The 'American Dream' of Mid-Twenty Century: Building the World of Tomorrow

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Abstract

The article begins from the New York World's Fair of 1939–1940, that was the first exposition based on the future, with an opening slogan of "Dawn of a New Day", allowing all visitors to take a look at "the world of tomorrow". From the historical standpoint, the event can be considered as a crucial moment of reflection about the meaning to assign to the term "modern" in American architecture, planning and design, beyond the restricted boundaries of a standardized *Style.* It happened at the end of a decade marked by the Great Depression, but dense of epochal changes. There are three core themes in the article. First, it claims that *modernism* in American architecture, urban planning, and city reforms, are ongoing conversations between architecture and society over the possibility of anticipating a better world. Second, that *modernism* is not the result of a discourse but rather a debate between different architectural practices and formal conceptions articulated against the backdrop of modernity. Third, that the idea of *modernism* is also drawn from other disciplines: from Emil Durkheim's sociology where *modernism* is part of the trilogy modernity-modern-modernism; and from the history of art where *modernism* is linked to a wide range of categories, including different styles, movements, genres, and means.

Keywords: Urban planning, Modernity, Modernism, Regional Modernism, Architectural history.

1. Introduction

The discourse on modernity in architecture and city planning has been largely influenced by phenomena that changed over time. In the twenties, it was marked by economic interests of increasing capitalism, the political climate of a society, dreaming not to pass again through the experience of a world war; the social climate, produced by astonishing scientific achievements on the constitution of space, matter and time; the cultural climate of new avant-garde practices in literature, music and art.

In the thirties, the interest is addressed to other concerns: the increasing polarization of totalitarian and democratic systems; the global economic depression; the growing interest in regional identity as a counterweight to the shadow of imperialism disguised as internationalism. After the World War II, a new array of political, social and cultural changes, contributed, once again, to give a new form to modernity: the propagation of democracy and the welfare state, the need to rebuild shattered cities or to reform the Mumford's "Intolerable City",[i] and the quick spread of mass culture and of broadcast media. Really the seeds of these changes were scattered, especially in the United States, during the twenties and the thirties of last century, within a set of factors strictly related but conceptually different. A cultural factor centered on the relations between architecture and art, architecture and its own traditions, architecture and design. A political factor focused on the set of social and economic institutions which architecture could and should boost.

A social factor based on the set of phenomena – cultural, political, economic – compelling the modernity; on how architecture can underline what is appropriate and of paramount importance in improving conditions of life, and in remedying the negative aspects associated to modernity, such as the mechanization, the standardization, the social Taylorism. The condition of man, both in American metropolises as New York or Chicago, and in the rural towns, became the subject of analysis from different standpoints: the literary, the sociological, the ecological, and the economical. On the European side of the Atlantic, for the avant-garde of distinguished architects of the twenties, architecture is a mean, leverage, or even a weapon, used to pursue the highest aim that humanity can endow to it. Architecture represented for these architects a great tool to "transform the human mankind". The world changed its base; a "modern" society was being built, founded on new production relationships and new forms of interaction between men. The hope was that "new" architecture could quickly give birth to a new man released from prejudices, from conformism and from the old lifestyle. This new society, this new man could not develop in the slums and in decaying and overcrowded suburbs of the industrial cities that were shaped to reflect the image of a society that, on the opposite shores of the Atlantic Ocean, Patrick Geddes[ii] and Lewis Mumford defined as "paleotechnic".

It was believed that a system of social organization and spatial structures adequate for that aim were essential. But this organization, this environment were not only thought as being the reflection and the physical reproduction of a new society; this system, this environment, had to be created quickly following the pace of technological advancement, because only living in such a space, the culturally lowbrow man transforms himself in a new man. And so, the dialectic conception of the human environment is defined: the image of a new society as well as the array in which that society is formed. New environments, new city, new architecture are conceived as tools allowing transforming and improving human mankind. This new architecture, according to the terminology used at the time, is "a new social condenser" within which the new transformation must be produced. Over these principles, which entail precise and determined relations between shape, program and political ideology, was founded what Reyner Banham called "the mythology of modernism".

After all, beginning from the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe and in the USA the first instances of "a new tradition" started to appear, wanting to break with past's stylistic and programmatic settings. With the development of both capitalism and industrial society, new needs become urgent. From these needs new programs are born, that the architects face resorting more and more often to building techniques and materials supplied to markets by the industrial advancement. Cast iron, steel, reinforced concrete, glass allow some of these architect to definitely cut the academism away, committing themselves to the research of a new architectural shape that fits these programs, suitable for the new society. Several contribute, both from the US and from Europe, to this "quest of the new", following paths that are sometimes convergent as well as divergent. And while the lack of institutional architecture schools in the United States, at least up to the seventies of the nineteenth century, forced Richard Morris Hunt, Henry Hobson Richardson, Louis H. Sullivan, Ernest Flagg, Daniel H. Burnham, George B. Post, Charles F. McKim, Bernard Maybeck – just to quote only a few – to attend the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, it can't be neglected that, towards the end of the century, the young Frank Lloyd Wright's stubborn refusal to accept "uncle Dan" Burnham advice to attend the Parisian school represented the first, most significant indication of an unyielding will to create a "new tradition" within the American architecture.[iii]

The beginning of this fragment of architecture history have been fixed at the opening of the New York World's Fair, since this happening marked a sort of conscious and definite emancipation of American culture from European models. The aim is to analyze the social, cultural and artistic context within which a debate developed, which tried to define a specific identity and an idea of urbanism that could be at the same time "modern" and "American". A research to which, directly or indirectly, contributed several European exponents of the modern movement of the twenties and whom, in turn, often came out deeply influenced from the contact with an American cultural *milieu* that proved to be much less superficial and technicistic compared to the stereotyped image that was still in vogue among the European intellectual *élites*, and to the constitution of which have contributed, albeit partially and more or less consciously, the publication of *De la démocratie en Amerique* by Alexis de Tocqueville, and the *American notes for general circulation* by Charles Dickens, since the thirties and the forties of the nineteenth century.

