

# The Vertical Order of the City: A Gender Perspective on the Urban Form

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## Abstract:

Throughout the twentieth century, the vertical orientation has become a predominant spatial arrangement of western metropolises. Male fantasies of verticality have reached their extremes not only in form of urban utopias but also in the built urban environment where the verticality is glorified as the exponent of economic and technological progress. In this paper a critical gender perspective on the symbolic associations with verticality is proposed, surveying the links between vertical architecture, power and masculinity. The urban space is examined from a feminist viewpoint, arguing that verticality equals masculinity, which is evidenced by a multidisciplinary investigation of the vertical semiotics. Before entering into the analysis of manifestations and consequences of vertical architecture, the relevance of associations between the vertical and the masculine is detailed, with the intention to demonstrate through various examples from architecture and art, that the vertical is traditionally and inseparably associated with the masculine. The skyscraper, being the vertical architectural form par excellence, is considered from a historical perspective as a symbol of masculine power and aggressive capitalism. Finally, the phenomenon of privileged views accessed via vertical architecture is identified as integrally related to the image of masculinity, virility and social status.

**Keywords:** City and gender, cityscape, urban semiotics, urban utopias, vertical architecture

## Introduction

The distinction between the horizontal and the vertical seems to be one of the most frequently applied binary opposites both in the symbolic and the built urban space. Henri Lefebvre (1991) understood the contrast attributed to the horizontality and the verticality in the urban space as a strategy to mask the symbolism of vertical architecture and its implications. What Lefebvre tried to point out is that verticality equals “arrogance, the will to power, a display of military and police-like machismo, a reference to the phallus and a spatial analogue of masculine brutality” (1991, 144).

Involving a gender perspective in the topic, Kerstin Dörhöfer (2003, 84) observed a convention of assigning architectural binary opposites directly to the categories of male/female:

[H]idden in buildings, in their very forms, is a centuries-old symbolic language that harbors a mental process of ascribing gender to binary opposites, freighted with tradition. Among these binary opposites are the distinctions of space as being internal or external, central or peripheral, upward or downward, vertical or horizontal.

The use of dichotomies specifically attributed to gender has a long tradition in western philosophy where one of the most notoriously stated dichotomies is that of culture/nature. Cultural anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner argued that the historical devaluation of women is rooted in the postulate that “woman is being identified with, or symbolically associated with, nature, as opposed to man, who is identified with culture” (1972, 12). Considering the paradigm about the purpose of culture that in its broadest sense is to transcend nature, this postulate predetermines and justifies the subordination and domination of nature by culture. Transferring these considerations to the problematic of urban space, it can be affirmed that culture tends to be considered as reflected in the city, in its built form and its exponents such as the vertical architecture. As within the architectural evolution the vertical construction is currently viewed as the highest degree of economic, industrial and technological progress, it became a symbol of culture, that is, of masculinity.

### **Vertical = Masculine?**

According to Diana Agrest (1996), there exist specific binary dichotomies related to the urban space such as nature/city or nature/architecture, which are based on the misogynist dichotomy of nature/culture. Agrest (1996, 60) developed her argument around the ideology of modernist urbanism where relationships between nature, architecture and gender are largely influenced by the opposition of nature and culture and are represented by the technological progress:

The ideology of modernist architecture and urbanism is still based on the mechanistic scientific ideology, taking the form of *machinism*, an ideology that implicitly sanctions the repression/suppression of woman. [...] The urban realm thus discloses the historical role of the alignment of nature and gender, an identification that is once again key to the struggle for power and the engendering of power. The conception of the world as a machine in a fetishistic architecture that is the result of the application of the principles of modernist urbanism allows the double domination (or negation) of nature and woman.

Nature, standing for woman, is excluded from the modernist ideology and from any participation in the formation of the vertical architecture, both practically and symbolically. In accordance with what Agrest calls “fetishistic architecture,” the vertical architecture can be considered as the materialization of the fetish of its creators that serves to symbolically represent masculinity.

