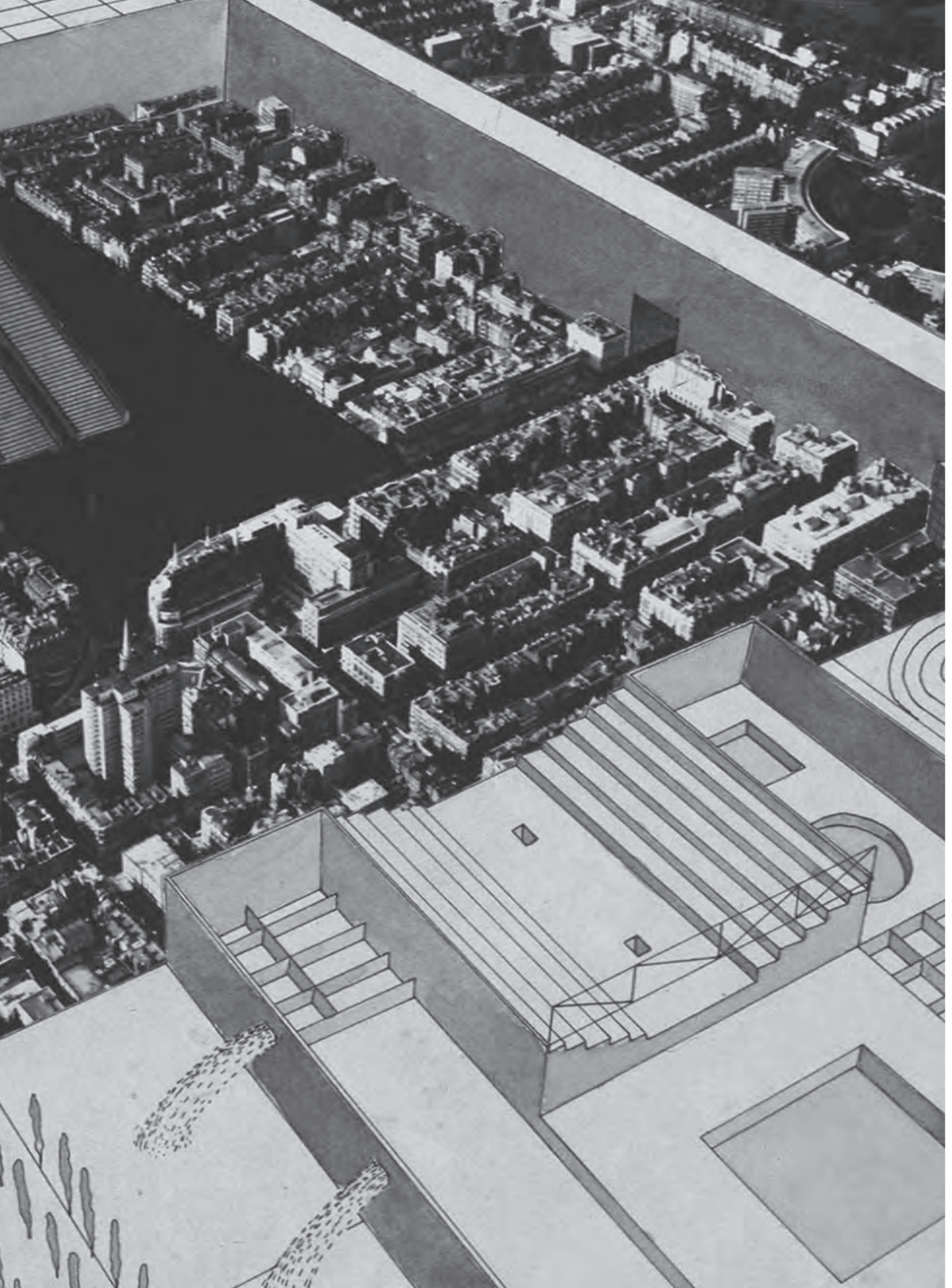

1.

WALL:
EXODUS, OR THE VOLUNTARY PRISONERS OF ARCHITECTURE,
LONDON
1972

Domenico Fontana inserted, by connecting the main churches into a sacred route, new streets into the old structure. The new streets enabled not only the circulation of the pilgrims along the path but also functioned as attractions and commercial elements. These interventions can also be interpreted as a means to recreate the sacredness of the city: Rome was turned from a city with sacred monuments into a sacred city as a whole.