2. Entering a new era: the 1939-40 New York World' Fair

"*The biggest international exposition in history was officially opened at 3:12 o'clock yesterday afternoon when President Roosevelt formally dedicated the New York World's Fair 1939 in an address before a gathering of 60,000 persons in the open-air Court of Peace*".[iv] This was the emphatic beginning of Russell Porter's article published on The New York Times on May 1st 1939: a decade after the crash of NYSE, while the American economic and financial system was still having problems with getting passed the Great Depression, and while the dark shadows of the Wehrmacht started to threaten the continental Europe, the United States entrusted the New York fair the task of representing the most updated image of their cultural and technological level, as well as the task of prospecting new lines of progress and forthcoming development. *Tomorrow* was the most recurrent topic of the event, and *Futurama* was the name given by Norman Bel Geddes – for the General Motors – to a futuristic and fanciful model of "The City of Tomorrow" that devised a skyscraper core-city placed within a landscape characterized by highways, inter-urban roads, railway lines, satellite cities and suburban green-belts.

On the theatrical and virtual background of *Futurama*, Bel Geddes projected a striking propaganda picture, embodying the individual and common troubles of the American society at the end of the twentieth century thirties.

If on one hand *Futurama* expressed the technocratic tension – typical of some kind of *American Excepionalism* – exerted by the powerful corporations of metalworking and car industries on federal government institutions to obtain financial support to build an integrated network of road infrastructures, on the other hand it tried to acknowledge and make popular the *terminus ad quem* of a critical confrontation on the semantic interpretation to be given to the terms "new" and "modern" to which, from different socio-cultural perspectives and, often, starting from different methodical stand-points, the artistic and professional *élites* have contributed from the opposite shores of the Atlantic Ocean since the early 20s. Moreover, the circumstance that the setup of several countries' pavilions was authored by European modern architects, made New York World's Fair an additional chance of debate and confrontation between European and American professional cultures.[v]

Seven years earlier – the same year of the famous "Modern Architecture International Exhibition" at NY MoMA– once again Bel Geddes, shifting the view from the *open-frontier* of nineteenth century to the *new-horizon* of twentieth, stated that […] We enter a new era. Are we ready for the changes that are coming? The houses we live in to-morrow will not much resemble the houses we live in to-day. Automobiles, railway trains, theaters, cities, industry itself, are undergoing rapid changes. Likewise, art in all its forms. The forms they presently take will undoubtedly have kinship with the forms we know in the present; but this relationship will be as distinct, and probably as remote, as that between the horseless buggy of yesterday and the present-day motor car. We live and work under pressure with a tremendous expenditure of energy. We feel that life in our time is more urgent, complex and discordant than life ever was before. That may be so. […] Critics of the age are agreed upon one thought: that what industry has given us, as yet, is not good enough. Another plea of critics hostile to the age is that machines make automatons of men. They fail to see that the machine age is not really here. Although we built the machines, we have not become at ease with them and have not mastered them. Our condition is the result of a swift industrial evolution.

If we see the situation clearly, we realize that we have been infatuated with our own mechanical ingenuity. Rapidly multiplying our products, creating and glorifying the gadget, we have been inferior craftsmen, the victims rather than the masters of our ingenuity. In our evolution we have accumulated noise, dirt, glitter, speed, mass production, traffic congestion, and the commonplace by our machine-made ideas. But that is only one side. […] It happens that the United States has seized upon more of the fruits of industrialism than any other nation. We have gone farther and more swiftly than any other. To what end? Not the least tendency is the searching and brooding uncertainty, the quest for basic truths which characterize the present day. Never before, in an economic crisis, has there been such an aroused consciousness on the part of the community at large and within industry itself. Complacency has vanished. A new horizon appears. A horizon that will inspire the next phase in the evolution of the age. We are entering an era which, notably, shall be characterized by design in four specific phases: Design in social structure to insure the organization of people, work, wealth, leisure. Design in machines that shall improve working conditions by eliminating drudgery.

Design in all objects of daily use that shall make them economical, durable, convenient, and congenial to everyone. Design in the arts, painting, sculpture, music, literature, and architecture that shall inspire the new era.[vi] In this sort of manifesto that, for some issues treated, can only appear as an up-to-date version of Futurism[vii], the new "project phases" listed by the American designer – "design in social structure, design in machines, design in all objects of daily use, design in the arts and architecture" – are matching with a progressive cultural revolution that happened within the American society during the years that followed what was supposed to be "the war to end all wars", and that entrusted the undisputed primacy to the United States for industrial, technological and capitalistic advance. However, the common perception of the "universality of the age of the machine", characterized by the tendency towards massive and standardized production methods and typologies, seemed aimed to influence and to uniform both individual and social behaviors, with clearly visible results in physical structures of commercial and industrial metropolis, in its housing fragments and even in simple daily life routines.

Celebrating the sesquicentennial anniversary of George Washington's oath, in New York's Federal Hall in Wall Street, April 30 1789, New York World's Fair happened at the end of a decade that was especially full of economical, social and cultural events. During that period, also owing to the immigration of several distinguished exponents of European architectural culture in the United States, the American discourse on architecture was progressively enlarged from the main aesthetic issues of International Style and Bay Region architecture, to the problems of city planning, of social housing, of urban communities and of their *habitat.* nTo the analysis of the relationship among individual/community/city/house – that finds in architecture, in art and, more in general, in the educational method practiced in American universities the utmost focal point – is addressed this paper. Within a wide spectrum of theoretical positions that, including both urban planning of American metropolis and the rural and anti-urban conception of Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City was the focus on the issues of social housing and single-family housing that were object of the sociologic and critical thinking since the end of World War I.

