Nathaniel Robert Walker  
Curator and Author

David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE CATALOG

Brian Horrigan
Dietrich Neumann
Kenneth M. Roemer

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE EXHIBITION

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COVER

Katherine Roy, View of Industria, 2011
This illustration, commissioned for the exhibition, depicts the great city of “Industria” as described by Comte Didier de Chousy in his 1883 novel Ignis. David Winton Bell Gallery.

LEFT

Margaret Bourke-White, Futurama Spectators, ca. 1939
Visitors to the General Motors pavilion in the 1939 New York World’s Fair are gently whisked past the Futurama in a track-based chair ride designed especially for couples. Courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin.
It is now plain and clear that neither past nor future are existent, and that it is not properly stated that there are three times, past, present, and future. But it might properly be said that there are three times, the present of things past, the present of things present, and the present of things future. These three are in the soul, but elsewhere I do not see them: the present of things past is in memory; the present of things present is in intuition; the present of things future is in expectation.

The Confessions of St. Augustine Book 11: Time And Eternity, 398 AD

It has been said that the past is a foreign country—but it is the future that remains undiscovered. Despite the obvious truth that no one has been to the future, that no one has even seen a photograph of it or heard a credible eyewitness account of it, the last three centuries have witnessed the rise and dissemination of a body of visual codes and tropes that are commonly seen and understood as “futuristic.” These “progressive” or “forward-looking” attributes are derived from an entirely imaginary landscape, indicative of a destination that is impossible to visit. Yet nearly everyone can recognize the place where no one has been.

Building Expectation: Past and Present Visions of the Architectural Future offers a glimpse into this undiscovered country, presenting a collection of historic and ongoing visions of the future, expressed in architectural and urban terms, from the nineteenth century until the present day. The focus of the show is less on canonical designers or art-historical movements and more on broadly based, popular speculation in the public sphere. It aims to ask a number of basic but important questions: what do people stand to gain from designing “futures”? How do people, individually and collectively, decide what does and does not look futuristic, what is and is not permitted to inhabit “the future”? Is it merely a process of extrapolation, in which we attempt to imagine the fulfillment of trends and patterns that are gaining power in the present—or is something more subjective, more arbitrary, more rhetorical, and/or more creative taking place?

Building Expectation also hopes to suggest ways of thinking about how popular expectation shapes what human societies understand as desirable, even as possible, in the real world of the here-and-now. Can speculative design liberate? Can an agreed-upon “futuristic” aesthetic also restrict and confine? These questions may seem particularly pressing in the portion of the exhibition which is dedicated to contemporary visions of the future, as many of these installations may not qualify as “futuristic” by the standards which emerge as dominant, even as a sort of orthodoxy, in our retrospective consideration of past futures.
The History of the Future

The “World of Tomorrow” has usually been imagined first and foremost as a place, in one sense or another—as the new Promised Land, the Millennial Landscape, as Utopia. And architecture, cast since the Enlightenment as the calling card for cultural and technological periods in the “grand narrative” of human development and progress, has always been one of the future’s most revealing and recognizable features.

It would probably be impossible to locate a single moment as the birth of “progressive,” future-oriented architecture, but one would perhaps not go too wrong starting such a search in the eighteenth century. During this time in France, for example, the influential architect, writer, and educator Julien-David Leroy (1724 – 1803) formulated a vision of history that used architecture to trace what he believed to be the rising trajectory of human progress. As Barry Bergdoll recounts in his book Leon Van der Velden: Historicism in the Age of Industry (1994), Leroy separated architecture into two distinct components: the science of structural technology and the art of articulation and ornament.

The quality of art might go up and down according to events, was from Leroy’s time increasingly seen by many of Leroy’s revolutionary compatriots, science would lead to a human triumph over nature, even over human nature—its story was a story with a destiny, with an ending.

Architecture, as a combination of both art and science, was from Leroy’s time increasingly seen by many as the best indicator of historical period, of evolutionary spirit, and of ultimate destiny. Such thinking begs the architect to understand his or her work not as merely art or as science, but rather as an indicator and/or harbinger of its “time,” or its slot on the ladder of human evolution. This framework for understanding cultural development as a series of movements, each unique but connected in a grand narrative, is called historicism, and a quest for the future grows naturally from it.