Theorists of architecture and urbanism claimed that the link between the vertical and the phallic has been historically transferred to the field of urban space and its architectural forms. Kim Dovey (1999, 122) noted that the desire of architects to produce an eternal vertical erection

cannot be separated from the phallic. With the same concerns, Lefebvre (1991, 287) affirmed that the vertical form of architecture metaphorically “symbolizes force, male fertility, masculine violence.” The phallic erectility as a symbolic feature of the vertical architecture hence “bestows a special status on the perpendicular, proclaiming phallocracy as the orientation of space, as the goal of the process - at once metaphoric and metonymic - which instigates this facet of spatial practice” (Lefebvre 1991, 287). Lefebvre additionally noted that in the case of vertical architecture the part represents the whole, that is, the phallic shape represents the phallocracy as a norm, together with the brutality of political and bureaucratic power. As for the link between power and the vertical, Lefebvre associated phallic architecture with a need to create an impression of authority and visually represent the arrogance and potential violence of phallocratic power.

The relation between power and verticality was a subject of investigation in the field of cognitive and social psychology, with affirmative results confirming a link between these two parameters. It was observed that a vertical arrangement of the space can create an effect of exaggeration, dramatization and mystification, which is why verticality is considered a symbol of authority (Meerwein et al. 2007; Schubert et al. 2009). A study dedicated to the analysis of the association between power and spatial arrangement affirms that the parameters of space can serve to establish, communicate and reinforce power relations (Schubert et al. 2009). Specifically, it has been shown that mental representations of power are associated with two qualities of space: its elevation and its verticality.

Another clue that insinuates the symbolic dimension of vertical architecture in terms of masculinity and power, is the vocabulary used in verbal expressions for describing vertical constructions. Schwartz et al. (1982) pointed out that social power relations are being defined on the scale of a vertical order, which becomes an almost universal phenomenon applied in various fields, from religious symbolisms to architectural conventions. In this sense, vertical pre-eminence symbolizes the concept of social power, which is why, to express power relations, expressions such as “being at the height” or “being above” someone are used in verbal language. In architecture and construction language, the expression “erection of a building” is often used to refer to the foundation of a vertical building or a monument, which directly alludes to the phallic shape of these constructions.

### **Meaning of Verticality in Architecture and Art**

Striving for verticality in architectural thinking is closely attached to the modern urban design, when architects like Louis Sullivan, Adolf Loos or Le Corbusier showed their fascination for the vertical and expressed themselves in terms of admiration for the tall edification. Sullivan, designated as the “father of the skyscraper” and the co-author of one of the first early skyscrapers, saw verticality as the substance of modern buildings. The text of Sullivan’s (1896) essay “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered” can be interpreted as a justification and glorification of the high-rise buildings:

Thus has come about that form of lofty construction called the “modern office building.” It has come in answer to a call, for in it a new grouping of social conditions has found a habitation and a name. Up to this point all in evidence is materialistic, an exhibition of force, of resolution, of brains in the keen sharp sense of the word. It is the joint product of the speculator, the engineer, the builder. (403)

Sullivan associated the vertical architecture with a male figure and with traditionally masculine qualities such as strength, logic and pride. According to Sullivan (1896, 405), the ability to design the perfect vertical form can only be attributed to “a man with a strong natural liking for buildings, and a disposition to shape them in what seems to his unaffected nature a direct and simple way.” With a constant endeavour and even absurd reasoning when justifying the tall buildings, Sullivan (1896, 406) systematically attempted to naturalize the vertical form as a predestined gift for the man who

must realize at once and with the grasp of inspiration that the problem of the tall office building is one of the most stupendous, one of the most magnificent opportunities that the Lord of Nature in His beneficence has ever offered to the proud spirit of man.

Sullivan’s thinking about the vertical architecture was explicitly associated with the power and the force of the built form, which according to him should provide the essential characteristics of the building. In fact, each line that does not correspond to the vertical order is perceived by Sullivan as dissident. The architect is projecting the binary distinction of vertical/horizontal into the built urban forms, where the vertical is perceived as masculine and desired, while the horizontal is undesired for as being feminine.

Another architect who explicitly linked verticality with the masculine was Adolf Loos, basing his considerations about the vertical on the assumption that every art, even architecture, is erotically charged. In this sense, Loos (1962, 277) defined the meaning of the horizontal and the vertical as follows: “A horizontal line: the reclining woman. A vertical line: the man who penetrates her.” With this statement Loos made clear his conviction about the subordination of women, represented by the horizontal, to men, represented by the vertical. We can observe again, how the binary opposite of horizontal/vertical is applied within architectural thought to symbolically justify the unequal power relations between men and women.

