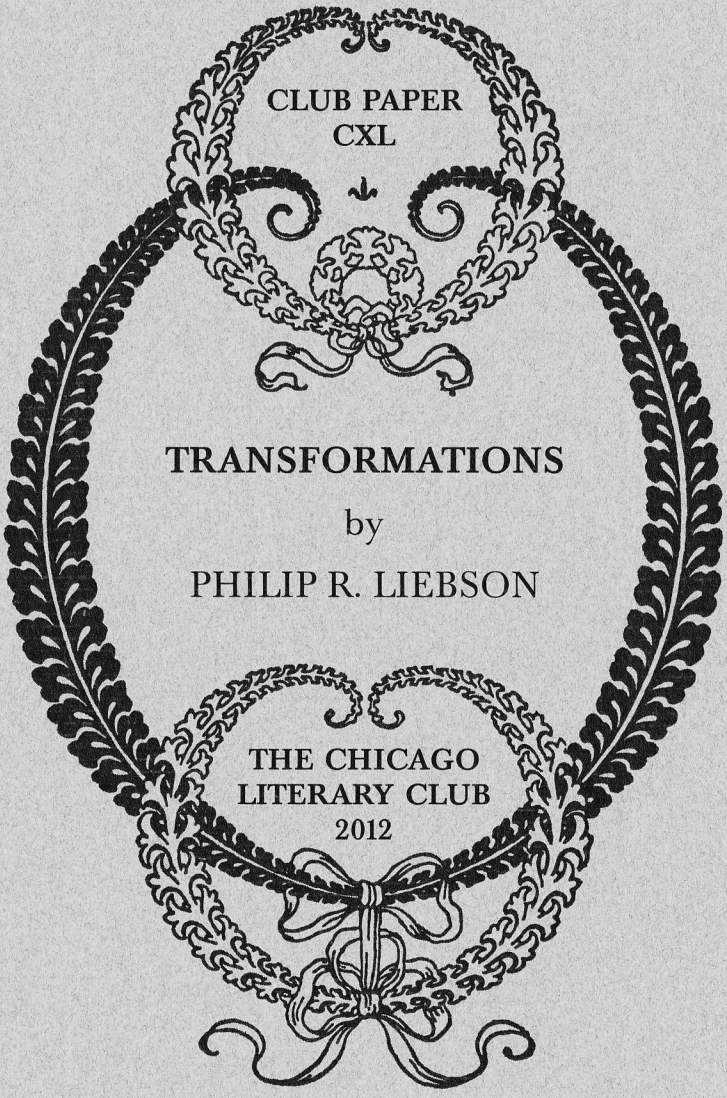

TRANSFORMATIONS

by

PHILIP R. LIEBSON

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Transformations

Paul Valéry, the poet, essayist and philosopher, wrote that "a work is never completed except by some accident such as weariness, satisfaction, the need to deliver or death; for in relation to who or what is making it, it can only be one stage in a series of inner transformations."[1] Transformation—the concept of change, radical or otherwise—is seen in art, architecture, literature, history, and our personal lives. As an example of the influence of historians on events, two young medieval historians, Percy Schramm and Ernst Kantorowicz, in the 1920s wrote two outstanding treatises on medieval German rulers, hoping for a renewal of a messianic transformation of Germany. Kantorowicz's tract on Frederick II was emblazoned with a swastika on the cover. Unfortunately, the authors, who believed in the emergent nationalism that developed (although perhaps not in the way they wanted), were not disappointed.

Transformations can be simple and visual. Listen to Ingmar Bergman: "I remember how the sunlight hit the edge of my dish when I was eating spinach, and, by moving the dish slightly from side to side, I was able to make different figures out of the light."[2]

In art, the naturalism prominent until the mid-nineteenth century has been transformed into an abstract expressionism that many find difficult to understand. The same holds true in music, where many current composers produce works that express dissonance and atonality to an audience that continues to appreciate the best works of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

In world events, the last century produced many apparent transformations that were advertised hyperbolically as New World Orders. For example, the world slipped on its axis with the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, about the same time that Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring,* Dadaism, and eugenics appeared and social conformations were being radically disrupted.

Transformations around us can develop transitionally. Although we think of the 1920s as the time of "female emancipation, jazz and the bright young people, . . . they made their appearance in the previous decade when war weariness dated from the Boer War."[3] In terms of our American experience, the 1910s saw the transformation of a hemispherical scoop of ice cream replacing the more generous conical scoop as well as the disappearance of the passenger pigeon. Envelope-shaped paper cups were everywhere with the increasing awareness of disease germs.