Reforming the Future

A number of future-makers who understood architecture in this way—who saw it as a tool to articulate, frame, and advocate cultural and political development along scientific and technological lines—are presented in the first section of Building Expectation. Their futures were constructed for political goals, designed to literally remake the world in the scientific image of industry.

The British industrialist Robert Owen (1771 – 1858) is a very early example of a techno-utopian reformer, and the designs he created and commissioned speak volumes about the ways in which the early-nineteenth century imagination thought a progressive and futuristic world might take form. Owen was a highly successful factory manager who despaired the effects that industrialism was having on traditional British society. He believed that “the character of man is formed for him, and not by him,” and that Britain’s typical polluted factory town was exactly the kind of place that formed bad character.

For these reasons Owen began to fashion an alternative paradigm for living in what he saw as the inevitable and desirable rise of the industrial age. Rather than reform industry, he sought to reform society: the factory town was transformed into a new sort of village estate, with the kind of architecture that would facilitate a totally new social fabric emphasizing equality, fraternity, healthiness, and a new set of scientific values to replace “backward-looking” institutions such as the family and the church. He designed a number of different versions of these factories-for-living in Britain, but his ultimate ambition was to start afresh somewhere completely new: the United States. Owen hired architect Stedman Whitwell to delineate for him a visionary town named “New Harmony.” A model was constructed and exhibited in the White House. After Owen outlined his plans to a joint session of Congress in 1825, he took scores of settlers to begin building New Harmony in southern Indiana.

The community failed and his scheme was never realized on the American frontier, but Owen continued to refine his vision and advocate its implementation.
“modernity” was also ridiculed mercilessly by skeptics, (1855 – 1932) [see essay by Kenneth Roemer, of Eden and the transcendent lives of devout conclusis. But later, after the failure of New Harmony, the design was revised to take on a distinctly “Oriental” flavor, with broad, flat-roofed terraces and Mughal arches and domes of the sort one might expect to find in India or Persia (1812). It seems that the free use, and perhaps even the deliberate conflation, of global architecture styles appeared “forward-looking” to Owen.

But by the time the nineteenth century drew to a close, such hybridity of expression and ornament seems to have lost its ability to connote “the future.” Owen’s fixation upon science and industry, however — shared with Leroy and countless others — would prove more durable, and indeed took on explosive power in the visions of key figures such as King Camp Gillette (1855 – 1932) [see essay by Kenneth Roemer, “A Compendium of Graceful, Yet Effective, Solvent for a Modest Root,”], Edward Bellamy (1850 – 1898), and the Italian Futurists. The view that industrial, and indeed corporate, technological production should be embraced as the dominant power in the present and advocated as the only power in the future was held by many.

Of course, many is not all — techno-corporate “modernity” was also ridiculed mercilessly by skeptics, as revealed in satirical future visions published by newspapers and magazines such as Punch and Judge (1842). These critical exaggerations of high-tech, high-volume industrial trends were seen and understood by hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people all over the world, even if today their ephemeral nature has left them largely forgotten.

The tension between the popular power of industrial visions of the future and the apprehension some people held for these visions is perhaps most eloquently expressed in the 1883 novel Ignis by Comte Didier de Chousy. Chousy, whose real identity remains unknown to this day, told the story of a group of European industrial magnates who joined together to drill a hole to the earth’s core, where they could both tap the planet’s limitless heat to power their industrial complexes and achieve the political autonomy needed to reestablish slavery. Their economic might allowed them to build a swirling, domino city of glass and steel called Industria. In this new metropolis, flowers glowed with ethereal light, streets coursed on conveyor belts, and Oriental palaces sprawled alongside glass villas. In the center of the city, floating over the chasm that led to the core of the earth, was a great temple — half-Parthenon and half-steam engine — where the city’s elite converged to worship their own power and technology: Coal, Electricity, and above all Fire.

When slaves proved too good at sabotage, however, the city’s leaders replaced them with steam-powered robots, and in doing so they sealed their fate. In time the robots — or atmophytes as Chousy called them — grew aware of their plight and rose up to annihilate the city, spitting electricity at their oppressors and broadcasting curses down every telegraph line.

