

Made-for-Broadcast Cities

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When searching through the papers of former ABC president Leonard Goldenson, I came across artworks he painted in 1977 toward the end of his thirty-five-year reign at the broadcast network. Like other executives and government officials who rose to prominence at midcentury, Goldenson was a “weekend painter” whose artistic aspirations resulted in a range of subjects and styles, including the one that interests me here: a painting he called *Communications Center* (fig. 10.1). Goldenson presents a fantasyscape of the then three dominant network headquarters lined up next to each other on Manhattan’s Avenue of the Americas. Rendered in blue, white, and yellow, with the CBS, ABC, and NBC corporate logos drawn whimsically on each, the skyscrapers rise in the foreground as the Empire State Building, Chrysler Building, and the (then-still-standing) Twin Towers (all homes for the technical infrastructure that carried the city’s broadcast signals) fade on the horizon. As Goldenson explained, even while he took some poetic liberties (NBC was actually housed in Rockefeller Center’s RCA Building, and CBS and ABC were not directly next to each other on the street), he did so in order to “convey the unity of the three buildings as the TV and Radio Communications Centers of America.”¹ Envisioning the city block as a communications grid for the nation, Goldenson’s skyscrapers demonstrate something of the mind-set of the old network chiefs, who, together with visionary architects, engineers, and urban planners, mapped out a new media landscape over the course of the twentieth century.

This essay explores broadcast “cities,” a conceptual framework and a generic term that architects and industry executives often used to describe a range of built and unbuilt plans for studios devoted to radio and television production. Much more than a single building, broadcast cities were designed as “cities within cities,”

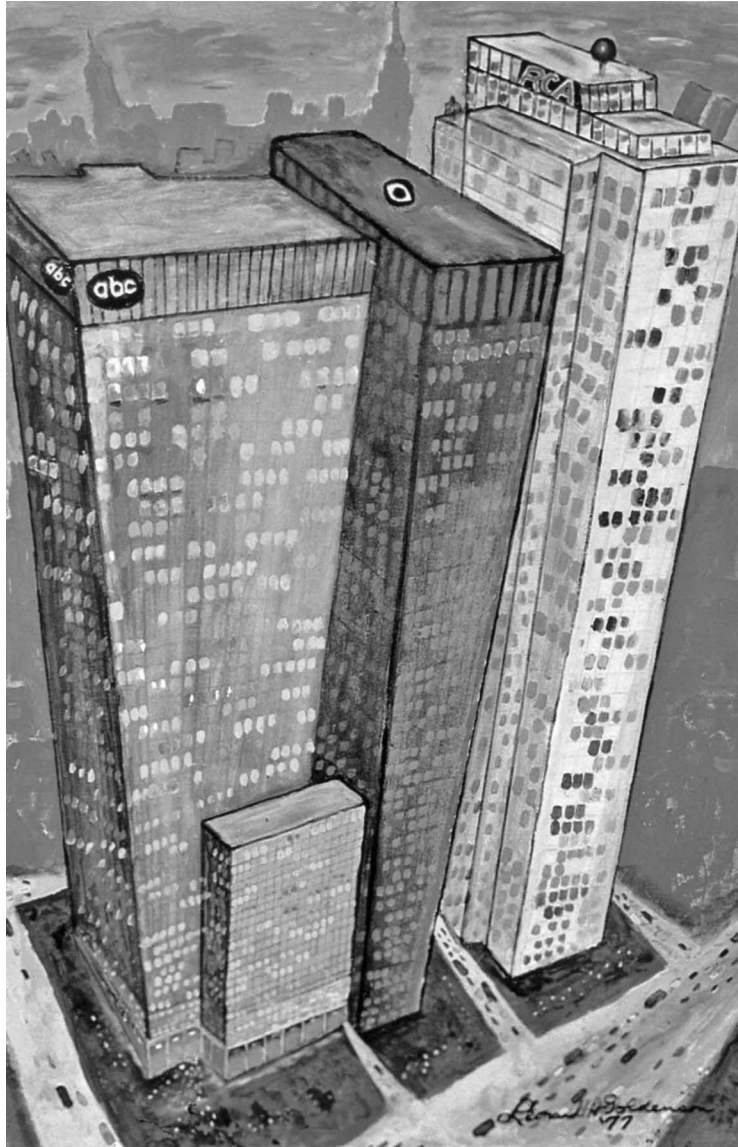


FIGURE 10.1. *Communications Center*, Leonard H. Goldenson, 1977. Courtesy of Loreen (Goldenson) Arbus and USC Cinematic Arts Library and Archives.

self-sustained environments capable of producing entertainment and information in unprecedented volumes and speeds. “Radio City” is, of course, the name of NBC’s first major radio studio, opened in 1933 in New York’s Rockefeller Center. The city concept carried through to television with, for example, CBS Television City and NBC Color City, both of which opened in the Los Angeles area in the 1950s. Moreover, as a conceptual framework, the broadcast “city” expanded beyond large metropolitan areas to studios across the country, which were housed in broadcast stations. Even if they did not always call themselves radio or TV “cities,” local radio and TV stations often presented themselves in the image of the city, as the ultimate in modern design.

Broadcasters and networks used the city concept to mark their value as urbane, civic, and, above all, *modern* environments for addressing and gathering publics through the wires. Mayors and governors hailed broadcast studios as boons for civic pride, but studios were also commercial meccas for tourism; and, most important, on the airwaves they served as showrooms for sponsors’ products. Here I trace the city concept back to US radio studios in the 1930s and 1940s, and I focus on several speculative and realized designs for television cities in the mid-twentieth-century period—especially, given its prominence, CBS Television City. In all their manifestations broadcast studios were distinctly modern forms of media architecture that created material spaces for the flow of commerce and communication while offering audiences new mental maps through which to navigate an increasingly mediatized nation.

GENEALOGY

To be sure, the “city” concept is not the invention of the broadcast industry. It dates back to modern industrial environments and utopian dreams for the future. The broadcast city is contemporaneous with Le Corbusier’s plans for an urban utopia in *Towards a New Architecture* (first published in French as *Vers une architecture* in 1923) and *The City of To-morrow and Its Planning* (1929).² Le Corbusier imagined machinelike, efficient, yet decongested noise-free cities with glass and steel skyscrapers, centralized transport (with “aero-taxis”), and large parks that promoted healthy lifestyles. In *City of To-morrow* Le Corbusier calls the skyscraper the “city’s brains, the brains for the whole nation,” and communication devices including radio are key to the skyscraper’s intelligent operation. “Everything is concentrated in them: apparatus for abolishing time and space, telephones, cables and wireless.”³ Le Corbusier’s unrealized plans for a “Radiant City” (first published in 1933) were modeled on similar goals of machinelike efficiency with business and residential towers, an underground transport system, and abundant green space and sunlight; moreover, many of the street’s functions were internalized in buildings. All of this would ideally contribute to the creation of a better society.⁴ The broadcast city also

developed in the context of more traditional designs for “radial” cities, which by the twentieth century were applied to the modern metropolis. (For example, the 1909 Burnham Plan in Chicago, first outlined in 1903, featured streets designed as “arteries” that radiate from the central civic center core.) The Latin root word *radiare*—“to beam, to shine”—speaks to the enlightenment project at the heart of the city of tomorrow. Radio, of course, is not far from this etymological and cultural equation. As Shannon Mattern claims in her work on cities and sound, “The ‘spatial ontology’ of radio is radiant, spherical, and lends itself to graphic representation in the form of expanding ripples.”⁵

The first major broadcast city, NBC Radio City studios in Rockefeller Center, was modeled on the city-of-tomorrow concept. In early planning stages Rockefeller Center was named “Rockefeller City,” in line with the more general language of utopian cities on which it was based.⁶ Its chief architect, Raymond Hood, was in dialogue with visionary architects and city planners.⁷ He had read Le Corbusier’s publications and Hugh Ferriss’s visions of futuristic cities in *The Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929), and he formulated his own dreams for the ideal city while working on skyscrapers in Chicago and New York.⁸ Hood was also a veteran in the field of radio architecture. His firm, Hood, Godley and Foulx, designed the first NBC radio studios that opened in 1928, just blocks away from what would become the more advanced studios in NBC Radio City.⁹ In 1931 Hood drafted visionary schemes for a “City under a Single Roof,” depicting vast complexes where industries “united into interdependent developments with clubs, hotels, stores, apartments and even theaters.”¹⁰ Hood’s concept materialized in a slightly different form in 1931 with the opening of Rockefeller Center, the largest urban complex of its time. As it grew over the course of the 1930s, Rockefeller Center housed radio studios, theaters (including the spectacular Radio City Music Hall), international buildings, restaurants, and office buildings. A subway led into the complex; on top, the roof garden afforded skyline views. Comparing the latter to Le Corbusier’s Radiant City, Rem Koolhaas claims Rockefeller Center represents “‘the maximum of congestion’ combined with the ‘maximum of light and space.’”¹¹

The conundrum that Koolhaas suggests was embedded in broader ironies of the utopian city. As Fredric Jameson notes of utopian programs more generally, they are always already failures. The city of tomorrow belied the paradox of a social vision in which forms of collective association are nevertheless forged through separation, what Jameson calls “utopian enclaves.” Intended to produce collectives, utopias wall out social difference and dissenting voices to achieve group consensus.¹² As should be obvious, the utopian cities were primarily the visions of white men in powerful situations. It is worth pausing to remind readers that *utopia* is a loaded word. The broadcast cities of the twentieth century were financed by male industrialists—network chiefs—who reigned over and hoped to control a new media landscape. Hood’s Rockefeller Center was the first megacity complex to house these industrialists’ dreams.