It would be many years, however, before ice boxes became refrigerators (we still used the term ice box in the 1940s for the upgrade), hats were no longer placed in paper bags when you embarked on a long-distance train ride (to avoid the soot coming from the engine), the iceman still cameth, and cards placed in the window indicated how many bottles of milk your family needed that day.

I would like to focus on the period before the Second World War as a time of transformation and evaluate a particular event—the New York World's Fair, held in 1939 and 1940—as a reflec-

tion of the transformations developing in this country at that time. I was then three and four years of age, I was at the fair, and I had, and still have, vivid memories of what I saw, remarkable at that age, but that's what the fair did to people. I am sure that similar impressions were implanted on visitors at the two previous Chicago expositions—the World's Columbian Exposition (1893) and the Century of Progress Exposition (1933-34).

Consider that many visitors at the New York World's Fair had experienced a time when there were no automobiles, airplanes, motion pictures, radio, X-rays, diesel locomotives, synthetic rubber, silk, electric streetlights, or refrigerators—the list could go on. Nylon stockings were just appearing, FM radio was still two years in the future. The period from 1893 to 1939 conceivably produced more remarkable changes as perceived by those experiencing those times than during any other time. In 1939, commercial television was being introduced sparingly in the New York area. The first sports events, collegiate and professional, were broadcast on television—a Columbia-Princeton baseball game and a Dodgers-Reds game. (Princeton, which had played in the first intercollegiate football game, was, therefore, involved not only in the first such football game but also the first television sports broadcast.)

The fair was set in what had previously been a marshland covered by mountains of ashes, rat-infested garbage, and debris, with a perpetual fire wafting smoke eastward to the nearby town of Flushing—transformation indeed! An excellent description of the ash heap was provided in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* who was on his way to visit Daisy while rolling from the Plaza through Queens. It was "a valley of ashes—a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes can take the form of houses and chimneys and rising smoke, and finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-gray men. . . ."[4]

The idea for the fair, planning the World of Tomorrow, was based upon the concept that the future could be controlled with systematic planning. The inspiration for the fair was the 150th anniversary of George Washington's inaugural on Wall Street. Not a small factor, however, was the desire to bring revenue to New York at a time of a post-depression slump (although the fair had been planned as early as 1934). Robert Moses put it succinctly: "I have not mentioned the patriotic background of the New York World's Fair of 1939 . . . because that was the excuse and not the reason for the Fair."[5]

It was twice as big as the Chicago Century of Progress and cost three times as much—certainly a harbinger of the world of tomorrow.

The thoughts of the optimists who planned the fair reflected what I suspect was more a sense of control of the future. There is a certain irony in this conception, since at the time world events were going at a rapid pace toward what promised to be a worldwide conflagration. When the fair opened, the world was at peace. This was a relative peace, however, since World War II had not officially begun, although several countries in Europe had been swallowed up by Hitler without a fight, Japan was bombing Chinese cities, and the Spanish Civil War—not to be confused with civility—was winding to a close. By the time the fair closed for good in October 1940, France and Poland were occupied, London was being bombed, Japan had invaded Indo-China, and President Roosevelt was on the verge of declaring a Limited National Emergency.

But one must consider that many in this country at the inception of the fair felt that these developing events were in countries far away, of which we knew little, and of which we cared less. Gallup and Roper polls in 1938 and 1939 showed that the majority were optimistic about the economy. Even more telling, in 1940, after France was crushed, a poll suggested that

more than 50 percent expected the Axis to win the war and that 90 percent believed that this would entail U. S. rearmament, yet a plurality (43 percent!) were optimistic about the "future of civilization."[6]

A *New York Times* foreign correspondent wrote of the fair, under the title "World of Undying Hope," that "The immediate future of Europe is clouded by the electric storms of today, but of the more distant Tomorrow no one who has looked behind today's sputtering headlines can have much doubt [that the future was bright]."[7]

Of the fair itself, a Gallup poll reported that the most popular destinations were the Perisphere, the General Motors, American Telephone and Telegraph and Ford exhibits, and the Soviet Pavilion, and that at least 85 percent of those attending the fair enjoyed it. However, a critic wrote in *Harper's* magazine that "price ranges of the fair are not . . . geared to the pocketbook of the fifty million people . . . [expected] through the turnstiles."[8] The admission fee was seventy-five cents (later fifty cents) and meals and tours of the popular exhibits and refreshments for two, another seven dollars. We're talking close to twelve dollars admission and one hundred dollars extra in current values.