The book Ignis was not illustrated, although some drawings were produced for the story several years later when it was serialized in the French journal La Science Illustrée (Science Illustrated). For Building Expectation, American illustrator Katherine Roy has brought the visions of key figures such as King Camp Gillette to live and breathe in a swirling, domino city, spitting electricity at their oppressors and broadcasting curses down every telegraph line.

Grant E. Hamilton, What We Are Coming To: Judge’s Combination Apartment-House of the Future, from Judge, February 16, 1895

In this satirical take on the trajectory of urban evolution, Hamilton singles out some rather pointed fun at the tendency of capitalism to relentlessly intensify the scale of real-estate development. In this somewhat residential building are found not only shops, living spaces, and a steam-powered mass transport system, but also religious institutions and the houses of government — the public main has been totally absorbed by the monolithic power of the private.

On loan from the Maison d’Alphonse.
BUILDING THE UTOPIAN FACE OF KING CAMP GILLETTE

Kenneth M. Roemer - University of Texas at Arlington

It is entirely possible that the face of America at the beginning of the twentieth century was not George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, but rather King Camp Gillette (1855–1932), whose image was printed on millions of safety razor wrappers distributed around the world. To encourage the use of their relatively new invention, the Gillette Company distributed free razors in boxes of toilet articles and in the pockets of overalls, boxes of marshmallows, and packs of Wrigley’s gum. Wrapped blades were sold to the US government for distribution to Army doughboys, who clipped their Gillette-clean faces in Europe. In Czechoslovakia and Italy the blades were even used as currency — their Wrang sails, after all, with Gillette’s portrait standing in for Washington.

Gillette had another vision, quite different from his role as a champion of American individualism and entrepreneurship. In the 1890s, around the same time he dreamed up his safety razor, he was inventing a model for a new world order. Like many other turn-of-the-century reformers, Gillette was disturbed by the inefficiencies, waste, corruption, chaos, and injustices of the current social and economic systems. Again like many of his contemporaries, he had great faith that the corporate model of large scale organization could make sense out of America’s abundant energies and resources. Listing both economic and social illnesses. Of course, this corporate engine for progress should be beholden to The People, not just to a few investors or magnates. Gillette believed the best model would be a similar joint-stock company, which he originally labeled the United Company, the People’s Corporation, or the World Corporation, and outlined in an article, “World Corporation (Unlimited),” National Magazine 54 (July 1900) and in a series of books, The Human Drift (1894), World Corporation (edited by the reformer and novelist Upton Sinclair, 1910), and The People’s Corporation (1924). The most interesting of these three is The Human Drift, which combines an incisive justification for and description of the People’s Corporation, a fictional interview with a Mr. X (an avid supporter of Gillette’s vision), and — of most relevance for this catalogue — a series of seven fully-annotated illustrations of the residential area of the utopian city, Metropolis, that would be the center of Gillette’s re-invented America and a model for centralized cities around the world. Actually, “centralized” is an understatement: most of the population of the United States would move to Metropolis, which would be located near Niagara Falls, the site of some of his earliest experiments. Gillette designed the center of the city in utopian shapes that hark back at least to Plato and certainly evoke the eighteenth-century egalitarian spirit surrounding the birth of American democracy; the utopia; and the circle. Arranged on an uninterrupted grid and featuring underground pedestrian walkways and delivery systems, the urban layout insured access to education (see Fig. 1, buildings marked A), entertainment (Fig. 2), and public services (Fig. 3) for all citizens. Structurally, the buildings were quite modern, drawing inspiration from the “Chicago School” and recently constructed high-rise buildings in New York City. From the air the Metropolis would look like huge gears: glass-domed atriums made up their centers; tiers of steel-framed apartments radiated out around. Gillette described three buildings as being layered up “like the three stages in the human life history; free stories in height, and consisting of eighteen to twenty-five stories in height, and consisting of eighteen stories of apartments, so arranged and connected at the back that it makes a single building in a circular form, with an interior court four hundred and fifty feet in diameters, the central portion of which is occupied by a dining room that is two-hundred and fifty feet in diameter.