In 1930 NBC and its parent company, RCA, became Rockefeller Center's first investors and prospective tenants. When it opened in 1933, NBC Radio City was a modern marvel, what historian Emily Thompson describes as an immense planned environment for the production of the modern soundscape.¹³ Occupying eleven floors and one hundred thousand square feet of Hood's art deco RCA building, the complex featured audition rooms, performer lounges, engineering stations, and twenty-seven studios of different sizes, including the "largest auditorium studio . . . in the world," seating 250 audience members and a stage big enough to accommodate a one-hundred-piece orchestra.¹⁴ Designed for optimal sound, the studios had the latest innovations in noise-abating "floating construction in which the walls, ceilings, and floors were mechanically isolated from the surrounding structure," as well as quiet air-conditioning systems (that cooled heat generated by machines).¹⁵ Art and interior design paid tribute to the new medium. An abstract rendering of radio, Margaret-Bourke White's photomural adorned the grand circular lobby. Entrances to the RCA building welcomed visitors with, for example, Gaston Lachaise's sculptural relief that presented modern civilization with radio waves depicting the "Conquest of Space."¹⁶ Promoting the public's curiosity about the new medium, the NBC Studio Tour (which began in 1933) gave visitors a behind-the-scenes look at the technical and architectural marvels inside.¹⁷ Just three years later, in 1936, NBC honored "Mr. and Mrs. Million"—the millionth couple to purchase tickets for the tour.¹⁸

But NBC Radio City was not designed just for tourists and studio audiences; it was also fashioned with home audiences in mind. As Thompson explains, the galleries were "wired for sound, so what the members of the audience heard there was not very different from what they heard at home; an electroacoustic reproduction of the live performance that they observed through a glass curtain. When 'audience noises' were desired 'to give the production a stamp of authenticity,' the [studio's] glass curtains were raised so that microphones in the studios could pick up the laughter and applause."¹⁹ Although Thompson does not focus on this, for the home audience, this "stamp of authenticity" was central to the aesthetics of radio as a cultural form. The studio setup elicited what Raymond Williams calls "mobile privatization"—broadcasting's affordance of connection with, and imaginary transport to, an urban center for people listening or watching in the privacy of their homes.²⁰ Broadcasters' emphasis on live transmission and on "liveness" (as an aesthetic appeal) ideally turned mobile privatization into a listener and (with television) a spectator experience by giving home audiences a sense of being on the scene of presentation.²¹ In this respect Radio City, and its "authentic" soundscape, was designed to negotiate the paradox of telepresence—the vexing relationship of absence and presence entailed in media communication. Speaking of NBC's architectural and engineering triumph, Koolhaas argues, "NBC conceives of the entire block . . . as a single electronic arena that can transmit itself via airwaves into the

home of every citizen of the world—the nerve center of an electronic community that would congregate at Rockefeller Center without actually being there. *Rockefeller Center is the first architecture that can be broadcast.*²²

In all aspects NBC Radio City served as a model for other studios, and telepresence continued to be a main architectural concern for the midcentury television city. In fact, NBC Radio City already anticipated television by creating conditions for future expansion in a rapidly changing industry. In the 1930s, Radio City was a home for experimental telecasts and tests for the RCA color system. In this regard the studio was a “house of the future.”

As such, the broadcast studio also finds its genealogy in the utopian environments of world’s fairs and exhibitions, which often featured new media technologies (including radio and TV) as part of their wondrous attractions.²³ It is no coincidence that some of the major architects of radio and television cities also designed exhibition spaces for the fairs. Hood codirected the architectural commission for Chicago’s Century of Progress Exhibition and designed the “Communications Court” for its International exhibition. Swiss émigré William Lescaze designed radio studios (several for CBS) before codesigning the aviation building at the 1939–40 New York World’s Fair. Industrial designer John Vassos (who was on staff at CBS and worked for RCA) designed media exhibitions at numerous venues, including the 1939–40 New York World’s Fair and the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair. As a young man, William Pereira (one of the chief architects of CBS Television City) helped draft the master plan for the Century of Progress Exhibition; his partner, Charles Luckman, designed the US Pavilion at the 1964–65 New York World’s Fair. Sol Cornberg, who worked for NBC in the 1950s and designed speculative plans for television cities, created television viewing carrels for library use that were first displayed at the 1964–65 New York World’s Fair. In the early 1950s, when NBC hired industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes to create a television studio, he was already famous for his futuristic designs, especially the General Motors “Futurama” exhibit at the 1939–40 New York World’s Fair. Indeed, the world of tomorrow and the world of broadcasting were never far apart.

Some of these same architects (including Pereira, Bel Geddes, and Cornberg) also designed film sets and stage effects for motion pictures and theater. Their experience in film studios and theatrical venues speaks to the more general relationship between broadcast cities and film cities such as Universal City, which opened to visitors in 1915. As Brian Jacobson argues in his history of early film studios in both the US and European contexts, film studios were cutting-edge spaces for the invention and use of building technologies and materials, especially glass, concrete, and lighting technologies, which were also “changing the character of the modern built environment.”²⁴ With the coming of sound, film studios joined radio studios in the development of architectural acoustics. And, like Le Corbusier’s utopian cities, Hollywood studios were machinelike places, often calling them-

selves “plants” for efficient production. Moreover, as Jacobson demonstrates, film studios constructed “unreal cities” and “artificial worlds” (like miniatures of Paris or New York). In Los Angeles film studios helped turn Hollywood (and surrounding areas) into a destination by serving, like Universal City did, as tourist venues. As Mark Shiel argues, “film studios had utopian aspirations and an EXTRA LARGE presence in the [LA] landscape.”²⁵

Although broadcast studios borrowed ideas from film studios, they were fundamentally different from their movie predecessors. They had unique technological requirements for lighting, sound engineering, and staging. As with Radio City, many broadcast studios were designed with auditoriums for studio audiences and with the experience of home audiences in mind. The sheer number of programs it took to fill a daily schedule, and the fact that programs were often broadcast live, required unprecedented volumes and speed of production. Broadcast studios operated more on a transport model (of the train schedule) than on the film studio’s theatrical model of distribution and exhibition. Moreover, unlike the film studio, radio and television studios sprang up in multiple places across the country, housed in local stations that dotted the US map.