In his writings on architecture, Le Corbusier frequently referred to verticality as the primary spatial orientation. Architecture and urbanism critic Barbara Hooper (2002, 60) pointed to the fact that Le Corbusier theorized vertical forms as “rational, modern, and masculine,” while horizontality represented for him the “feminine irrationality of a primitive nature.” Le Corbusier’s architectural discourse turns into a discourse of power that is based on the verticality of straight lines, predominating in his urban designs. This was made visible in his project *Ville Contemporaine*, a city destined first of all for white-collar workers, managers and bureaucrats, made up of twenty-four skyscrapers aligned in a monumental complex. The verticality of *Ville Contemporaine* reflects a type

of centralized power, where the elite operates in the heights of the buildings, watching over the daily life of the city. The celebration of a vertical elevation of the city is even more present in the urban design of *La Ville Radieuse* where Le Corbusier proposed a vertical arrangement for the city of Paris, with a rationally regulated urban life. In both urban designs, Le Corbusier tried to impose a new urban order based on verticality, with the aim to create a new social order by establishing a technical, scientific and intellectualized space.

A gendered distinction between the vertical and the horizontal, similar to the one articulated in the field of architecture, can be further identified in the conceptual thought of representatives of abstract art. The vertical line was of particular importance in the artistic creation of the De Stijl abstract art movement. For Theo van Doesburg, the founder of the movement, the straight line equaled “the new means of expression of the future” (1971, 201) and in his artworks he reduced the compositions to pure abstractions comprised of vertical and horizontal lines and shapes of basic colors. Van Doesburg (1922, 24) resorted to the binary distinction of verticality/horizontality, comparing it to a power struggle:

This struggle, which is based in the structure of life, is a struggle between two polar forces. Let us call them nature and spirit, or the feminine and the masculine principle, the negative and the positive, the static and dynamic, the horizontal and the vertical - these are the unchangeable elements on which the contradiction of our life is based.

From the writings of van Doesburg it can be deduced that the conceptual foundation of his artwork is based on a supposed gender struggle, where the vertical lines represent the spirit, the positive, the dynamic—the masculine, while the horizontal lines represent the nature, the negative, the static—the feminine.

Although Piet Mondrian is known primarily as a painter, his artistic interest was situated in a continuity between design, visual art and architecture, in some cases he even titled his compositions by cities such as New York or London and turned his artistic creation towards pure abstraction composed of horizontal and vertical lines. The link between gender and the symbolic meaning of lines in Mondrian’s artwork is evidenced by an annotation in his sketchbook stating: “Masculine and feminine, vertical and horizontal” (Seuphor 1964, 39). We see here that for Mondrian, the horizontal and vertical lines represented among other things a binary attribution to the qualities of the feminine and the masculine. When analyzing Mondrian’s artwork, Michel Seuphor interpreted the horizontality as the sea, the nature—the feminine, whereas the verticality he saw as pillars—the masculine, concluding that this “fundamental dualism” would have subsequently “become the basis of Neo-Plasticism” (1964, 40). It can be deduced that the fundamental dualism described by Seuphor is based on the historical misogynistic tradition of associating nature with women, as opposed to culture, associated with men.

As a representative of European Constructivism, Seuphor transferred his ideas of the vertical and the horizontal into abstract artworks to which he attributed a direct association with

architecture. In his essay for the Constructivist journal *Cercle et Carré* Seuphor (1974, 184) stated that:

Every man is equally attracted by each of these two notions of the world: on the one hand, principle, the strongly willed, the vertical; on the other the natural, the feminine, the horizontal. Our judgement is constituted in such a way that two opposite poles make an equal impression on it. Natural beauty takes us kindly by the hand and leads us into the bosom of matter, while the attraction of the true incites us to thought and elevates us to abstraction.

Clearly, Seuphor associated the feminine with beauty, nature and the horizontal, placing it in a direct opposite with the vertical, that is to say, the strong, the true, the wise, the masculine. In addition to fostering the concept of a gendered spatial orientation, Seuphor also assigned the capacities of thought and abstraction to masculine virtues, fomenting the misogynist belief of the intellectual inferiority of women.

### **Utopian Vertical City**

Even before construction materials and technologies enabled the boom of tall buildings, male fantasies of vertical cities were being articulated and visualized by various representatives of art and architecture. These utopian visions emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and were continuously developed throughout the twentieth century. In some of the utopias, the vertical order was applied on a scale of an entire city, whether existing or imagined, while other utopian visions proposed isolated monolithic structures as models to be implemented in urban areas.