In effect, the walls of Exodus function like ancient city walls. Setting up confines creates a difference between the area inside and outside of Exodus. The meaningful life and the promise to be part of a new powerful community justify the rigorous spatial rupture and constitute the place as sanctuary. The emphasis on the ritual entry of the "fugitives," the "environmental sluice," and the training period in the "reception square" expresses the importance of the threshold and thereby enhances the aural nature of the "walled city."

The gate of Exodus only functions in one direction, though. Like the procession of a Roman triumph that enters through a special *porta* and carries on past a sequence of monuments, the new inmates of Exodus proceed along a given set of monumental squares. In antiquity, however, the *via sacra* simply connected the ritually important sites into a symbolic unity within the heterogeneous city fabric, whereas in the Exodus project, every point inside is seen as significant and every area outside as insignificant. Although the form of Rome has been transformed, violated, and re-structured by a symbolic order, such as at the time of the Roman Empire or in the sixteenth century, the existing city scheme has by no means been destroyed as a whole. By contrast, the strip of Exodus pierces into the city by eliminating and replacing the grown urban fabric.

THE IDEAL CITY AND OTHER MODELS OF UTOPIAN LIFE

The Closed and the Open Society as Ideal Worlds

Visions for ideal settlements, like Koolhaas's Exodus, have a long tradition, stretching back to accounts on Atlantis in ancient Greece, considerations in Plato's *Republic* (around 380 BC) and the *Laws* (348 BC), passages of Aristotle's *Politics* (around 350 BC), Augustine of Hippo's *The City of God, or The Heavenly Jerusalem* (413–426), Filarete's Sforzinda (1460), Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1623), Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), Claude-Nicolas Ledoux's City of Chaux (1774–79), and including proposals from more recent times, like William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891), Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902), Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City in *The Disappearing City* (1932), and Le Corbusier's *The Radiant City* (1922), among others.

According to Lewis Mumford, the ancient cities in Egypt and Mesopotamia can be seen as examples of built utopian sites and as visible evidence of something "out of this world."[73] This is not only because the city was created as a sacred place built with an intrinsic cosmic order but also because it was founded by a king or authority figure acting by divine right. For instance, the Purple Forbidden City of Beijing at the beginning of the fifteenth century is an ideal site out of this world; it is completely closed off from the environment, surrounded by a six-meter-deep ditch and a ten-meter-high wall designed at the exact geometrical center of the ancient capital.[74] Combining imperial rule with a cosmic order made the city a site protected by divine power, which ensured the inviolate character of the emperor's residence and provided him with supreme authority.[75]

Besides such formal approaches, Plato's account in *The Republic* outlines the ideal society as a rationally organized city-state close to the ideology of Sparta, but his account does not provide further information about the spatial configuration of the model site.[76] He links his discussion about justice and happiness of the individual to an

[73] Lewis Mumford, "Utopia, the City and the Machine," in *Utopias and Utopian Thought: A Timely Appraisal*, ed. by Frank Manuel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 3–24, here 13.

[74] Reginald Fleming Johnston, *Twilight in the Forbidden City* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1990); Chuimei Ho and Bennet Bronson, *Splendors of China's Forbidden City* (London: Merrell, 2004).

[75] Even the soil excavated during the construction of the ditch was piled up within the site, where it created a artificial hill.

[76] Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, transl. by Desmond Lee (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), Timaeus 20e–25d, Critias 108e–121c.

(8) Superstudio (Adolfo Natalini, Cristiano Toraldo di Francia, Roberto Magris, Gian Piero Frasinelli, Alessandro Magris, Alessandro Poli), The Continuous Monument: New New York, 1969.
Source: Neue Galerie Graz am Universalmuseum Joanneum
© 2015 Adolfo Natalini, Florence

in contrast, as the private sphere of the Strip, present scenery where the inmates have their own houses with gardens. These objects have the form of small palaces built of the most expensive materials. Yet, as the entire zone is strictly supervised, the design precludes any privacy or intimacy. While neither the Bath nor the Allotments provide spaces of retreat and seclusion, they both ensure control and surveillance by their institutional settings, despite their seemingly different programmatic conception.