MAPPING THE BROADCAST CITY

In recent years scholars have focused on material geographies and media infrastructures, detailing how media and communication technologies have influenced the design and experience of modern environments, often focusing on cities as media spaces.²⁶ Scholarship on the media city is less concerned with studio architecture per se, however, than with the ways in which the rise of new media—especially telephones, radio, and digital media—have helped create urban communication routes and the experience of everyday life in different parts of the world. Much of the existing scholarship on media cities focuses on major metropolitan areas. Similarly, the relatively scarce literature on broadcast studios is generally concerned with major cities; in the US the focus has been on network studios in New York and Hollywood.²⁷

But, rather than just big city architecture, the broadcast studio was also a form of vernacular modernism throughout the nation. Over the course of the twentieth century the city concept permeated the entire US map. The advent of radio broadcasting was in itself a reinvention of place as geographical locations and their populations were reorganized into broadcast “markets” where citizens were increasingly addressed as consumers. Attempting to convince sponsors of the wide consumer populations within their reach, stations often advertised themselves with images of maps that displayed their signal coverage over the borders of local towns and even states.²⁸ In this context the architecture of broadcast stations and their studios became a major opportunity for local economies and for forging audience pride in

being part of a newly mapped broadcast community. Even before NBC's Radio City, newspapers and popular magazines like *Radio in the Home* reported on the construction of radio towers and studios. Such stories may well have responded to public curiosity about the mysterious "ether" by locating the airwaves in material places and concrete architectural sites, but they also spoke to a utopian future. By the 1930s and 1940s studios around the country boasted of their cutting-edge technologies, and broadcasters frequently used the term *ultramodern* to describe their wondrous forms. For maximum coverage and to avoid interference with their signals, industrial cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland housed studios in their tallest buildings (often hotels, department stores, or office towers). The CBS network placed its first major radio studios in its newly built Madison Avenue skyscraper near the transmitter on top of the Chrysler Building.²⁹

Many studios were built from the ground up or housed in converted buildings that were turned into palaces of modern design.³⁰ In 1933 CBS affiliate station WCAU in Philadelphia relocated from its original 1922 station to a new headquarters with seven studios (the largest of which accommodated a one-hundred-piece orchestra). The studios employed the latest technologies and materials, including sheet steel wall coverings, sound-enhancing fabric imported from Germany, and floating floors for soundproofing. Calling it the "last word in modernity," *Broadcasting* enthused about its "100-foot glass tower [that] rears above the eight stories of the building, adding to the beauty of the striking blue finish of the structure."³¹ The tower gleamed with neon lights, a beacon in the night. Complementing the tower, WCAU's interiors were adorned with modern art and design (fig. 10.2). In 1934 industrial designer John Vassos (by then a regular employee on the CBS staff) filled WCAU's lobby with an abstract mural composed of swirling geometric and cylindrical shapes that indicated radio towers, skyscrapers, and technical mechanisms.³²

While New York's Radio City and the WCAU tower represented the height of vertical modernity, other studios—from Florida to Montana to Arizona—were often low one-to-five-story buildings designed in the streamline or art deco style. They were typically white or pastels, color choices that worked in conjunction with modern air conditioning systems to keep the buildings cool. But their color palettes were also in keeping with the whiteness of architectural modernity more generally, and they especially recalled the white pavilions and monuments at world's fairs, marking their "world of tomorrow" status.³³ Meanwhile, like NBC Radio City, their architectural acoustics delivered the utmost in noise-free modern sound. Local studios used equipment and studio layouts designed by Western Electric and RCA, which consequently standardized the modern sonic environment for a broadcast nation.³⁴ Yet, despite architectural and technological standardization, building designs and decor varied with local iterations.

Even radio stations located in small cities promoted themselves as major urban attractions. In 1937 NBC affiliate KGNC boasted of its "ultramodern radio city" in

A Visitor Tours WCAU

By KENNETH W. STOWMAN, In Charge of Public Relations, WCAU

AS A casual passer-by walks along the busy and fashionable Chestnut Street in Philadelphia, he sees a handsome blue building on the south side between 16th and 17th Streets. This new structure stands as a symbolic monument to the radio industry and is noted for its striking beauty. The front of the new home of WCAU is trimmed with stainless steel in designs created by the architect to express impressions of radio.

After sundown the large glass tower atop the building, illuminated from within by mercury vapor lamps, casts a blue light throughout the center of the city and can be seen twenty-five miles away.

A visitor entering the portals of WCAU for the first time is greeted at the entrance with beautiful stainless steel doors and overhead are architectural designs depicting Drama, Music, Literature and Comedy.

The interior of the entrance lobby is of Italian marble with indirect lighting overhead casting a silver glow. As we await the arrival of the elevator to the studio reception room on the seventh floor, we notice a



A PERFORMANCE IN PROGRESS IN STUDIO J. ARTISTS WHO HAVE PERFORMED AMID THESE PLEASANT AND UNUSUALLY BEAUTIFUL SURROUNDINGS AGREE THAT HERE THEY FEEL INSPIRED TO PUT FORTH THEIR FINEST EFFORTS AND THAT SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE IN ENABLING THEM TO ACHIEVE THE BEST RESULTS.



STUDIO 5, LOOKING TOWARD THE "DEAD END." CONSIDERING THE BRILLIANT COLORS AND THE CHROMIUM METALLIC TRIM EMPLOYED IN THE DECORATION SCHEME OF THIS STUDIO, THE ABOVE VIEW IN BLACK AND WHITE HARDLY DOES JUSTICE TO THE SUBJECT.

copper cut plate on the outer doors of the elevator. Here the architect has created a masterpiece in the figure of a man holding a WCAU microphone with radio waves emanating from the transmitting station.

As we step into the elevator we are impressed with the unusual interior decoration of the car itself and we imagine that we have been transferred into a new world of modern and artistic conception. The

FIGURE 10.2. John Vassos's *Radio Tempo* mural pictured in an article on radio station WCAU in *Broadcast News*, April 1933. Courtesy of the Hagley Museum and Library.

downtown Amarillo, Texas, a white one-story building fashioned in the streamline style with glass tiles decorating its marquee-like corner window (the high point of the plan). Interiors included “a large studio for audiences and . . . the latest acoustical treatment . . . western electric throughout.”³⁵ That same year in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the WOWO-WGL station replicated the striking modern photo mural collage in the lobby of NBC Radio City with its own “modern motif” collage set off by an eggplant-colored linoleum floor with a “sixteen point star of tan and terracotta.”³⁶ Opened in 1940, WMBG in Richmond, Virginia, was fashioned in the streamline style but this time with a white limestone and glass brick exterior. *Architectural Record* named WMBG one of the “most noteworthy examples of modern architectural design in the vicinity.”³⁷

With even grander visions, in 1937 the Crosley Broadcasting Company drew up blueprints for WLW’s million-dollar building that would relocate the historic Cincinnati studio to an area just outside the city’s core. As featured in a promotional sketch, WLW echoes the “city within a city” concept, housing the “latest in modern improvements” with twenty-eight offices, twelve studios, a theater accommodating six hundred people, stages capable of handling shows with sixty to seventy performers, employee lounges, a “modern lunchroom,” a vast music library, and a “radio post office”—all in a three-story building with a five-story glass-paned tower in front. As a twist on the gleaming tower of WCAU, this all-white building was to be bathed in an “ingenious system of floodlighting . . . visible all day and night for miles throughout the neighboring Ohio and Kentucky area.”³⁸ According to the logic of this speculative design, the studio would bring the shining city on the hill to the heartland. Unfortunately for its owners, the plan did not materialize. Instead, in 1942 WLW moved into Crosley Square, a converted Elks Lodge in downtown Cincinnati. Yet, despite this downsized vision, Crosley Square was still a monument to architectural modernism. William Lescaze (known for his prominence in the International Style and his designs for previous CBS radio studios) was the chief architect for the Elk Lodge building conversion, overseeing the station’s sound design, interior design, and principal furnishings.³⁹ Although not as spectacular as the floodlit building that Crosley had previously planned, Lescaze’s spectacular design for the president’s suite showcased radio’s radiance with “luminous large panels of glass block that transmitted daylight in two directions.”⁴⁰

By the mid-1930s, as Hollywood became a production center for radio programming, the major networks moved west, where they built their own streamlined megacomplexes. In 1935 CBS hired Bel Geddes, who drafted plans for a huge CBS entertainment center, yet another self-sufficient “city within a city” with performing and visual arts facilities, athletic fields, restaurants, and gardens. While that never materialized, in 1938 CBS hired Lescaze to build CBS Columbia Square, which he designed in the modern International Style with streamlined motifs, ribbon windows, and a large glass facade (fig. 10.3). When the studio opened in Hollywood on



FIGURE 10.3. Exterior view of the CBS Columbia Square building on Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood, California, 1938. © CBS via Getty Images.