In 1894 the entrepreneur King Camp Gillette published his utopian plan for a city called *Metropolis* that would house almost the entire American population within its twenty-four thousand monumental buildings. In order to eliminate the chaos and misfortune of individuality, Gillette planned a new social and economic order concentrated in this utopian city, where each of the buildings would have an identical construction. Almost all the activities of the population would be centered in this giant urban complex of vertical buildings with twenty-five floors including luxurious apartments and industrial establishments. Gillette's urban utopia is based on an elitist and monetarist thinking, putting economics and industrialization at the top of social values: "Under a perfect economical system of production and distribution, and a system combining the greatest elements of progress, there can be only one city on a continent, and possibly only one in the world" (Gillette 1894, 87).

Gillette's exaggerated and ostentatious vision extolled the utopic *Metropolis* as the ultimate city that would make cities like London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna or New York "look like the work of ignorant savages" (Gillette 1894, 75). Considering the ideologies articulated along the planning of *Metropolis*, we detect here an example of how the junction of arrogance, megalomania and a strictly economic, quantitative and exclusive thinking is projected in the male vision of the ideal urban space, whose main characteristic is the vertical order.

In the panorama of European Futurism, the Italian architect Antonio Sant'Elia presented

his utopian designs of a modern metropolis, once again dominated by verticality. Sant'Elia (1914) verbalized his radical views of architecture in the manifesto *L'architettura futurista*, declaring a contempt for classicism and neoclassicism, whose principles he described as grotesque, imbecile, stupid and powerless. In fact, Sant'Elia appealed to the need of introducing new forms, new lines and new volumes into the urban realm. In the series of sketches for his project named *La Città Nuova* Sant'Elia visualized an idea of the new futuristic city where buildings “have to be like giant machines” (1914, n.p.). The urban arrangement proposed in the design of *La Città Nuova* represents a new aesthetic crowded with vertical structures dominated by steel beams and reinforced concrete that for Sant'Elia (1914) equate to supreme grace, a flash of genius and technical expertise.

In his manifesto Sant'Elia (1914) explicitly announced his despise for architecture containing pleasant and horizontal lines, while proclaiming an architecture full of calculation and reckless audacity. He further stated that the city and its architecture should be, both spiritually and materially, “the immediate and faithful projection of ourselves” (Sant'Elia 1914, n.p.). Considering the ideology and the formal parameters of *La Città Nuova*, we can deduce that the “ourselves” referred to by Sant'Elia represents a specific group of people that can be defined within the qualities of strength, sharpness, genius and technical thinking, that is, within the terms of masculinity, which practically prevents women from being reflected in this futuristic urban utopia.

German architect Ludwig Karl Hilberseimer saw the ideal solution for cities in a vertical overlap of buildings, envisioned in the *Hochhausstadt* project. His urban plan consisted of a system of tall, slender and uniform slab-type buildings of twenty stories, of which the first five would have a commercial function, whereas the remaining floors would have a residential function. In Hilberseimer's visions, the metropolis is “a product of the economic development of the modern era” and a “natural and necessary result of global industrialization” (2012, 85). In a manner similar to Sant'Elia, Hilberseimer despised historic cities for their chaotic urban life and uncontrolled structure, and aimed to convert the city into a calculated vertical urban system with regulated streets and concentrated edifices, without respecting the sentimental historic values for the reason that the “task is not to conserve the past, but to prepare the way for the future” (Hilberseimer 2012, 100).

Hilberseimer's utopian project was criticized mostly for a conspicuous absence of green urban areas but also for its subordination to a mechanistic principle. Other critical opinions even compared the city of Hilberseimer to a cemetery, due to its funereal atmosphere and the shapes of buildings reminiscent of tombs (Hilberseimer 2012). Indeed, Hilberseimer's vision of the city approaches an urban dystopia that lacks the variety of any human individuality, it appears cold, uniform, sharp and rationalized, designed under a strictly mechanistic thinking, which is why it does not reflect real human needs for an environment to reside in general, nor does it consider specific needs of women, who disappear in the vertical order of the cityscapes formulated between utopia and dystopia.