There would be 36,000 of these buildings in Metropolis, identical in shape and size with varying patterns of hygienic ceramic tiles on the exterior walls. All these apartment complexes and the similarly designed educational, amusement, and public service buildings would rest atop three layers that accommodated sewage, water, electricity, heat, and cold air distribution (cooler, ventilation, cooling), among other things. Combining modern technologies and artistic trends, the grand Metropolis might seem to us today, it is not difficult to imagine why this turn of the century inventor would imagine a city that could bustle all the chaos and confusion of our own times. As naïve and stultifying as Gillette’s grand Metropolis might seem to us today, it is not difficult to imagine why this turn of the century inventor would imagine a city that could bustle all the chaos and confusion of our own times.
V
isions such as Ignis are not merely political statements, designed to make a point about the non-negotiable failures of human nature and the dangers of industrial hubris. Stories about dramatic futures can also be entertaining and empowering, in the same sense that any tale of faraway places is exciting to hear, and that any scoop of “news” assembled by “experts” can help its readers feel informed and in tune with the world. Indeed, futures are not only designed and constructed to advocate ideals, they are also created as commodities to buy and sell. Building Expectation has framed a collection of such money-making visions — and while many of them do bear multiple meanings on multiple levels, there is no denying the fact that they were for sale.

It is an interesting fact that many people so enjoy reading about and seeing visions of the “World of Tomorrow” that they will purchase products offering little more than delightfully wild but totally implausible speculation. Typical of such products are the pulps and magazines, such as Everyday Science and Mechanics (fig. 4), that filled convenience store shelves in the 1920s and 1930s. These often purported to consult “specialists” in order to report on the future. As every story needs a stage, fantastic urban landscapes were among the most prominent features of these colorful and sugary visions — and as certain themes appear over and over again, they often seem less about creating new futures and more about signifying or reinforcing an existing “future” that has been pre-established in the popular imagination.

One of the tropes that repeats with almost infinite persistence is the violent collision of machines and persistence is the violent collision of machines and urban fabric. This was also explored with equal rigor by leaders in the formal architecture profession such as Le Corbusier (1887–1965). Indeed, the latter’s vision of a “contemporary” urbanity equipped to accommodate gyrocopters had enough in common with pulp speculation that it was featured on the cover of Gernsback’s Science and Invention in January of 1930 (fig. 8).

The pleasure of speculation could be bought in many places. Postcard companies mass-produced photographs of real towns comically adjusted to connote their destiny “in the Future” (see essay by Brian Horrigan, figs. 9–10). Department stores gave away beautifully designed depictions of future landscapes to glamorize their brand, and consumer-goods companies included collectible “World of Tomorrow” cards with products such as margarine (itself a fruit of science), chocolate, and wine (figs. 8–9). And of course Hollywood sold many tickets to tomorrow, often pandering to and occasionally challenging existing expectation. It seems that cities of the future could do a brisk business, managing to sustain something akin to a virtual tourism and hospitality industry.
POSTCARDS FROM THE FUTURE

Beg inning in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and continuing forcefully throughout the twentieth, the American definition of “the Future” was virtually synonymous with “the City.” The City—especially that archetypal metropolis, New York—was the future: dense with towering buildings and scurrying humans, criss-crossed and honeycombed with fast-moving conveyances, all of the world’s goods condensed into a few square (but always exciting) miles. If the principal model for popular-culture prognosticators was extrapolatory—taking current conditions and projecting and magnifying them into the future—then, indeed, the Victorian protagonist slipped more than a century, and that one-man hot-air balloons, motorcycles, with a contemporaneous rather than speculative look), and, most dramatically, a monorail with bus-sized cars suspended from towering rails (news of the 1901 Schwebebahn, or “floating train,” in Wuppertal, Germany, seems to have traveled quickly to America). Often these machines seem to exist in the city at the expense of the city. The hastily cut-out “futuristic” ingredients are shoe-harnessed into ill-prepared traditional streets and squares with an almost deliberate violence (perhaps to enhance the comic effect), and pedestrains are seen being mowed over by automobiles and motorcycles. Airborne thieves make quick getaways (with airborne policemen in hot pursuit).

Aside from this plethora of clanging and soaring transportation options there are few other surprises. In Northampton and Gardner, Massachusetts, the future seems mostly about driving and flying and getting nearly killed. Occasionally, one does glimpse what might be a vision of a “New Woman”—the independent, free-thinking, soon-to-be politically enfranchised woman of the turn of the century. And one or two examples hint at another favorite comic prediction of tomorrow’s cities—that is, that advertising, plastered all over buildings and vehicles, will become all but unavoidable in the future. (Imagine that?)