For New Yorkers, the city's image had changed radically from even the late twenties: tunnels, bridges, and skyscrapers had been constructed in as little as a decade, streetcar lines were closed, elevated lines torn down, and subways built. In 1929 there was no Rockefeller Center, no Empire State Building, no Wall Street skyscraper, no George Washington or Triborough bridge. In the 1930s, automobiles and household appliances went from boxy to streamlined. Parkways began to encircle and to pass through the city.

Looking back, and comparing the attitudes of that time with our current experiences, some observers have suggested that

one major difference in attitudes was a respect for authority—in the sense that society more likely followed rules, not necessarily because they were the best rules, but that they were there to be followed. Going into the "city" you dressed up. A gentlemen would stand up when a lady was on her feet, there was proper attire for concerts and the opera, there were rules on who should call you by your given name and who not, words to be spoken and not spoken, and private versus public behavior. Looking back at scenes from the '30s and '40s, although hats had begun to disappear, suits and ties and dresses or skirts for women were the rule, not the exception. Of course, casual bigotry was more common then.

There was also a sense of authority and certitude in public addresses and writings that has disappeared. An ad in *Life* magazine, for example: "No matter the year, no matter the field, if you start in business you need three things: a stout heart; an honest mind; the ability to add and subtract."[9] Our language was not yet politically correct. Rejects from the October 1940 conscription re-clothed in the "Rejects' Changing Room." From the president of the United States, addressing the National Youth Congress on the White House lawn (many of whom had Communist leanings): " . . . as Americans you have not only the right but the sacred duty to confine your advocacy of changes in the law to the methods prescribed by the Constitution of the United States."[10]

The fair was enormous, color coded, and, unlike previous fairs, had a theme center—the Trylon and Perisphere—which was supposed to symbolize the infinite as an abstraction. The Trylon, a thin, tall pyramidal spire stretching six hundred feet in the air, placed near the two-hundred-foot Perisphere, produced remarkably varied impressions when viewed from different aspects. The fair itself was a city of geometrical shapes, of which the

Trylon and Perisphere were the most fundamental. At night, the lighting system, lavish and colored, was described as the most spectacular ever seen, aside from the aurora borealis. Indirect lighting was common within the buildings and outside, trees were lit from below—as were the cows on the Borden rotolactor display. There were in fact numerous one-of-a-kind light standards throughout the fair, including fluorescent lighting, first introduced to the public on a large scale. An imposing row of fluorescent triple standards glowed in the Court of Power at night. Fountains and pools were also everywhere. Several cylindrical fountains (called Aqualons) consisted of upright glass tubes containing moving water and goldfish. The Electrical Utilities exhibit was occupied by a waterfall and a spillway over which those entering the exhibit passed through a cylindrical glass-enclosed passageway under the waterfall. From the diary of a fictional character in the book *1939: The Lost World of the Fair:* "Walking through the glass tunnel is marvelous—a ton of water pounds down roaring & frothing up around you. . . you do feel slightly cheated that you can't feel anything—the glass tunnel deposits you well away from the falls. . . . Somehow it is too antiseptic."[11]

The most outré fountain display was located in the vast pool of the Lagoon of Nations. The diary of the fictional character continues: At night the fountains are

> lit in yellow-golden white, and then returned off so that it is completely dark. Then the waters of the pool begin to glow brighter and brighter...a dense mysterious mist rises from the surface. Suddenly clouds of blue steam hiss around the edges. Then the fountains rise in the center, higher and higher with a dense mist rising around them, changing colors, rose and amber and blue—and then huge pillars of flame rear up enormous on either side of the fountain. This is synchronized with music seemingly coming from the Lagoon. Searchlights arch overhead.