An even more dystopian representation of a city of the future was designed by Hugh Ferriss under the title *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*. In his reflections on the urban, Ferriss (1929) proposed an imaginary metropolis visualized in a series of drawings dominated by giant vertical structures installed densely in a gloomy environment. The tower buildings of this city would have a monumental height of three hundred meters, covering the surface of up to six street blocks. By proposing a system of dividing the city into three main zones, the trade zone, the art zone and the science zone, Ferriss imposed a strict zoning and a vertical hierarchy that also omits many areas of daily urban life, which was the main point of criticism expressed by architectural historian Carol Willis who claimed that “his grandiose vision of urban utopia contradicts the contemporary idea of a livable city” (1986, 148). Another critical perspective was articulated by Lewis Mumford who blamed the metropolis of Ferriss for depicting a “morbid dream” of an “infantile paper city erected by megalopolitan business men and skyscraper architects” (Mumford 1938, 521). From a gender perspective, Ferriss's vision can be criticized for reflecting ideas of cold masculinity that are being materialized in vertical construction forms and for the absolute rationalization of space that presupposes an androcentric homogeneity of its inhabitants.

The utopia of a vertically established city reached its most explicit form in the 1960s with the projects *Vertical City* by Friedrich St. Florian and *Die Vertikale Stadt* by Klaus Gartler and Helmut Rieder. These two urban utopias designed by Austrian architects refer to the vertical order as the only spatial orientation of the urban arrangement, with the intention of concentrating the entire city in a single vertical construction. To achieve this, St. Florian conceived a city that would consist of a giant tower of three hundred floors rising above the clouds, including all the components of a city in an exclusively vertical scale. Gartler and Rieder proposed a similar urban design consisting of a vertical mega-structure with a height of thousand six hundred meters, located floating in the center of a lake, which would house a city of two hundred thousand inhabitants (Frac Centre 2015, 5). Both projects are showing a radical utopian vision of transfiguring the spatial urban order into an absolute verticality, eradicating any horizontal distribution in the city.

### **The Phallic Skyscraper**

Since the late nineteenth century, when the first skyscrapers emerged in the United States, the skyscraper has become a globalized architectural phenomenon that interferes the skyline of western metropolises. Today it is highly unlikely to find a capital city without a district of skyscrapers, as there is a vehement structural desire to project economic, industrial and social advances in this type of edifice. Skyscrapers are usually concentrated in urban complexes creating an integrated neighborhood, centering commerce, financial institutions and the privileged elite, and thus promoting urban zoning and exclusion that at the same time reflect social inequalities of an urban society. In this sense, the access to the use of the skyscraper is reserved for the economically and politically powerful citizen groups.

In order to comprehend the urban dynamics produced by skyscrapers, it is crucial to analyze

the power relations which accompanied the construction of skyscrapers throughout their history. A seminal analysis of this problematic was presented by urban historian Dolores Hayden in her 1977 essay “Skyscraper Seduction Skyscraper Rape,” using the metaphor of a rape to explain the scale on which the construction of skyscrapers has invaded the urban space and human lives, without the consent of the citizens.

The heights of the early skyscrapers could not have been reached without the sacrifice of many construction workers’ lives, who frequently died from accidents, falling from the heights. Hayden (1977) emphasized that this violent and inhuman aspect of the skyscraper history has been largely overlooked. The pressure to build fast, coming from the part of the investors, was superimposed on human lives and their safety, and even these deaths were related to a perverse pride (Hayden 1977, 109). Another violent aspect that accompanied the construction of skyscrapers since their origin is their arrogant imposition against the will of the majority. As Hayden (1977, 108) pointed out, there exists a stark contrast between public disagreement with the construction of skyscrapers and their persistent praise by their advocates:

For a century most American architectural historians have busily rationalized the aesthetic, functional, and social distress the skyscraper creates, nurturing the prevalent belief that the skyscraper is a glorious triumph of engineering, a natural part of urban life, and an inevitable result of urban concentration.

Despite the efforts to glorify and rationalize the vertical edification, the fantasies of the investors did not correspond to the will and the needs of the majority of urban citizens, which is why the construction of skyscrapers was accompanied by protests. As Leslie Kanes Weisman (1981) noted, skyscrapers have been competing for dominance in urban space while significantly reducing the quality of urban life, sometimes even causing feelings of anxiety. One of the negative effects of the new built heights installed by the skyscrapers is that they are taking away views and cast shadows on streets, parks and neighborhoods, and it seems that for most cities the only solution to restrain the rampant yearning for heights is to impose strict height limits on urban construction.

