic with its well-tested catalytic potential to trigger fantasies. Where Luna insists on its otherworldliness by claiming an outrageous alien location, Dreamland relies on a more subliminal and plausible dissociation: its entrance porches are underneath gigantic plaster-of-paris ships under full sail, so that metaphorically the surface of the entire park is "underwater," an Atlantis found before it has ever been lost.

This is only one of the strategies Senator Reynolds employs to exclude

reality from his state. In a flash-forward to the formal policies of Modernism, he chooses to identify his terrain by the *absence of color.* In contrast to the garishness of the two other parks, the whole of Dreamland is painted snow white, thus laundering whatever concepts it has borrowed through a graphic process of purification.

CARTOGRAPHY

According to an intuitive cartography of the subconscious, Reynolds arranges 15 facilities around his lagoon in a Beaux-Arts horseshoe and connects them with a completely even supersurface that flows from one facility to the next without a single step, threshold or other articulation — an architectural approximation of the stream of consciousness.

"All the walks are level, or inclined. The park being so laid out that there is no possibility of congestion of the crowds, 250,000 people can see everything and move around without fear of congestion."

Scattered across this Wonderpavement are small boys selling popcorn and peanuts, dressed as Mephistopheles to stress the Faustian nature of Dreamland's bargain. They constitute a proto-Dadaist army: every morning their supervisor, Marie Dressler, the famous Broadway actress, instructs them in "nonsense" — meaningless, enigmatic jokes and slogans that will sow uncertainty in the crowds throughout the day.

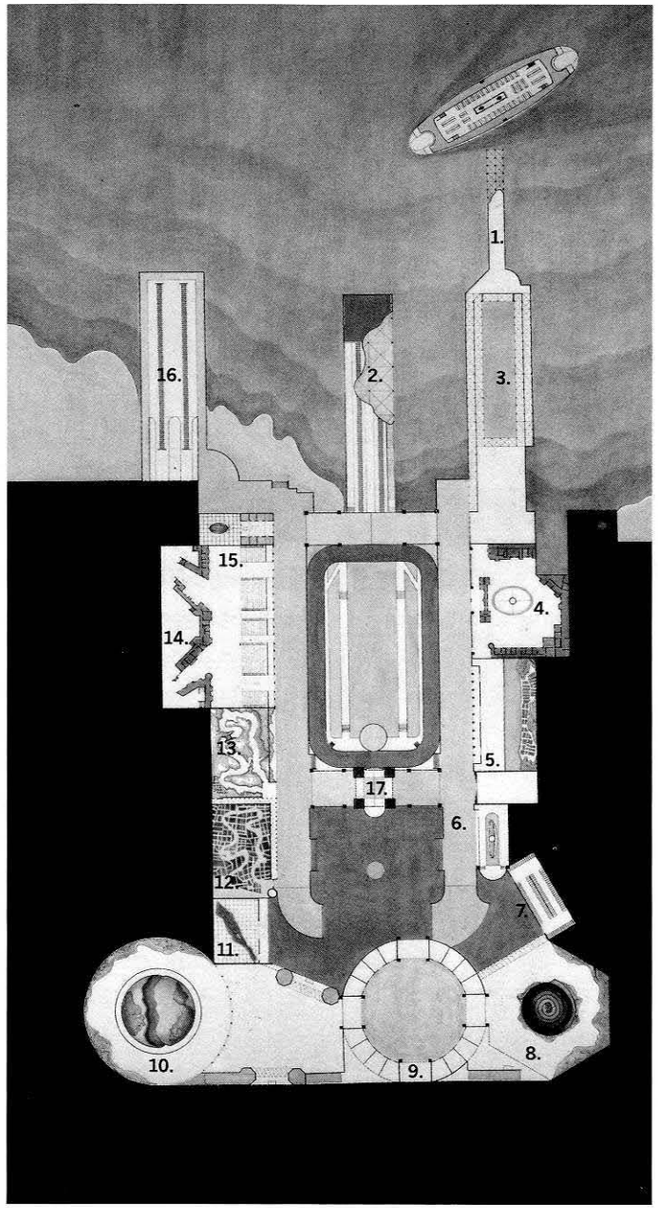
There is no plan left of Dreamland; what follows is a reconstruction based on the best available evidence.

1. Dreamland's steel pier, projecting half a mile into the ocean, is two stories high, with broad walks for 60,000 people. An excursion steamer leaves Manhattan's Battery every hour, so that Dreamland can be visited without setting foot on Coney.

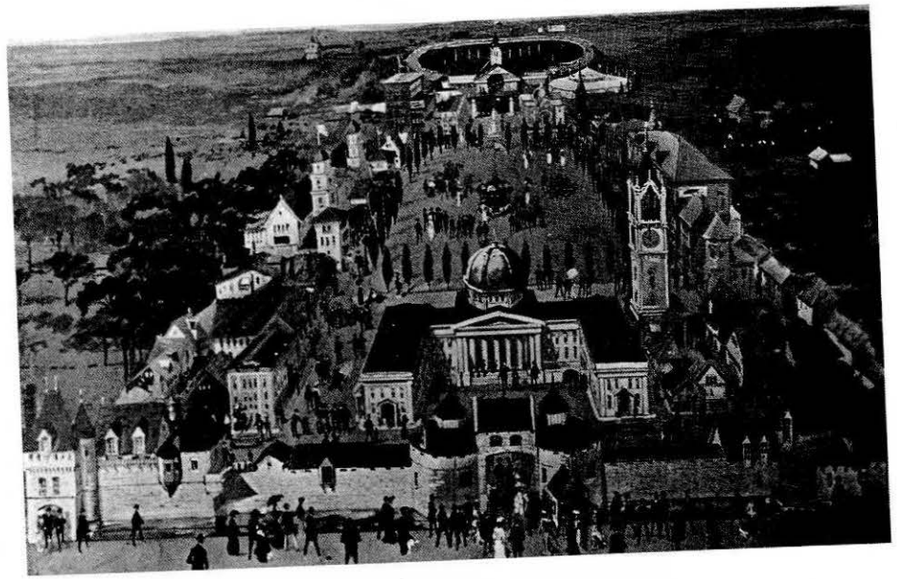
2. The final manifestation of the Shoot-the-Chutes: "The largest ever built ... Two boats will descend side by side, and a moving staircase will take ... 7,000 people an hour to the top...."[15]

Located for the first time on the main axis of a park, the Chutes reinforce Dreamland's underwater metaphor; its toboggans are the perfect vehicles for descent into a world below the world.

3. Straddling the arrival pier is "the largest ballroom in the World" (25,000 square feet), a space so enormous that the intimate patterns of traditional ballroom dancing become meaningless.



Plan of Dreamland.
1. Steel Pier
2. Shoot-the-Chutes leading into Lagoon
3. Ballroom
4. Lilliputia
5. Fall of Pompeii
6. Ride in a Submarine
7. Incubator Building
8. End of the World
9. Circus
10. Creation
11. Flight Over Manhattan
12. Canals of Venice
13. Coasting Through Switzerland
14. Fighting the Flames
15. Japanese Teahouse with Santos Dumont Airship No. 9
16. Leap Frog Railway
17. Beacon Tower

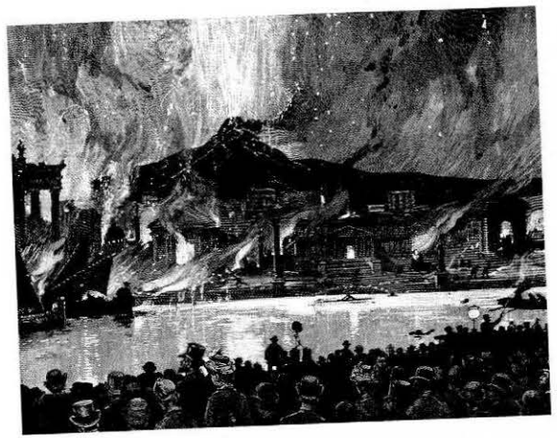


View of Lilliputia — parliament in background.