April 30, 1938, CBS broadcast *A Salute to Columbia Square*, a star-studded program featuring Bob Hope, Al Jolson, and Cecile B. DeMille. Remarking on its futuristic look, Jolson joked, “Columbia Square looks like Flash Gordon’s bathroom.”⁴¹

In 1938 NBC replaced its already outgrown Melrose Avenue studios (built in 1935), with Radio City West, a streamlined building constructed by the Austin Company (a major builder of film, radio, and, later, television studios). Calling the studio a “modern plant for a modern institution,” promotional materials touted its “attractive appearance,” especially its thirty-foot terrace wall, its magenta “zeon” light trim, and its three-story glass-bricked lobby (the highest point on the edifice) that wrapped around the corner of Hollywood and Vine. But NBC especially emphasized the studio’s “functional” layout and cutting-edge technical systems (including “complete air conditioning,” “new standards of lighting,” automatic switchers that provided “split-second timing,” and sound-absorbing surfaces). Rather than CBS’s focus on celebratory spectacle, NBC purposely opened “without premiere or fanfare” and sought instead to position the studio as the “ultimate scientific development in broadcasting facilities.” (Even the pale blue paint used

for the exterior “was chosen scientifically to reduce the California sun glare.”⁴² Nevertheless, with live production for studio audiences, NBC Radio City West soon courted the public. By 1939 both Columbia Square and Radio City West offered studio tours to eager fans, helping to expand Hollywood’s influence as a national tourist destination.

More broadly, across the country stations welcomed studio audiences, and they publicized themselves with studio tours and forms of civic engagement such as fireworks shows, parades, or exhibits at local and state fairs. Despite their media modernity, these events often spoke to regional folk customs such as WREC’s “sweet potato festival” in Dresden, Tennessee.⁴³ In these ways the studio was more than an abstract transmission zone; it became a local place. By publicizing the broadcast studio as a community center, stations encouraged local citizens to think of themselves as faithful audiences (and consumers) in the market. Some of the place-marking publicity tactics went beyond the spectacle of architectural and technological modernity to other more blatantly erotic attractions.

BROADCAST GIRLS

On a regular basis broadcast studios promoted a sense of local place through a specifically female form: the radio and TV “girl.” Often also known as “Miss Radio” or “Miss TV,” these young women appeared in pinups used for station and studio publicity, and they competed in station beauty contests. Perhaps evolving out of the 1920s radio “hostesses” (the young women who welcomed visitors into early radio stations), the radio and TV girls were sites of attraction for studios. On the one hand, they were a simple exploitation tactic used to appeal to program sponsors and male employees, and they also served to promote new technological innovations. (In their famous color patent wars, RCA/NBC and CBS each promoted their systems with a “Miss Color TV.”)⁴⁴ On the other hand, the broadcast girl was also a means to charm audiences and to generate local pride in the station.

In 1931, when CBS debuted its new radio studio in its Madison Avenue skyscraper (built in 1929), the network announced the occasion in newspapers by featuring a photo of Olive Shea, its “CBS Girl” and “Miss Radio of 1929.”⁴⁵ As the practice evolved at local stations, radio girls spoke to the specificities of place. At radio station WHO in Des Moines, Iowa, broadcast girls decorated a 19 1/2 foot cornstalk. (The stalk had just won the National Tall Corn Sweepstakes prize in a competition with other stations in the region.) As depicted in a 1940 issue of *Broadcasting*, the cornstalk is placed next to a ladder with five young women in bathing suits straddling each rung. In this local articulation of the radio girl, the cornstalk and its bathing beauties form a farmland version of the looming radio towers located in cities like Chicago and New York.⁴⁶



FIGURE 10.4. Miss Television finalists in *Miss Television U.S.A* (TV pilot, produced by David Wolper, 1965).

By the TV age, the conceit had become a standard practice.⁴⁷ Stations used specifically salacious titles like San Francisco's Miss K-RON (the station called her "36-24-36 WOW"), and Sally Ardrey, Miss WSPB, "Winter Cheesecake" of Sarasota, Florida. In station ads featuring TV girls (or cartoon renderings thereof), the slippage between signal "coverage" and clothing "coverage" on female bodies was a constant pun. In a 1954 promotional pinup Los Angeles's Channel 7 "KABC Girl" Maxine Marlow sits on a gigantic number "7" (studio prop), wearing a costume reminiscent of pinups in the then scandalous men's magazines—a black strapless bathing suit, with cleavage, black hose, and high heels.⁴⁸ (The station manager next to her wears a business suit.) While she was not dubbed Miss TV, Marilyn Monroe (then Norma Jeane) appeared as a pinup in a studio portrait shot at Hollywood's pioneering Don Lee Television Studios in which she posed seductively in a revealing (for the time) two-piece bathing suit.⁴⁹

In more family-friendly versions broadcast girls were billed as attractions at fairs. The RCA Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair featured several Miss TVs. At the 1950 Chicago Fair TV girls from local stations across the country competed for the Miss US Television prize (fig. 10.4). The contest was televised live on the DuMont Network.⁵⁰ Serving as host, the Grand Finals chairman periodically called attention to a map featuring station locations while judges (all men) ranked the various Miss TVs as they pranced around in swimsuits and talent competitions. (The winner, Edie Adams—Miss New York—would go on to TV fame with her husband, Ernie Kovacs.) In 1965, TV producer David Wolper resumed the practice with his unaired television pilot *Miss Television U.S.A*. The winner, Miss Orange Grove, California (a.k.a. UCLA student Pam Bennett), walked down the runway as host Byron Palmer serenaded her with a song that began: "A vision for television you are . . ."⁵¹

Given their ubiquity as a symbolic marker and popular attraction of the broadcast studio, radio and TV girls were as central to the mapping of broadcast cities as

were the studios' technical and architectural wonders. In that sense the utopian modernity of the studio revealed itself as a "technology of gender" in which women were feminine decoration, functioning much as the murals and sculptures did in the otherwise clean empty soundproof spaces of modern studio design. Moreover, even in their more family-friendly versions broadcast girls evoked the red-light district of the modern metropolis. Just like the burlesque queen, the broadcast girl was modernism's sideshow—but one that nevertheless endured at broadcast studios for at least five decades.

THE IMAGE OF THE CITY: TELELOCATION AND VIRTUAL TRANSPORT

While radio and TV girls recalled the erotic sideshows of city life, just as typically, stations promoted themselves as urban centers, hoping to convince sponsors of the densely populated consumer markets in their locations. Ads in *Broadcasting* often featured images of skyscrapers, crowds, and busy streets. A perfect example is a 1941 ad for KNOX radio in St. Louis. Bragging of the station's strong signal, the copy tells prospective sponsors that KNOX covers the entire sweep of the "River Valley Market" (which comprised not only downtown St. Louis but also outlying suburbs and farms). Yet, despite this heterogeneous landscape, the ad presents the station and its studio as a thriving vertical urban center with a sketch of modern skyscrapers dotting the banks of the Missouri River. All sorts of modern transport—spiraling highways, a freight train, a cargo boat, trucks, and cars—adorn the city, picturing it as a space of mobile modernity. But the most striking visual detail in the ad is a huge hand that literally covers the image of the city, which is presented in Lilliputian proportions from an aerial perspective. With its larger scale, the hand appears to manipulate the city as one might arrange a dollhouse miniature. In this way the image evokes the sponsor's ability to capture what the ad calls a "money maker market."⁵²

Images of cars, trucks, and trains—as well as aerial (helicopter) views of cities—appear over and over again in station and studio ads. As in Le Corbusier's city of tomorrow, traffic circulation was a key aspect of the modern broadcast city and its image. Studios were often planned according to preexisting transport routes and included ample parking and easy access from streets so that people and vehicles (such as delivery trucks or mobile radio and TV units) could move fluidly inside and outside the buildings. More generally, the station publicity reminds us that "telecommunications has historically been interrelated with transportation," and often their routes were overlaid on each other.⁵³ The intertwined fates of media networks and transport routes is signaled by the very language used to name them. The word *station*, for instance, applies equally to transportation systems (bus stations, train stations) and to broadcast stations. For much of the early part of the

twentieth century, the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* measured communication and transportation under one heading, suggesting the close association of the two in practices of governmentality.⁵⁴

In the postwar period the urban iconography of skyscrapers and mobile transport remained central to TV stations. An ad for CBS affiliate WMAR in Baltimore presents an aerial view of the downtown city core, telling prospective sponsors to “look at the very center of the picture. See the tall buildings dominating this prosperous area? . . . See the ocean-going ships docked right in the downtown area? . . . See the railroad terminals? . . . Look very closely and maybe you can see just a few of the television aerials leading to the more than 40,000 homes in the Baltimore area that now have television receivers.”⁵⁵ With its triple focus on skyscrapers, family houses, and transportation, this ad indicates how the midcentury TV city stretched beyond the urban landscape per se into the outlying areas marked by suburban developments. Ads for television studios evoked an increased emphasis on mobile privatization that was key to the postwar commuter suburb, as well as to television’s appeal.