Bel Geddes' theatrical model broadly drew from the regionalist ideas which animated the urban planning debate, especially in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, during the 20s and the early 30s. On the West-Coast of the United States the discussion was framed around the proposal contained in "Regional Survey of New York and its Environs" by the British urban planner Thomas Adams, and the regional-city conception proposed by Lewis Mumford and the "Regional Planning Association of America" which Clarence Stein and Henry Wright, as members of the City Housing Corporation, planned to install in Fair Lawn, New Jersey. The new concept of "regional city" considered a city planned and divided in "zones" that, rationally, sectioned residential, commercial and industrial zones as well as social classes. The new metropolis should have been grounded around a central business district connected, by traffic flow arteries, to residential and industrial suburbs with low volumetric density organized in ring shape increasing outwards. But more than else the whole urban complex should have been framed within a tidy zoning plan. This new concept of "regional city" emerged from general thinking about the necessity of restoring continuity between individual, community and environment, which appeared threatened by the cultural barbarization produced by increasing Taylorization. The full representation of a psychological distress which, starting from the individual, reverberated its effects on social behavior and on city's formal setting was given – as a literary piece – in 1922 by Harry Sinclair Lewis in *Babbitt*.[viii]

Zenith, the "Zip City", fake and standardized prototype of a Middlewest city with about a hundred of thousands inhabitants, with its tall steel and reinforced concrete towers used as office buildings, middle-class residential units on Floral Heights hill, commercial and financial center crossed by the usual street grid, the park-ways, malls, railway station, represents the image of a society ephemeral and homotopical that forsakes any other cultural and artistic interest, to reach profit. Zenith is permeated by an amazing enthusiasm but it is absolutely lacking of open-mindedness: advertising, non-sense careerism, self-promotion are substitutes of art and humanistic culture, and individuals themselves have to conform to a superficial and standardized *Weltanschauung.* Not only its inhabitants bought the same furniture, the same davenports and the same cars, but they are also lead "to think the same thoughts".

They are scared by cultural pluralism, by ideas that may appear eccentric, radical, or merely different. Sinclair Lewis gives an early picture – albeit dramatized for narrative purposes – of the American transformation during the 20s to become the industrial and urban contemporary country. The province towns – such as the fake Gopher Prairie in Minnesota, described two years earlier in *Main Street* – were disappearing. Americans shifted towards great cities, worked in offices instead of farms, used cars, and went to the movies, showed their pride in being "modern": Sinclair Lewis associated to this mainly physical-meaning "mobility" the psychological interpretation of "instability" as well. Lewis' portrait of the "new America" appeared even worse than the "old America" of the Gilded Age described by Mark Twain fifty years earlier[ix]. During the Roaring Twenties of prohibitionism and of social Taylorism, that replaced segregation and social Darwinism of late nineteenth century Brown Decades, other exponents from the literary world – amongst which Sherwood Anderson, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos – denounced the same discomfort and, like Sinclair Lewis, looked at the other shore of the Atlantic Ocean suffering the expressive freedom that appeared to be the inspiring engine of European avant-garde arts.

But if from one hand Lewis, in *Babbitt,* described the middle-class lifestyle in an average-size American city, on the other, Scott Fitzgerald, in *The Great Gatsby*, drew the portrait – likewise vacuous and culturally depressed – of the metropolitan upper middle-class between the New York speakeasies and the luxurious mansions of the East and West Egg on Long Island's north coast separated from the city by the *Valley of Ashes,* a small channel that carried the Flushing River's muddy water, on the west coast of which was a waste-land inhabited by people hopeless and desperate that survived in the middle of a site of industrial waste materials. It was, moreover, a perception of diffused social discomfort that was noticed in Continental Europe as well – which was forced to face further difficulties linked to post-War physical and institutional reconstruction – that Oswald Spengler[x] resolved in the cyclical transition between *local culture* to *universal civilization* and which Lewis Mumford, in 1938, will later comment in its social-anthropological fallouts about the city life conditions.

Mumford was fascinated by Spengler's book, whose prophetic vision of human's destiny have deeply influenced a whole generation of American and European writers. That weighty and extraordinarily brilliant book, written by a lonely German professor, impressed him since 1926, when he reviewed for *The New Republic,* the English translation of the first volume judging it "*an audacious, profound* [...] *exciting and magnificent, one of the most capable attempts to order the annals of history since Auguste Comte*" in spite of several inaccuracies and its unique mixture "*of Nietzschean mysticism and arrogant Junkerism*". Not even Spengler's later adhesion to National-socialism changed Mumford's original thought about the book that, in 1939, he chose as his contribution to *Books That Changed Our Minds* by Malcom Cowley and Bernard Smith. Waiving any fee of objectivity, Spengler put himself at the center of his story, writing notes, showing sympathy, expressing critiques, making comparisons. Perhaps he was the writer that more than anyone else got close to the historical narration that Mumford meant to use in his books on American cultural tradition. Spengler was less interested in reporting history's main events as he was in getting closer to what he called "their meanings". He sought for the main style of a culture, its intimate founding conception that was expressed through arts, architecture, literature, philosophy, music and the institutional form of Country administration. But something even more fundamental got Mumford close to Spengler: his history was actually a sort of moral prophecy.