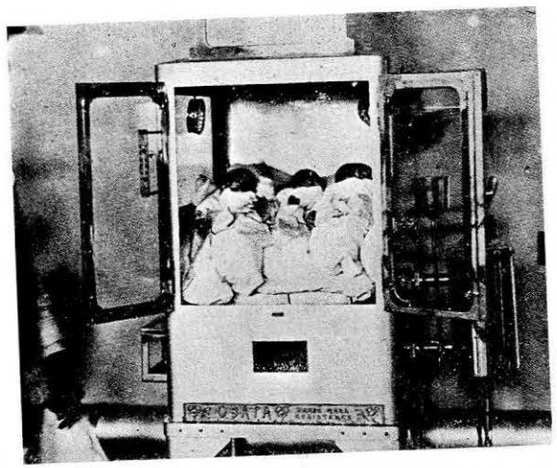
"Aristocratic" midgets in deceptive pose:
the institutionalization of misbehavior.

In the technological frenzy of the time, the natural movement of the human body appears slow and clumsy. Roller skates are introduced into the delicate formal textures of the ballroom. Their speed and curvilinear trajectories strain the original conventions beyond the breaking point, atomize the dancers and create fresh and random rhythms of coupling and uncoupling between the sexes.
Tracing its own abstract course through this pandemonium, oblivious to the movements of the dancers, is an independent architectural satellite, "a novel contrivance consisting of a motor propelled platform [that] is run out on the floor with the [orchestra and] singers on it so that the entertainment can be enjoyed by everyone."[16] This platform is the harbinger of a truly mobile architecture, a generation of self-propelled tectonic satellites that can be summoned to any location on the globe to perform their particular functions.

4. Lilliputia, the Midget City: if Dreamland is a laboratory for Manhattan, Midget City is a laboratory for Dreamland. Three hundred midgets who had been scattered across the continent as attractions at World's Fairs are offered a permanent experimental community here, "a bit of old Nuremberg in the fifteenth century."
Since the scale of Midget City is half the scale of the real world, the cost of building this cardboard utopia is, at least theoretically, quartered, so that extravagant architectural effects can be tested cheaply.
The midgets of Dreamland have their own parliament, their own beach complete with midget lifeguard and "a miniature Midget City Fire Department responding [every hour] to a false alarm" — effective reminder of man's existential futility.
But the true spectacle of Midget City is social experimentation.
Within the walls of the midget capital, the laws of conventional morality are systematically ignored, a fact advertised to attract visitors.
Promiscuity, homosexuality, nymphomania and so on are encouraged and flaunted: marriages collapse almost as soon as they are celebrated; 80 percent of newborn babies are illegitimate. To increase the *frisson* induced by this organized anarchy, the midgets are showered with aristocratic titles, highlighting the gap between implied and actual behavior.
Midget City represents Reynolds' institutionalization of misbehavior, a continuing vicarious experience for a society preparing to shed the remnants of Victorianism.



Fall of Pompeii — "new inventions which have just been put into *practical* effect."

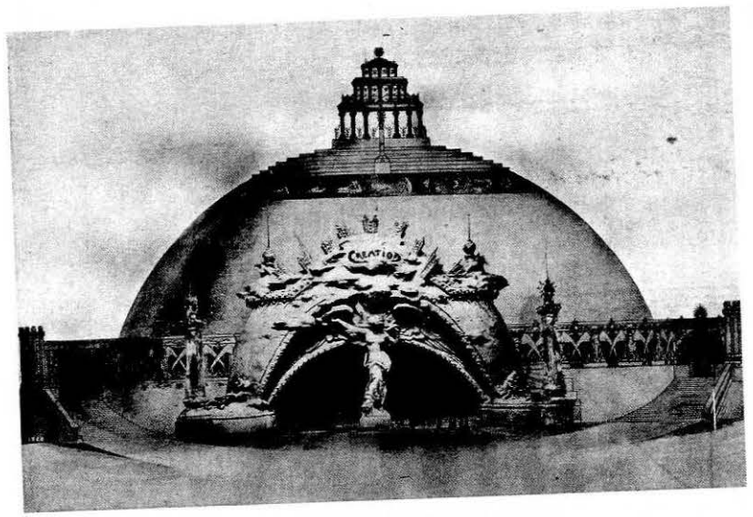


"Preemies" in incubator — the creation of a private race.

5. The Fall of Pompeii is the perfectionist culmination of a series of simulated disasters that have apparently become a psychological addiction for the metropolitan public. In a single day on Coney Island it is possible to "experience" the San Francisco earthquake, the burnings of Rome and Moscow, various naval battles, episodes from the Boer War, the Galveston Flood and (inside a Classical Greek temple decorated with a fresco of a dormant volcano) the eruption of Vesuvius, realized "with scenic and mechanical equipment coupled with a most extraordinary electric display ... new inventions which have just been put into *practical* effect."[17]
Each nightmare exorcised in Dreamland is a disaster averted in Manhattan.

6. Simulated ride in a submarine — and confrontation with "the inhabitants of the deep."

7. The Incubator Building: here most of the premature babies of the Greater New York area are collected and nursed to health in incubator facilities superior to those of any hospital at the time, in a benevolent variation of the Frankenstein theme. To soften the radicalism of an enterprise that deals openly with the issue of life and death, the exterior of the building is disguised as "an old German Farmhouse," on its roof "a stork overlooking a nest of cherubs" — old mythology sanctioning new technology.
Inside is an ultra-modern hospital divided into two parts, "a large clean room where almost motionless prematures doze in incubators"[18] and a nursery for the "incubator graduates" who have survived the first critical weeks of existence.
"As a scientific demonstration for the nurture of feeble infantile life, it is ... a practical, educational life-saving station...."[19]
Martin Arthur Couney, the first pediatrician in Paris, tries to establish his incubator institute there in the 1890s, but that project is aborted by medical conservatism. Convinced that his invention is an essential contribution to Progress, he exhibits his *Kinderbrut-Anstalt* ("Baby-Hatching Apparatus") at the International Exhibition in Berlin in 1896. Follows the familiar odyssey of a progressive idea/exhibit across the globe — to Rio de Janeiro, then Moscow — with Manhattan as its inevitable destination.
Only in the New Metropolis can Couney find and exploit the confluence of proper conditions: a limitless supply of "preemies", a passion for

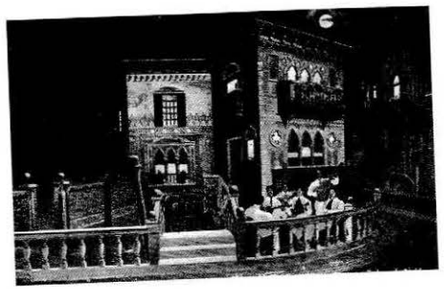


Creation.

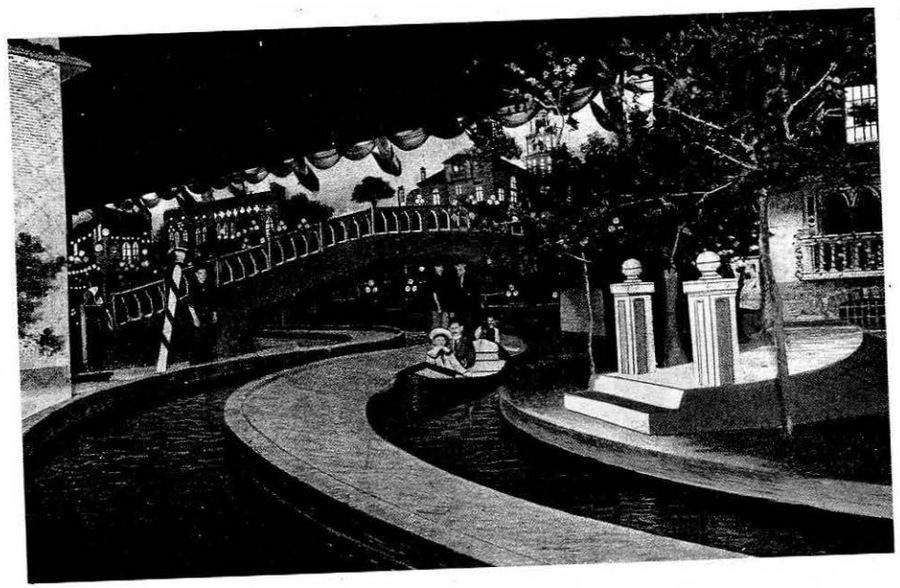
technology and, especially in Coney Island's middle zone — premature Manhattan — ideological sympathy.
Couney's installation gives the Irresistible Synthetic a new dimension, in which it directly affects the fate of human beings.
In the preemies Dreamland nurtures a private race whose graduates celebrate their survival in a yearly Dreamland reunion sponsored by Reynolds.