Bos ton looks and feels rather different in the year 2000. “At my feet lay a great city...” Public buildings of a colossal size and an architectural grandeur unparalleled in my day raised their stately piles on every side.” Or consider the case of the great 1936 movie adaptation of H.G. Wells’ (1866–1946) Things to Come, in which a machine-age, hermetically sealed metropolis tellingly named “Everytown” is cast not only as the embodiment of the future but also as its fountainhead, as the literal launching point of our imperial cosmic destiny.

In the fifty-odd years spanning these two similarly scaled and detailed visions, the theme of the “City of the Future” had become a standard trope not only of melodramatic novels and hyperventilating cinema, but also of modern commercial culture, as amply evidenced in Building Expectations’ collection of “in the Future” postcards. These cards were designed and produced from the 1900s to the 1920s—mostly in Germany or Austria (like many American postcards), but a fair number were detailed and manufactured domestically by the Frank W. Swallow Publishing Company. A New Hampshire businessman of sundy talents, Swallow (1864–1927) was also a photographer and sometime automobile salesman who drove around New England captur ing townscapes and publishing the pictures as postcards, sometimes tinted by hand. Some of these urban portraits were altered by way of “futuristic” additions. Transforming a sleepy New England mill town such as Northampton, Massachusetts, into a bustling futuristic metropolis had obvious comic effects—and seems to have resonated with pre-existing popular expectations enough to be both intelligible and funny. The blatant and almost reflexive commercialism of these postcard images also points to another axiom of American culture—the swift appropriation of “high-art” (or high-minded) imagery by the engines of popular commerce. Seemingly within moments of the publication of, for example, such serious tomes as Looking Backward or H.G. Wells’ dystopian When the Sleeper Wakes (1899), these volumes’ sensational descriptions of the “World of Tomorrow” were translated into popular images (usually while ignoring their polemical or political meanings) in postcards such as these, in magazine illustrations and cartoons, burlesque shows, and even amusement park attractions.

The additions that the publishers chose to make to these picture postcards are instructive. Architectural backgrounds are left unaltered—in one “Boston in the Future” card, there’s a recognizable Copley Square; in another, there’s South Street Station. In Northampton Mass. in the Future, there are the landmark First Church and county courthouse. The “futuristic” additions layered onto the extant streetscape are almost entirely related to transportation: small zeppelins, one-man hot-air balloons, motorcycles, electric streetcars, automobiles (all of which are often made to appear large ormagically funny). And often these machines seem to exist in the city at the expense of the city.

Take one of the nineteenth century’s best-selling novels, for example. Looking Backward: 2000–1887, written by Edward Bellamy and first published in 1888. The Victorian protagonist of the story wakes up to discover he has been able to peer into the future...
If cities and landscapes of the future are desirable in and of themselves, they are also prestigious places to do business of a more common variety. As the promise and excitement of speculation on the techno-cultural future of human destiny attracted an increasingly large portion of the public’s imagination in the early twentieth century, companies and personalities began to leverage popular expectation of the future to attach prestige to products and services that existed very much in the present.

Some of these products could not have been more distant from the traditional themes of expectation gaining ground since the time of Robert Owen — Seagram’s Canadian Whisky, for example, or Greys Cigarettes. But companies that sold the sort of goods tied to futuristic discourse in the popular view — namely, industrial materials and machines — were perhaps a more “natural” fit. They used visions of the future to contextualize their products in the consumer’s imagination, selling a tire, engineering services, or asbestos, but promising access to a new, progressive world. The future cities from which these goods were “imported” were designed to promote the products in question — and of course, many of these companies had every reason to glamorize a view of tomorrow that was heavy on technology and light on everything else.

Detroit-based Bohn Aluminum and Brass capitalized on the “futuristic” qualities of aluminum to add shine to their products, embedding their brand in a landscape of Modernist skyscrapers and cutting-edge kitchens. Shell Motor Oil Company hired streamline designer Norman Bel Geddes (1893–1958) to produce a 1937 print advertising campaign featuring photographs of a model of the “City of Tomorrow,” which was so attuned to the needs and speed of automobiles that motorists could imagine racing through it with impunity.