Mumford had a profoundly different vision of the future compared to the Prussian professor. The main topic of *The Decline of West*, which is the continuing evolution of society from an organic to a non-organic life, from biological to mechanical, was exactly the concept that Mumford was developing in his research on the American culture. Reading Spengler suggested some ideas on how to extend this thesis to Western culture as a whole: classical culture of ancient Greece and Rome, Jew Christian and Arabic magical cultures, modern, or Faustian, culture of Northern Europe that was born around the tenth century with the development of the Romanesque architecture. Each one of these cultures had its own organic life cycle – Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter – the same organic metaphors that Mumford, for pure coincidence, used in his essay *The Golden Day.* With a definitely less deeply accent, Sinclair Lewis' novel did not end with a mere literary description of average Americans' psychology and of the alienation given by his "way of living" in a strongly urbanized city – for the study of which the author spent three years in Cincinnati, Ohio[xi] – but it was characterized also for numerous reference to themes of architecture and urban planning as well.

The main character of the novel, whom very significantly is a *realtor,* when he can treat himself with a break from his job's daily routine, he decides to spend his leisure-time in the wilderness of Maine, showing a surprising agreement with the "deep-dramatic appeal of scouting-camps and camp-communities" to which Benton MacKaye referred in "An Appalachian Trail: A Project in Regional Planning."[xii] In the article, that influenced great part of the subsequent American discussion on the problem of regional planning and "community planning" during the 20s until the institution of the "Tennessee Valley Authority" in 1933 at the beginning of the first New Deal, MacKaye stated indeed that

[…] The problem of living is at bottom an economic one. And this alone is bad enough, even in a period of so-called 'normalcy'. But living has been considerably complicated of late in various ways – by war, by questions of personal liberty and by 'menaces' of one kind or another. There have been created bitter antagonisms. We are undergoing also the bad combination of high prices and unemployment. This situation is world-wide – the result of a world-wide-war. […] The customary approach to the problem of living relates to work rather than play. Can we increase the efficiency of our 'working' time? Can we solve the problem of labor? If so we can widen the opportunities for leisure. The new approach reverses this mental process. Can we increase the efficiency of our 'spare' time? Can we develop opportunities for leisure as an aid in solving the problem of labor? Elements of dramatic appeal.

The results achievable in the camp and scouting life are common knowledge to all who have passed beyond the tenderfoot stage therein. The camp community is a sanctuary and a refuge from the scramble of every-day worldly commercial life. It is in essence a retreat from profit. Cooperation replaces antagonism, trust replaces suspicion, and emulation replaces competition. An Appalachian trail, with its camps, communities, and spheres of influence along the skyline, should, with reasonably good management, accomplish these achievements. And they possess within them the elements of a deep dramatic appeal. Indeed the lure of the scouting life can be made the most formidable enemy of the lure of militarism (a thing with which this country is menaced along with all others). It comes the nearest perhaps, of things thus far projected, to supplying what Professor James once called a 'moral equivalent of war'. It appeals to the primal instincts of fighting heroism, of volunteer service, and of work in a common cause.[xiii]

The same lengthwise development of the *Appalachian Trail*, extending, for more than 2000 miles, from Mount Washington in Maine to Mount Mitchell in Georgia, if on the one hand testifies that the dimensional scale within which American planning strategies were outlined was characterized by a wideness, that was not only unconceivable, but actually unworkable in European countries, on the other hand it discloses some of the reasons of a ruralism profoundly rooted in the American thinking and practice and which Frank Lloyd Wright will try to set up with his *Broadacre City.* Furthermore, from a political and sociological perspective, the dualism between *work* and *play,* between *labor* and *leisure, antagonism* and *cooperation,* along with the couple *community* and *nature* and the need "*to supplying what Professor James once called a 'moral equivalent of war'*"[xiv], pointed out by MacKaye as determining factors of his ethical-naturalistic and precociously ecological approach to the *problem of living* solution, will be recurring topics in John Dewey's anti-dualistic instrumentalism as well, following the lines of William James' radical empiricism, proposed as "American way of Thinking" in *Democracy and Education* in 1916, in *Experience and Nature* in 1925 and in *Art as Experience* in 1934.

3. Mumford, Adams and the Regional Plan of New York

In the Spring 1923 Benton MacKaye, Lewis Mumford, Clarence Stein along with other intellectuals from New York gave birth to the "Regional Planning Association of America" (RPAA), a composite association of economists, sociologists and urban planners.[xv] In July of the same year, the British urban planner Thomas Adams, gaining the Plans and Surveys director task for the Russell Sage Foundation, elaborated the "Regional Survey of New York and its Environs" that anticipated the "Regional Plan of New York" (RPNY)[xvi]. The "regional city" emerges, at the end of the decade, as a planned resolution to the problems of American industrial metropolis.

While, at the beginning of the twentieth century already, the "City Beautiful" movement by Daniel Burnham took note of the majority of urban instances, regionalist approach appealed to a new interpretation of "metropolitan-machine" functioning, of governmental activity, and of advance capitalism's nature itself to propose a unitary view of spatial and social relations in the metropolitan area of New York. Regionalists endorsed the eighteenth century critiques based on "blight" and "congestion" but reformulated them within an ideological frame that proposed a radical reconstruction of the "decentralized" city, according to functional areas. Just in 1929, during the completion of Clarence Stein and Henry Wright's project in Radburn, New Jersey and, after Thomas Adams' publishing of the ten volumes urban plan, a fracture within the regional groups started to show up, especially referring to the exact definition of "region" and to the practical aims to pursue through regional planning.

