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The Stainless-Steel Illuminated Indian

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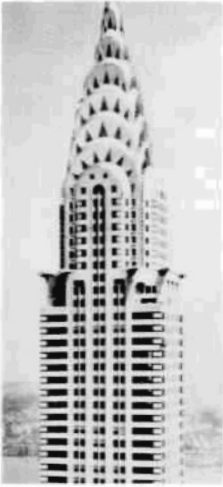
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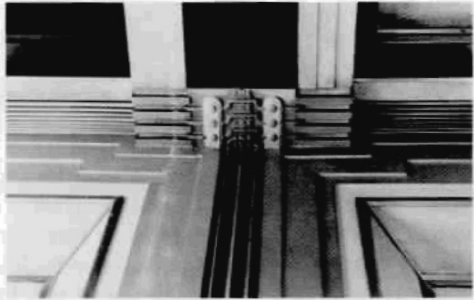
ESSAYS PRESENTED TO
D. KENNETH SARGENT

THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY SYRACUSE, NEW YORK

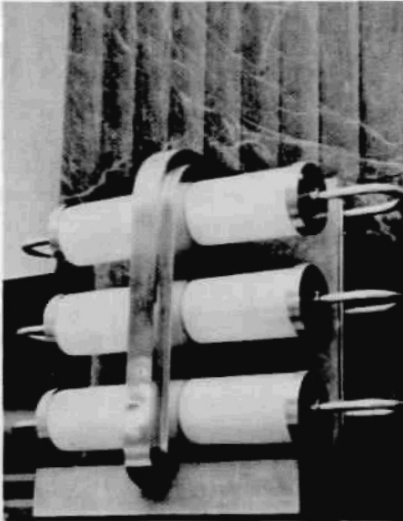
JUNE 1971



Chrysler Building, New York, 1929, William Van Alen.



Niagara Mohawk Building, Syracuse, 1931, Bley & Lyman. Photo on right, Interior detail.



Niagara Mohawk Building, Syracuse, 1931, Bley & Lyman. Center photo, neon lights, elevator lobby.

THE STAINLESS-STEEL ILLUMINATED INDIAN

WILLIAM CHAITKIN

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I. The Uses of the Past: Play it again, Sam

Beginning in the last half of the last decade, we have been subtly but steadily embracing a sort of Nineteen-Thirties Revival, until in our present total immersion it's hard to recall how it all began. Certainly the 1967 film "Bonnie and Clyde" marked a milestone, a point of no return; but just as certainly it represented a *symptomatic* rather than causative event. Likewise the subsequent "They Shoot Horses, Don't They?" *reflected* rather than created a popular urge to recapture the bittersweet tone of period authenticity.

And for whom? The majority of any American movie audience is under 25, unmotivated by nostalgia. Yet this same generation had already been frequenting campus film festivals devoted to Bogart and Garbo, W. C. Fields and the Marx Brothers, Busby Berkeley musicals and Flash Gordon serials, gangster classics, the original "Frankenstein," and of course, "King Kong." The Revival appealed to *youth*, not to the previous generation which, having *lived* through the Thirties, found its erstwhile entertainments neither Camp, kitsch, nor an art form.

Before Thirties Revival attracted the condescending attention of Madison Avenue and the In-group, to be commercialized and exploited, it had already been quietly rediscovered by Americans not even born in that decade, reminiscing *vicariously* about the Golden Age of Radio and Hollywood, and thereby *identifying* with a lost American culture they could relate to more positively than their own. For the causes of this envious interest in the Thirties experience must be sought in the pressures, complexities, and anxieties of the Sixties.¹ The Thirties stood for an engagingly naive, simpler, and nobler time in which America had *seemed*, by comparison, to possess a funky but genuine *soul*, shining through the cathartic catalyst of the Depression.

Perhaps, too, alienated Thirties Revival escapists used the historical nineteen-thirties as selectively as the Renaissance had used Classical Antiquity: as an *invented* tradition satisfying a contemporary need to believe in appealing myths (Jung defines "myth" as a group dream) without having to abide its less attractive realities. Rejecting the Sixties' galloping materialism, its consumer mentality and media overkill, its neurotic domestic fragmentation and Cold War paranoia, Thirties Revival meant a return to the supposed state of isolationist grace before World War II and the postwar boom, before the sort of traumatic loss of innocence and disorientation that anthropologists are wont to call *culture-shock*.

As the Revival took shape, inspiration from the popular culture of the Thirties manifested itself also in English and American Pop Art² of the Sixties and in French New Wave cinema.³ But the mass media most appropriately transmitted the new eclecticism: the Beatles endorsed it (in their lyrics and subjects) on radio and records, as did Tiny Tim; women's magazines purveyed the vogue

and high fashion literally followed suit (how else explain the midi?); and television, especially, showed the effects of media-transference. The *content* of a new medium is the *former* medium—also sprach Marshall McLuhan⁴—and extinct radio programs like “The Green Hornet” or even comic-strips like “Batman” (although R. Crumb brilliantly revived the Thirties comix form itself) reappeared as T.V. programs; witness further the divers references to Thirties media and humor on “Laugh-In.”⁵ Countless commercials have tuned in to old Hollywood cliches for television copy, and Thirties-style lettering and design motifs are ubiquitous in the graphics of both T.V. and print media, and advertising of all kinds.

The Revival thus encompassed both a self-conscious emulation of Thirties fashions, graphics, and media, as well as a renewed appreciation of the American culture produced by the history and art of that Golden Age. It may logically be expected that Thirties *architectural* style be rediscovered too (much of our urban environment still consists of it), and this essay hopes to help stimulate interest therein. But first:

Enter the art historians, who recognized that since the Thirties' spirit had been resurrected, the visual imagery of its *Zeitgeist* needed a name, and they called it Art Deco. Indeed, many names suited it: Moderne, Modernistic,⁶ Jazz Modern, Three-Stripe Streamlined, Aztec Airways⁷ (my personal favorite), and other such irreverent but descriptive appellations as Early Buck Rogers.⁸ But *Art Deco* stuck as the official designation for a Style which until the middle 1960's nobody (authoritative) acknowledged as having historically existed. And just as fashionable youths retrieved double-breasted pinstriped zootsuits from second-hand stores, so did art historians now seek vintage Art Deco artifacts from junk shops and attics and the fetish collections of Camp-followers. Prestigious museums organized exhibitions of black-laquered lozenge-shaped coffetables with inlaid ivory lightning-bolts, mirrored clocks in trapezoidal frames, tubular chrome lamps employing the concentric rainbow motif, plastic Egyptoid jewelry, green-and-orange enameled cigarette cases, square teapots, fabrics in contrasting zigzags, and two-tone shoes with sunrays emanating from the toes. What had formerly often been regarded as tasteless obnoxia was now reevaluated esthetically, not just as nostalgic memorabilia.

The term “Art Deco” comes from “L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Moderns” held in Paris in 1925. This exhibition marked the dissemination of a consistent influence thereafter, but historians don't all agree on its effective range: Battersby in fact contends that the Déco Exposition was the final *culmination* of a decorative style current between about 1910 and 1925, rather than the *root* of a new taste,⁹ while Judith Applegate extends it to 1935, with emphasis on an ascendancy between 1920-27.¹⁰ Hillier, less dogmatic, treats the Twenties and Thirties together in view of their relevance for the present Revival.¹¹ Insofar as Art Deco is useful to the present discussion as a stylistic background of taste, not chronology, suffice it to accept Giulia Veronesi's definition as “the style of the years from the end of Art Nouveau to the rise of the Bauhaus.”¹²

This implies some debt to Art Nouveau, the immediately preceding style (also recently “rediscovered” and to some extent revived)¹³ which, having by the end of the first decade of the 20th century spent its own creative energies, engendered new stylistic mutations surviving itself. The rigorously geometric work of C. R. Mackintosh, for example, and the whole Austrian Sezession, especially Josef Hoffman, has been reinterpreted as belonging more to the origins of Art Deco than to late-phase Art Nouveau. Yet inasmuch as “Art

Deco" is a catch-all term, a vast matrix of cultural and artistic contributions can justifiably be included; indeed, a sort of promiscuous, free eclecticism seems essential to its stylistic richness.

