

# Fulcrum

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## moderne übermenschen.

I. Krier

**Fulcrum:** In R.A.M. Stern's introduction to the your book Speer he says later generations (presumably including my own) are unable to distinguish between form and content in historical studies. Do you agree?

**Leon Krier:** Stern refers to the post WWII generations, for whom Classicism was, and still is, considered a thing of the irrecoverable past. That is a general and worldwide fact, transcending political differences. Why this should be so is explained by the idea that Classicism was a characteristic of backward reactionary politics, and thus unfit for technologically and socially advanced modern and democratic societies.

A more perverse (post- and neo-modernist) argument sustains Classicism to have been irredeemably polluted by its role in totalitarian regimes. Classicism was, and still is, amalgamated with totalitarianism, *e basta*. Speer's post war assessment of his own work confirmed this official dogma. Interestingly, the *vade mecum* has served to obscure the central role of modernism in 20th-century totalitarian regimes.

**F:** You write "Industrial civilization is incapable of building cities or villages. It is unable to create meaningful and beautiful places. It builds suburbs, zones and transport-systems, dumping grounds and concentration camps. These are always forms of mass-housing, mass-employment, mass-transport, mass-communication, mass-elimination. Auschwitz-Birkenau and Los Angeles are children of the same parents." The pure ferocity of this comparison is compelling. Was the power of Speer's controversial image necessary as a counterpoint to what you see as the continued power of a failed modernism?

**L.K.:** The figure of Speer is emblematic for modern superman. He believes that he is in control of hyperscale, while in fact he is the game of ominous powers. My writing is often polemical in tone in order to underline dangers scandalously ignored. The love story with colossal Faustian projects is unbroken and largely unconscious. We are just at the beginning of a generalised loss of human scale in most human activities.

**F:** Is there really a link between the "insignificant architecture" of the UN and European Parliament and "their moral impotence and uncertain authority? Would it improve their power and politics if they were classical?

**L.K.:** Excellent question. Of course there is no mechanical relationship between good architecture and good behaviour... By reverse, nor is there a causal link between evil politics and evil architecture.

**Good architecture often serves to give legitimacy to political or economic power. In my opinion, some evil politics have produced some good architecture and some good politics have recently produced evil architecture.**

What I describe particularly concerns the European (essentially good and vital) institutions. Their overly bureaucratic, technocratic (Eurocratic) side is strikingly symbolised by the bland, scaleless, cold and unloved architecture in Bruxelles, Luxembourg and Strasbourg. The UN buildings in New York also embody, and almost perfectly symbolise, the triumph of bureaucracy (the enormous vertical, faceless, scaleless, speechless slab) over the cowering and demure Assembly Buildings.

Speer handled very well the urban and architectural hyperscale, giving shape to the metropolitan sprawl of Berlin as it was in 1937. Had his masterplan been built, it could have been easily occupied by a modern democratic society, state and politics. The architectural Colossi would have become prime world tourism attractions. Other modern metropolitan models like those of LeCorbusier or Hilberseimer represent instead a triumph of the hyperscale in its most abstract, inhuman embodiment and as such are totally unfit for a modern democratic society.

**F:** Speer describes his architecture not as an expression of National Socialism, but integral to the movement. This is not architecture as the pastime of popes, and not even as political will, but as the fulfillment of a claim to absolute dominance over a nation. Can we have politics without ideology?

**L.K.:** It is very striking how closely Hitler's and Speer's will not to copy historical styles, but create a modern style, correspond to the declarations

of modernist artists and architects. Nazi propaganda announced that there existed already a Nazi style. This was an ideological pretense, which ironically is still today largely believed to be a historical truth. In fact, most Nazi architects, including Speer, were not trained as Classicists. They learned the language as they went along. Judging from the results and Hitler's own sketches the main influence was not Schinkel but Wagner, who produced his most striking works when Hitler lived in Vienna. The Reichsparteitag buildings are pure Otto Wagner Schule.

In the late 30s an architectural policy became increasingly evident in publications, and architectural competitions. Party and State buildings were to be of a classical style, residential buildings of a vernacular style and industrial and leisure buildings of a modernist style. This policy was strongly influenced by Hitler himself. Notwithstanding Hitler's criminal madness, this was an intelligent and rational policy influenced by modern thinking. It is not merely a mindless and amateurish rehashing of Victorian eclecticism as is commonly held.