Extremely synthesizing, the most significant difference between the two points of view was in the fact that Adams' group started from the concept described by historian Robert Fishman as "metropolitan's," [xvii] while Mumford's group was inspired by a profoundly anti-metropolitan "communitarianism" as well as by European urban reformation experiences and, notably, those in Netherlands. While Thomas Adams aimed to rationalize, reinterpret and reinforce New York City's cultural and economical hegemony, as regional and national center, Lewis Mumford aimed at the metropolitan "city of the dead" destruction to encourage a net of small-sized "satellite cities"[xviii]. As remarked by Andrew Meyers[xix] the difference can be synthesized in the contrast between "diffuse recentralization," supported by the first group, and "decentralization" supported by the second, both being widely generic terms that, if closely examined, reveal that basically Adams was oriented to allow the presence of urban industries and a limited dispersion, while RPAA proposed centrifugal distancing from the main nucleus towards non-urbanized territories. [xx] Lewis Mumford and Thomas Adams were just the most active and distinguished amongst the several promoters of regionalist principles during the early decades of the twentieth century. The period abound of definitions of "region" from which New York urban planners drew. Mumford and Adams' groups had their cultural roots in Ebenezer

Howard's Garden City movement of Great Britain. Howard's concept, expressed in *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898), and partially fulfilled with a series of projects in London Metropolitan Area, was built on the assumption of working class delocalization from industrial London congested neighborhoods towards satellite towns capable of connecting the best attributions of town and country[xxi]. Garden Cities should have been build through a balanced collaboration between a "philanthropic land speculation and a collective land ownership", including housing and factories and limited to 32000 residents. But it was as part of a regional cluster that the garden-city was going to be actually capable of merging town and country, as "*each inhabitant of the whole group, though in one sense living in a town of small size, would be in reality living in, and would enjoy the advantages of a great and most beautiful city; and yet all the fresh delights of the country* [...] *would be within a very few minutes' ride or walk*".

There was, however, a key preoccupation of Mumford's group, clearly inspired by Patrick Geddes, concerning the ecological crisis. Mumford saw indeed the ecological crisis not as a unique and recent phenomenon but the culmination of forces that relies on an entirely instrumental reason. Mumford attempted a reconstructive analysis as well as a damning critique, claiming that: "We must re-examine man's needs and re-establish more human goals than those we have mistakenly pursued: we must choose the road to life, which of old was called the road to salvation, and which now is also the road to survival. We need more knowledge still, but of a different kind from the fragmentary, unco-ordinated triumphs of modern specialists; we need more wealth, but a wealth measured in terms of life rather than profits and prestige; we need more power too, the human power to control, to inhibit, to direct, to restrain, to withhold, in direct proportion to our augmented physical power to explode and destroy". Adams' group definition of region and of the role of regional planning integrated the concept of Howard's garden-city with the analysis of Urban Ecology by University of Chicago School of Urban Sociology. Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Louis Wirth represented the nucleus of a group of sociologists from Chicago that started studying "human ecology", the scientific analysis of "orderly and typical grouping of [the city's] population and institutions" according to natural behavioral group laws and urban accretion.

At the beginning of the 1920s Robert Park and his collaborators contributed to transform the study of society as groups of individuals based on numerical-statistic methods in a heuristic science that considered social groups as organic units that can be controlled with a suitable manipulation of the urban environment. This new setting produced Robert Park and Ernest Burgess' diagrammatic image of the standardized city, essentially of American cities, as "dart-board" made of concentric circles that was aimed at explaining how groups' behavioral laws, could produce a specific physical setting of the city. This configuration, creating a spatial hierarchy between financial value of land, social classes and ethnic groups, determined in turn the whole group's behavior.

Beyond slight semantic distinctions, both New York groups shared essentially the definition of the regional adjective given by Chicago School of Urban Sociology and both focused their attention especially on the problem of regional congestion. The spectrum of congestion, produced by urban-mass, threatened Adams and Mumford's "invisible cities". The term congestion borrowed from the reformers of social building and from late nineteenth century urban planners, was likened by regionalists to concepts such as blight, slums, overcrowding, concentration, mobility, density, and traffic jams. The ductility of this term allowed a broad concordance between New York groups from a critical perspective. While Mumford and Adams often did not consider necessary to correct this generic assimilation, being clear that mutual attacks to congestion held actually two different elements, economical and social.

The economical aspect of the critique to congestion responded to a crisis perceived in the distribution of consumer goods and it was believed to be rooted in the principles of scientific management introduced by Frederick Winslow Taylor, which complied to the efficient localization of industry in order to reduce building density and to enhance transportation and transit systems. The social aspect of the critique to blight and slums complied to density as well as to population, living conditions, public health, environmental hygiene, and as the negative social effects produced by real estate speculation. Re-including all the critical aspects of the urban problem – denounced by housing reformers, by municipal urban planners and Taylorist technocrats – under the sign of regional planning, both Adams and Mumford legitimated and gave popularity to an *élite* debate which will later dominate the concept of metropolis during the twentieth century.

There has been a substantial accord between two New York groups on the nature and impact of economical congestion. The industrial and commercial activities concentration in Manhattan produced a crisis in handling of goods and distribution of operators. The orthogonal grid street system, imposed by 1811 zoning, did not absorb the increasing vehicular traffic and the public transportation system required great investments to be upgraded to the latest requests. As residential complexes were moved far from the center due to commercial activities and expensive land, Manhattan monopoly on commercial and productive activities required more and more exchange. These inefficiencies contributed to increase consumption goods' prices and to greater investments in public infrastructures. Both groups believed that the solution for the problem was to relocate industries, reduce population density, adjust and strengthen transportation system, even if they did not agree on the nature and entity of such "de-concentration".