In a related way broadcast stations engaged local audiences by offering an experience of imaginary transport to the broadcast studio, providing the sense of telepresence so important to radio from the start. On the airwaves, studios took on the qualities of *lived* places through discursive and representational cues. The space of the studio has always made itself present, not only via the “noise” of the studio audience but also through the voice of the station announcer. During much of the broadcast era (roughly, through the 1980s), when programming was not an around-the-clock affair, the local station greeted viewers in the morning and put them to bed at night with sign-ons and sign-offs. (For example, “On behalf of the management and staff at KTUL TV in Tulsa, Oklahoma, we wish you a very pleasant night and good morning.”) Such salutations typically stated the address of the broadcast station, and on TV this was usually followed by the station’s local iteration of the national anthem (often a waving flag intercut with sites of the local city or landscape).⁵⁶ In this sense the studio became what Benedict Anderson (referring to newspapers) calls an “imagined community” that joined people together through a common language of nation, location, and place.⁵⁷

URBAN DILEMMAS AND TV STUDIO SPECULATORS

Ironically, given the history of radio cities, it was the city—and specifically the vertical industrial city—that created the major hurdle for television executives. In the earliest years of commercial TV, television was mostly an urban affair. In 1948 the FCC put a freeze on station allocation, which lasted until 1952. While intended to provide time to resolve technical vexations and patent disputes, the “freeze” also had the effect of limiting local station and studio construction. This meant that

television was confined to preexisting outlets, many of which were CBS and NBC affiliates in major urban areas on the East Coast and in Chicago, Los Angeles, and a smattering of locations in between. So, too, in the late 1940s and early 1950s the production of live network prime-time dramas and variety shows usually took place in New York theaters, whose stages were too small for the vast amount of camera technology, sets, lighting, boom mikes, and other necessities of television production.⁵⁸ Television producers, performers, and industry executives complained about the theaters' effect on the development of TV art, especially the static feel of programs resulting from restrictions on camera mobility, set design, blocking, and performer movements on the small stages. As *New York Times* television critic Jack Gould put it, television producers were "working in a closet."⁵⁹ Network executives also decried the exorbitant rental and subleasing costs incurred by theater owners. To solve the space shortage, ABC, CBS, NBC, and the short-lived DuMont network began to acquire (via ownership or lease arrangements) theaters, concert halls, hotel ballrooms, skating rinks, and even a Coca-Cola bottling plant. In Chicago, which was also a vibrant production center for early television, NBC affiliate station WNBQ converted its radio studio, located in the expansive space of the Merchandising Mart, to accommodate TV production.⁶⁰ In New York CBS converted the vast space above a waiting room in Grand Central Station, located across the street from its transmitter in the Chrysler Building. Despite such solutions, a dedicated television studio complex seemed a much better choice.

As early as 1948, the networks and broadcast stations began to contemplate plans for expansion, and designers drew up speculative prototypes they hoped would be adopted as industry standards. In 1951 NBC hired Bel Geddes, who created a series of models, the first of which he called "Atlantis." As Joshua Gleich describes in detail, the Atlantis studio took the form of a Manhattan skyscraper (TV's answer to NBC Radio City), equipped with "the 14 largest stages in America" and a wondrous system of overhead mobile grids "that moved sets and lighting up and down the multiple stories of the building" to the shooting stages. While Atlantis was a spectacular display of designer showmanship, Bel Geddes nevertheless called it a "television factory" that promised to produce the maximum "number of shows to sell to advertisers" and to cut labor costs through mechanization. Atlantis also remedied the static feel of television programs by eliminating the proscenium altogether, minimizing the distance between the spectator and the performer and drawing "both the live and home audiences closer to the program."⁶¹ While this had the potential to enhance the industry's much desired sense of liveness and telepresence, for a variety of reasons (including the sheer complexity of the mechanical devices) NBC eventually deemed the plan imprudent.

About the same time that Bel Geddes first imagined Atlantis, NBC's Sol Cornberg created his own designs. Departing from the Manhattan skyscraper model altogether, Cornberg produced sketches that were published in a fourteen-page

article titled “Television City” in a 1951 issue of the design journal *Interiors*. Cornberg’s plan was one of the earliest television cities on record and the first (as far as I know) to garner intense interest from the design community.⁶² Cornberg was the multimedia renaissance man of the moment. An influential theater stage designer, by 1951 he had joined the staff at NBC, where he created sets for the network’s innovative schedule of live programs, *Tonight, Today* (with its glass observation window looking out on Manhattan), and *Home*, a women’s program whose rotating circular set—which NBC called a “machine for selling”—showcased the latest consumer products.⁶³ By 1955, Cornberg was the director of studio and plant planning at NBC.

Although designed independently of the network, Cornberg’s television city was a grand vision for the industry. It featured “five buildings in one”: a central circular tower with four blocks situated around the core. As *Interiors* described it, the tower “command[s] a scenic field that broadens as it radiates outward.” In other words, this television city was designed on the model of a radial city for efficient circulation of the vast number of things, people, and “complicated activities required to televise a day’s programs.”⁶⁴ The studio features business offices, craft shops, storage facilities, dressing rooms, business offices, screening rooms for sponsors, underground parking, and employee amenities, including a cafeteria, a library, a dispensary, a rooftop sun deck, and a recreation area. It also contains vast stage spaces for camera mobility and plans for TV’s unprecedented growth (fig. 10.5).

Media specificity is central to the design. Cornberg explains: “Technical ability in the transmission and reception of television has far outstripped its literary, histrionic, and artistic development. Vital to the hastening rapport between the technical and artistic facets of the medium is a clear understanding of what television is not. It is not Living Theater! It is not Cinema! It is not Radio! *IT IS TELEVISION!*” He continues: “A prerequisite . . . toward a genuine television form is . . . television plant design and production approaches, divorcing the industry from Lilliputian ideals and work habits.”⁶⁵ By way of illustration, Cornberg presents graphic comparisons that superimpose designs for a TV studio over those for a living theater, a radio studio, and a film studio. The blueprints collectively demonstrate the need for expansive stage spaces and unique seating arrangements.

Cornberg especially focused on audience experience and spectator psychology. In each graphic he presents a “schematic” of a human head, and he calculates the “eye, ear, and brain activity of audience members as they participate in each medium.”⁶⁶ While he cites no actual scientific principles, the important point for Cornberg is the creation of a new media architecture that will produce an ideal spectator experience. Television, he suggests, must “compensate” for the losses of previous media. The television “medium as it now functions would deprive the audience of all the opportunities for satisfactory participation which the older media afforded: mental: via suggestion and imagination [as in radio]; physical—