Judith Applegate simplifies the variety of influences by differentiating between the "exotic romantic,"¹⁴ beginning with the heady impact of the Russian Ballet (costumes, sets, music, stylized dance and all) in Paris in 1909, plus the emotional angularities of German Expressionism, plus ample Pre-Columbian and American Indian borrowings; and what she calls the "modern romantic" of mechanistic Italian Futurism, misapplied Cubist formalism, and the bogus streamlining of contemporary industrial design. Somehow the "official neo-classicism" of public buildings, and the "heroic neo-classicism" of their murals and statuary, whether in Fascist Europe, Stalinist Russia, or in American W.P.A. post offices, can also be incorporated, as well as the "moderne" décor of movie houses, hotel lobbies, and ocean-liner interiors.

Art Deco, by definition light, popular, and superficial, never intellectualized itself. It never explained any esthetic philosophies in manifestoes, like the Futurists, nor founded dedicated groups of practitioners, like the several schools of Cubism, nor published radical magazines like *De Stijl*. The 1925 Expo did promulgate Art Deco, but its adherents never considered it a Movement, especially not a Cause in revolt against histories or academies or prevailing taste. It coexisted with dozens of such movements, isms, and groups, blithely pirating them all, and although it was the isms that made art history, it was Art Deco that created the distinctive *look* of the Twenties and Thirties.

Now, concomitant with this decorative art went a "decorative" life-style, tellingly evoked by Veronesi and characterized by Battersby as artificial, ephemeral, gay, fantastical, and however cleverly sophisticated, "not at all profound or serious,"¹⁵ like the chic café-society itself which patronized it in Paris and other fashionable European centers. "But," as Veronesi contends, "the decorative life which America recreated, for better or worse, had no corresponding decorative 'form'";¹⁶ i.e., although the Twenties life-style in this country may have been equally "artificial, ephemeral, and gay," whatever Art Deco obtained here seemed as derivative of Europe as our "Culture" had always been.

Nonetheless, just as American *architecture* had always remained more creatively independent of Europe than our other arts, so did an *original* American Deco architecture flourish, impinged upon by European Art Deco but not directly by European Deco architectural models. For in fact, in *Europe* architecture seemed the weakest exponent of a style which totally permeated the other arts, while in *America* the converse transpired. Thus an indigenous American Deco architecture evinced itself, although Art Deco here seemed embryonic and imitative; in Europe Deco architecture hardly developed, while their Art Deco grew apace. In both European and American architecture the deciding factor was the effective degree to which Deco architecture was either supplanted by (in Europe) or substituted for (in America) the Modern Movement, specifically the International Style.

Of Europe, Applegate may say: "The Art Deco movement was not headed by the architects who favored a coming to terms with the new technological age, but by graphics designers, fashion stylists, craftsmen. . . ." ¹⁷ At the 1925 Paris Expo the arts décoratifs were suitably displayed in Deco pavilions; their facades were designed more by interior decorators than by architects and they looked it. But there among the elegant show-room confections, officially uninvited and standing "somewhat insolent in the midst of the decorative arts

of 1925,"¹⁸ was a pure white Cartesian composition, the aptly-titled *Esprit Nouveau* pavilion by Corbusier. And it was *this* that adumbrated European architecture's next direction,¹⁹ not Deco style.

If Deco architecture came to fruition only in America, may we amend Applegate's statement to read: "In America, the Deco movement was headed by the architects who favored a coming to terms with the new technological age"? If by this "coming to terms" is meant functionalism, rationalism, and the abstract esthetic of modernism, the answer must be in the negative. If however we allow a romantic, mythic interpretation of American technological progress itself, at once sentimentalized and idealized, we must admit that they achieved, in their *own* terms, a morphology expressive thereof.

II. Modern vs. Modernistic

Whereas Hillier makes much of English radio cabinets or bits of French jewelry designed in Aztec-temple silhouette,²⁰ a favorite Art Deco motif, in America other artifacts, covering a city block and proportionally tall—up to a thousand feet—followed the same form: the setback skyscraper. Let it be clear at the start that American Deco architecture refers not merely to surface ornament (plentiful as it was, and essential to the style). This Deco ornament served a total architecture, just as did Wright's ornament; modern criticism has been unduly intolerant of both.

On that note, enter the historians again. We realize by now, of course, that the partisanship of such Modern Movement historians as Giedion²¹ renders their interpretations less than objectively balanced; this is forgivable in view of the moral crusade then underway against traditionalist architectural thinking. It is rather like reading one of the Early Church Father's *Apologia* for Christianity, or an official Communist history of the Russian Revolution. So, bearing in mind their propagandistic purposes, when the orthodox historians explained the development of *American* modern architecture, it usually went something like this:

Nothing promising happened in the nineteenth century, except for bridges and trainsheds, until the Chicago School created its structurally expressive skyscrapers out of technological and economic necessity. But then Eastern reactionaries (hiss! boo!) squelched the progressive Chicago School with their neo-classical Columbian Exposition of 1893. Only Frank Lloyd Wright carried on the ideals of the Chicago School (utter nonsense, but let it pass); however, after 1910 or so Wright's relevance for modern architecture somehow ceased (although his career dragged on unabashedly for another half-century, ignored). Meanwhile, in Europe, the Modern Movement dawned through the new vision of the Great Pioneers, but in America eclecticism and esthetic confusion prevailed until some of the Pioneers (Gropius, Breuer, Neutra, and Mies) emigrated in the Thirties due to Hitler, bringing modernism with them. After World War II, this had its beneficent effect in the Miesian skyscraper and its imitators, beginning anew where the Chicago School had left off.

Right. What happened in America between 1893 and 1946? Except for the problematical Wright and a few unredeeming modern examples,²² nothing worth mentioning by the orthodox historians. Does this mean American built little in this benighted period? What about the skyscrapers of midtown Manhattan? In the forced evolutionary advance of modernism, preconceived quality, not sheer quantitative magnitude, was said to matter architecturally. Thus

the Chrysler building, its incredible needle-nosed spire looking very *much* like Early Buck Rogers, and further provided with huge metallic pseudo-cubist gargoyles, and the Empire State Building, its Freudian spire originally intended as a Zeppelin-mooring mast but appropriated for King Kong's tryst with Fay Wray, didn't count as modern, albeit both of these towers thrust aggressively higher than any other man-made structures in the world. But all that . . . jazz, well, that *ornament*, for Corb's Sake! I mean, really, such *taste!* Both, naturally, as perfect specimens of American Deco style never qualified for serious historical consideration until the present Thirties Revival.