> Then the fireworks start. At the climax, everything is turned off at once, lights, fountains and music...the sudden black is immense and a little frightening and incomparably dramatic.... Like many other things at the Fair, it is simply unlike anything you have ever seen before.[12]

It is easy to be overcome by the color and excitement of an exposition. Let us hear from a more dispassionate observer—E. B. White, who was assigned by *The New Yorker* to observe the fair when it opened in late April 1939. At the best of times, White was in a battle with technology and took an adversarial position about many of what were considered technologic advances. On top of that, he had a bad cold when he visited the fair at its opening. His essay was filled with ironical comments about the fair and its slogan:

> The road to Tomorrow leads through the chimney pots of Queens. . . . It winds through Textene, Blue Jay Corn Plasters, through Musterole . . . .
>
> Suddenly you see the first intimation of the future, of man's dream—the white ball and spire. . . . Except for the Kleenex, I might have been approaching the lists of Camelot . . . .[13]

White went on to document the "minor difficulty in the Perisphere": "That's the way it is with the future. Even after Grover Whalen has touched it with his peculiar magic, there is still a short wait." Whalen, a dapper fellow with a moustache and boutonnière, was New York's official greeter for decades and initially president of the fair.

White continues: "The architecture is amusing enough, the buildings are big enough, to give the visitor that temporary and exalted feeling of being in the presence of something pretty special..."

White concludes by describing a child's conversation over a long distance telephone at the AT&T pavilion. The child had drawn a lucky number and was allowed to make a long distance

call to his home in Massachusetts. He described the fair but mostly talked about his train ride to New York, and what mostly impressed him was the "great big BUMP" when a new car was put on.

For White, "the Fair has vanished, leaving only the [boy's] voice.... So many million dollars spent on the idea that our trains and our motorcars should go fast and smoothly, and the child remembering, not the smoothness, but the great-big-BUMP."

I attended the fair on a number of occasions, and although I was only three and four years of age, I remember the excitement and anticipation. We came to the fair on the old Second Avenue El from Midtown Manhattan where we lived at the time. We traveled over the Queensborough Bridge, and through the chimney pots of Queens, and, as E. B. White describes it, "through the delicate pink blossoms on the fruit trees in the ever hopeful back yards." The ramp entrance to the fair was a pageant of flags, and the Trylon and Perisphere looming up in the background appeared as objects of mysterious significance to me, perhaps signifying some message that I was too young to unravel. I have vague memories of the walk through the Perisphere and a 3-D demonstration at the Chrysler exhibit of the construction of a car.

The fair allowed American industrial designers to build miniature model cities. Their collective views of the future were fast travel on luxurious streamlined aircraft, trains, buses, ships, and automobiles. Streamlining was the mode, although it usually had nothing to do with aerodynamics. For example, a time capsule was buried within the Westinghouse exhibit, containing artifacts of the 1930s, and not to be opened until 6939 (and presumably not to be moved). Yet it was also streamlined. There is no indication that streamlined coffins were built, but they may as well have been because most of the streamlining of products had nothing to do with motion.

There was also a sense of control over the landscape. One designer of the period commented on Democracity, the city of 2039 assembled inside the Perisphere. "This is not a vague dream of a life that might be lived in the far future. . . . the tools for building the world of tomorrow are already in our hands."[14] At the time, planned towns such as Greenbelt, Maryland, and Radburn, New Jersey, had been developed recently as model suburbs. These towns, among others, were modeled after British garden cities, with footpaths routed through underpasses to separate pedestrians from traffic. Ribbon parks ran between dwellings on streets curved to slow traffic. There was a similar vision of the World of Tomorrow, portrayed in the documentary "The City" that was shown at the fair. It was written by Lewis Mumford and focused on anti-urban planning, using the greenbelt communities as the ideal solution.

This concept was echoed in the plan of the Perisphere's Democracity. It was a city that emptied out at night as the workers returned to suburbs. To get to Democracity, one had to enter the Trylon and ascend one of two enormous escalators. These were the longest in the world at that time, and made of stainless steel, which was unusual for that time since typical escalators were then wooden and clackety-clacky. Stepping into the Perisphere involved entering a small tunnel leading to a rotating band of seats in the large inner space of the Perisphere, with the vast model of Democracity below you and a huge blue-lit dome above. The city itself was filled with factories and skyscrapers in widening concentric half circles bounded by expressways. The suburbs were filled with greenery. Every worker had his own home in the suburbs—there were no slums.

H. V. Kaltenborn, of NBC broadcasting fame, spoke as the oracle of the future, with an accompanying musical score by André Kostelanetz. "As day fades into night, each man seeks home, for here are the children, comfort, neighbors, recreation—

the good life of the well-planned city."[15] The show took all of six minutes, at the end of which projected images of groups of people, teachers with books, farmers with tools, miners with lamps, and architects with blueprints appeared on the horizon and grew larger, seemingly pumped up like balloons and converging on Democracity, followed by an enfolding, shimmering light on the horizon with choir music in the background. The exit led onto an encircling ramp called the Helicline.