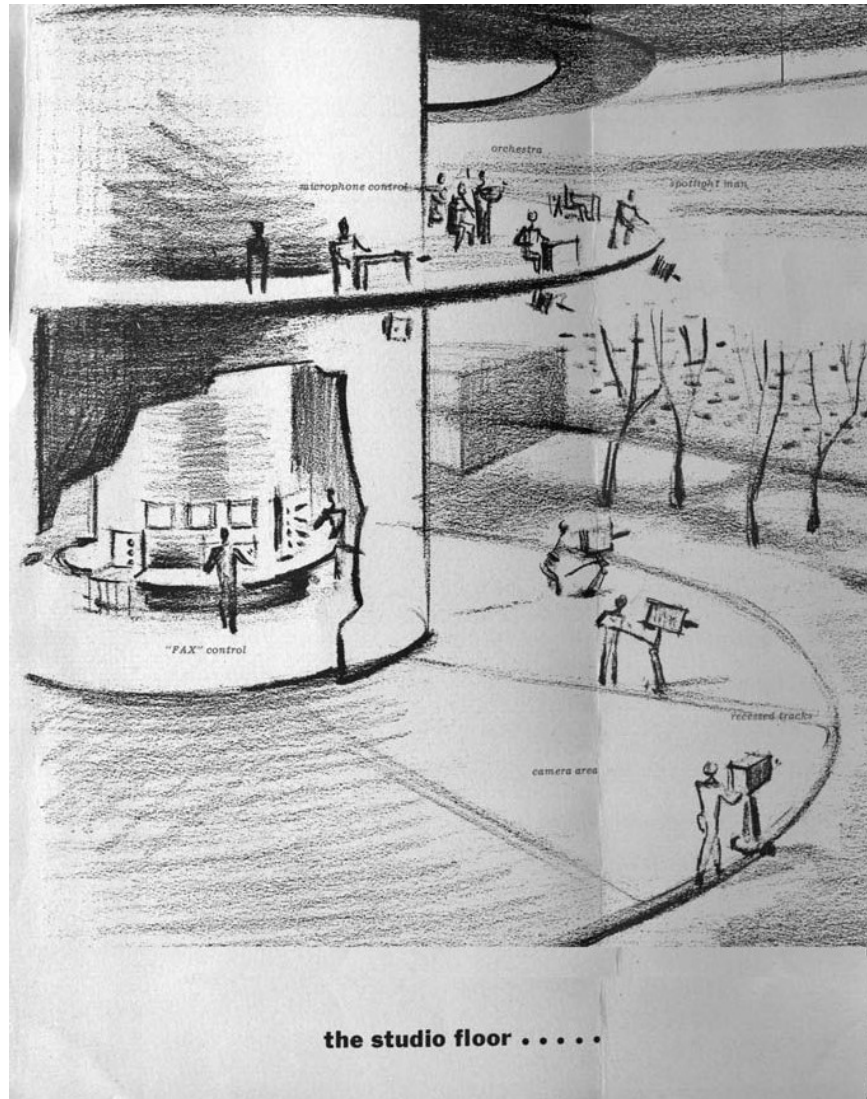


FIGURE 10.5. Sketch of the expansive stage space for a prototype "Television City," Sol Cornberg, 1951.

which going out to the theatre or motion picture afforded; not to mention the exciting proximity to mass emotional contagion.”⁶⁷ In other words, like the radio cities before it, Cornberg’s television city is a place designed to negotiate the paradox of presence and absence through an architecture of telepresence—this time with TV in mind.

Even if Cornberg’s television city remained speculative, many of its features continued to inform television studios that began to materialize in the early 1950s, especially after the lifting of the FCC freeze. As NBC art director Robert J. Wade observed in 1953, “Vast efficiently articulated, spacious television cities for New York, Hollywood and possibly other production centers are no longer mere dreams of the future—architects and engineers are beginning to sharpen their pencils in earnest.”⁶⁸ In that same year *Progressive Architecture* ran a special issue on some of the first television studios in the country. The editors’ analysis resulted in general principles of design. Primary among these were “sufficient space,” “flexibility and expansion” to serve future growth, and the “need for speed and split-second timing in production.” The editors also noted that “placing the television station in the right location is *all-important* and critical.”⁶⁹ CBS Television City was the first, and most coveted, example featured in the issue.

CBS TELEVISION CITY: THE VIDEO TEMPLE OF HOLLYWOOD

Confronted by the shortage and cost of studio space, and lured by the prospects of radio and film talent, CBS, NBC, and the then fledging ABC network moved from the vertical downtowns of New York and Chicago to the horizontal sprawl of Hollywood locales. By far, as the *New York Times* reported, CBS was the most “spectacular” of the “the video temples of Hollywood,” a model of “revolutionary design.”⁷⁰ At midcentury the studio was *the* TV city, synonymous with the CBS brand.⁷¹

CBS Television City was an extension of the company’s focus on defining itself as the “Tiffany” network—a quality brand achieved in large part through modern graphic and architectural design.⁷² For the Los Angeles project CBS chairman William S. Paley and network president Frank Stanton employed the firm of William Pereira and Charles Luckman, architects who created much of the midcentury Southern California environment, including iconic structures such as the original Disneyland Hotel (1955) and the Los Angeles theme building at LAX (1960).⁷³ Fashioned in the International Style, with clean simple lines and the requisite concrete and steel “floating” construction, Television City occupied twenty-five acres in LA’s Fairfax District. Construction began on December 29, 1950, and moved at a remarkably rapid pace. When it opened in November of 1952, the facility contained four studios (the largest to date, and two created for live production), as well as business offices, film storage facilities, screening rooms, a master control

area, rehearsal and dressing rooms, craft shops, employee lounges, and related amenities. The architects spoke often of the building's "complete flexibility" with "demountable walls and movable lighting and wiring grids," which allowed for malleability in production areas and adaptability for television's future expansion (fig. 10.6a).⁷⁴

The building promoted the Tiffany label through design elements. Like TV at the time, Television City is mostly black and white. The name "Television City" appears black-on-white on one edifice and white-on-black on another, and the two edifices meet at a sharp corner so that the overall effect is high contrast and sharp focus (two of the most desirable qualities in TV reception). A canopied ramp with a marquee exclaiming "CBS Television City" (in clean Didot Bodoni typeface) led into the building. The CBS eye figures prominently both outside and in. The lobby alone featured a wall of CBS eyes (thirty-six thousand eye tiles) that could be seen through the building's most spectacular feature—a demountable curtain wall composed of more than twelve thousand sheets of glass (one of the largest glass installations of its time) on the facade of the four-story service building. The glass glowed by night like a television screen to broadcast the company image.⁷⁵ Publicity photos of Television City, most of which were taken by architectural photographer Ezra Stoller, emphasize all of its televisual features. Both in its depiction in media publicity and in relation to its material status as media, Television City is the perfect example of Beatriz Colomina's famous claim: "Modern architecture is all about the mass-media image."⁷⁶

Even before the studio opened, CBS promoted Television City with a two-ton interactive model known as "the monster" that toured the nation via department stores (fig. 10.6b).⁷⁷ The ribbon-cutting ceremonies on November 15, 1952, featured network executives and stars (including CBS's top draw, Lucille Ball), Mayor Fletcher Bowran, religious leaders, and the "Spirit of Television," a TV girl donning a tin-foil headdress shaped as an antenna. Declaring it "Television City Day," Mayor Bowran enthused about the studio's boon to tourism and the local economy. On the same day, CBS televised a network special, *Stars in the Eye*, which not only featured CBS celebrities but also displayed the vast stages, technical wonders, camera mobility, and (for the time) rapid scene transitions that the studio afforded. One year later, on November 15, 1953, CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow hosted *Inside Television City*, a TV special that gave home audiences a tour of the studio's main attractions.⁷⁸ The building had become a CBS star in its own right.

Studio interiors had expansive stages meant to solve the "working in a closet" dilemma. Pereira and Luckman used what they called a "sandwich-loaf" principle: four large rectangular studios (two of them for live productions) divided by service doors. The live studios were designed for televisuality, configured to accommodate the maximum number of seats (350) without disturbing the performance in front of the cameras. The audience was "placed between the center camera



FIGURE 10.6a (above). CBS Television City by night, 1953. © CBS via Getty Images.

FIGURE 10.6b (below). Actress Betty Luster pushing a toy truck on the parking lot of CBS Television City architectural model, 1952. The curtain wall facade is also featured. © CBS via Getty Images.

range and the stage floor,” and the audience section began at a lower level than the stage, rising halfway back in the auditorium to the stage level. Pereira and Luckman proposed that “with the camera platforms in the midst and on the sides of the audience, the spectators will feel that they are actually a part of the production that is taking place.”⁷⁹ From the point of view of CBS executives, that feeling of participatory spectatorship would ideally translate to the small screen, giving home audiences the sense of “liveness” and “being there” that the network considered the optimal television experience (and the one that differentiated CBS’s TV products from those of film studios). Like NBC Radio City, but now through a careful coordination of cameras, spaces, and sight lines, Television City was (to borrow Koolhaas’s phrase) an architecture that could be broadcast.

Pereira and Luckman also considered television’s temporal demands. While Paley and Stanton often called Television City a “plant” designed for efficient production, the building also had to address televisual (rather than just architectural) time. Television City’s vast stages allowed for swift transitions between scenes. Wide hallways afforded rapid transit of sets, props, costumes, and talent. “This emphasis on split-second timing,” said the architects, “has not been a major consideration in architectural planning for any other medium [but] becomes mandatory in television, where the volume of production surpasses anything [yet] achieved, and where production costs can become uneconomic unless the most optimum conditions for efficient operations are provided.”⁸⁰ State-of-the-art technologies like the automated Izenour Lighting Board (originally designed for theaters by Yale drama professor George C. Izenour) memorized and delivered technical cues on demand, leading *Variety* to dub the plant “the ultimate in push button entertainment.”⁸¹ The building was a material manifestation of what Paul Virilio calls telecommunication’s collapse of time and space into “speed.”⁸²

Outside the complex, the aesthetics of speed, mobility, transport, and, especially, automobility were communicated through landscape design. Set back on the intersection of Beverly Boulevard and Fairfax Avenue (two main traffic arteries), Television City was meant to be witnessed and accessed not by pedestrians (as with NBC’s New York Radio City) but by drivers. A vast parking lot constructed of twenty-six thousand yards of asphalt wrapped around the building and secured it from the street.⁸³ CBS publicity photos and the two-ton model showcased the parking lot as if the huge expanse of cars was more impressive than the building itself. Murrow’s televised tour began with a zoom out from the building to the parking lot, followed by a pan depicting cars driving through the lot. He observed, “This building has enough concrete in it to build twenty-eight miles of a four-lane highway.” The imagery of modern transport in station advertising had become an architectural ideal. CBS Television City helped to usher in a new national imaginary in which Los Angeles, the car, and speed became the quintessential alternative midcentury modernity to the dense urban metropolises of the first half of the

twentieth century. Moreover, CBS Television City served to make LA and its mid-century autopia a national state of mind. Central to the studio style was the announcer's voice introducing programs with the tagline, "Live from CBS Television City in Hollywood." (The actual Fairfax District location would not have had the same ring!)