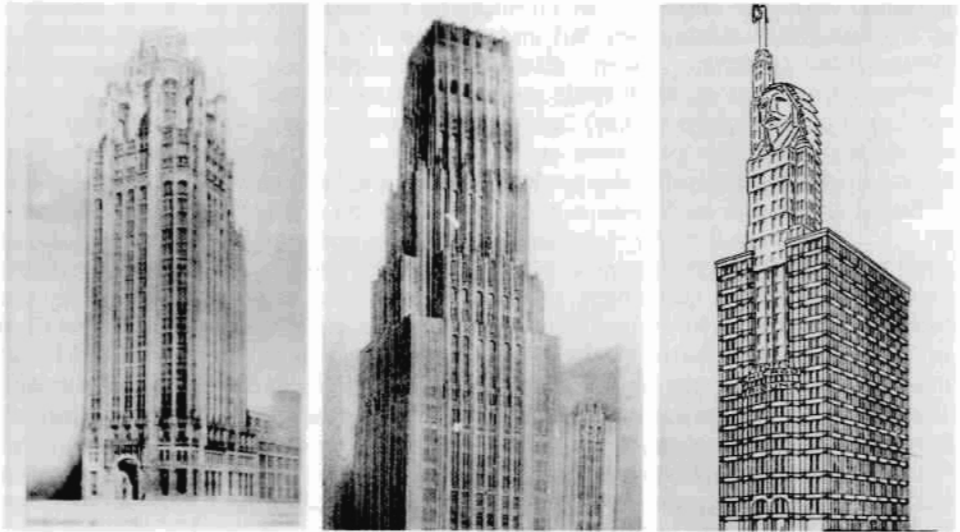
But at that time, in America, as an architectural commentator of 1929 puts it: ". . . is a school of protagonists who are lyrical and even extravagant in their praise of the skyscraper, who see it as both a necessary result of American conditions and a characteristic product of American genius."²³ Likewise, the less enthusiastic architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, also writing in 1929, conceded that: "Public opinion even among architects still held that there was nothing in the new architecture of Europe of equal significance to the skyscraper."²⁴ This also suggests that even had American architects desired it, European modernism offered no guide to skyscraper style. (Nor did the native Frank Lloyd Wright, who was hung up in his own "decorative period," playing with geometrically-patterned concrete blocks in California.) Art Deco, however, did.

Modern Movement historians give the impression that American architecture's retrogressive refusal to accept the salutary lessons of European modernism was due to the persistence of historicism. Indeed, traditional eclecticism did seem to dominate the first decades of the twentieth century in America. For public buildings, the classicism of McKim, Mead, and White bridged between the 1893 Chicago Exposition and, say, Henry Bacon's Lincoln Memorial of 1922 in Washington. Gothic Revival, strong since the nineteenth century, was perpetuated in churches and on campuses. But skyscrapers might permissibly be in *either* Classical or Gothic style, as a glance at the American entries to the 1922 Chicago Tribune Tower competition reveals.

However, in the later Twenties and after, the battle was patently not between historicism and modern (it never had been), but between *modernistic* and modern. One confidently suspects that this was because the Paris Exposition of 1925 proposed to American architects a viable *alternative* to Classical or Gothic eclecticism: Art Deco, bright, new, and quite harmlessly *avant-garde* in contrast to stale historicism, but far short of the severe, denuded functionalism of European modernism. (Whether this compromise effected an inevitable historical transition, or blindly delayed America's "coming to terms with the new technological age," is beside the present point.) An instance of overnight conversion from historicism is Raymond Hood, who, having *won* the Tribune competition with a Flamboyant Gothic design (which was immediately built), forever abandoned that style thereafter, creating instead prolific variations on modernistic themes—beginning with the American Radiator Company Building of 1925 in New York, a black masonry fantasy with gold Deco ornament "incandescent at the terminals."²⁵ Neither did any major New York skyscraper architect after 1925 emulate past styles; the American architectural Establishment had been solidly sold on Deco modernistic, which it parlayed into the original, native manifestation which is the subject of this study.

The definitive celebration of this skyscraper style occurred at the Architecture and Allied Arts Exhibition of 1931 in New York, jointly sponsored by the New York Architectural League, the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects, and the A.I.A.

STATE OF THE ART: AMERICA, 1922



I. to r., Winning Chicago Tribune Tower Competition entry, Howells and Hood. 2nd Prize Chicago Tribune Tower Competition, Eiel Saarinen. Chicago Tribune Tower Competition entry, Mosdorf, Hahn, & Busch.

A gold medal went to William Lamb's hardly traditional Empire State Building, for, as mentioned, "The New York Architectural League staged a show organized by men who had designed New York's skyscrapers with an eye to the decoration they had seen at the Paris Exposition of Decorative Arts in 1925."²⁶ Two contemporary phenomena tend to illustrate that, first, the conflict wasn't between traditional and modern, and, second, that it was between modernistic and modern.

First, as to critical reception, even a conservative critic writing in 1931 of the Exhibition recognized that

American architecture is of a far greater catholicity in respect to taste than one might infer from current controversies . . . heavily involved in the matter of modernism, and the skyscraper is the leading symbol of that element . . . the disciples of tradition are as numerous as ever.²⁷

He meant, in essence, that historicism (or traditional eclecticism) and skyscraper "modernism" (Deco architecture, or *modern* eclecticism) had more in common with each other than either had with European modernism, of which he entirely disapproved. Making the same point from the opposite camp, the left wing historians who supported the European Modern Movement, H.-R. Hitchcock had already ruefully noted in 1929 that

The engineering of the skyscraper provides certainly a magnificent raw material for architecture. But to . . . give to it qualities of mass based on towers of the past . . . stylized in the direction of height . . . is no more to create an authentic architecture than had been done by applying Flamboyant or Renaissance detail. . . .²⁸

Hitchcock at least perceived that it wasn't the mere presence of ornament, but

STATE OF THE ART: EUROPE, 1925



I. to r., Au Bon Marché (Department Store) Pavilion, Paris Expo, L. H. Boileau. L'Esprit Nouveau Pavilion, Paris Expo, Le Corbusier. Madime Shop, Bauhaus, Dessau, Walter Gropius.

rather the “stylized qualities of mass” which betrayed the false modernism of skyscraper style. To most orthodox modernists the test lay in ornament versus *no* ornament, while to the first critic quoted, and to many architects, Modernistic became another Style, as valid as Classical or Gothic, to be added to the repertory of designers’ choices.

Secondly, a revealing episode shows the extent to which *modernistic* and *modern* were mutually antagonistic, while *eclectic* and *modernistic* persuasions coexisted at the 1931 Exhibition without much ideological distinction. An article headed “Rejection” in *Art Digest* of May 1931 tells it:

Nine young modernist architects (all under 30 years of age) are in active rebellion in New York against constituted art authority. Their models were rejected by the Architectural League for its fiftieth annual exhibition, so they have established a “Salon des Refuses” . . . They have even gone so far as to picket the big show at Grand Central Palace with a man bearing a placard: “See really modern architecture, rejected by the League, at. . .”²⁹

The rejected modernists issued a manifesto which exemplified “really” modern as the work of Corbusier, Oud, Gropius, and Mies; it involved the following parameters: “The design depends primarily on function. . . . The style takes advantage of new principles of construction and new materials . . . ornament has no place . . .” and so on. “This International Style,” they correctly observed, “has little in common with the capricious and illogical work of the ‘modernistic’ architects who have recently won popularity in America.”³⁰

To be sure, the proponents of European modernism would soon enough have a more respectable polemical forum, for in 1932 H.-R. Hitchcock and Philip Johnson mounted the famous “International Style” show at the Museum of Modern Art, introducing “real” modern architecture to America. Although not until the European Pioneers arrived in person did International Style achieve its desired currency, irrevocably transforming American design, never again was it relegated to a picket’s placard.³¹ In the meantime, the American architectural profession heedlessly continued to thrive on modernistic instead of modern. This skyscraper style had roots—besides Art Deco—quite independent of, and sometimes antithetical to, European modernism.