The Perisphere had its mysterious qualities. It was not just a white sphere. At night it was a glowing blue, with clouds appearing to revolve around it. Seemingly unearthly music emanated from it, described as a harp-like ringing of bells. The mall around it was filled with this strange music, which emanated from an amplified piano in a wooden box inside the Perisphere.

The most popular exhibit was General Motors' Futurama, featuring a one-third-of-a-mile journey in comfortable padded seats over the landscape of 1960, remarkably similar to the Perisphere's 2039 landscape. It featured cross-continental highways of seven lanes, designed to accommodate speeds of up to one hundred miles an hour. Automobiles were teardrop in shape and air-conditioned. Speed was controlled by radio control towers. The landscape itself featured federally protected recreational areas and examples of technological developments in dams, mines and farms. The cities accommodated separate pedestrian and vehicular systems, and many buildings with rooftop gardens (well before the mayoralty of Richard M. Daley). Only missing were churches and filling stations. The exhibit predicted that ". . . liquid air is by 1960 a potent, mobile source of power. Atomic energy is being used cautiously. Power is transmitted by radio beams focused by gold reflectors. These great new powers make life in 1960 immensely easier."[16]

Walter Lippmann, the leading pundit of that era, thought Futurama to be "as proud an exhibit as one can find of what

men can achieve by private initiative. . . . this is what private enterprise can do, and the best that the Italians or Russians have to show is no more than a feeble approximation of it."[17] Moscow and Rome, however, were not just several miles east of the Flushing Meadows site, allowing a comparatively large display.

Lewis Mumford, ever the critic of the fair despite his participation in the 1939 documentary "The City," found a lack of innovation in the exhibit. "One has to rub one's eyes before one remembers that the future, as presented here, is old enough to be someone's grandfather."[18] The towns depicted "were like the tinny world of a Jules Verne romance, or one of those brittle nightmares Mr. Wells used to picture in the early nineteen hundreds."[19]

Contemporary views of the fair varied. Perhaps we can imagine a visitor saying, "Tomorrow scared me a little. Could I grasp the immense plan expressed in occult symbols all over the fair? Would I be up to Tomorrow? It seemed so urgent that Tomorrow be dragged out of the future where it lay, peacefully unborn. But why so urgent?"[20]

The critic Joseph Wood Krutch felt that the science and industry represented at the fair provided only spectacles and advised people to spend their time in the amusement area. He especially liked the nude shows, frequently raided by the police. "My libido did not carry me through all of them , and some are said to be country fair swindles, but one I did see . . . is rather ingenious and does fully provide what it promises."[21]

Concern was expressed by others about the "controlling power" of the packaged messages through the exhibits, statuary and murals, going as far as declaring the exhibits an exercise in "latent fascism" and suggesting that the fair constituted "contrived conditioning." Certainly the ideal American women statues as well as other statues and murals at the fair portrayed a stiffness of design seen in statues in Nazi Germany and Soviet

Russia. In fact, the popular Soviet exhibit , a U-shaped building in the middle of which was a tall tower, had a heroic seventy-nine-foot stainless steel statue of a worker holding up a red star, popularly nicknamed the "Bronx Express Straphanger."

The Soviet exhibit was closed in 1940 after the Soviet Union invaded Finland. Among our future adversaries, Italy and Japan were represented by pavilions as well. Italy had a statue of *Roma* on top of a stepped tower with a cascading turquoise waterfall emptying into a large pool. *Roma* looked a little like the Columbia University *Alma Mater* or a misplaced *Britannia* from the British Pavilion next door. No factory workers were portrayed there, but inside was a deluxe restaurant run by the steamship line famous for the *Conte di Savoia,* duplicating the appurtenances of the ship's restaurant. Walter Lippmann analyzed the pavilion in his column and wrote "how excellent it would be if Signor Mussolini and Count Ciano could stand under it and cool off and relax, and remember that Rome, which was not built in a day, is the Eternal City of Western Man, to be guarded with reverence and exalted in magnanimity."[22] But there was to be no repeat of the Century of Progress Balbo's squadron at the 1939 fair, no caption reading "From the Eternal City to the Emerald City."