However, the massive scale changes necessary for building a modern imperial continental armament and defense industry (the Pharaonic projects of the West Wall in '36, and Autobahns in '37 and Atlantic Wall in '40) and the awesome destructions suffered from allied bombardments lead to a revolutionary change in Nazi architectural politics after 1942. Neufert produced a treatise for Speer for the large-scale industrialisation of urban reconstructions (*Bauordnungslehre*). Its frontispiece was headed by Hitler's *Dritter Führererlass* of 23.10.1942: "Building elements (...) have to be largely normalised. Work on building-sites has to be mechanised, in order to eliminate artisanal work as far as possible. One has to find methods (...) which allow an essential simplification and acceleration of the building process." It became clear to Hitler that his Classical plans for German cities were condemned for the post war economy, even if Germany won the war.

**F:** Is the assertion that the architecture of assemblies is central to the domination of the people still relevant in an internet era?

**L.K.:** In order for large social groups to create peaceful bonds, overcome rivaling violence, they need shared language, laws and collective symbols.

An appealing physical public realm, as well as cadastral and physical stability of properties and buildings, are the instruments to implement and realise, respect and maintain a durable social peace. They are no guarantee of longevity, but are necessary for its existence. We don't know what influences the internet will have over the nature of the public realm. What needs to be secured is that it will not change the bodily reality and specific scale of human individuals and communities.

My proposal is simple. Given the present evolutionary stage of the human species: **even if** the demographic explosion were uncurbed; **even if** there existed no limits to the provision of fossil and other energy resources; **even if** there were no limits to the automation of production, the mechanisation of transport and electronic communication; **even if** there was no limit to the provision of better and healthier synthetic building materials, and, in short; **even if** there was no limit to globalisation and technological innovation; we should nonetheless return to traditional settlement, architecture and construction models. The humaneness of building-scales, of building techniques, of building-styles, of design, and of planning methods is dependent on these three disciplines. What I condemn is the ideological idealisation of modernism and industrialism and the parallel delegitimation of traditional technological models.

**Modernism and industrialism are not projects with any foreseeable endform other than hell on earth.**

In nature all healthy growth reaches a stage of mature form. Environmental sciences are yet in a state of infancy. The question science has to address is: How many humans can live in given locations, regions, countries, continents, in given geo-climatic conditions, for how long, under what political economies and with what technical and biological inventories? And beyond, what can be our ethical, aesthetic, technical and technological value systems in conditions of limited free-energy resources?

Leon Krier is an architect, theorist and urban planner, and author of *Albert Speer: Architecture 1932-42* (reprinted by Monacelli Press 2013 with foreword by Robert A.M. Stern).

THE TOWER ~ DRIVE  
controlled ~ uncontrolled



TOWER-LESS SPRAWL  
FUTURELESS HORIZONTALITY

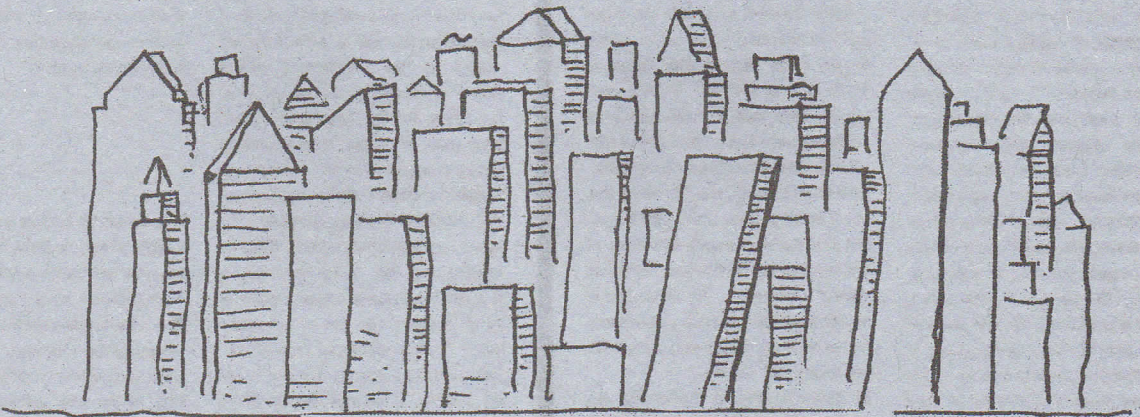
"towerless"



TRUE SKYSCRAPER CITY  
HORIZONTAL CITY WITH VERTICAL ACCENTS

"tower-ful"

LK 06



SPRAWLING TOWERS  
FUTURELESS VERTICALITY

"tower-sick"