8, 9, 10. By the turn of the century it is evident that *creation* and *destruction* are the poles defining the field of Manhattan's abrasive culture; three separate spectacles show this awareness.
10. The Blue Dome of Creation, "Largest Dome in the World," represents the universe. "The visitor to this illusion glides backwards through sixty centuries in a grotesque craft along a water canal encircling the dome for a distance of one thousand feet. A moving panorama of the centuries is passed until the grand spectacular and dramatic climax, the portrayal of the actual Creation, is reached.... The waters part, the earth arises, inanimate and human life appear."[20]
8. Creation's mirror-image is the "End of the World — according to the Dream of Dante." In Dreamland, only 150 feet separate Beginning and End.
9. The Circus, featuring the "greatest aggregation of educated animals on earth," acts as a buffer in between.
The three spectacles unfold simultaneously in apparent independence, but their stages are connected by underground passages so that the casts, human and animal, can shuttle freely between them. An exit from one performance allows reappearance seconds later in another, and so on.
The three theaters — architecturally separate on the surface — form, through invisible connections, one histrionic cluster, prototype of a multiple play with a single cast. The subterranean traffic introduces a new model of theatrical economy where an infinite number of simultaneous performances can be given by a single rotating cast, each play both isolated from and intertwined with all the others.
Reynolds' triple arena is thus a precise metaphor of life in the Metropolis, whose inhabitants are a single cast performing an infinite number of plays.

11. A simulated flight over Manhattan, before the first airplane has ever flown.



Canals of Venice.



Canals of Venice.

12. The Canals of Venice is a gigantic model of Venice inside a reduced version of the Ducal Palace, the largest building in Dreamland. Inside it is night, "with the soft moonlight typical of the city of 'Water Streets' ... accomplished by a newly invented electrical device."

"Real gondolas carry the visitors through a Grand Canal reproduced with faithful regard for detail." The miniature palace is an architectural compression chamber: "all the most famous buildings are here reproduced ... on 54,000 square feet of canvas" mounted in receding planes on both sides of the Grand Canal.

Life in Venice is simulated too. "All along the line of progress [of the gondolas] are the natives of the city engaged in their various occupations, coming and going just as the traveler would find them in a real city...."[21]

The Shoot-the-Chutes, the Tunnels of Love, the Submarine, the Creation have all relied on water-based locomotion. The persistence of this mode of travel apparently reflects a deep-seated need of metropolitan inhabitants; the Canals of Venice is its apotheosis, but only provisionally. Dreamland is a laboratory and Reynolds an urbanist: this interior Venice, wrapped in its cocoon of many layers of canvas, is an urban model that will reappear in later incarnations.

13. Coasting Through Switzerland is a machine designed by Reynolds to correct flaws in Manhattan's topography and climate. It is the first entirely mechanical resort, a compressed replica of Switzerland.

"Swelterers in Manhattan's summer sun direct their steps to Dreamland's ... confines, and find relief in a visit to the cooling ice-tipped mountains of 'Switzerland.'" On the facade of the otherwise hermetic box is "a picture of snowy peaks [that] indicates the pleasure to come" as the visitor mounts "a little Red Sleigh."

Like Manhattan, this Switzerland is a compound of anxiety and exhilaration. "The first feature to meet the eye is a scene familiar to all who have visited the Alps.... Roped climbers in their dangerous ascent to the mountain have met ... with the snapping of a guide-rope and the climbers seem to be falling through space." But as the little Red Sleigh passes through a valley "teeming with Swiss life," the impact of the opening drama is "lost in the opening vista of the famous Mt. Blanc."

Now the sleigh penetrates a tunnel 500 feet long to enter Reynolds' Alps. "A notable feature is the cooling apparatus which diffuses iced air throughout the whole structure.

"Deftly concealed pipes with openings in the various snowbanks emit the air from the cooling apparatus, while suction ventilators in the roof make

a draught that keeps this artificial 'Switzerland' as cold and as full of sweet pure air as can be found among the picturesque Swiss mountains...."[22]

Through his manipulations in Switzerland Reynolds fully realizes the potential of technology for the support and production of fantasy, of technology as an instrument and extension of the human imagination. Coney is the laboratory of this Technology of the Fantastic.

14. Where Switzerland shows Reynolds taming technology, Fighting the Flames constitutes his most convincing exposition of, and commentary on, the metropolitan condition itself.

It is a building without a roof, 250 feet long, 100 feet deep. Each column on the facade is surmounted by a figure of a fireman; the roofline is an intricate motif of fire hoses, helmets and axes.

The classical exterior gives no indication of the drama inside, where "in the vast expanse of ground a square of a city has been built, showing houses and streets with a hotel in the foreground." Four thousand firemen inhabit, permanently, this metropolitan "set"; they are "recruits from the fire departments of this and nearby cities [who] know their business thoroughly." Waiting in the wings of the synthetic block is a flotilla of disaster prevention: "The fire apparatus will include four engines and hose wagons, an extension ladder truck, a water tower, an ambulance and a battalion chief's wagon."

But the main protagonist on the urban stage is the city block itself: Fighting the Flames introduces the block as actor. "An alarm rings; the men will leap from their beds and slide down the brass poles.... The hotel in the foreground is on fire and there are people inside it. The flames, discovered on the first floor of the hotel, cut off their escape. People throng the square, shouting and gesticulating; the engines arrive, then the water tower, hose wagons, extension ladder truck, the battalion chief and" — once more establishing the connection between rescue and loss — "an ambulance, which runs over a man in its race of relief.

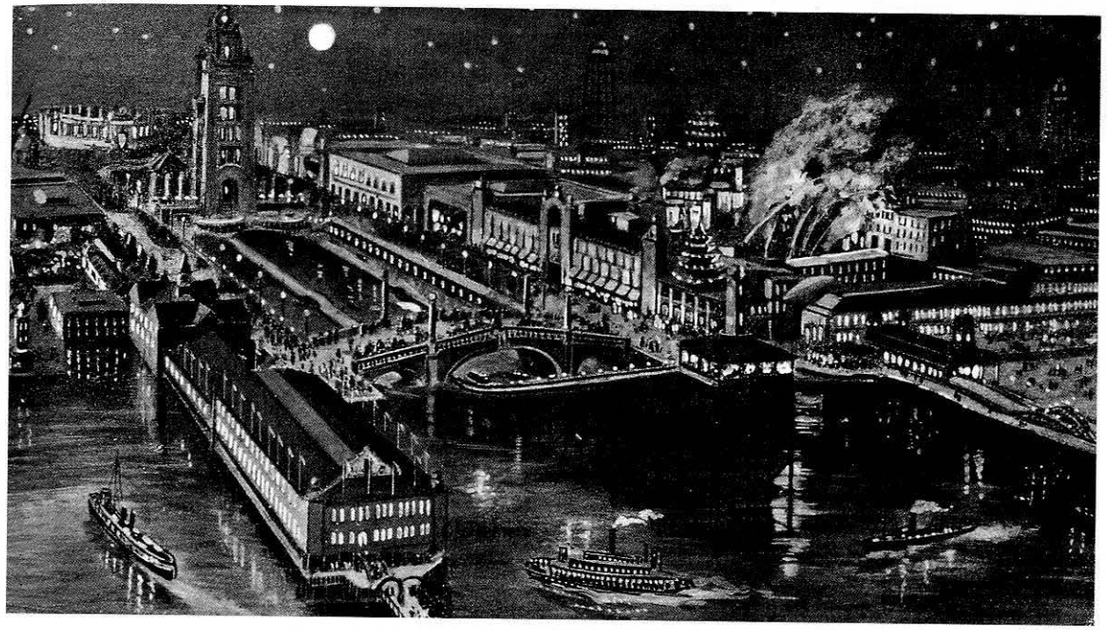
"The flames creep up to the next story.... The inmates at the windows are driven from story to story by fire and smoke.

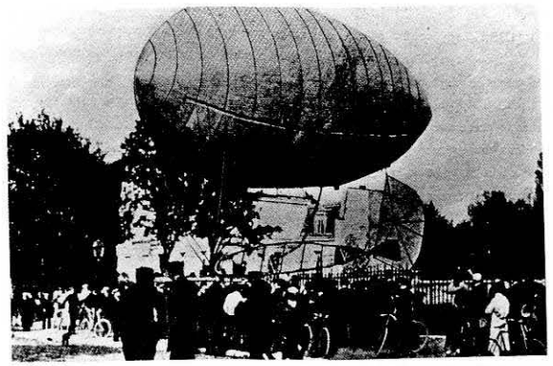
"When they reach the top floor an explosion is heard, and the roof of the building falls in...."[23]

Yet the hysterical guests are saved, the fire put out and the city block prepared for its next performance.