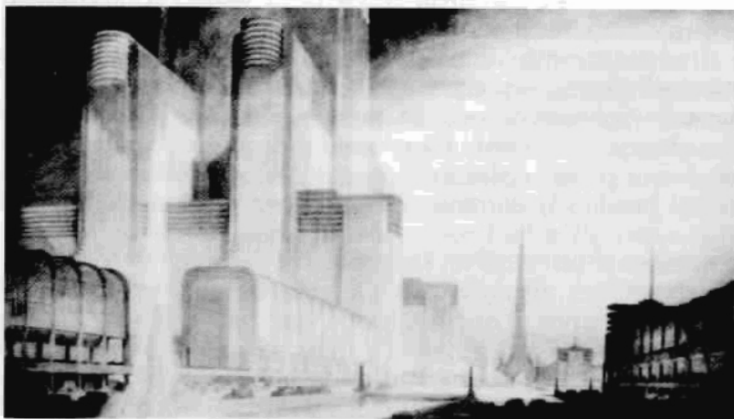
For instance, it is sometimes assumed that the setback silhouette resulted automatically from the necessary evil of compliance with the New York Zoning Law of 1916, which limited the tall building’s mass to a sort of pyramidal envelope, so as to prevent sheer opposing vertical facades from blocking sunlight to the intervening street.³² But if only because of the fact that, of 377

buildings over 20 stories tall in the U.S. in 1929, only 188,³³ or just about half, were actually in New York, it may be submitted that the setback manifested an *esthetic* preference as well. Not subject to this imposed restriction, most notably, was Eliel Saarinen's 1922 Tribune Tower competition entry, for Chicago.

His Second-Prize design, be it remembered, received far more real approbation among critics than Hood's winning Gothic entry (beloved only of the Tribune's publisher, architect Hood, and the most reactionary or chauvinistic observers);³⁴ Louis Sullivan himself led the chorus of acclaim for the former,³⁵ and the subsequent invitation to Saarinen to come to America and establish Cranbrook Academy recognized the attention his design had precipitated. Now, be it also remembered that Gropius and several other modern German and Dutch architects had entered the competition too, but their radical designs did not impress Americans as ideas to conjure with, while the rather busy formalism of Finnish modernistic—a sort of vertical classicism, clean-lined but not without punctuating ornament, and stepped back to pile distinct blocks into a tectonic entity—was incorporated forthwith into American skyscraper style, replacing both historical eclecticism and the columnar Chicago School formula of base, fluted shaft, and heavy terminating cornice.

The expressiveness of rising verticals, ordered but not overly interrupted by the setbacks, academically rational yet *romantic* (was he not a spiritual kinsman to Sibelius?) and giving a vertical *effect* without Hood's forced archeological detailing, was admittedly a skillful invention, but to Saarinen this wasn't a unique exercise in problem-solving, but an ordained style, as the whole Cranbrook scene attests. Here, in the Twenties and Thirties, a kind of Deco-version Bauhaus emerged, integrating arts, crafts, and architecture (the Finch College "Art Deco" exhibition of 1970 was assembled in conjunction with Cranbrook and drew liberally from its collection). As for the ongoing influence of Saarinen's unbuilt Tribune Tower, Hitchcock perceived that the competition should have "opened American eyes to the contemporary architecture of Europe. Yet the net result of it for years was little more than that a foreigner had shown a new way of decorating skyscrapers."³⁶

This however was not Saarinen's fault, and in fact he played no further role in formulating skyscraper style, his importance being more as an educator, planner, designer ("the best of the eclectics," said Wright) and father of Eero. Less tangential perhaps was Hugh Ferriss, whose visionary picture-book *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, 1929, must have been required reading for skyscraper



Science Center, Imaginary Metropolis, from Hugh Ferriss' *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, 1929, p. 117.

architects then, as it is now for understanding the style. Ferriss wasn't even an architect himself, but a renderer (he calls himself an "Illustrator or Consulting Designer"); he was thereby free to work for many firms on many major New York skyscrapers, and clearly wasn't just called in to delineate buildings already designed. Lest Ferriss' reputation at the time be underestimated, Sheldon Cheney said of him in *New World Architecture*: "he probably deserves more credit than any architect since Sullivan for stirring the imagination of designers, students, and public."³⁷

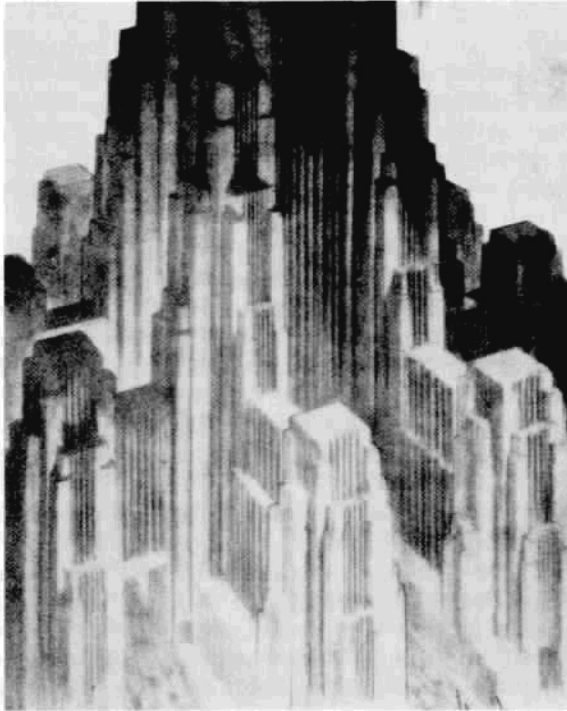
Ferriss makes the point early in his book—in the first specific example cited, the St. Louis Telephone Building—that the setback form "came into existence not as an indirect result of some legal or economic cause, but as the direct result of a bold stroke on the part of its designers,"³⁸ i.e. an esthetic justification, since St. Louis had no Zoning Law. Subsequent enactment of such regulations in over 300 municipalities throughout the country by 1929 connoted, to Ferriss, no oppressive hindrance but rather a form-giving determinant, more or less enforcing stylistic adherence to a desirable compositional type.

In sequential drawings Ferriss showed how the given Zoning Law envelope could be cut into and molded plastically; he conceived the maximum permissible envelope to be like "crude clay . . . awaiting the hand of the sculptor."³⁹ Of course, this implied that the buildings be designed *from the outside in*, contrary to every modernist from Wright to Corbusier. But Ferriss after all employed a *renderer's* method; the building's structural system was not his problem, and the "morality" of expressing it or allowing it to generate the design never intruded upon his visual sense: "Designers have generally come to realize the importance of the principle stated by the late Louis Sullivan, 'Form follows Function.' The axiom is not weakened by the further realization that Effect follows Form."⁴⁰

The easy appeal of this romanticizing *effect*, the same that Hitchcock adduced as "qualities of mass stylized in the direction of height" in his 1929 book *Modern Architecture: romanticism and reintegration*, already quoted, doubtless served literally to elevate the exhibitionistic architecture of capitalism to a noble new Architecture, an American Style, and Hugh Ferriss was its prophet.⁴¹ Even the renderings of existing skyscrapers in his first section, "Cities of Today," exude immense *power*;⁴² he specialized in night views, with soft tonal chiaroscuro modeling the rearing towers into cubistic prisms, their lower steps strongly illuminated as if by floodlight, their upper works dark against a sort of glowing nimbus, or halo, and the background sometimes shot through with beacons: pure baroque theatricality by a veritable Rembrandt of the skyscraper. This dramatization obviated details of ornament, whether Gothic, Classical, or Deco, and presented the buildings as reductive massing studies of *effect* alone. In his "Projected Trends" section, Ferriss advocated

... a theatrical district—let us say, Times Square—is built up in a romantic interpretation of the Zoning Law. The ancient Assyrian ziggurat, as a matter of fact, is an excellent embodiment of the modern New York legal restriction; may we not for a moment imagine an array of modern ziggurats?⁴³

Indeed, *all* of Ferriss' sensationalistic proposals were "romantic interpretations of the Zoning Law." It is immaterial whether historians opt to call them Aztec-temples (stepped pyramids)—because of the supposed Pre-Columbian influence on Art Deco—or ziggurats; the *effect* is the same.