Koolhaas's title Exodus explicitly refers to the Second Book of the Torah and the Old Testament, describing the departure of the Israelites from subjugation in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the years wandering in the wilderness where Moses received the Ten Commandments and the Covenant Code. Picking up the Biblical theme of suppression and departure, Koolhaas uses architecture as the central instrument for transgression, collectivity, and freedom. From this point of view, London can be associated with ancient Egyptian civilization, whereas the Strip, by contrast, correlates to the Promised Land, a utopian vision yet to come. Indeed, the project can be interpreted as an ironic comment on the Promised Land, given that the monumental scheme of Koolhaas's Exodus rather resembles the "house of bondage" in Egypt than a desirable place to live.

Koolhaas's project also resonates with other famous projects from the late nineteen-sixties and early seventies, such as Archigram's Control and Choice and Archizoom's No-Stop City. They also give evidence of a critical change reflecting the growing crisis, impasse, and disenchantment with the social and political conditions of modernism in the post-war period. These new spatial concepts reacted against the increasing consumerism and industrial mechanisms of planning that reduce architecture to mere building technology stripped of a social agenda. According to the generation of architects in the sixties, any attempt to escape the confined field and to activate the utopian potential is effective in challenging the discipline. Architecture should again function as an ideological model, by providing the conditions for revolutionary change and thereby bringing about a better society. Many architects, however, proposed dystopian worlds as an ironic, provocative critique aimed at revealing the threats, contradictions, absurdity, and even obsoleteness of architectural planning. One of the most striking imaginary worlds is Superstudio's Continuous Monument (1969–71), which bears a strong formal and theoretical resemblance to Koolhaas's Exodus project (→**8**).

Both schemes express architecture's full power by presenting visions of an inevitably oppressive, limited world created within a fully artificial trope. Both projects show a disturbing utopian world posited against the naïve idealistic pretension of the nineteen-fifties and early sixties. As Adolfo Natalini puts it, when the globe has become a cleared, homogeneous, urbanized model with seemingly egalitarian possibilities, projects like the Continuous Monument may show the "forewarning images of the horrors that architecture has in store for us."[8]

In addition to the walled territory of Exodus, several other projects of Koolhaas's investigate the relationship between planning and freedom. It became a central concern in a number of projects and essays in *Delirious New York* (1978), such as the City of the Captive Globe (1972), a project that brings to mind the cover image of Huxley's *Brave New World Revisited* (→**9,→10**). Other projects where this concern surfaced again include the text "The Story of the Pool"; the theory of

(9) Rem Koolhaas/Madelon Vriesendorp, *The City of the Captive Globe Project*, New York, 1972, watercolor, axonometric projection.
Source: McQuaid and Riley, *Envisioning Architecture*, 168
© 2015 Rem Koolhaas

[8] Quoting Adolfo Natalini, see Martin van Schaik, ed., *Exit Utopia: Architectural Provocations 1956–1976* (Munich: Prestel, 2005), 188.

THE WALL AS A MEANS OF DIVISION, EXCLUSION, AND DIFFERENCE

Good Half and Bad Half of the City: Exodus, or The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture

In "Typical Plan" (1993), Rem Koolhaas proclaims that "architecture is monstrous in the way in which each choice leads to the reduction of possibility."[1] Even more dramatically, he argues that, like "often before in this history of mankind, architecture was the guilty instrument of despair."[2] Planning is seen to entail the limitation of freedoms, for it imposes a particular scheme and establishes a system of order onto a given site. However, he goes on to say, "it is possible to imagine a mirror image of this terrifying architecture, a force as intense and devastating but used instead in the service of positive intentions."[3] Rethinking the idea of architecture as a means of restraint, division, and exclusion, Koolhaas investigates new ways in which planning could become a tool for initiating change, for providing freedoms, and for allowing the emergence of unpredictable, virtual events.

In his article "Recent Koolhaas," Jeff Kipnis argues that what really drives the work of Koolhaas, from writing to buildings, is one particular intent: "that aim, so brazen that almost no one but Koolhaas ever mentions it in other than occult terms, is simply this: to discover what real, instrumental collaboration can be effected between architecture and freedom."[4] Though there can be no collection of liberating techniques supported by architectural means, Kipnis claims that Koolhaas's concepts propel open-ended situations of choice and self-rule—even in such constraining, inflexible schemes as the Manhattan grid or the panoptical prison. Yet, how can planning relate to the creation of unprecedented events and new forms of social life? How do architectural decisions function as powerful means of order, division, and control? What are Koolhaas's strategies to present alternative ways of planning and decision-making?