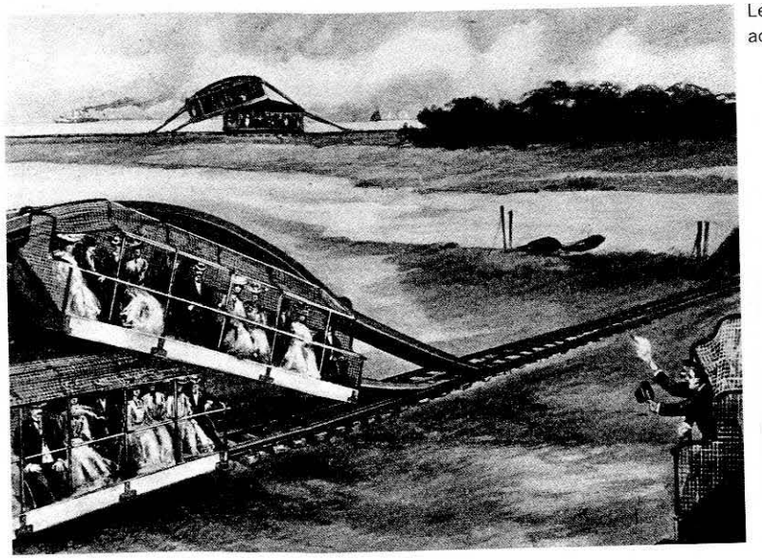
The entire spectacle defines the dark side of Metropolis as an astronomical increase in the potential for disaster only just exceeded by an

Bird's-eye view of Coney Island at night, with regulated Apocalypse of Fighting the Flames: "the dark side of Metropolis — an astronomical increase in the potential for disaster only just exceeded by an equally astronomical increase in the ability to avert it."





Santos Dumont Airship No. 9.

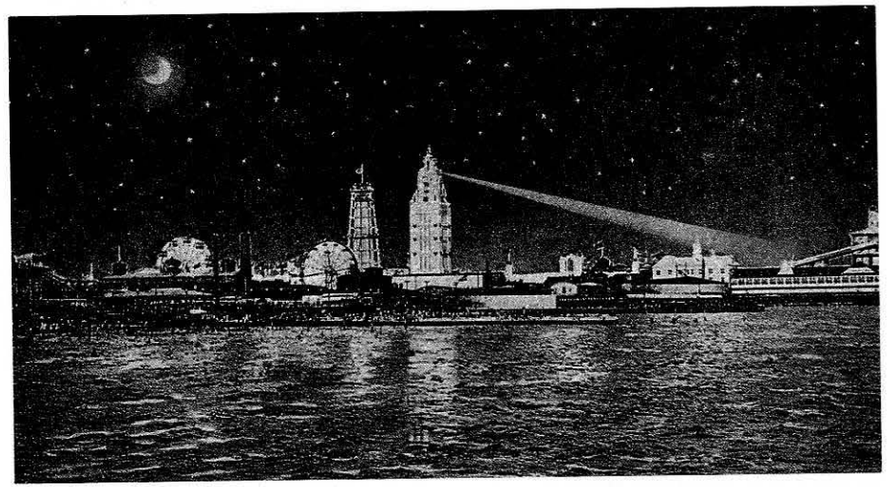


Leap Frog Railway — exhilarating accident witnessed from parallel track.

equally astronomical increase in the ability to avert it.
Manhattan is the outcome of that perpetual neck-and-neck race.

15. The Japanese Teahouse is converted, after one year and minimal modification, into the Airship Building. Inside a two-story Japanese temple is displayed, from 1905, the Santos Dumont Airship No. 9.
"A cigar-shaped balloon ... 60 feet long of oilskin from which is suspended a framework 35 feet long. A three-horse-power gasoline motor operates a two-blade propeller...."[24]
Earlier in 1905 Santos Dumont has performed maneuvers with this vehicle for the French president and war department; only months later Reynolds is in a position to schedule "a daily flight over Coney Island."
To substantiate Dreamland's claims as an autonomous state — with its own intelligentsia — he introduces the aeronaut-inventor Santos Dumont — now his employee — as the "noted Brazilian Scientist"; the small aircraft does, in fact, perform scientific experiments from its base in the backyard of the Japanese temple.
Simultaneously with this daily flight over Coney, Dreamland still accommodates, in apparent conflict, the hourly *simulated* flight over Manhattan. Reality now supersedes dream, reinforcing the suggestion implicit in Dreamland that the Future is gaining on fantasy, and that Dreamland will be the territory where the actual overtaking occurs.

16. The Leap Frog Railway is a special pier with a track leading nowhere, on which Reynolds stages the impossible: two bulletlike trains move toward each other at full speed on the same track, to meet an absurdist challenge once posed by Mark Twain as "the only thing that Yankee Ingenuity had not yet accomplished ... the successful passing of two carloads on a single line of tracks."
The Leap Frog cars rely on a technical invention that mimics animal copulation. They carry a pair of bent rails on their backs that allow them to glide over and under each other. (On the return trip the cars change position.) "The passengers in breathless excitement momentarily anticipating disaster, realizing that their lives are in jeopardy, clinging to one another for safety, closing their eyes to the impending danger....
The cars crash into one another, 32 people are hurled over the heads of 32 others.... They are suddenly awakened to a realization of the fact that they have actually collided with another car and yet they find themselves safe and sound ... proceeding in the same direction in which they started..."[25]



Beacon Tower at night.
(Senator Reynolds would later promote the Chrysler Building.)

Ostensibly the Leap Frog Railway is a prototype "to reduce the mortality rate due to collisions on railways," but in this apotheosis of the tradition of barely averted disaster Reynolds has blended the mechanics of sex with the imminence of death in a single respectable experience.

17. The Beacon Tower, smallest in plan, is perhaps Dreamland's most important structure.
It "rises 375 feet above a spacious park and is the dominating note around which the general scheme is centered.... The most striking and conspicuous structure for miles around ... When illuminated by over 100,000 electric lights it can be seen for a distance of over 30 miles. The Tower contains two elevators and from the top is obtained a magnificent sea view ... and a bird's-eye view of the Island."[26]
For a year it leads a relatively bland existence as "the finest Tower ever built." Then Reynolds makes it the definitive instrument in the systematic short-circuiting of the external world that is Dreamland's true mission.
He equips it with the most powerful searchlight on the eastern seaboard. The US Department of Lighthouses is forced to "crack down on the park in 1906.... Didn't the park realize that the alternating red and white beam was identical with that of the Norton's Point light"[27]—which marks the official entrance to New York's harbor? This surreal competition with reality is Reynolds' masterstroke: the searchlight is to lure ships off course, add real wrecks to the inventory of Dreamland's disasters, confuse and discredit the world outside Dreamland's borders.
(Twenty-five years later Reynolds, as the developer of the Chrysler Building, will insist on its silver crown over the objections of his architect.)

SHORTAGE

Dreamland opens only seven years after Steeplechase. Ostensibly seeking to provide unlimited entertainment and pleasure, Tilyou, Thompson and Reynolds have in fact alienated a part of the earth's surface further from nature than architecture has ever succeeded in doing before, and turned it into a magic carpet that can:
reproduce experience and fabricate almost any sensation; *sustain* any number of ritualistic performances that exorcise the apocalyptic penalties of the metropolitan condition (announced in the Bible and deeply ingrained since in the antiurban American sensibility); and *survive* the onslaught of over a million visitors a day.
In less than a decade they have invented and established an urbanism

based on the new Technology of the Fantastic: a permanent conspiracy against the realities of the external world. It defines completely new relationships between *site, program, form* and *technology.* The *site* has now become a miniature state; the *program* its ideology; and *architecture* the arrangement of the technological apparatus that compensates for the loss of real physicality.

The frenzied pace with which this psycho-mechanical urbanism has extended its tentacles across Coney Island testifies to the existence of a vacuum that had to be filled at all costs.

Just as a given meadow can only support a certain number of cows without being grazed bald, the reality of nature is progressively consumed under the simultaneous escalation of culture and density in the same spot.

The Metropolis leads to Reality Shortage; Coney's multiple synthetic realities offer a replacement.