Financial Center, Imaginary Metropolis, from Hugh Ferriss' The Metropolis of Tomorrow, 1929, p. 129.

The third and last section of *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* is finally Ferriss' "Imaginary Metropolis." It is disappointingly static and formal. Like Sant' Elia's Futurist City, traffic moves on elevated streets and airplanes land on the buildings,⁴⁴ and like Corbusier's Radiant City,⁴⁵ 1200-foot towers are dispersed half a mile apart, but Ferriss' scheme merely extended the Zoning Law to city planning, resolving the (admittedly exciting) chaos of "Cities of Today." Although composed symbolically of Business, Art, and Science districts in tripartite equanimity, it presupposed no revolutionary changes in urban society itself, just as American Thirties architecture rebutted European International Style as being too radical not only in its design, but for the sociological imperatives that went with it. Unlike Gropius' Weimar Republic, America had not lately had, and earnestly did not want, a *revolution* of any kind. The 1930 American film "Just Imagine," showing a New York of 1980 taken expressly from Ferriss' book, is lightweight stuff compared to the brilliant 1934-36 English film "Things to Come," depicting H. G. Wells's technocratic utopia with Bauhaus sets, and not just *visually* inferior.

In a way, though, America's socio-political utopia resided in the past: 18th century Jeffersonian democracy. With 19th century industrialization the accommodation of Americans to this *change* was left to the dubious agencies of Social Darwinism: economic survival of the fittest; thus the socio-political context of *change* was exchanged for a technological one. Progress is our most important product. The 20th century has not reconciled these two American Dreams. It remained for Thirties architecture to foster a compelling form-language (using Norberg-Schulz' terms for style in his *Intentions in Architecture*) for the symbol-system latent in our socio-technological mythology, rather less self-consciously than the European modernists whose parallel but disparate iconology at least attempted to synthesize the two.

III. Towards an Electric Architecture

A particularly vivid example of American Deco skyscraper style is the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation Building, unappreciated right here in Syracuse.⁴⁶ It is not the purpose of this summation to summarize exhaustively the design thereof, however much it merits the full treatment. Yet nothing extraordinary about the circumstances of its creation warrants special pleading; it originated in the architectural office of Bley and Lyman,⁴⁷ Buffalo, about 1931.

It therefore represents an almost anonymous instance of the flowering of Thirties Deco style, *style* meaning in this case a pervasive esthetic *attitude*, in contradistinction to Deco architecture's historical competitor, International Style—which *style*⁴⁸ means the collected works of individual masters like Corbusier, Mies, and Gropius, and which was comprehended only by a limited audience of intellectuals. On the other hand, since America built thousands of Deco buildings in the Thirties, Niagara Mohawk may be taken as *typical*, a symbolic cultural index rather than an isolated masterpiece.

Of course, its architectural appeal is direct enough, to receptive sensibilities. Although hardly a *skyscraper* at six stories (not counting the central projection) and broader than it is tall, Niagara Mohawk presents a powerful triple-stepped Aztec-temple profile with a dense profusion of rich ornamental detail. Its compactness renders it a sort of vest-pocket version of the great Manhattan monoliths. Like Eliel Saarinen's Tribune entry and Hugh Ferriss' dream towers, main sources of the setback esthetic, it rises in vertically-stressed tiers, which effloresce into hysterical metal finials at the uncorniced terminals.

The decorated spandrels between the piers bear crisp, angular chevrons, grills, fins, sunbursts, stripes, zigzags, and other Deco patterns. Prodigious quantities of bright stainless-steel or similar metals overlay the buff brick exterior walls, but shiny black tile, terra-cotta, black-and-green marble, frosted cast glass, translucent white lighting strips, and concrete sculpted in geometrical relief are also lavishly used. Shiny black and silvery metal predominate. Within the overall symmetry of the facade, vertical rhythms syncopate in varied modalities (with no two adjoining bays alike), very much like the hot jazz of the time, and far livelier than anything International Style attempted.⁴⁹ If architecture is frozen music then Niagara Mohawk is contemporaneous Benny Goodman, not contemporaneous Stravinsky or Bartok.

To tastes conditioned by International Style abstraction, balanced reserve, and economy of means, all this tends to appear overwrought, excessive and even vulgar, but remember that it had been on much the same grounds that self-righteous Italian Renaissance theorists like Alberti or Vasari denegated Gothic style as the undisciplined crudities of barbaric Goths. Yet it is this same naivete and exuberant ingenuousness which recommends both Thirties Pop-architecture and the popular culture which produced it. Deco architecture did not, as European Art Deco before it had not, make any recondit intellectual claims upon its auditors; it conveyed no more didactic or esoteric a message than the Marx Brothers, and no less *implicit* a view of American life, a *Weltanschauung* of jocular, calculated, and consummately artful absurdity, an architecture of fun, a Marxist architecture of Harpo, not Karl.

Again, this relationship between Thirties film and architectural media perforce eludes those who choose to judge this culture in terms of the European Modern Movement. Burchard and Bush-Brown in *The Architecture of America* assert that "The mass media had the power to create a higher public taste," i.e. Bauhaus-oriented, and

... the movies, along with the radio, did contain the power to expose large portions of the American people to common standards of ... manners, speech, even architecture ... as it was they proposed no crusade, contaminated only in a mediocre way, and elevated not at all.⁵⁰

Why American media would want to proselytize an imposed, if supposedly superior, taste—alien to both the culture and the media themselves—is not explained. Anyway, “they seem to have failed” and

Perhaps we may be thankful ... What architectural taste might have been like in America had it been ministered to by Sam Goldwyn, Cecil B. DeMille ... and Frank Sinatra, is sometimes better not to contemplate.⁵¹

This indignant disdain so far misses the mark that one honestly wonders why they subtitled their otherwise admirable book “A Social and Cultural History.” One can no more imagine International Style Hollywood moviehouses (doubtless running Leger’s film “Ballet Mechanique” continuously) than King Kong climbing all over the Villa Savoye, chasing Gertrude Stein.

The Modern Movement, so far from being a fun architecture, tended to compel one to participate in a philosophical, or rather, *moralistic* dialog (about functionalism, structural honesty, integrity of materials, and like issues) which stood quite apart from the sensory values and purely visual or psychospatial reactions normally operative in persons experiencing buildings. When every International Style opus became a statement of principle, an expression of a cerebral idea, perhaps the human uses of architecture took a subservient place (the Barcelona Pavilion is an extreme example of this). Analogously, compare the later “comedies” of Chaplin—painfully moralizing and preaching—like “The Great Dictator” (why Nazis are not only laughable but evil), with a decidedly undidactic Marx Brothers farce like “Duck Soup.” While the content, or *meaning* of a work of art is inseparable from the vehicle, or *means* by which it is presented, great art sometimes succeeds in *spite* of preachment, but rarely by the *absolute* worth of the message itself. We may be less indulgent of International Style in this regard now that we realize the extent to which its rarified, sublime, and rather precious esthetic often made only *symbolic* gestures to functionalism, structural honesty and integrity of materials; when available construction methods proved inadequate to achieve what they professed to be expressing, the Great Pioneers compensated with white stucco camouflage and well-meaning claims for a technological *Zeitgeist* that existed only in their own manifestoes.

American Deco architecture related to *its* culture’s technological base more literally and perhaps even more convincingly, although not necessarily more validly. For example, the chromium-nickel-steel gargoyles of the Chrysler building, already mentioned, actually replicated the famous winged radiator-cap trademark of Chrysler automobiles;⁵² their wingspans measured 15 feet, to be seen from 39 stories below—conceivably by average Americans driving Chryslers. No wonder Americans never understood Corbusier’s “*machine à habiter*” dictum; to them a machine was a *machine*, like a car, not an *idea*.