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of the American landscape of 1960, coursing with miniature limited-access freeways and peppered with automobile-friendly central business districts. Experienced by viewers as a sensuous and intimate narrated chair-ride, it became the sensation of the 1939–1940 New York World’s Fair [FRONTISPIECE]. GM later decided to make the most of the Futurama by putting sections of it on display in equally sensational buses designed by Harley Earl called Futurliners, which toured North America in the aptly named Parade of Progress, building popular expectation and support for a national highway system and car-focused city planning reform [FIGS 17–18].

It was not only companies that stood to gain from tapping into the popular imagination and framing their products with visions of "forward-looking" cities and buildings. Individual architects and artists, such as Arthur Radebaugh (1906–1974) or Hugh Ferriss (1889–1962) [see essay by Dietrich Neumann, FIGS 21–22], built entire careers by both leveraging and influencing expectations regarding the future. Syd Mead (born 1933), an artist and visionary who has worked with equal potency for both Hollywood and heavy industry, made a name for himself by designing conceptual automobiles that seemed to have been brought, at great expense, from the “World of Tomorrow.” In 1969, when aluminum began to overtake stainless steel as the cutting-edge detailing material of choice for automobile designers, United States Steel hired Mead to design a series of vibrant images of the future issued as Portfolios of Probabilities [FIG 19]. USS hoped that Mead’s hand would restore some of the futuristic polish to steel, and by Mead’s own account, it worked. He continues to support efforts by industrial corporations and other clients to present a progressive face to the public, in 2007 providing Qatar Steel with a striking image of a future Doha [FIG 20].

FIG 18
Syd Mead for United States Steel, "Megastructure" from Interface: A Portfolio of Probabilities, 1969

In this America of 1960, the westward landscape has been marked by an enormous steel high-rise comparable only to the dramatic rock formations rising above the Grand Canyon’s floor. The resulting drama is accessed with all the convenience of a drive-in theater. Courtesy of Dennis Bille.
Before, architects merely designed the street façade of a city’s building block—now, they were invited to give the upper portions a “treatment more individual than anything we have yet seen.” Triumphantly, Ferriss exclaimed: “The day of the box is ended...architecture comes into her own...We are not contemplating the new architecture of a city—we are contemplating the new architecture of a civilization.”

As hyperbolic as Ferriss’ claims may sound, the impact of the zoning code on architecture in the US could hardly be overestimated. Ferriss himself embarked on a stellar career as the most celebrated architectural draftsman of the twentieth century, and his vision of a city of setback skyscrapers became the building imagery for high-rise architecture in the US through the early 1960s.

Our future buildings with their superstructures—under which the building must remain…within which the building must remain…under an angle of 45 degrees to the street—now, they were invited to give the upper portions a “treatment more individual than anything we have yet seen.” Triumphantly, Ferriss exclaimed: “The day of the box is ended...architecture comes into her own...We are not contemplating the new architecture of a city—we are contemplating the new architecture of a civilization.”

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The final section of *Building Expectation* contains a collection of contemporary architectural visions of the future, some of them specially commissioned for the show. In a number of cases, the artists involved had little or no prior experience working with architecture, but found themselves nonetheless prepared to comment upon orthodox modes of urban and architectural “modernity,” and to offer alternative futuristic paradigms that “disrupt” or otherwise critically engage with the themes of industry and technology, machines and progress that have so dominated the past few centuries of speculative design. A few other contributions were provided by urban designers and conceptual architects who have spent many years questioning the standard definitions of rhetorically charged words such as “progressive,” “futuristic,” and “avant-garde.”

Providence-based artist Pippi Zornoza has used fiberglass board, smoothly polished stones, and paint to create a prefabricated mosaic panel façade inspired in part by the legacy of Catalonian architect Antoni Gaudí (1852–1926) [Fig 23]. It reveals an unabashed, even darkly profound affection for nature, and deploys a sensuous but nonetheless formal and meticulously composed body of iconography, populated by both flora and fauna, that might be described as an arabesque-laced illuminated manuscript transformed into a spatial order by way of Gothic symmetry. Importantly, Zornoza also seems to share with Gaudí a love of precision which is made self-conscious, and perhaps even urgent, by a reluctance to submit to the machine. Her piece argues that a nature-oriented aesthetic can be a meaningful and rewarding starting point for artists and architects practicing today, and in so doing Zornoza proposes a unique take on future possibilities.