OUTPOSTS

Coney's new urbanism of Fantastic Technology generates spin-offs all across the United States, even on sites that do not nearly approach an urban density. Outposts of Manhattanism, they serve as advertisements for the metropolitan condition itself.

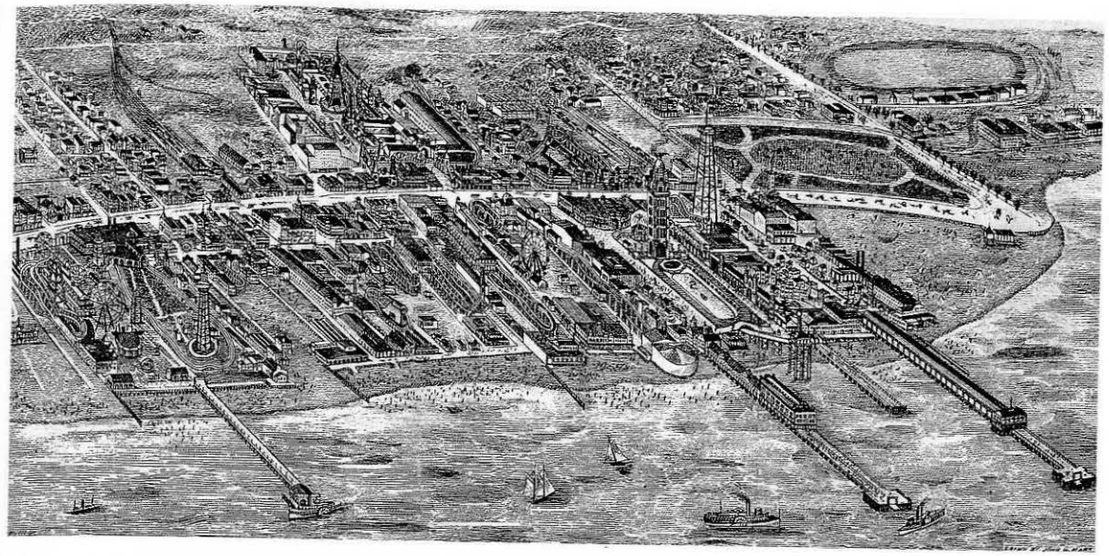
Steeplechase, Luna and Dreamland are reproduced faithfully: Roller Coaster, Collapsing Alphabet and Fighting the Flames are transplanted to the middle of nowhere. Smoke and flames can be seen for miles on otherwise innocent horizons.

Their effect is stunning: rural Americans who have never been to cities visit the parks. The first high-rise building they ever see is a burning block, their first sculpture is an alphabet about to collapse.

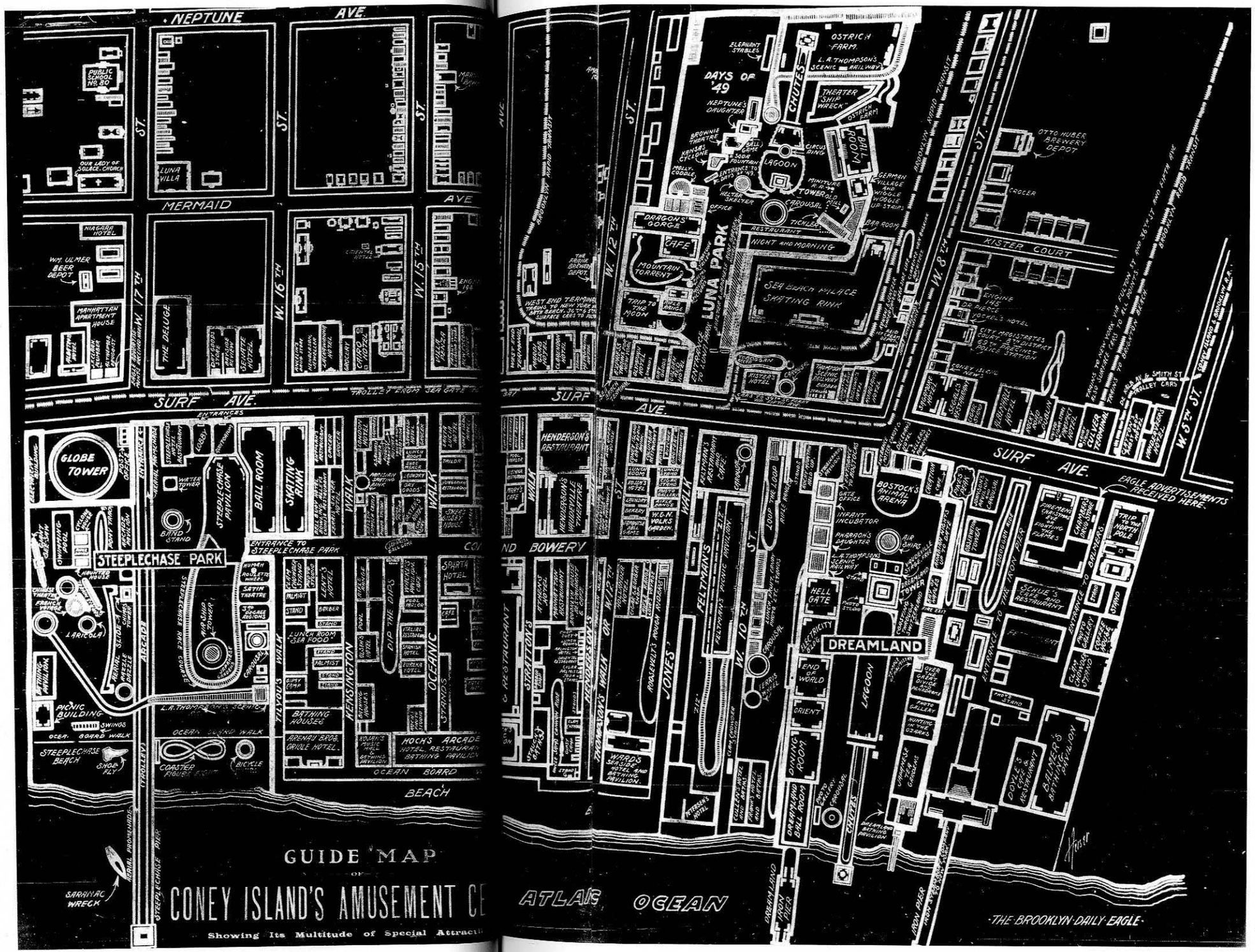
REVOLUTION

Now that the masses have solved the problem of Pleasure, they present the elite elsewhere on the island with the problem of the Masses.

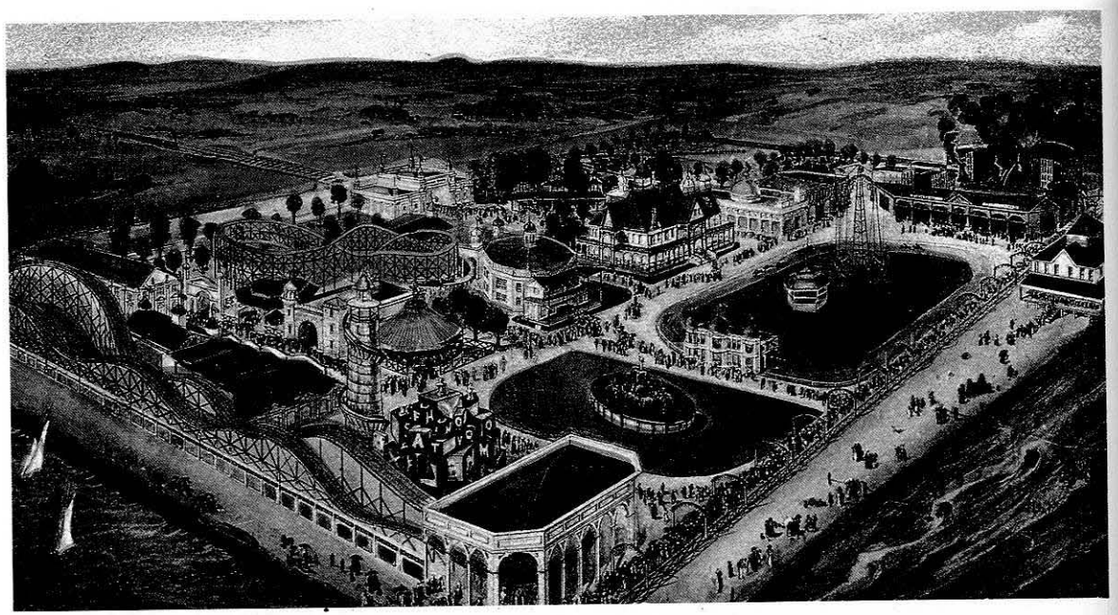
Between the comparatively salubrious islands of Steeplechase and Luna Park is an ever-deteriorating community. "There is scarcely any variety of human flotsam and jetsam that is not represented in its permanent population.... Every defaulting cashier, every eloping couple, every man or woman harboring suicidal intent ... comes flocking to it from every part of the land" to be exposed to "a concentrated sublimation of all the mean, petty, degrading swindles which depraved ingenuity has ever devised to prey upon humanity..."[28]



Bird's-eye view of Coney Island's middle zone, c. 1906 — a Metropolis of the Irrational: Steeplechase (far left), Luna Park (rear center, north of Surf Avenue), Dreamland (front right). The incipient Urbanism of the Fantastic was extremely unstable — facilities were modified and replaced continuously to respond to new demands and latest technological developments; all curves are competing roller coasters.