Nazi Germany was not represented, although there is evidence that it was invited. It may not have accepted the invitation, because when the invitations were being sent out by Grover Whalen, Mayor La Guardia suggested that the German Pavilion be named the Chamber of Horrors.

Symbolism was rampant throughout the statuary of the fair. Near the Perisphere was the *Astronomer,* head cocked sideways, peering up in a direct line to the Life Saver Parachute Jump almost a mile away. Also near the theme center was a sculptural sundial, *Time and the Fates of Man.* Near a giant statue of George Washington were the four *Moods of Time*—night represented by

a female figure shaded by owls, a man awakening in the morning to a crowing rooster. Most human figures were nude for there was a strong element of modified classicism. Other, more abstract sculptures were the *Fountain of the Atom* with playful ceramic balls representing electrons, and the *Tree of Life,* a central elm trunk flanked by a man and woman carved in eucalyptus.

Murals were everywhere. An example of the genre was a mural by Rockwell Kent in the General Electric building representing the progress from "obscurantism to enlightenment made possible by electric research,"[23] an example of the lofty language throughout the fair.

The new technologies displayed at the fair included a "radio living room of tomorrow," with even a fax machine. The emphasis on consumerism was strong, and there is some indication that it fostered an artificial demand for products or perhaps the added appurtenances of products that were not needed. I have already mentioned the impact of streamlining. It is interesting that as products became less boxy and more streamlined (autos are the prime example), the opposite took place in architecture as the International style replaced previously slender ziggurat-style skyscrapers with buildings looking like boxes on their side. Such are the paradoxes of progress. Perhaps another pervasive current at the fair in its quest for consumerism was its effect of an educational curriculum. In 1939, the fair was organized in zones, each with a theme. Although other nations and the states were represented, most of the space in the main part of the fair was organized around transportation, communications, industrial production and distribution, and food production. In each zone, a generic display introduced the consumer to the wave of the future in the development and use of products.

I mentioned the statues of the ideal American women. There was also an effort to define the typical American boy. A contest

was run in which boys were to send in their ideas of what would constitute a typical American boy. The contest was won by a twelve-year-old from Manhattan with the odd-sounding name of Alfred Roberts.[24] His letter indicated that the typical American boy should "possess the same qualities of the early pioneers. He should be handy, dependable, courageous, and loyal to his beliefs. He should be clean, cheerful and friendly, willing to help and be kind to others. He is an all around boy interested in sports, hobbies, and the world around him."[25] I am sure that Master Roberts did not intend to copy parts of the Boy Scout oath. By the way, each contestant had to submit a photograph because *strength of appearance* also counted—probably to exclude those with two ears on one side of the head.

It is interesting that E. L. Doctorow, in his novel *World's Fair,* had his protagonist, a seven-year-old with the same first name as the author, submit an essay. Unlike the "typical American boy," he was Jewish, and his idea of an American identity was as follows: ". . . not fearful of dangers . . . he should traverse the hills and valleys of the city. If he is Jewish he should say so. If he is anything he should say what it is when challenged. . . . He reads all the time. . . . Also radio programs and movies may be enjoyed but not at the expense of important things. For example he should always hate Hitler. In music he appreciates both swing and music. In women he appreciates them all."[26] Of course, his essay was not selected.

It is a fact that at least one travel agency, World's Fair Tours, instructed its salespeople to prearrange tours for whites, not the general public. The Westinghouse exhibit defined the "average American family," the Middletons, as white, upper-middle class. African Americans were not represented in the murals, but they were the performers in the World's Fair Music Hall in the *Hot Mikado,* and there was a sculpture, *The Harp,* by the black sculptress Augusta Savage near one of the entrances, consisting of

black figures within "the hand of God" forming harp strings. The Democracity hymn was the work of a black composer, William Grant Still. There was a "Negro Week" but not until 1940. At the end of the 1939 season, there was also a panel discussion on racial prejudice, but an end to bigotry was not one of the shining motifs in the murals or in the zone theme centers. In that regard, the fair mirrored the America of the 1930s, but prominent blacks did protest. The chair of the Harlem Community Cultural Conference declared that the "position allotted to the Negro gives a false picture of his place in the World of Tomorrow."[27] In fact, the fair's corporation offices had been picketed by African American organizations even before the fair opened.