The opening of CBS Television City coincided with the construction of NBC Color City, and, not surprisingly, the tale of these two TV cities is one of dramatic conflict. In a desperate push to catch up with CBS, NBC completed partial construction of the studio on a forty-eight-acre lot in Burbank. "To cope with the quick deadline" (imposed by the race with CBS), "the structural designers [used] . . . pre-cast concrete columns and wall panels . . . hoisted in place in three weeks' time." The wall panels were punctuated by simple decorative "scorings" impressed in the concrete.⁸⁴ Although a modern building, it never aspired to Television City's spectacular vision. Instead, as with Radio City West, Color City was built by the Austin Company, which emphasized functionality and the research and design agenda of NBC and RCA. As the name suggests, NBC Color City served RCA and NBC's goal to own the future of color TV. In 1955, a little more than a year after RCA emerged the victor in the color patent wars with CBS, Color City was complete. As Susan Murray explains, despite its nondescript look, the facility was a high-tech mecca with "three times the amount of lighting . . . required" for black and white studios. Designed (like the CBS facility) with a mix of film and live studios, Color City had a "fifteen-by-twenty-foot large screen RCA color projector" that allowed the studio audience to experience color TV onscreen.⁸⁵ Although with diverging agendas, both NBC Color City and CBS Television City materialized in relation to early network business goals and visions of what television might be. But, as it turned out, the future did not go exactly as planned.

BROADCAST CITIES IN SLOW DECLINE

By the early 1960s, the great broadcast cities were already in decline. The live production model at the core of the CBS complex was petering out. Increasingly, telefilm and videotape production spread across the LA area, and CBS moved much of its production to Burbank. It seems *Architectural Forum* was right when it claimed in 1953 that "the most striking feature of the [CBS] building is its impermanence."⁸⁶

Rather than a sudden death, the demise of the broadcast city was a slow and uneven decline. Even while their use value for the television industry was more limited than originally imagined, the CBS and NBC studios continued to be a viable network model, and both buildings expanded. With the lifting of the FCC freeze, broadcast studios with live facilities materialized around the country, several designed by Pereira and Luckman before they parted ways.⁸⁷ Built by other

architects, many fashioned themselves on the model of the television city (although they typically called themselves “centers”), and seeking space, they moved to suburban locales. One of the earliest to do so was CBS affiliate WCAU, which left its gleaming tower of 1933 for a ten-acre site in the Philadelphia suburbs. Praised in the architectural trades, the new WCAU Television and Radio Center (built by the Austin Company) had a curtain wall facade, smaller than but similar to the one featured at CBS Television City. The glass wall facade became a marker of midcentury broadcast modernity in numerous stations around the nation.

Speculative designs for megacomplexes also persisted. After Atlantis, Bel Geddes envisioned two more TV studios for NBC, both of which emphasized live production with studio audiences. The “Pilot Studio” (1952–55) and “Horizontal Studio” (1956–57) were spectacular science fiction–like spaces in line with Bel Geddes’s “Futurama” sensibilities.⁸⁸ In 1955 Cornberg followed up his 1951 Television City with his own sci-fi “Space-Control” studio, which was illustrated in a full color futuristic design on the cover of RCA’s inhouse journal *Broadcast News*. “The ultimate in automation,” the studio had “remote control floors, walls, and scenery flying equipment for operating purposes.” The pièce de résistance was its “one-tenth scale model of the Space-Control production areas” that allowed technicians to calculate programs before they were shot. The calculations and output could “be recorded on tape or electronic calculator for re-use at any future date.”⁸⁹ The Space-Control Studio was a computational space for a utopian space-age future.

Even in 1985, the television city was still a viable utopian concept, albeit in the more neoliberal corporate form of late twentieth-century urbanism. Most noteworthy today for its famous visionary, then real estate magnate Donald Trump, “Trump Television City” was a mixed-use complex to be located on seventy-six acres of redeveloped land from the old Penn Central rail yards. According to a recent story in *Politico*, Trump “intended to build nearly 8,000 apartments and condominiums . . . almost 10,000 parking spots, some 3.6 million square feet of television and movie studio space, and some 2 million square feet of ‘prestigious’ stores.” There would be “no fewer than six 76-story towers, and looming atop it all, one unprecedented skyscraper twice that height” that, Trump claimed, “would be the world’s tallest building. . . . And he was going to live at the top.”⁹⁰ Things, of course, turned out differently both for Trump and for the future of the broadcast city.

DEMOLITION

Today, in an era marked by digital transformations, the broadcast city exists in vestigial forms. NBC’s New York Radio City is revamped as the NBC Studios, and the RCA Building is now the Comcast Building. Many of the old local stations still dot the map, with studios converted for digital systems. The broadcast city concept informs London’s recent plans for a mixed-use residential and television complex

in its White City district (which exists in the context of London's own separate history as a broadcast city). Yet despite such recent iterations, the ultramodern twentieth-century broadcast city is no longer a central fascination. NBC Radio West was the first to go, demolished in 1964 and replaced by a bank. More recently, from 2013 to 2016 CBS Columbia Square was redeveloped into a mixed-use office, retail, and residential complex. After CBS moved its primary studio facility to Studio City in 2008, Television City was the next logical target. Under threat of destruction, the studio was rescued by preservationists. In June of 2018 the Los Angeles City Council granted the studio landmark status, ensuring that iconic portions (but not all) of the complex will remain for future generations.

It seems somehow predictable that when finishing this essay, I learned that CBS sold Television City to the real estate developer Hackman Capital Partners. When the sale was announced in December of 2018, Hackman Capital (which also recently purchased the historic Culver City studios) promised to maintain the historically protected parts of the CBS studio, as well as the Television City trademark name (minus the "CBS" brand designation). Marking the end of this grandest of television cities, the sale is the material manifestation of the waning of the three-network broadcast era over the course of the last thirty years.

Like other utopian cities of modernity, Television City has become what Koolhaas calls "Junkspace"—the detritus of the twentieth-century metropolis—which he variously describes as "authorless yet authoritarian," places of "terminal hollowness," and "a tyranny of the oblivious." Junkspace piles uses on top of uses, styles on top of styles. "Restore, rearrange, reassemble, revamp, renovate . . . rent: verbs that start with re- produce Junkspace." He laments, "Junkspace will be our tomb."⁹¹ With his exhilarating prose and doomsday observations Koolhaas evokes the derealized branded landscapes of a Philip K. Dick novel, ending (maybe all too predictably?) with the ultimate "junky" object of dystopian tales: TV. After his voyage through all sorts of environmental disasters, Koolhaas winds up in a TV studio. "TV studio-sets," he writes (in stream of consciousness prose), are "real space edited for smooth transmission in virtual space, crucial hinge in an infernal feedback loop . . . the vastness of Junkspace extended to the edges of the Big Bang."⁹² Although in less earth-shattering terms, Television City's simultaneous demolition and reuse by the authorless Hackman Capital does resonate with Koolhaas's Junkspace vision. Still, it is also the case that the old broadcast cities continue to have affective resonance as "places" in contemporary times, especially for the TV generations who will miss them.

Following CBS's sale of Television City, the internet exploded with posts nostalgically recalling Television City as its bits and pieces came falling down. One month into the demolition, blogs and news sites posted "ruin porn" (a random piece of Television City's studio marquee; some Didot Bodoni "C" "B" "S" letters on the ground). Many of the posts are maudlin—even angry—expressions of longing not

just for the architecture but also for the virtual sense of place and generational bonding that the studio provided for so many years. For these bloggers and posters (most of whom appear to be boomers and Gen-Xers), it was as if Mom and Dad had sold their homes. One post presents a CBS eye with a tear streaming down.