Plan of Coney Island's middle zone, 1907: Steeplechase (lower left), Luna Park (upper right) and Dreamland (lower right). Each rectangle represents a different pleasure-generating unit; entire system of mass irrationality is structured by island's grid.



Metropolitan outposts in the provinces:
Park with Burning Block on Lake Ontario.

The beach itself has become a last resort for the most hopeless victims of metropolitan life, who buy tickets to Coney with their last few cents and huddle together with the wreckage of their families to wait for the end... staring out over the impassive ocean to the sound of waves crashing on the sand.

"What a sight the poor make in the moonlight,"[29] whispers with an aesthetic shiver the chronicler of the mutant lifestyle of the Metropolis, faced with this terminal front line; each morning Coney's police collect the corpses.

But however outrageous, the situation of the wretched poor is not the real threat to the peace of mind of the reformers now isolated on the east end of the island, forced to retreat inside the still-civilized bastions of the resort hotels by the proliferation of the middle zone.

The gay battlefield of the Reality Shortage, the entertainment generated in Steeplechase, Luna and Dreamland, inspires loathing. Machines going through the motions of the Tango, a lighthouse that lures innocent ships, the masses racing on steel tracks in the moonlight, electric phantom cities more beautiful than anything seen before on earth, all seem to announce the imminent usurpation of a civilization that has taken thousands of years to mature.

They are the symptoms of revolution.

The east panics and becomes the headquarters of a belated campaign to rescue the rest of the island, a last-ditch effort at preservation that intensifies in direct proportion to the success of the Parks.

The issues, tactics and proposed solutions anticipate — in naked form — the tortured misunderstandings between official and popular culture, between elitist taste and popular imagination, that are to agonize the coming century. The debate is a dress rehearsal of the arguments respectable culture will mobilize to denigrate its probable replacement: the potentially sublime is criticized for being cheap and unreal.

FIASCO

In 1906, two years after the opening of Luna, Maxim Gorky visits the USA as a Socialist reporter.

His visit is a fiasco, especially after Manhattan's newspapers organize a mass protest in front of the Times Square Hotel where Gorky, "the Bitter One," is staying. To cheer him up, friends take the Russian to Coney Island. In the essay "Boredom," he articulates his horrified reactions to Coney and its freak culture.

"The City, magic and fantastic from afar, now appears an absurd jungle

of straight lines of wood, a cheap, hastily constructed toyhouse for the amusement of children.

"Dozens of white buildings, monstrously diverse, not one with even the suggestion of beauty. They are built of wood, and smeared over with peeling white paint which gives them the appearance of suffering from the same skin disease....

"Everything is stripped naked by the dispassionate glare. The glare is everywhere, and nowhere a shadow.... The visitor is stunned; his consciousness is withered by the intense gleam; his thoughts are routed from his mind; he becomes a particle in the crowd...."

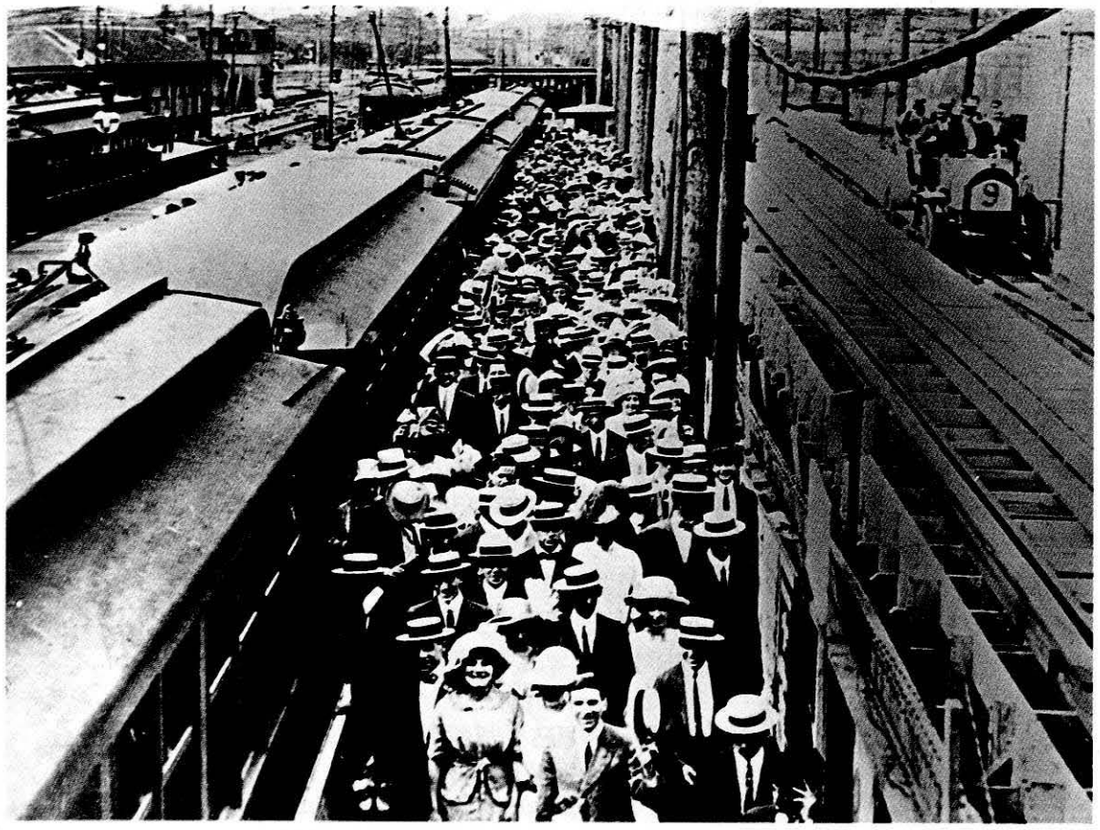
Gorky's disgust represents the modern intellectual's dilemma: confronted with the masses, whom he admires theoretically, in the flesh, he suffers from an acute distaste. He cannot admit to this disgust; he sublimates it by identifying external exploitation and corruption as the reason for the masses' aberrations.

"The people huddled together in this City actually number hundreds of thousands. They swarm into the cages like black flies. Children walk about, silent, with gaping mouths and dazzled eyes. They look around with such intensity, such seriousness that the sight of them feeding their little souls upon this hideousness, which they mistake for beauty, inspires a pained sense of pity....

"They are filled with contented *ennui,* their nerves are racked by an intricate maze of motion and dazzling fire. Bright eyes grow still brighter, as if the brain pales and lost blood in the strange turmoil of the white, glittering wood. The *ennui,* which issues from under the pressure of self-disgust, seems to turn into a slow circle of agony. It drags tens of thousands of people into its somber dance, and sweeps them into a will-less heap, as the wind sweeps the rubbish of the streets...."[30]

INDICTMENT

Gorky's indictment of Fantastic Technology and of the middle zone's arsenal against the Reality Shortage as essentially mediocre and fraudulent is only the most sophisticated display of the compound of prejudice and contempt that feeds the hotel zone's phobias. This fundamental misjudgment and a subsequent series of similar mis-readings guarantees the taste-making establishment's early disqualification for further participation in the experiment Manhattan. Their sensibilities offended by the "peeling white paint," pitying the manipulated masses, disparaging the events in the middle zone as compared to their own unreal well-preserved Arcadia, they look



Metropolitan densities arrive at Coney Island.

behind Coney's facade and therefore see nothing.
Based on a false analysis, their solution is doomed to be irrelevant: in the public interest, the island is to be turned into a park.
In what will become a standard remedy against the spontaneous urbanism of the masses — exorcism of the demon of mass irrationality — they propose to raze the City of Towers, to root out every trace of the infamous infrastructure as if it were a poisonous weed and to restore the surface of the earth to its "natural" state, a thin layer of grass.