Beloved in continental Europe but woefully neglected in most of the English-speaking world is the work of Belgian graphic novel artist François Schuiten, who together with writer Benoît Peeters has produced a series of fantastic visions of alternative urbanity entitled _The future, here and now_ [Fig 24]. A city rises in shimmering glass, filled with green growing things, after the population is struck by a “fièvre des jardins” [garden fever] following a great botanical exposition.

DPZ starts with the walkable, traditionally informed (but progressively oriented) principles of New Urbanism and grafts an “agrarian sociability” throughout: the community’s carefully planned edges and its public spaces are enlivened by “the organizing, growing, processing, exchanging, cooking, and eating of food.” Agrarian Urbanism promises to offer a new network of relationships to economy and to ecology as an alternative to suburban consumerism. Courtesy of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company.

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*Fig 23* Pippi Zornoza, _The Dirt Palace Façade_ (artist), 2011. Courtesy of the artist

*Fig 24* François Schuiten (artist), Benoît Peeters (author), _Pièce No. 11_ (Piece No. 11) from _L’Archiviste_ [The Archivist], 1987


GZP starts with the walkable, traditionally informed (but progressively oriented) principles of New Urbanism and grafts an “agrarian sociability” throughout: the community’s carefully planned edges and its public spaces are enlivened by “the organizing, growing, processing, exchanging, cooking, and eating of food.” Agrarian Urbanism promises to offer a new network of relationships to economy and to ecology as an alternative to suburban consumerism. Courtesy of Duany Plater-Zyberk & Company.
Les Cités Obscures [The Obscure Cities]. Schuiten’s stunning dreamscape of glass, stone, wroght iron, and sunlight are by many accounts the result of his background not only as a student of architecture, but also as the son of a prominent Modernist architect practicing in 1950s and 1960s Brussels. His father took part in what the stories of Les Cités Obscures later characterized as ‘Brise-soleil’, the senselessly destructive of warm, human-scaled buildings and the erection, in their place, of ugly, disordering, dehumanizing nonsense. In Schuiten’s imaginary cities resistance is not only possible, it is productive—and alternative architectural traditions inspired by Victorian glasshouses or the Art Nouveau handiwork of Brussels’ own Victor Horta (1861 – 1947) often confront, and even displace, the capitalist-friendly monolithic tendencies of totalitarian Modernism. The Miami-based urban design firm Duany Plater-Zyberk has provided Building Expectation with images from their forthcoming book Theory and Practice of Agrarian Urbanism (fig. 14), as well as drawings from the 2010 Sprawl Repair Manual written by Galina Tachieva. The former reveals a careful consideration of the relationships between productive agrarian land and individual houses, neighborhoods, districts, and larger urban bodies, while the latter offers practical and indeed elegant solutions to the deep problems intrinsic in America’s overabundance of single-use, car-dependent, aesthetically bankrupt suburban development. Collectively the body of DPZ’s work suggests future paradigms of walkable, nature-engaged urbanism that reject Modernist technological triumphalism of the sort promoted by General Motors in the Futurama and attacked, more than a century ago, by Cheney.

Christian Voldvogel’s Globus Cassius, on the other hand, pushes industrial, high-tech doctrine to its furthest logical extreme by suggesting that the entire planet could be transformed into a construction site of cosmic proportions, in which the natural and cultural legacies of Planet Earth could be used as building material for a new world, greatly expanded and turned literally inside-out (fig. 24). Such a vision gives new and powerful meaning to the notion of the “global citizen.”

These utopian visions of the future, and others like them, shine light on the processes—sometimes mysteriously elusive and sometimes utterly predictable—that have been shaping the way humans imagine the “World of Tomorrow” for centuries. They challenge the dominant themes, forms, and even the value systems that have come to be accepted as “futuristic” by broad swathes of both the general public and the design professions, and in doing so they ask, “who has the power to decide what the future can, or cannot, be?” Ultimately they use architecture, in different ways, to articulate new paradigms for social, political, economic, spiritual, and cultural life, and show that sometimes building expectation requires more than mere speculation along lines old or new—it also requires reflection, sometimes even demolition and, more often than the term “progressive” may have implied in the past, restoration.