If I were building a house tomorrow it would certainly not follow the lines of a dynamo or a steam shovel.⁵³

H.L. Mencken, 1931

We must invent and remake the Futurist City to be like a huge tumultuous shipyard, agile, mobile, dynamic in all parts; and the Futurist house to be like a gigantic machine.⁵⁴

Antonio Sant’ Elia, 1914

America was more completely than Europe the very child of the machine age; the machine has actually played a minor role in American emotional life, and the impulse to dramatize it has been extremely rare.⁵⁵

Vincent Scully, Jr., 1957

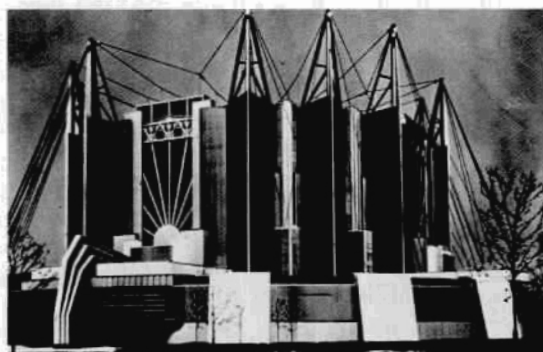
This peculiarly American representationalism should be even more pronounced in the Niagara Mohawk Building, dedicated as it was to the corporate institutionalization of energy itself. Electricity, however, is not as readily visualized as a machine, nor can it be monumentalized like the works of engineering to which its energies respond, and an *idea* like Rationalism, nominally a premise of Science, didn't greatly stimulate Deco architects. Effect follows Form follows Function. Yet a sort of mystical *feeling* for technology literalized did find its architectural counterform in the Niagara Mohawk Building. Call the style of its ornamental component "Geometrical Romanticism" if you like.

As the very icon and emblem of the new promise of perpetual Progress, it sanctified both the Captain of Industry's gross national product and the good life of the American housewife's electrified home.⁵⁶ Better living through electricity. Mass communication—telephones and radio—depended on it, as did public transportation—streetcars, trolley-buses, subways, and elevated trains. Its wires, like an animating cosmic force or demiurge, unified the nation more reliably than any socio-political system. The uniquely privileged status granted public utility companies in the U.S., *transcending* both government and private enterprise, is indicative of the architectural possibilities inherent in buildings devoted to such service; of course they might well invoke Aztec or Assyrian temples: they too are religious edifices. So unlike the postwar Miesian office towers, in elegantly neutral glass-and-steel for gray-flannel organization men, Niagara Mohawk's ritual garb bespeaks the millennialism of the new magic, closer to science-fiction than to science or technology. Early Buck Rogers. Flash Gordon, pure cinematic Art Deco. King Kong, an anti-technological Caliban, stunned by gas bombs and shot off the radio transmitter of the Empire State Building by aeroplanes.⁵⁷

This hope for a utopian technological future was invested with added poignancy and urgency just about when Niagara Mohawk was built. After the Crash of 1929, and before the New Deal caused America to face its own economic realities (F.D.R. was still Governor of New York), many Americans truly believed that technology alone, freed from that selfishly inefficient capitalist management which had failed in 1929, offered the best chance of national salvation, especially better than socialism or any merely economic or political ideology. "Technocracy" did become a kind of rationalists' religion,⁵⁸ corroborating as it did the old American materialist dream. Thus it was at this time that Frank Lloyd Wright designed Broadacre City—not the back-to-the-land escapism its detractors claim, but a humane technocratic society decentralized by the automobile and the telephone; thus Buckminster Fuller first undertook the technocratic mission he still preaches; and thus Lewis Mumford began writing about Biotechnic Man and the exemplary new regionalism soon to be effected by T.V.A., its social and environmental planning based on an electric power grid. Modernistic architecture like Niagara Mohawk articulated this hopeful vision with perhaps less restraint but no less optimism. It occurred not only at this unique moment in historical time but also at the highpoint of American Deco skyscraper style, between about 1925 and 1933.

If electricity was the Niagara Mohawk Building's subject, its iconography, then *light* was its architectural medium as much as metal or glass.⁵⁹ Light has

always been to American Pop-culture what fountains had been to urban Italy; from Times Square to Las Vegas outdoor lighting meant not just illumination but environment, kinetic color in non-space. A light bulb, says McLuhan, is pure information; the medium is the message, symbolizing also the difference between the old Machine Age⁶⁰ of hardware (which International Style addressed) and the new software Electronic Age. Accordingly, all over the Niagara Mohawk Building lighting elements energize the design: story-high vertical facade panels, stylized white-neon tubes flanking the elevators, efficient indirect lighting inside and out, dramatizing floodlights, glowing bands of cast glass interspersed among the metal decorations, spotlights on the special features. Just as it is inconceivable to behold the skyscrapers of Manhattan only by day, so is it impossible to consider fully Niagara Mohawk without its night-time visual dynamics; yet since World War II most of its external lighting output has been ironically and regrettably curtailed. Perhaps some day when the Power Corporation can spare the power, its electric Aztec-temple, its great American ziggurat, will again light up like a mighty jukebox over the city.



Transportation Building, Chicago Century of Progress Exhibition, 1933.

Meanwhile perhaps we can gain some impression of its intended impact, through the nearly contemporaneous Chicago Century of Progress Exposition of 1933. World's Fairs in general always project "cities of the future"; this one in particular partook of the same idealized technological ethos which informed the Niagara Mohawk Building itself. In a way it also denoted the last great statement of American Deco architecture after the Depression discouraged new skyscrapers. Most of the pavilions had windowless facades, which provided the opportunity to coordinate the total effect. Let the Chief of Exterior Illumination describe:

The Electric Building, seven blue neon cascades on the facade, each 55 feet high, symbolizing hydroelectric power in 5000 feet of tubing . . . a Grand Staircase with four setbacks thrown into bold relief by 2100 feet of red neon tubing . . . the "morning glory" fountain with 500 water-jets and 135 underwater floodlights in red, yellow, green, and blue . . . The Electric Color Scintillator . . . fireless fireworks . . . aurora borealis in varicolored beams . . . 24 searchlights of 1,440,000,000 candlepower play on smoke clouds and steam effects from perforated pipes. . .⁶¹

Niagara Mohawk Power! How propitious is the name itself? Although it was originally designated the Niagara Hudson Building, of the Central New York Power Company, obviously the present name fits more evocatively. Hillier notes that *waterfalls*, abstracted into streaming parallel lines, became "the most popular motif" of Art Deco, and Niagara in our case *is* literal power, not just

its metaphorical token but the energy *source* of those currents coursing through Syracuse's galvanized body electric, turning on television sets to . . . old Bogart movies!

And presiding over all from the uppermost tower, his hands resting on two fins rising the full height of the facade, wings spread between the two tallest piers, with a lightning rod overhead to draw the electric fire from the skies, a torso made of bundled neon tubes . . . no, this hardly exaggerates . . . the ultimate Mohawk. A streamlined cubist-classical metal winged warrior, helmeted (or is that a Mohawk haircut and headband?) with facial planes smoothly but strongly formed, deep-set eyes, and . . . he's *smiling*. If it isn't an Indian it ought to be; Hillier devotes a whole chapter of his *Art Deco* book to the "Influence of American Indian Art." Admittedly it's a sort of Aryanized Indian, perhaps the Viking Prince Kilowatt, but whatever, he's exalted high over the entrance marquee like the benign genie of all electricity. The new magic personified. What is a flying radiator-cap compared to this?