The social aspect of congestion became a crucial element of regionalist thinking. Building speculation and demographic pressure could have generated "congestion and blight" but, according to Burgess, these agents themselves became organic part of the city's social structure: the intensity of economic competition and following social stimulus in the congested metropolis lead to an increase of destabilizing effects implied by what was defined as *mobility*, i.e. the

"Change of movement in response to a new stimulus or situation. [...]The mobility of city life, with its increase in number and intensity of stimulations, tends inevitably to confuse and to demoralize the person. For an essential element in the mores and in personal morality is consistency, consistency of the type that is natural in the social control of the primary group. Where mobility is greatest, and where in consequence primary control breaks down completely, as in the zone of deterioration in the modern city, there develop areas of demoralization, of promiscuity, and vice.[xxii]

4. Conclusions

The American dialectic universalism versus regionalism between the two World Wars, exemplified in the article through urban planning, could ease to comprehend the so called borderline manifestations, that can be found on the boundary of architectural culture, considered by Kenneth Frampton to be the base of "Critical Regionalism": "It is my contention that Critical Regionalism continues to flourish sporadically within the cultural fissures that articulate in unexpected ways the continents of Europe and America. These borderline manifestations may be characterized, after Abraham Moles, as the "interstices of freedom."[xxiii]

Critical Regionalism refers to an architecture that "resists" the tendency to flatten the cultural differences in the ecumenism of a universal language. This "resistance" gives birth to the will of highlighting local singularities and peculiarities, harmonizing, synthetically, with the structural shapes of "modern" buildings, and emphasizing, through oppositions and contrasts, with a significant attention towards the nature of building materials. Frampton exhorts to understand the difference between a "critical" conception of regionalism from the mere nostalgic regression towards pre-industrial building models or methods: this regionalism can be defined as "critical", because it seeks new roads to connect the "new" with the "tradition". During the enforcement of the distinctive characters of a specific region, even with shapes modified by the language of the International Style, it is possible to produce an architecture that can express a "dual coding", that merges "new" with "antique", that is sensible to physical influences of weather and geography as much as to the local culture and traditions.

Like Reyner Banham and Charles Jencks, Frampton recognizes that the level of abstraction reached by the so called International Style, stripped of the ethical ambitions and the ideological tensions that sustained it, has produced as main result the brutal dominion of the merely visual sensibility, heritage of the western tradition associated to rationality and to the epistemology applications, and concludes with hoping an "architecture of resistance", capable of broadening the spectrum of physical and psychological sensibilities called at stake to "read" a building, in order to gain full awareness of: […] intensity of light, darkness, heat and cold; the feeling of humidity; the aroma of material; the almost palpable presence of masonry as the body senses its own confinement; the momentum of an induced gait and the relative inertia of the body as it traverses the floor; the echoing resonance of our own footfall."[xxiv]

Therefore, this work has been aimed to demonstrate that not different critical-dialectical motions were the basis of the "regionalist" conception, anti-chauvinist for sure, that Mumford, from the initial elaboration in *The Story of Utopias*, ultimately exposed in *The South of Architecture* in 1941 and the strict point of view that F.L. Wright had towards Le Corbusier's "cardboard house" in *Modern Architecture: Being the Kahn Lectures* in 1931. "Europe has lost much of its magic. Gertrude Stein comes to us from Paris and is only a seven days' wonder. Ezra Pound's new volume seems all compound of echoes from a lost world. The expatriates do not fit in with the newer America, so greatly changed from the old" writes Grant Wood in his 1935 manifesto *Revolt against the City*[xxv].

"Regional modernism" initially originated in architecture to characterize building design that opposed the standardizations of an International Style – promoted in the USA by the most celebrated Exhibition at NY MoMA by Alfred Barr, Philip Johnson, and Henry-Russell Hitchcock – was characterized as "a theory that supports resistance to various forms of hegemonic, universal, or otherwise standardizing structures that would diminish local differentiation."[xxvi] In 1926 on Harper's Journal, Mumford in "The Intolerable City: Must It Keep on Growing?" claims:

The mouths of our great cities are gigantic hoppers. Into them pour the foods we coax from the earth, the energy we snare from the sun, the metals we disembowel, the men and women we draw from the sampler communities. What comes out of these hoppers? Ordinarily, people think that wealth is increased and life is far more attractive and thrilling; for if this were not so, who would be drawn into New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, Philadelphia, and why should any other city boast about its increases in population and attempt to put itself in the same census tables? Surely, this *is* the best that modern civilization can offer, this New York with its dazzle of pointed towers, this Chicago with its sweep of avenues, this Detroit with its thick pageant of motors?

But let us look at the hopper more closely and see what is actually coming out of it. Census reports, mortality statistics, and income tax returns do not tell the whole story: there is something beneath all that, the life of the ordinary man and woman. In the long run the things that tip the balance are those that cannot be weighed: they must be seen, felt, handled, endured. Recently, the New York State Housing and Regional Planning Commission confessed that only one third the population of New York City had an income sufficient to enable the family to live in decent modern quarters.

Here is the very significance of the Regional Modernism in USA inter-war time.

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i Mumford L. (1926). The Intolerable City: Must It Keep On Growing? Harper's Journal, Sections I-IV.

ii Geddes P. (1915). Cities in Evolution. An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and to the Study of Civics. London: Williams & Norgate.

iii Wright F.L. (1932) . An Autobiography . New York: Longmans, Green & Co.

iv Porter R. B. (1939). Nations in parade. The New York Times, May 1, 1.

v Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer designed Pennsylvania pavilion, Henry Van de Velde, Léon Steiner and Victor Bourgeois the Belgian, Alvar Aalto the Finnish, Sven Markelius the Swedish, Ernst Weismann Yugoslavian, Lucìo Costa and Oscar Niemeyer the Brazilian, the interiors of which were set up by Paul Lester Wiener.

vi Bel Geddes N. (1932). Horizons in Industrial Design. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 2–3.

vii To the concept of "speed", that Reyner Banham considers the main constitutive factor of the futurist manifesto by Marinetti, Bel Geddes seems to give the same propulsive value, but nonetheless he includes it, retrospectively, amongst the main productive factors of social friction and discomfort: "*In our evolution we have accumulated noise, dirt, glitter, speed, mass production, traffic congestion, and the commonplace by our machine-made ideas*".