BARRACKS

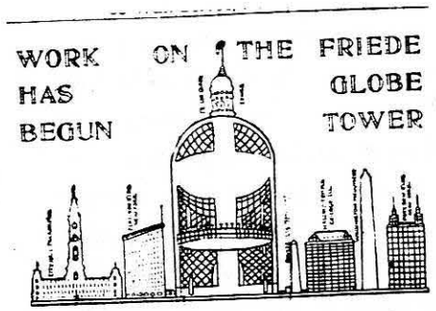
But as early as 1899 the patronizing puritanism of the Urbanism of Good Intentions is exposed by more acute observers, who perceive the genius of Coney's phantasmagoric transformation.
"The places of Amusement [on Coney] ... are liberally patronized by those who constitute what we call 'the masses,' meaning thereby persons whom the humanitarians and reformers would like to house in whitewashed barracks, and who possess a sense of the picturesque that I commend to the careful consideration of their would-be benefactors....
"Just now a good many of these reformists and humanitarians and representatives of what they themselves usually term the 'better element' are crying aloud to have the most picturesque and popular summer resort on the continent turned into a public park....
"The enthusiasm with which this proposition has been seconded and approved by everybody who does not know anything about the subject whatever, leads me to fear that our municipal authorities, who are notoriously prone to lend an ear to the clamor of ignorance, may succeed in establishing this park on a site where nothing higher than a currant bush will grow....
"The masses love Coney Island as it is, and although they will probably bear with dumb resignation any attempt to transform it into a region of asphalt walks and patches of scorched 'keep off the grass' sward, they will certainly turn their backs upon it in its new form and seek their summer recreation elsewhere...."[31]
The debate about the park is a confrontation between the reformist urbanism of healthy activities and the hedonistic urbanism of pleasure. It is also a rehearsal of the later showdowns between Modern Architecture and the architecture of Manhattanism.
For the coming century, the battle lines are drawn.

BLOB

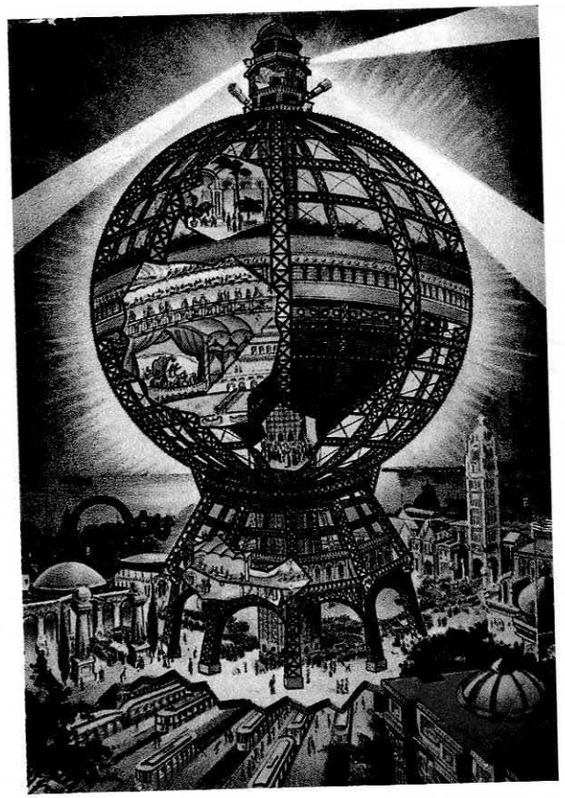
Oblivious to the contest for the middle, literally rising above the conflict between mechanical and natural surfaces, is the circular silhouette of a phantom structure that proves — if nothing else — Coney's continuing fertility as a breeding ground for revolutionary architectural prototypes.
Early in 1906 advertisements appear in New York papers announcing "a ground floor chance to share profits" in "the largest steel structure ever erected ... the greatest amusement enterprise in the whole world ... the best real estate venture,"[32] the Globe Tower. It will cost $1,500,000 to erect. The public is urged to invest. The stock will pay 100 percent interest annually.
The most voluminous building ever proposed in the history of mankind, it combines in a single gestalt the opposites — needle and sphere — that have been the extremes of Manhattan's formal vocabulary ever since the Latting Observatory and the balloon of the Crystal Palace were juxtaposed in 1853.
It is impossible for a globe to be a tower.
A sketch illustrating the ad — of a skyline dominated by a blob — reveals the Globe Tower's concept: the sphere is to be so colossal that simply by resting on the earth it can claim — through the height of its enormous diameter — also to be a tower, for it is at least "three times as high as the Flatiron building, the present marvel of New York."

SPHERE

The sphere appears throughout Western architectural history, generally coinciding with revolutionary moments. To the European Enlightenment it was a simulacrum of the world, a secular counterpart to the cathedral: typically, it was a monument and, in its entirety, hollow.
It is the American genius of Samuel Friede, inventor of the Globe Tower, to exploit the Platonic solid in a series of strictly pragmatic steps.
For him the globe, ruthlessly subdivided into floors, is simply a source of unlimited square footage. The larger it is, the more immense these interior planes; since the Globe itself will need only a single, negligible point of contact with the earth, the smallest possible site will support the largest reclaimable territory. As revealed to investors, the tower's blueprints show a gigantic steel planet that has crashed onto a replica of the Eiffel Tower, the whole "designed to be 700 feet high, the largest building in the world with enormous elevators carrying visitors to the different floors."[33]



Appearance of the Globe Tower, advertisement in the *New York Herald*, May 6, 1906.



Globe Tower, second version, with exploded exterior. From the top: Roof Gardens; layer of theaters; revolving restaurant; ballroom; *chambres séparées;* Africa, one of the continent/circuses; lobbies; entrances; etc. Special gravity elevator connects interior with underground metropolitan arteries.

SOCLES

A total of eight socles will support the Globe Tower. Otherwise the hovering monument will not directly interfere with life on earth, except where its specially designed gravity elevators penetrate the earth's crust to connect the interior of the sphere with the interior of the earth. Underground will be a multilevel interchange of various modes of transport: a combination of parking garage, subway and railway station with a branch going out to the sea as a pier for boats. As a program, the Globe Tower is an agglomeration of Steeplechase, Luna Park and Dreamland, all swallowed up in a single interior volume, stacked on consecutive floors, the whole parked on a small corner of Steeplechase that Friede has leased from Tilyou.

STATIONS

The capacity of the Globe Tower is 50,000 people at one time. Every 50 feet of its height is a station consisting of a main attraction embedded in subsidiary amusement facilities.

150 feet above the ground: "a Pedestal Roof Garden with popular price restaurant, continuous vaudeville theater, roller skating rink, bowling alley, slot machines, etc."

250 feet above the ground: "the Aerial Hippodrome, seating 5,000 people ... largest Hippodrome in the world, with four large circus rings and four immense animal cages" — incarcerating a vast number of species of wild animals — "giving continuous performances." Each ring represents a continent: a world inside the world. The circus is ringed by "automatic telescopes, automatic opera glasses, slot machines, a miniature railroad...."

300 feet above the ground: in the globe's equatorial zone are concentrated "the Main Hall, the Largest Ballroom in the world, and a moving restaurant enclosed in glass...." A revolving strip 25 feet wide carries "tables, kitchens and patrons around the outer edge of the Tower to give the effect of eating in an airborne dining car" with "a continuous panoramic view of Coney Island, the Ocean, the Countryside and Greater New York."

To stimulate continuous (24-hour) use of the Globe Tower by its 50,000 temporary inhabitants, the middle zone also contains a hotel floor, with small, luxuriously equipped, padded suites, rooms and cubicles.

Connecting the facilities of the main station are a "circular exhibition hall, candy devices, slot machines, toy devices, shows of various kinds,

goods manufactured where spectators can see the operation and purchase the goods as souvenirs."

350 feet above the ground: Aerial Palm Garden.

Implicit in Friede's horizontal arrangement is a social stratification; ascent in the Globe coincides with increased refinement and elegance of the facilities.

