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PHALANSTERY

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Fourier’s unitary architecture centered on a social approach that synthesized “man’s passions and desires” rather than “trying to change human nature.” The phalanstery, a container of collective luxury, put forth a design and that was based on work as the centerpiece of life, but with work redefined as full of passion and pleasure. The ideal number of 1,620 residents was “mathematically based to achieve infinite combinations amongst people,” but one that was not so vast as to dilute the energy formed by the collective (Larsen). In the phalanstery, Fourier’s architecture strove to facilitate “the production of composed, collective, and integral pleasure… --a theory of architecture as the art of association and putting together senses, forms, bodies and ideas” (Stanek). These associations would not necessarily be complementary, but through the friction coming from contrasting ideas, new knowledge would arise. Thus, the phalanstery was to be a meeting place for a diverse group of people “of all ages and types who would realize the multiplicity of relationships of love and labor” (Stanek).

The phalanstery was organized as a four-story structure punctuated by courtyards and connected through galleries. Each house was required to have empty space surrounding it, an area no smaller than the surface area of the house itself. This rule was to guide the networked growth of the phalanstery system, creating an urban condition in which built and unbuilt had a pre-determined relationship based on size, and which also made it much more affordable to live communally than to construct ones own house. Most structures would host 20-30 families with shared common services and places for meeting. The bourgeois family unit was questioned, with children raising themselves in groups and contributing to the everyday life of the phalanstery, while adults pursued their passions and pairings through work and pleasure.

Fourier’s plan for transitioning into the familistere life was bused on a buyout system in which former property owners would be compensated with cerificates giving them an equal value of property in the new community. Dividends based on this certificate would be paid, in addition to dividends paid related to the productive efforts and diligence of the resident. Thus, “Fourier does not eliminate capitalism, and allows the wealthy to remain wealthy, but also allows for the hard-working laborer to increase material security” (Bathelor). It is a redistribution of the wealth of the community on a more equitable basis.

Fourier’s writings and architecture inspired communities and buildings in the centuries following his life, including phalansteries in the US and communes like Togetherness, a 1960s San Francisco commune.

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Lukasz Stanek, “Collective Luxury: Architecture and Populism in Charles Fourier,” Hunch 14, 128.

Lars Bang Larsen, “Giraffe and Anti-Giraffe: Charles Fourier’s Artistic Thinking,” e-flux journal #26, June 2011.

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