In the presence of such a being, does not one secretly suspect, appropriating for an instant the innocence of the Thirties, that behind the lightning-bolt insignia on the portals, beyond the robot clerks and weary secretaries with toothpaste smiles frozen by lockjaw, under the offices occupied by crew-cut engineers and administrators with bow ties, deep below the building are . . . the humming dynamos themselves, the ozone-generating turbines, induction-coil circuits, and high-tension voltage, and . . . why not? . . . pulsing, undulating flashes sparking and zapping up and down the charged arc-gaps in Dr. Zarkov's laboratory?



Footnotes

1. Perhaps the immediate impetus came when the brief, hopeful idealism of J. F. K.'s New Frontier, the Peace Corps, and civil rights marches, in the early Sixties, turned to the cynical withdrawal of the later Sixties under L. B. J., escalation, and polarization. For the last generation not to have been weaned on television, dispossessed teenage beatniks of the Fifties, Thirties Revival offered a sort of counter-culture to an age group slightly too old (or not "tribal" enough) for Woodstock.
2. Bevis Hillier's excellent little study *Art Deco* (London Studio Vista Ltd., 1968) claims to have been partially inspired by English Pop Art. American Pop owes much to Thirties billboard-scale blow-ups, girlie calendars, and block-letter signs in bright colors that yelled EAT, or GAS. Warhol's soup cans recalled, perhaps rather wistfully, an easy-to-take Thirties bluntness, when soup was sold by its happy red can, not by the motivational research and subliminal projection of Fifties and Sixties media marketing.
3. E.g. Goddard's fascination with the American gangster-film genre of the Thirties, or Truffaut's homage to Hitchcock.
4. Of course, McLuhan meant that, because of our rearview mirror syndrome, the content of early television (a "cool" medium) followed the preceding movie format, but in his terms the same syndrome holds for radio, since it, like film, is a "hot" medium. Indeed, many T.V. shows of the Fifties were simply visualized versions of such radio programs as Jack Benny, Amos n' Andy, or The Lone Ranger. However, the self-conscious transfer of Thirties radio to Sixties television is not included in McLuhan's thesis.
5. Despite its topicality, "Laugh-In" is an extreme case of affected Revivalism, replete with period-costumed radio-studio announcer, spoofed musicals, chorus lines, and tap-dancers. Its slapstick pace recalls Thirties film comedies, while Rowan and Martin's verbal repartee evokes Thirties radio humor—straight man, gag man, etc.
6. As derogatorily applied in Osbert Lancaster's *Home Sweet Homes*, London: John Murray, Ltd., 1946, p. 72. Lancaster's satirical illustration of the style dates from 1938, according to Hillier, p. 12.
7. Coined by the art historian Derek Clifford, quoted by Hillier, p. 11.
8. Employed by a guard at the Niagara Mohawk Building to identify its architectural style.
9. From the Introduction to M. Battersby's *The Decorative Twenties*, New York, 1969, reviewed by J. Anderson in *Interiors*, July 1970. Cf. M. Battersby, "The Rise and Fall of Art Deco," *Arts and Artists*, October 1969.
10. *Art Deco*, catalog to exhibition at Finch College Museum of Art, New York (distributed by Wittenborn Art Books, New York, 1970), text by Judith Applegate.
11. Hillier, p. 10.
12. Giulia Veronesi, *Style and Design 1909-1929* (New York: George Braziller, 1968,) p. 7. Originally published in Italian as *Stile 1925*, Florence, 1968. Let the reader not be confused by the disparity between assertions of a Thirties Revival and the style originating in the Twenties, primarily in France: Art Deco. This style perpetuated itself in the Thirties American skyscraper. By the same token, although the Bauhaus was active only in the Twenties, in Germany, its influence wasn't really felt in America until the Fifties.
13. Not surprisingly, a brief flirtation with Art Nouveau Revival in the earlier Sixties, through psychedelic posters, Tiffany imitations, and Beardsley prints on lilac-and-heliotrope-colored dresses, immediately preceded Thirties Revival. Obviously Art Nouveau's *fin-de-siècle* decadence appealed less to Americans than their own romanticized past, which the Revivalists belatedly refused to outgrow.
14. The categories are Applegate's; the influences cited above have been supplemented from other sources.
15. Battersby.
16. Veronesi, p. 193.
17. Applegate.
18. Le Corbusier, quoted in Veronesi, p. 219.
19. This is not to claim for Corbusier any immediate impact; French architecture remained somewhat retarded, ironically due in part to the neo-classical conservatism of the authoritative Perret. But 1925 also saw the genesis of the Dessau Bauhaus, which didn't exhibit at Paris for, according to Battersby, "political reasons." Likewise, according to Veronesi, De Stijl artists were excluded from the Dutch pavilion at the Expo.
20. Hillier, pp. 45-46.
21. This is not to impugn the historiographical method of a great historian—Giedion is not singled out as the worst, but the best—nor does partisanship invalidate his monumental contribution. But the good fight has been fought, and won, and we can afford to be more tolerant now, or less ashamed, of America's Pop architecture. Neither is it necessarily chauvinistic to question the sympathies of Europeans like Giedion, Zevi, Joedicke, Pevsner, Richards, or Banham, for the American historical experience. More reprehensible perhaps are our own elitist tastemakers, like Philip Johnson, for their premature value-judgments (out of cultural context) on American alternatives to the International Style.
22. E.g. Howe and Lescaze's P.S.F.S. Building in Philadelphia, 1931-32, or E. D. Stone's Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., 1939.
23. From "The Economic Height of Buildings," *Architect*, November 1929, p. 311. The article purports to prove that buildings of 75 or more stories return higher profits than lesser heights, citing research undertaken for the American Institute of Steel Construction.
24. Hitchcock, *Modern Architecture: Romanticism and Reintegration*, New York, 1929, p. 200. This book accompanied the first modernist exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, in 1929.
25. John Burchard and Albert Bush-Brown, *The Architecture of America: A Social and Cultural History*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1961, p. 283.
26. Burchard and Bush-Brown, p. 385.

