

# The Utopian Moment: the Language of Positivism in Modern Architecture and Urbanism

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## Abstract

Many masters of modernist design believed that sociological science and industry stood as the emancipatory powers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Arguably, the social and environmental implications associated with this outlook were framed by a system of thought called Positivism, which was the creation of the French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798-1857). No work has explored the role this system of ideas played in shaping the utopian moment of early modernism, but it is often thought that Positivism was an icy, objectivist science upholding the status quo. This essay seeks to remedy this gross misrepresentation and neglect by showing that the movement of organised Positivism embraced a desire to reorganise the Victorian landscape. It begins with an analysis of the emergence of Comte's scientific-humanist ideas and their use in a participatory sociological practice; here his followers were attempting to make convivial spaces in complete regional city-communities. Thereafter, I will argue that the modern masters displayed similar patterns of language by relaying the aspiration to coordinate science and industry to improve the lives of the masses. Effectively, this essay seeks to show that organised Positivism played a role central to creating the utopian moment of early modernism.

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