Well, this was nothing new. Robert Moses, whose Grand Central Parkway abutted the west end of the fair, made sure that the overpasses throughout his parkways to suburbia were low enough to prevent busses filled with "undesirables" from reaching those Edens. The fair, in fact, was a godsend to Moses. He wanted his parkways surrounded by country gardens, and in 1936 when the Grand Central Parkway was opened to connect with the newly opened Triborough Bridge, it passed by miles of ashes, smoke, and malevolent odors. For Moses, the future he saw was another grand park, Flushing Meadows, which would develop after the fair and complete his grand design.

One thing that must be said about the architects and designers was that they were extraordinarily talented. The board of design originally appointed to draw up plans was headed by the architect Stephen Voorhees. The Trylon and Perisphere were designed by Wallace Harrison and André Fouilhoux and the interior exhibit by Henry Dreyfuss. Harrison had been a principal architect of Rockefeller Center and went on to become the lead architect for the United Nations headquarters complex. Dreyfuss was responsible for the classic Western Electric tele-

phone and later the Princess and Trimline desk phones, as well as the New York Central's streamlined Twentieth Century Limited locomotive a year before the fair. The architects and designers among you will also recognize the names of Aymar Embury, Walter Dorwin Teague, Ely Jacques Kahn, and Norman Bel Geddes. It was Bel Geddes who in the fair's second year added six hundred churches and several hundred filling stations and one university to Futurama—all in response to protests about their absences, presumably in proportion to their value in the community.

However, some modernists, such as Frank Lloyd Wright, were absent. (He had not been represented at the Century of Progress either.) Lewis Mumford was there when one of Mumford's associates suggested to the assembled architects that Wright should be included. He was met with jeers. Mumford responded, "I grant that the suggestion was ill-advised. One does not improve a rhinestone necklace by setting a real diamond on it."[28] Design board chair Voorhees himself got a tongue-in-cheek endorsement from an architectural journal, indicating that as an architect he was an "excellent administrator."[29] The editors of *Architectural Review,* taking issue with the building designs, opined that "these buildings are pompous when they should be impressive, confused when they should be logical, and their attempts at lightheartedness are laboured when they should be witty."[30] Another criticized the classic touch of "added domes and rotundas, cupolas and colonnadesas disastrous, neither monumental nor gay, taking away from the simplicity."[31]

Another personal reflection: In the eighth grade in "the school in the gardens" in Forest Hills, otherwise known as P. S. 101, in celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Greater New York in 1948, we were assigned essays on great events within those fifty years. I chose the New York World's Fair and more particularly the

roles of the architects. At that time I had a considerable interest in the development of Manhattan, absorbed from books with the titles *New York Advancing* and *New York: The World's Capital City* that for the most part ignored the other four boroughs. The illustrations of the future of Manhattan reflected urban elements similar to the models seen in the Perisphere and the General Motors exhibit. The plans included superhighways cutting through self-contained neighborhoods, which of course had to be cleared. It was only because of the efforts of people and neighborhood-oriented campaigners such as Jane Jacobs that several of these superhighways did not destroy Manhattan residential neighborhoods. Fortunately, the downtowns of many cities, almost deserted at night like Democracity, are being revitalized.

We Chicagoans might consider comparing the New York World's Fair—its similarities and differences—with the Columbian Exposition and the Century of Progress. Certainly the Century of Progress was on the minds of the developers of the New York fair when they first met in 1934 at the time the Century of Progress was closing. However, there was a closer parallel with the more distant Columbian Exposition. Both looked from the distance like white cities in the midst of the grayness of Chicago. Both fairs had ideal communities, visions of the world led by industry. As for the Century of Progress, the New York design board was concerned about what was conceived of as a Buck Rogers-style modernism. The New York plan also envisioned an organic distribution of buildings surrounding a theme center as opposed to isolated buildings, each surrounded by a park-like setting as was the case at the Century of Progress. In the organic conception, the Trylon and Perisphere were to be stark white, and the buildings of the seven theme-zone sectors radiating from the center would be designed in deepening hues of individual colors as the distances increased from the center.

In all, I visited the fair three times, according to my parents—once by El, once by Fifth Avenue bus, and once by auto. Each time the entrance was far distant from the amusement area—my object was the Children's World, naturally, specifically a ride called "A Trip Around the World" sponsored by Gimbel's department store. To get to the amusement section, we had to pass through the Avenue of Patriots, Court of Communications, Court of Power, Plaza of Light, and the Avenue of Labor.