The rape metaphor articulated by Hayden was likewise derived from the phallic shape of the skyscraper and from the rhetoric by which its construction is being justified such as “developers ‘can’t help themselves’” or “the city really wants it” (Hayden 1977, 108). Although the comparison proposed by Hayden may appear extreme, it undoubtedly captures the wide spectrum of controversies embodied in the vertical architecture, especially in relation to connotations of masculinity, desire, sexuality and power. Considering the male symbolism, Weisman argued that the skyscraper represents a “pinnacle of patriarchal symbology” which is based on the male myth of “the great, the erect, the forceful—the full balloon of the inflated masculine ego” (1981, 6). In fact, several skyscrapers explicitly allude to masculinity due to their ostentatious phallic shape, such as the Torre Glòries, formerly Torre Agbar, in Barcelona or the 30 St Mary Ax skyscraper located in London. From this perspective, due to their height and

omnipresence, skyscrapers represent emblematic buildings which stand out in the urban panorama to visually and symbolically dominate the city and remind its inhabitants of the male presence on a daily basis.

Architect and urban theorist Rem Koolhaas (1994) contributed with a critical interpretation of the vertical arrangement of Manhattan in his manifesto *Delirious New York*. Koolhaas compared the urban area of Manhattan to a “factory of man-made experience, where the real and the natural ceased to exist” (1994, 10) and was filled with monotonous rectilinear rows surrounded by stacks of erected buildings and utopian fragments. A part of the manifesto Koolhaas (1994, 130) dedicated to reflect on the position of women within the vertical architecture: “Architecture, especially its Manhattan mutation, has been a pursuit strictly for men. For those aiming at the sky, away from the earth’s surface and the natural, there has been no female company.” The exclusion of women from vertical edifices became a spatial practice in case of some skyscrapers such as the Downtown Athletic Club, a luxurious club with sports, leisure and socialization facilities, where the club membership was provided only to a specific group of men and even the access to the building was restricted for women (Koolhaas 1994; Brozan, 1977). From its founding in 1931 until 1977, the first twelve floors of Downtown Athletic Club were accessible exclusively to men, so they could enjoy the facilities quietly among each other, without being disturbed by the presence of women. Considering these facts, the presence of women in a vertical urban space filled with skyscrapers is perceived as an intrusive element that should be excluded and attributed a position of “the other.” Hayden stressed that the skyscrapers are a “reminder that our culture depends on false hopes of economic mobility as well as on rigid hierarchy, and that it thrives on social seduction as well as on architectural rape” (1977, 115). The skyscraper inherently represents a symbolic demonstration of power, a symbol of masculinity, corporate capitalism and aggressive entrepreneurship. Precisely due to the fact that in today’s cities the presence of skyscrapers has become a common part of the everyday urban space, we should not ignore the symbolic connotations of skyscrapers and their impact on shaping our perception of the urban reality.

### **Privileged Views**

A particular phenomenon resulting directly from the urban vertical order are the privileged views of the city and its surroundings, which can only be appreciated by an elite group of users of the vertical architecture. Historically, elevated points were used to establish, display and symbolically communicate a position of power, be it the castles of emperors located on a hill or the religious symbols installed on top of church towers. Looking upwards to the inaccessible height, the elevated locations served as a space to exercise power, especially because of its vertical relation within the topography of the geographical space. Nowadays, it is mostly the upper floors of the high-tech vertical architecture that represent a symbol of power established within a vertical social hierarchy and patriarchal economy.

The top floors of skyscrapers are generally reserved for luxury facilities with panoramic views,

meeting rooms and private offices, from which the highest-ranking associates exercise their power, overlooking the urban areas of their domination. The symbolic value of these views, perceived as exclusive privileges, involves several components. First of all, the views symbolize the supremacy of those who look down at the city from high above and have the entire city “under their feet.” The panoramic views from the tall buildings further allow to keep distance from the unwanted urban effects, such as pollution, urban noise and the regular citizens who dissolve in the abstract image of the city when seen from above. The access to privileged views is also a symbol of status and prestige that serves for certain elite of companies or individuals to distinguish themselves from the rest of the population. In fact, the views from the vertical architecture turn into views of domination, which according to Dovey is related to the very position of the building within the topography of the city: “The dominance of the building as a landmark on the skyline is meshed with the feeling of power engendered by the commanding view” (1999, 116).