27. From an account in *Art Digest*, May 1, 1931, pp. 16-17. Royal Cortissoz, architectural critic for the *Herald-Tribune*, began his career as a designer for McKim, Mead and White.
28. Hitchcock, p. 200.
29. *Art Digest*, May 1, 1931, pp. 16-17.
30. *Art Digest*, pp. 16-17. Judging from the examples they use, their familiarity with European modernism derives from the first M.O.M.A. exhibition of 1929; see note 24.
31. The Architectural League show of 1932 hardly competed with the International Style Exhibition, but still rejected modernists, not regarding the P.S.F.S. Building, for example, as "worthy of presentation as architecture." Accordingly, Howe and Lescaze resigned from the League in protest, while Royal Cortissoz viciously derided them with a caustic poem; see *Art Digest*, March 15, 1932, p. 13.
32. Furthermore, since the amount of floor area taken by elevators diminished on the upper floors, these floors provided deeper offices between exterior wall and elevator core, compared to the lower floors. However this extra depth, beyond optimum range of the windows for light and ventilation and view, was not considered rentable, so the solution to decrease office area in proportion to diminishing core area, thus maintaining optimum depth (about 30 feet), also encouraged setback design. Of course, the decreased area per floor meant the building needed more floors, but the Architecture of Capitalism welcomed the opportunity to express its aspirations, and still does.
33. Hugh Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*. New York: Ives Washburn, 1929, p. 50. Of the 188 in N.Y., 15 were then over 500 feet tall, and two over a thousand. Now, to say only half were in N.Y. belies the incredible concentration of height (which has indeed greatly increased); on the other hand, half of all the drug addicts in the U.S. are statistically reported to be in N.Y. too.
34. Of 281 entries from around the world, the jury had initially awarded win, place, and show to Americans; the *Tribune* still prints an American flag beside the headlines to this day and tends editorially furthest to the political right of any major American paper, which is pretty far. And indeed, in any purely architectural judgment, many of the foreign entries, except for the modernists, were outrageously bad, even absurd, like Adolf Loos' giant Doric column (Loos denies this was a joke, unfortunately) or that sculpted tower in the form of an Indian chief (but read on . . . to the Niagara Mohawk Building!). Saarinen's submission arrived late due to a hassle with U.S. Customs, and the impressed jury awarded it second-place on their final vote.
35. Although Hood claimed as late as 1929 that his tower "soared magnificently into space," Sullivan announced "Visibly it is not architecture . . . Its formula is literary . . . It could be but as a founding at the doorstep of the Finn." Quoted in Burchard and Bush-Brown, p. 281.
36. Hitchcock, p. 200. He continues, "The skyscraper therefore awaits the first American New Pioneer who will be able to take the engineering as a basis and create directly from it a form of architecture. He will have no real support from Europe." Mies van der Rohe unforeseen!
37. Quoted in *Art Digest*, Feb. 15, 1932, on the occasion of a retrospective exhibition of Ferriss' work. As we have seen, 1932 was a good year for exhibitions.
38. Ferriss, p. 20.
39. Ferriss, p. 82.
40. Ferriss, p. 60.
41. In the first sentence of his Forward, Ferriss "disclaims any assumption of the prophet's robe." But the title speaks for itself. Perhaps Ferriss considered himself an Illustrator or Consulting Designer for tomorrow's architecture: "Architecture never lies. Architecture invariably expresses its Age correctly." P. 16.
42. Ferriss produced a later book, *Power in Buildings*. Its pertinence to the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation Building is implicit.
43. Ferriss, p. 98.
44. The idea actually occurs in the "Projected Trends" section, p. 64: ". . . there will be the aeroplanes. The drawing suggests tower hangars in whose shelves they will—why not?—land neatly!" There are, in fact, excellent reasons why not, but as usual the visionaries were less conversant with real technology than their imaginations demanded. In his "Ville Contemporaine" of 1921-2, Corbusier also puts an airport on the roof of his "Central Station" between ranks of extremely tall buildings, "thus repeating a suicidal device of Sant' Elia" as Reyner Banham puts it in *Theory and Design* . . . etc., p. 253.
45. Corbusier had been in New York in 1932 (saying unflattering things to the *N.Y. Times* about that city's urban disorder) and his ideas were at least familiar enough by that time to be cribbed outright by the accommodating Raymond Hood in a Corbusian scheme of his own at the International Style exhibition. Ferriss could easily have been exposed, in his architectural circles, to Corbu's planning prior to 1929.
46. Other minor masterpieces of Thirties Deco in Syracuse include the Sears Gas Station, the old Penn Central Station (now sadly remodeled as the Greyhound Bus Depot), and the Little Gem Diner, entirely of stainless-steel outside and with a mirrored ceiling inside.
47. The firm undertook a number of commissions for this and other utility companies, judging from an article by architect John B. Rogers and Lyman in *Architectural Record*, Dec. 1932, called "Planning Sales and Office Buildings for Public Service Companies," pp. 397-409. He recommends a consistent style in each to encourage "easy recognition as being related to other buildings erected by the company" and "use of modern building materials in keeping with the new appliances exhibited" as well as "the most advanced methods of construction as an indication of the advanced engineering methods employed by the power company in its own field."
48. Modernists have always discountenanced the term "style," insisting that such preconceptions were anathema to functionalist design, and that style was, if anything, a result of the process, not an input. Gropius said something to the effect that if the Bauhaus had created a style, it would have been an admission of failure. Yet perhaps they kidded themselves; Giedion's *Space, Time, and Architecture* is subtitled "The Birth of a New Tradition." Alfred Barr is quoted in *Art Digest*, Feb. 1, 1932: "The 'International Style' is probably the first fundamentally original and widely distributed style since the Gothic."

49. De Stijl perhaps came closest, but Mondrian didn't discover "Boogie Woogie" until the Forties, in America. Whereas one might have expected architectural analogies to Stravinsky or Bartok from the Modern Movement, its compositions avoided dissonance and violent rhythms, preferring smooth machine-like regularities and the harmonious Classical-Greek proportions idolized by Corbusier.
50. Burchard and Bush-Brown, p. 257.
51. Burchard and Bush-Brown, p. 346.
52. In "The Structure and Metal Work of the Chrysler Building," *Architectural Forum*, Oct. 1930, pp. 493-8, its architect, William Van Alen, describes them as such. In a broader sense some Pop-esthetic affinity exists between American Deco architecture and the chrome trim, shiny finishes, and "streamlining" of contemporaneous automobile design, e.g. Pontiac's famous Three Stripes.
53. Quoted in Burchard and Bush-Brown, p. 272. Mencken specifically indicted "houses as coldly structural as step-ladders" and "the florid chicken-coops of Le Corbusier and company."
54. Quoted in *Design Quarterly* 74/75. Although this translation favors the claim that Sant' Elia, not Corbusier, coined the "house is a machine for living" dictum, the same statement in Sant' Elia's *Messaggio* of 1914 is translated in Reyner Banham's *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age*, p. 129, as "the modern building like a gigantic machine," and is most probably the more accurate reading.
55. Vincent Scully, Jr., *Modern Architecture*. New York: George Braziller, adapted from lectures etc. of 1957, "Modern Architecture: Towards a Redefinition of Style." The point is well taken that America accepted the machine more matter-of-factly than Europe, since we had less of a preindustrial tradition to lose (except Jeffersonian democracy); the machine thus connoted neither a threat nor a revolutionary force for change. Since Scully discounts or ignores American "modernistic," he sees the difference between our modernism (Wright) and that of Europe in the latter's romanticizing or dramatizing attitudes towards the machine and especially its transforming energies. Interestingly, American painting of the Thirties bears this out; in John McCoubrey's *American Tradition in Painting*, 1963, p. 46, Demuth and Sheeler are seen to divest the machine of its animating vigor, "which enable them to paint in the man-made, industrial landscape of steel, concrete, and asphalt the same alien indifference they and their predecessors saw in the natural landscape."
56. Illustrating Rogers' article (see note 47) is the Rex Cole Display Building, Brooklyn, with its General Electric logo in neon extending the full height of the showroom windows and a three-stepped pyramid on the roof, on top of which, where the king's chariot would have been on the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, is a giant refrigerator. Technology literalized and monumentalized but the mechanistic object itself unromanticized, prescient of Claes Oldenburg.
57. Well the reader may wonder at this repetitious *leitmotif* of King Kong and the Empire State Building. The two are not inseparable, although hopefully the generic connection between Thirties film and architecture has been established. Not uncoincidentally, perhaps, while the author was photographing the Niagara Mohawk Building a total stranger gave him the unsolicited suggestion that inclusion of a man in an ape-suit, as Kong climbing the building, would enhance the ambiguity of scale.
58. Cf. Frederick Lewis Allen's excellent socio-cultural history of the Thirties, *Since Yesterday*, chapter IV, section 4, "Technocracy."
59. Rogers, p. 405: "Lighting as an integral part of the design of a sales and office building is the primary medium by which the company can demonstrate the advantages of light to the merchandisers of the community . . . the intensity of the lighting of the front of the building should be higher than that of other buildings in the neighborhood." And again, p. 398: ". . . the problem demands the incorporation of a new architectural element as an integral part of the design: artificial light."
60. As used by Banham in *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* or K. G. Pontus Hulten's *The Machine as Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age* accompanying the 1968 Museum of Modern Art exhibition of that title. The postwar era is electronic (television), the Industrial Revolution previously had been mechanical (automobile). It may be argued that not until the "Computer City" of the Archigram Group in the Sixties was software given an architectural form-language closer to Fuller and McLuhan than to Thirties metaphors for electric technology.
61. Paraphrased from Walter D'Arcy Ryan, "Lighting the Exposition," *Architectural Forum*, July 1933.