The trip, in a small steam locomotive-driven train, went through miniatures of historical structures and monuments such as a windmill, a droll Sphinx in front of a pyramid, a castle, the Roman Forum, and a Venetian canal. Of course I don't remember much of this at all, mostly the long walk to that section of the fair and the sound of the first notes of "The Sidewalks of New York" from the horns of the small Greyhound busses on the walkways. The Children's World was one of the few areas praised by *Architectural Review,* noting its "...feeling of lightness, gaiety and impermanence, which is most appropriate in a fair but is found only in a few instances on Flushing Meadows."[32]

For those who were too nearsighted to appreciate the buildings of Futurama or Democracity, there was the Town of Tomorrow, a mock neighborhood with fifteen full-scale model homes that could be reproduced for a cost ranging from three to fifteen thousand dollars (well beyond the means of at least 90 percent of the fairgoers). Of course, whether Mid-Atlantic Georgian, Southern Regency or New England saltbox, each home had all the modern appliances. The homes had quaint, non-commercial names, such as the House of Electricity (sponsored by General Electric). A "motor home" had centrally located flanking garage doors, tiled flooring, and glass brick walls. The garage became a glorified entrance hall. Lewis Mumford reflected the general attitude by some about the theme of the fair itself, of

industry's progressive attitude toward technology and a more conservative attitude toward aesthetics. His conclusion about the Town of Tomorrow: "[It] doesn't even come up to the standards of current thought and current design. It remains the bootleg tomorrow that used to be sold as genuine Scotch before the end of prohibition."[33]

Of the sixty million visitors predicted in 1939, fewer than half attended. Coney Island had attracted greater crowds. In 1940 the World of Tomorrow became For Peace and Freedom. Perhaps some observers might have seen a close resemblance of the World of Tomorrow with Tomorrow the World. The fair reopened on May 10, 1940, the day of Germany's blitzkrieg of Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France. Fountain Lake was renamed Liberty Lake. The admission price was reduced. The Soviet Pavilion was dismantled and the area was renamed American Commons. Grover Whalen, New York's official greeter, lost his job as president and was replaced by a dour Harvey Gibson, president of Manufacturer's Trust Company, who would be more likely to bolster fair revenues. The *New Yorker* magazine described Gibson as "playing Mussolini to Grover Whalen's Victor Emmanuel."[34] Although Italy attacked France in June, there was still an Italian pavilion, and Japan remained while entering Indo-China. At that point in history, the fair remained an Emerald City while war was encroaching. Foreign visitors were less enchanted. Wyndham Lewis arrived from London after Dunkirk and was unsettled by what he saw as ". . . the hauntings of what Power-worship spells for men in this very week, at this very hour. . . . For what was the 'Nuremberg Rally' but a sort of German World's Fair."[35]

Last week I was rereading a section of a book about twentieth-century medievalists. That section, on the Oxford Fantasists

(C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien), characterized one of the medieval themes that Lewis perceived as fantasy as an antidote to evil: a delight in little things. As Norman Kantor, the author of a work on twentieth-century medievalists, interpreted it, Lewis's concept of medieval ambience was "the transformation of the realm of the mundane where the cloud bank of the reality of evil is ever-present, by projection of an imaginative faith out of the simulations of particularly uncostly things that makes us feel good."[36] Except for the cost, the fair represented all that.

The fair closed for good on October 27, 1940, nearly the day that Italy invaded Greece. A bugler played taps at the Perisphere in the presence of some one-hundred-odd employees, and Democracity shut down.

Over the next few years, after we had moved to Forest Hills, my parents and I would take walks over the old World's Fair grounds. Part of the grounds became a military installation during the war, but the rusting bridges over Grand Central Parkway, the broad avenues, and the plazas were still there, emptied of the music, tulips and buildings. In later years, walking among the willows (the New York City Building and Aquacade being the only permanent reminders of the fair), I thought of a parallel with Stephen Vincent Benét's short story "By the Waters of Babylon," where a future priest visits the remains of a Manhattan destroyed by a conflagration and feels the presence of its ghosts. The New York City Building became an early home of the United Nations, and decades later another world's fair occupied the site, in an effort to reproduce the feeling of the original. But you can't reverse transformations. Robert Moses's wish for a park to replace the ash heaps was achieved and the Edens of suburbia were all around us—but the Emerald City was gone.

Notes

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28. Stern, *New York 1939,* 729.
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30. Stern, *New York 1930,* 731.
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