In the 1972 project Exodus, or The Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture, Koolhaas turns the scheme for a prison into a voluntary, desired habitat by a radical mirror inversion of significance and attraction. He proclaims that "division, isolation, inequality, aggression, destruction, all the negative aspects of the Wall, could be the ingredients of a new

[1] Rem Koolhaas, "Typical Plan," in Koolhaas and Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, 334–53, here 344.
[2] Koolhaas and Mau, *S,M,L,XL*, 5.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Kipnis, "Recent Koolhaas," 27.

the rhizome, the diagram, and the abstract machine.[139] Basically, the concepts themselves function like an abstract machine that does not put forward a representation of the real "but rather construct[s] a real to come, a new type of reality."[140] Yet, despite the many attempts of translating these philosophical concepts into architectural form, it remains vague how they could be expressed in architecture. How does architectural space connect to virtual space and its sub-representative nature?

The Wall as a Means of Freedom Beyond Planning

Kowloon Walled City at the boundaries of Hong Kong provides an example that outstrips Koolhaas's idea of Exodus. Here the wall as means of separation and spatial difference becomes a tool that allows a liberty zone beyond planning (→**19**). Both schemes, Kowloon City and Exodus, draw on a dialectic view of the existing city; both enclaves introduce artificial and scaleless design within a deficient exterior. However, Kowloon's dense and chaotic spatial structure is quite the opposite of the giant squares of Exodus but nonetheless outperforms Koolhaas's plan. Whereas the autonomous shanty town of the Walled City provides a refuge and asylum for various people outside society, the inmates of Exodus voluntarily leave society and enter a totalitarian system of preprogrammed activity and surveillance.

The Walled City was a political no man's land free of government interference, and its inhabitants can be regarded as the true "voluntary prisoners of architecture."[141] Throughout the ninety-nine-year lease of British rule in Hong Kong, the Walled City, which was initially a walled fortress built in the mid-nineteenth century, remained an area of *anomaly* inside the British domain and yet outside the colonial authority. Because the disagreements between the Chinese and British governments over the status of Kowloon Walled City were never settled and as the situation threatened to spiral out of control whenever authorities tried to impose their will, the territory became a kind of political vacuum free from political control. So Kowloon's continually growing community developed its autonomy within the confines of the old city's walls. And although the wall was torn down during the Second World War, the site became the perfect place for refugees, because there the illegal immigrants were free of legal interference

[139] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[140] Ibid., 177.
[141] Greg Girard and Ian Lambot, *City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City* (Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1993); Ryuji Miyamoto, *Kowloon Walled City* (Tokyo: Hiroshi Shimonaka, 1997).

(19) Kowloon Walled City, Hong Kong, 1980, photograph. Source: Girard and Lambot, *City of Darkness*
© 2015 Greg Girard/Ian Lambot

and prosecution. Using architecture as a means of migration and freedom, the Walled City proved highly adaptive to future change.

The population of Kowloon continued to expand, from a few thousand inhabitants in the fifties to 40,000 people in the early eighties. The low-level houses gave way to high-rises until the entire area was covered with a single dense structure of fourteen stories covering 2.7 hectares (the site itself measured little more than 100 x 200 meters). Its constant dampness came from overhead pipes carrying water, which, along with artifical lightening also contributed to its greenish atmosphere. As there were no automobiles in Kowloon, the only circulation space was a warren of passages that one could traverse without once setting foot on the ground. The roofscape was the only escape from the density below. Without legal regulations regarding property rights, labor, or the environment, the Walled City quickly became a hotbed of untaxed and unrestricted economic activities of any kind. Many illegal businesses flourished under conditions of exploitation so that Kowloon became synonymous with all that was darkest and threatening in society. Of course, the illegal activities could flourish inside the Walled City only because of demand from outside. Eventually after its final demolition in 1993, the site became a public park and the former residents were moved to public housing areas. Yet, behind the negative image of decay and social marginalization, Kowloon was closest to an autonomous, self-organizing city. Despite its chaotic structure, it also provided utopian conditions for its