"Higher up there will be a more expensive restaurant with tables scattered in a palm garden with cascades of running water screened from each other by shrubbery artistically arranged on the Italian Garden plan." Friede hints at his ambition to collect a specimen of every plant known to man: the restaurant as Eden.

500 feet above the ground: Observatory Platform, "containing automatic telescopes, souvenir stand and various small concessions, highest platform in Greater New York."

600 feet above the ground: United States Weather Observation Bureau and Wireless Telegraph Station, "highest observation platform in the United States, equipped with modern weather recording devices, wireless telegraph, etc., surmounted with the largest revolving searchlight in the world.

"Thousands of electric lights make the building a gigantic tower of fire at night."

DISCREPANCY

Because it simply is not of this world, the Globe Tower can do without its predecessors' metaphorical stratagems of discontinuity. The first single *building* to claim the status of resort — "the most popular resort in the whole world" — it has severed all connections with nature; the immensity of its interior precludes any reference to external reality.

The full theoretical ramifications of Friede's quantum leap can best be illustrated mathematically:

1. assuming that the Globe Tower's diameter is 500 feet,
2. assuming further that its floors are spaced 15 feet apart,

then the formula of its total square footage,

$$\pi h^2 \sum_{k=0}^{n} k(n-k)$$

(h = 15′ height, n = number of floors + 1),

gives a total of 5,000,000 square feet.

Assuming a total of 1,000 square feet as the surface consumed by the eight socles, then the proportion,

$$\frac{\text{artificial surface}}{\text{area of site}} = \frac{5{,}000{,}000}{1{,}000}$$

The Globe Tower can reproduce that part of the world it occupies 5,000 times.

In light of this colossal discrepancy, the Globe Tower must be seen as the essence of the idea of Skyscraper, the most extreme and explicit manifestation of the Skyscraper's potential to reproduce the earth and to create other worlds.

FOUNDATION

The first advertisements mention that "work on the foundations of the Friede Globe Tower has been started by the Raymond Concrete Pile Co. of Chicago, and will be completed in 90 days according to contract, when the steel structural work will be rushed to completion."

As the future landing points of the as yet free-floating planet, the socles are invested with a special mystique.

On May 26, 1906, "the cornerstone laying will be the event of the day at the Island, and will be celebrated with band concerts, fireworks and oratory.... In years to come it will be stated with pride that 'I was there when the cornerstone was laid.'"

There is a rush of investors at the Globe Tower Co. office built next to the first socle.

At the end of the 1906 season the foundations are still incomplete. Investors become anxious. Another cornerstone ceremony marks the beginning of the 1907 season; another socle is completed "and a few steel girders ... raised on [the socles] as preliminary work on the Tower."

By 1908 it is clear that the most impressive architectural project ever conceived is a fraud.

Tilyou is stuck with the abortive supports that now obstruct the expansion of Steeplechase. "On account of the sandy formation at Coney ... long concrete spiles were sunk to a depth of 35 feet. Eight of these spiles were grouped together and a solid concrete piece about 3 feet thick was placed on top to hold them together.... About 30 of these bases were sunk on the property.... These concrete foundations are massive and it is believed that they can be removed only by liberal use of dynamite."[34]

FIRE

At the end of his proto-socialist-realist diatribe, Gorky unveils an alternative solution to Coney that is more imaginative than the artificial

resurrection of nature advocated by the "better element." "The soul is seized with a desire for a living, beautiful fire, a sublime fire, which should free the people from the slavery of a varied boredom."[35]

In May 1911 the lighting system in the devils that decorate the facade of Dreamland's End of the World short-circuits. Sparks start a fire that is fanned by a strong sea wind.

Only weeks before a superior fire-fighting apparatus has been installed; the ground has been dug up once more, to add new water mains and hydrants. But somehow the new ducts have not been connected with the Atlantic, inexhaustible fire extinguisher. In shock, the fire fighters of Fighting the Flames are first to desert their dormitories and the confines of Dreamland.

As real fire fighters arrive on the scene, they find no more pressure in the system than "in a garden hose."

Fireboats are kept at a distance by the heat. Only Lilliputia's midget fire fighters — confronted with the real thing after ±2,500 false alarms — put up a real fight against the holocaust; they save a small piece of their Nuremberg — the fire station — but otherwise their actions are hopeless.

The most pathetic victims of the disaster are the "educated" animals that now become victims of their unlearning of instinct; waiting for their teachers' permission, they escape too late, if at all. Elephants, hippos, horses, gorillas run amok, "enveloped in flames." Lions roam the streets in murderous panic, finally free to kill each other on their way to safety: "Sultan ... roared along Surf Avenue, eyes bloodshot, flanks torn and bleeding, mane afire...."[36] For many years after the holocaust, surviving animals are sighted on Coney, deep in Brooklyn even, still performing their former tricks...

In three hours Dreamland burns to the ground.

END

In the end, Dreamland has succeeded so well in cutting itself loose from the world that Manhattan's newspapers refuse to believe in the authenticity of the final disaster even as their editors see its flames and smoke from their office windows.

They suspect it is one more catastrophe staged by Reynolds to attract attention: the news is printed only after a 24-hour delay.

In an objective postmortem Reynolds admits that the burning of Dreamland is only the formalization of its earlier decline. "The promoters of Dreamland sought to appeal to a highly developed sense of the artistic ... but it did not take long for them to discover that Coney Island

Dreamland burns.

was scarcely the place for that sort of thing.... Architectural beauty was virtually lost upon the great majority of visitors.... From year to year Dreamland was popularized, its original design abandoned."
The disaster concludes Reynolds' preoccupation with Manhattan's prototype. He surrenders the gay battlefield of the Reality Shortage to the Urbanism of Good Intentions — "the City should take the land and turn it into a Public Park"[37] — and shifts his energies to Manhattan itself.

JOY

Follows a period of unsettlement.
In 1914 Luna Park too goes up in flames.
Dreamland becomes a parking lot.
Steeplechase survives, its attractions more debased with every new season.
Manhattan itself has become the theater of architectural invention.
Only with the Palace of Joy (1919) does Coney generate another breakthrough, resolving the apparent irreconcilability of *density* and *dignity* that has so upset its enemies. The palace shifts the emphasis in solving the Problem of Pleasure away from the compulsive production of passive entertainment to constructive arrangements of human activity.
The Palace of Joy is a pier, modified to become a condenser of social intercourse: two parallel walls contain an endless number of rooms and other private accommodations that define a linear public realm.
"The Palace of Joy ... will contain the largest enclosed swimming pool in the world; will contain salt water from the Atlantic Ocean and will be open year round.
"A mammoth Dance Hall and Skating Rink ... operated in connection with the Swimming Pool" are planned for the end of the pier.
"The equipment will include Russian, Turkish and Salt Water Baths; there will be 2,000 Private Bath Houses and 500 Private Rooms with 2,000 lockers to accommodate those who wish to stay overnight."[38]
Ballroom *inside* the locker room: an American Versailles for the People.
The Public at the core of the Private — a theoretical inversion that will make Manhattan's inhabitants a population of houseguests.
But the Palace of Joy fails to materialize.
The beach reverts to its earliest condition: overcrowded arena of the dictatorship of the proletariat, "monstrous safety valve of the world's most highly charged metropolis."[39]

CONQUEST

The final conquest and definitive eradication of Coney's original urbanism are assured in 1938 when Commissioner Robert Moses brings beach and boardwalk under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department, ultimate vehicle of the Urbanism of Good Intentions. For Moses, the anti-Reynolds, Coney becomes — again — a testing ground for strategies intended ultimately for Manhattan.
"Engrossed in dreams of lawn-flanked parkways and trim tennis courts,"[40] he considers the thin strip of oceanfront under his control as merely the base for an offensive that will gradually replace Coney's street grid with innocuous vegetation. The first block to fall is the site of Dreamland, where he establishes the new New York Aquarium in 1957.
It is a modern structure, an incarnation of the "whitewashed barracks," painfully cheerful in the upward sweep of its concrete roofline, implanted in a vast lawn.
"Its lines are trim and clean."[41]
The aquarium is a Modernist revenge of the conscious upon the unconscious: its fish — "inhabitants of the deep" — are forced to spend the rest of their lives in a sanatorium.
When he is finished, Moses has turned 50 percent of Coney's surface into parks.
Mother island to the bitter end, Coney Island has become the model for a modern Manhattan of Grass.