viii Lewis H. S. (1922). Babbitt. New York: Harcourt and Brace, "[…] *George Follansbee Babbitt probably approaches the ideal of an American popular hero of the middle class. The relativity of business morals as well as private rules of conduct is for him an accepted article of faith, and without hesitation he considers it God's purpose that man should work, increase his income, and enjoy modern improvements. He feels that he obeys these commandments and therefore lives in complete harmony with himself and society.*" From the speech by Erik Axel Karlfeldt, Permanent Secretary of the Sweden Academy, on giving the Nobel Prize to Harry Sinclair Lewis on December 10, 1930. In: Frenz H. (1969), *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1901-1967*, Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Company

ix The term Gilded Age was coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today* in 1873. The name refers to the gilding process and was used by the authors with a sarcastic meaning, to ridicule the American leisure class inclination towards an excessive ostentation of wealth. Actually The Gilded Age is considered, in American historiography, as a period of great demographic growth together with an impetuous economic development during the Reconstruction after the Civil War (1861-65) in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century (1869-1896). This historical period was characterized by the affirmation of particularly aggressive forms of industrialism and capitalism: economy developed with a growth rate even bigger than recent history in America even due to the institution of the corporation associative system. Lewis Mumford gives a rather penetrating analysis of the social and cultural implications that followed the passive acceptation of so called "social Darwinism" and the "corporations'" super power: "[…] *Unchecked, unmodified industrialism controlled the mind as well as the material apparatus of the country; men who had a cut for scholarship, like Charles Francis Adams, became railroad magnates, and the son of the Great Emancipator became the head of the Pullman Corporation. H. G. Eastman founded the business school in 1885, and by the end of the war that which was established in Poughkeepsie had more than a thousand pupils. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was established in 1861 and dedicated to the practical applications of science in the arts, agriculture, manufacture and commerce; when it has was opened in 1865 the courses on industrial technology dominated the whole program. The multiplication of these institutes witnessed the new orientation in industry and life. 'We do not properly live in these days' one of the early Transcendentalists, J. S. Dwight, had written, 'but everywhere, with patent inventions and complex arrangements, are getting ready to live. The end is lost in the means, life is smothered in applicances.' The Gilded Age accepted these facts with complacence: business was the only activity it respected; comfort was the only result it sought. Gone were the tragic doubts that had vexed the Transcendentalists and made life interesting and terrible and very beautiful for all the sensitive minds: the steel mill, the mine, the counting house, claimed then; or if not that, they went to an equally materialist post-war Germany, dominated by Bismarck and Krupp, and specialized in their 'Fach', as they might specialize in railroad securities, or foreign markets.*". In Mumford L. (1926). The Golden Day. New York: Boni and Liveright, 169–170.

x Spengler O.A.G. (1926-28). Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte, Gestalt und Wirklichkeit; Welthistorische Perspektives. (Munich: C.H. Beck'she Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2 vols.

xi "[…] *Cincinnati is honourably famous for its free schools, of which it has so many that no person's child among its population can, by possibility, want the means of education, which are extended, upon an average, to four thousand pupils, annually. I was only present in one of these establishments during the hours of instruction. In the boys' department, which was full of little urchins (varying in their ages, I*

should say, from six years old to ten or twelve), the master offered to institute an extemporary examination of the pupils in algebra; a proposal, which, as I was by no means confident of my ability to detect mistakes in that science, I declined with some alarm. In the girls' school, reading was proposed; and as I felt tolerably equal to that art, I expressed my willingness to hear a class. Books were distributed accordingly, and some half-dozen girls relieved each other in reading paragraphs from English History. But it seemed to be a dry compilation, infinitely above their powers; and when they had blundered through three or four dreary passages concerning the Treaty of Amiens, and other thrilling topics of the same nature (obviously without comprehending ten words), I expressed myself quite satisfied. It is very possible that they only mounted to this exalted stave in the Ladder of Learning for the astonishment of a visitor; and that at other times they keep upon its lower rounds; but I should have been much better pleased and satisfied if I had heard them exercised in simpler lessons, which they understood. Dickens C. (1842). American Notes for General Circulation. London: Chapman & Hall.

xii MacKaye B. (1921). An Appalachian Trail: A project in Regional Planning. Journal of the American Institute of Architects, n. 9, October.

xiii Ibid. In 1919, as officer of Federal Department of Labor, Benton MacKaye expressed for the first time the ideas that he will later identify and frame for his Appalachian Trail proposal. The first document, entitled "Employment and Natural Resources", proposed community's development lines and work programs for World War I veterans. The program included projects of that implied a revision of governmental approach to *small-farm-owners* instituted with the Homestead Act in 1862. MacKaye's proposal projected a new vision of human an natural resources usage, of rural/urban and work/community relations. It was a non-consumerist program based on a focused management of ecological resources. The following year MacKaye moved his ideas from the segment of social politics to the one of regional planning and began collaboration with Charles Harris Whitaker, editor of Journal of the American Institute of Architects, on topics of regional planning including community projects capable of producing goods and material resources intended for urban center consumption. In 1921 MacKaye associated to Committee on Community Planning, a New York group of urban planners chaired by Whitaker, from which the Regional Planning Association of America will born.

xiv MacKaye here refers to *The Moral Equivalent of War* conference during which, in 1906, William James expressed, at the Stanford University in Palo Alto, his ideas on America's need for an organized civil service. James' ideas will inspire the New Deal political ideas with the constitution of civil services such as Civilian Conservation Corps, Peace Corps and the AmeriCorps. Despite some of James' points of view can be arguable – the consideration that only men could perform the services, some racial argumentations and the concept that civil service should be seen as a form of "warfare against nature" – the essay keeps his supporting value to civil service in the mutual interest of individuals and nation.