A particular category of urban property established on the upper floors of the vertical architecture is the most exclusive, most luxurious and most expensive penthouse apartment. This type of property becomes a symbol of social status and economic power, generating a largely inaccessible desire, where simultaneously the privileged views become a distinctive luxury market value. With the penthouse and its privileged views, not only a new economic desire is being created but also a new type of urban citizen is being defined, the one who should inhabit this luxury penthouse, that is the male urban bachelor. One of the most explicit evidences of the construction of a new masculinity based on vertical architecture was provided by the *Playboy* magazine in the article “Playboy’s Penthouse Apartment” from 1956. Here, a housing instruction manual for the new urban bachelor was visualized through illustrations of a luxury penthouse as the new home for the young single man, described as a refuge from where one can enjoy the views of the city. In this fantasy of urban masculinity, the penthouse becomes a type of panopticon, where the bachelor can voyeuristically observe the city from behind the glass walls without him being seen by others. Architectural theorist George Wagner pointed to the fact that the penthouse is located high above the city while at the same time being a part of the city, which is why the views from the penthouse allow the bachelor “a controlling gaze of the urban spectacle” (1996, 199).

Feminist philosopher Beatriz Preciado analyzed the architecture and sexuality presented in *Playboy* magazine, highlighting the direct association of the penthouse with a specific type of masculinity presented as “a redefinition of masculinity based on consumption, urban life and a maximization of its heterosexual encounters” (2010, 62) and we could add that the new urban masculinity is also based on the appropriation of vertical architecture and the privileges attached to it. The male figure living in the luxury attic is thus attributed specific privileges intertwined with his economic power, independence, virility and singleness, thanks to which

the new bachelor could enjoy the privileges of the public space (and we must understand here the gender and representation privileges, as well as the monopolies agreed by capitalist commodification) without being subject to the laws (family, moral, anti-porn) and the [exterior] dangers. (Preciado 2010, 130)

A narrative of the new masculinity is being created around a man who lives in the city, who is single or divorced, who is heterosexual and whose social and economic power is reflected in the building he inhabits. The status of male power linked to the iconography of the luxury penthouse and its views becomes a recurring image reproduced in cinematographic and popular culture representations, expanding and fostering this idea in a collective imaginary.

## **Conclusion**

The vertical order of the urban space appears in a constant link with masculinity, domination and power. Throughout the modern history, vertical arrangements have been valued and proclaimed among some of the most influential representatives of architecture and art, who projected masculine qualities into the verticality while rejecting the feminized horizontality, drawing on the misogynistic tradition of attributing binary opposites to gender. Until nowadays, the vertical paradigm is dominating the world's metropolises, influencing urban planning practices and architectural thinking. Utopias of vertical cities reflected a radical architectural thinking characterized by a masculine vocabulary, both verbal and visual. Among their common traits we can observe the contempt for the horizontal, the rejection of traditional architecture and the consequent effort to reform the urban space under a mechanistic, economic and technical thinking, without considering the human needs for a habitable space. The authors of the utopias had a vision of establishing not only a new architectural urban order but also a new social order, based on masculine principles, such as strength, sharpness, rationality and verticality. The introduction of the vertical order in the urban space would then serve to turn the city and its components into a type of machine that would prioritize production, commerce and traffic while at the same time ensuring a rationalized and disciplined urban life. Although none of the vertical utopias has been realized in practice, they significantly influenced in popular cultural representations and architectural thought. In fact, the architecture of several contemporary metropolises is reminiscent of a vertical utopia, especially those urban areas that are dominated by skyscrapers, the type of edifice that has become the exponent of vertical architecture.

The vertical architecture is not destined for everyone and especially not for women. The privilege of forming the urban order and observing the urban space from a bird's-eye view completes the continuity of the particularities of vertical architecture that serve as an instrument to reflect masculinity and indulge masculine fantasies. In fact, we believe that a vertical arrangement of the urban space needs to be considered as a phenomenon in a context of gender perspective. This includes a reflection on the historical and conceptual aspects that link verticality to masculine, economic, androcentric and phallographic power, which is why the vertical order of urban space should be perceived with a critical view as it is systematically contributing to a symbolic gender inequality in the urban space, as well as to the spatial exclusion and alienation of women and other citizen groups that inhabit the contemporary city.

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