xv "[…] The group included not only [Henry] Wright, Stein, Mumford and MacKaye, but also Frederick Ackerman, Charles H. Withaker, realtor Alexander Bing, economist Stuart Chase and architects Robert D. Kohn, John Irwin Bright, and Frederick Bigger. Other associated with it later were Tracy Augur, Catherine Bauer, Clarence A. Perry, Robert Bruere, Joseph K. Hart, Russell Black, and Edith Elmer Wood". See Scott M. (1971). American City Planning Since 1890, Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

xvi Adams T. (ed.) (1929). The Regional Plan of New York and its Environs, Vols. 1–2, New York: Committee on the Regional Plan of New York of the Russell Sage Foundation.

xvii Fishman R. (2000). The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

xviii Mumford L. (1932). The Plan of New York. The New Republic 71, 5 June, 121–126 & 122, June, 146-154.

xix Meyers A. A. (1998). Invisible Cities: Lewis Mumford, Thomas Adams, and the Invention of the Regional City, 1925-1929. Department of History Columbia University, New York: Business and Economic History, Volume XXVII no.2, Winter. 894–68.

xx In an article written for *The Survey Graphic* in 1925 Mumford, reconstructing the history United States, migrations, stated that *the fourth migration* represented the ultimate act of territorial migrations of the following American generations. The *first great migration* of his saga included the sub-continent conquer, which began during the seventeenth century and kept moving to West through following frontiers. The symbolic transport of the *first migration* was represented by the "covered wagon", pulled by oxen or horses and, often, used as temporary shelter, which allowed the pioneers to move through wild territories over a period of three centuries: "[…]*The little communities that clustered about the mine or the railway station were towns and villages only by courtesy of the census taker: they lacked the traditional resources of a common life - their games, their religious revivals, their intellectual stimuli, were all of the crudest. Pleasure never interfered with the 'business' of the early pioneer; because business was his pleasure*". The *second great migration*, triggered from the Industrial Revolution during the first half of the nineteenth century and partially overlapped with the previous, developed over the country, colonized by the time, along canals and railway lines towards small cities which arouse around factories and train stations: towns often with poor and overcrowded houses and factories, which contributed to environmental pollution and cultural depression: "[…] *The conditions that determined this flow of population were narrowly*

industrial: a city was considered solely as a place of work and business opportunity. That children need a chance to play and grow, that families need decent shelter and privacy and a few amenities, that learning and culture are worth encouraging for their own sake – these things were too often forgotten and ignored by the men who fostered the new industrialism. The result is familiar, and there is scarcely a town with more than 10,000 people and a working population which will not serve for example. Homes blocked and crowded by factories; rivers polluted; factories and railway yards seizing sites that should have been preserved for recreation; inadequate homes, thrown together anyhow, for sale anyhow, inhabitants anyhow. The result was called prosperity in the census reports, but that was because no one tried to strike a balance between the private gains and the social losses". The following *third migration* during late nineteenth century towards commercial and industrial metropolis was the effect induced by advanced capitalism and concentration of financial power in banks, insurances, stock markets: "[…]*The magnet of the third migration was the financial center. As the industrial system developed in America productive effort came to take second place to financial direction, and in the great consolidations of industry that began in the eighties, in the growth of banking and insurance facilities in the 'nineties, and in the development of advertising for the purpose of securing a national market, that got under way in the present century, the sales and promotion departments have absorbed, directly or indirectly, a large part of the population*". Mumford believed that a *fourth migration* should have been planned from the imperial city – tyrannopolis – made possible by automobiles and other communication technological innovations that should have acted as centrifugal agents, dissipating urban families towards the suburbs seeking better quality of life: "[…] *The first migration sought land; the second industrial production; the third, financial direction and culture; but as a matter of fact, each of these types of effort and occupation is needed for a stable, all-round community. Only here and there have we even fitfully attempted to utilize the land intelligently, relate industry to power, resources and market, and provide an adequate "human plant" for the community at large. To effect this union is the task of the fourth migration*". The *fourth migration* was Mumford's main objection to Adams' plan: non–reversible mobility given by automobiles and the quick electrification of internal territories meant, first of all, that planning concentrated civic centers with skyscrapers, speculation housing, and pollution was an act of absolute madness. Mumford L. (1925). The Fourth Migration. The Survey Graphic 54, n.3, May 1, 130–33.

[xxi] Howard E. (1898). To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 165. Howard acknowledged that his focus shifted towards urban planning after reading Edward Bellamy's *Looking Forward* utopian novel in 1888. The "garden city" idea was suggested to him from the description of future Boston in the year 2000, given by the novel's main character Julian West: "[…] *Miles of broad streets, shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings for the most part not in continuous blocks but set in larger or smaller enclosures, stretched in every direction. Every quarter contained large open squares filled with trees, along which statues glistened and fountains flashed in the late afternoon sun. Public buildings of a colossal size and architectural grandeur unparalleled in my day raised their stately piles on every side. Surely I had never seen this city nor one comparable to it before*". Bellamy E. (1888). Looking Forward: 2000-1887. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 21.

[xxii] Burgess E. (1925). The Growth of the City, in Park R., Burgess E. and McKenzie R., (eds.), The City: Suggestions for the Study of Human Nature in the Urban Environment of Chicago. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 69.

[xxiii] Frampton K. (1983). Prospects for a Critical Regionalism. Perspecta, Vol. 20, 147-162.

[xxiv] Ibid.

[xxv] Wood G. (1935). Revolt against the City. Iowa City: Clio, 19.

[xxvi] Canizaro V. B. (ed.). (2007) Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. 16–33.