But perhaps not all is lost. It may be that every television city that once was will rise again—if only in digital form. Attempting to monetize the CBS wreckage, Hackman Capital is leasing space—and Google is about to move in. (Amazon already leased offices in Hackman Capital’s renovated Culver Studios.) Indeed, the Junkspace of the broadcast city is now an anonymous rental opportunity for digital corporations and their flexible workforces. Unlike the old broadcast cities with their gleaming towers, ultramodern styles, studio audiences, thrilling tours, and architecture of telepresence, the place of digital media remains so elusive that most people have no idea where Netflix, Amazon, or Hulu are, save for a spot to select on a remote control and digital menu. To be sure, newly planned digital cities, powered through tech giants like Google, offer extravagant utopian plans for the twenty-first century’s increasingly mediatized social life. But radio and television producers don’t typically mark their territories through the city concept. In this sense my tour of the broadcast city leads somewhere else altogether—to anonymous transmission zones and data storage sites, spaces that chart a future that no longer seems to need the modern city as a utopian concept at all.

NOTES

1. Leonard H. Goldenson, quoted in Slight, Exhibition Catalog, n.p.
2. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*; Le Corbusier, *City of To-morrow*.
3. Le Corbusier, *City of To-morrow*, 187.
4. The plans for the Radiant City began in the 1920s and were published in French as *Ville Radieuse* (1933), but Le Corbusier continued with the concept. It is reprinted with some revisions in English as *The Radiant City*.
5. Mattern, *Code and Clay*, loc. 822 of 3893, Kindle.
6. Gordon, *The Urban Spectator*, 108.
7. Hood collaborated with many other designers, engineers, urban leaders, industrialists, and, most important, John D. Rockefeller Jr., who financed the complex. For histories of Rockefeller Center see Gordon, *The Urban Spectator*; Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 161–230; and Okrent, *Great Fortune*.
8. Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*. Koolhaas discusses Hood’s familiarity with Le Corbusier in *Delirious New York*, 164. In that same book (109–17) he explains Ferriss’s influence in the period.
9. See Hood, “National Broadcasting Studios.”
10. Hood, quoted in Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 174.
11. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 207.
12. Jameson, however, still values what he calls the “utopian impulse.” See Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*.
13. “NBC Begins Occupation of Radio City,” *Broadcasting* (Oct. 1, 1933): 20; Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 303–4.
14. Thompson’s *Soundscape of Modernity* provides a seminal history of modern sound. Its principal features include a “commodified nature,” a “direct and non-reverberant quality,” an “emphasis on the

signal and its freedom from noise,” and the ability to transcend traditional constraints of time and space.” See Thompson, 284.

15. Raymond Hood, quoted in Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 266.
16. Thompson, 299, 301.
17. “NBC Begins Occupation of Radio City,” 20. For more about the public curiosity for television during the 1930s and the role studios played in profiting from this desire to see the infrastructure beyond the televisual frame, see also chapter 3 of this volume.
18. “Mr. and Mrs. Million,” *Reception Staff Review* 2, no. 4 (April 1936): 1.
19. Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 304.
20. Williams, *Television*, 26–28.
21. For liveness and telepresence in radio and early TV see, e.g., Scannell, *Television, Radio, and Modern Life*; Boddy, *Fifties Television*; and Sconce, *Haunted Media*.
22. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 200 (emphasis in original).
23. Chicago’s Century of Progress Exhibition (1933–34) demonstrated a large-screen television set, and the city’s radio stations maintained offices on the site from which they broadcast fairground thrills; the 1939–40 New York World’s Fair, with its “World of Tomorrow,” featured RCA’s TV system in the company’s radio tube-shaped building; and the 1964–65 New York World’s Fair exhibited everything from the Bell System’s picture phones to IBM’s computer to RCA’s color television studio that, following a similar tactic from the previous fair, allowed the public to see themselves on TV (this time in full color) and to witness the operations of the TV studio. Note, too, the dazzling electric lights at nineteenth-century fairs and world expositions is a precursor to the twentieth-century fair’s media exhibitions. See Nye, *Electrifying America*, 37; and McQuire, *The Media City*, loc. 1866–90 of 3609, Kindle.
24. Jacobson, *Studios Before the System*, 15; Jacobson, “Fantastic Functionality,” 52–81.
25. Shiel, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, 130 (emphasis in original).
26. See, e.g., McQuire, *The Media City*; Mattern, *Code and Clay*; Packer and Crofts, *Communication Matters*; and Parks and Starosielski, *Signal Traffic*.
27. For scholarship on broadcast studios see Ericson and Riegert, *Media Houses*; Spigel, *TV by Design*, 110–43; Gleich, “Lost Studio of Atlantis”; Doordan, “Design at CBS,” 8–12; Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity*, 226–306; and Harwood, “Wires, Walls, and Wireless.” For studios of the major networks see the wonderfully detailed collaborative blog *Eyes of a Generation: Television’s Living History*, hosted by Grady School of Journalism, University of Georgia, at <https://eyesofageneration.com>.
28. See, e.g., ads for WEEI, Boston, MA, in *Broadcasting*, Nov. 15, 1933, 36; WHAS, Louisville, KY, in *Broadcasting*, Sept. 1, 1939, 8; and KGW, Portland, OR, in *Broadcasting*, March 15, 1951, 41.
29. For more on CBS’s studios see Grady School, *Eyes of a Generation*, <https://eyesofageneration.com>.
30. Material shortages during WWII put much of the station construction on hiatus; however, designers still devised visionary plans.
31. “The New WACU: A New Standard in Radio,” *Broadcasting*, Feb. 1, 1932, 9.
32. *RCA Broadcast News*, Feb. 1934, 21.
33. For whiteness in architecture see Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses*.
34. In the 1950s RCA sold do-it-yourself TV studio planning kits for purchase by local stations. See, e.g., *Broadcasting*, April 20, 1953, 19.
35. *Broadcasting*, August 1, 1937, 45; *Broadcasting*, July 15, 1937, 14.
36. *Broadcasting*, August 1, 1937, 88.
37. *Architectural Record*, cited in *Broadcasting*, Nov. 15, 1940, 34.
38. “WLW Plans Million Dollar Structure,” *Broadcasting*, Sept. 1, 1937, 12.
39. William Lescaze, “Offices and Broadcasting Studios, Station WLW, Crosley Corporation, Cincinnati, Ohio,” *Pencil Points*, July 1944, 42.

40. Lescaze, 50.
41. Jolson, quoted in "Columbia Dedicates Coast Radio Center," *New York Times*, May 1, 1938, 7; see also "New Broadcast City Dedicated," *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1938, A8.
42. David Glickman, "Hollywood Radio City an Ideal Plant," *Broadcasting*, Nov. 1, 1938, 22–23, 58; Noel Corbett, "Preview of Hollywood's Radio City," *NBC Transmitter*, Sept. 1938, 2; "Hollywood Radio City to Have Studio Tour," *NBC Transmitter*, Nov. 1938, 1.
43. See the ad for WREC in *Broadcasting*, August 1, 1937, 29.
44. Although the networks used them for promotional tactics, the "Miss Color TV" girls served primarily as models for network color tests. Their use as test models helped establish racialized standards for color (the women were chosen for their white skin tones). See Gross, "Living Test Patterns"; Sterne and Mulvin, "Low Acuity for Blue," 118–38; and Murray, *Bright Signals*, 110–11, 117, 119.
45. C. E. Butterfield, "CBS Soon Will Broadcast Moving Pictures by Radio," *Galveston Daily News*, June 7, 1931, 6.
46. *Broadcasting*, Oct. 1, 1940, 18.
47. *Broadcasting*, Oct. 11, 1954, 41.
48. The ads are respectively in *Broadcasting*, Feb. 7, 1955, 75; *Broadcasting*, March 2, 1953, 21; and "KABC Girl," *Broadcasting*, March 1, 1954, 82.
49. Shot (c. 1948) most likely by the studio pinup artist Joseph Jasgur, this is likely a publicity photo for the studio but circulates now as a star pinup of Monroe.
50. For the program see www.youtube.com/watch?v=K28fAaae6s4.
51. The judges included stars like Agnes Moorehead and Jane Meadows.
52. *Broadcasting*, Dec. 19, 1941, 21–22.
53. Forrest Warthman, "Telecommunications and the City," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 412 (March 1974): 127.
54. Perhaps it's no coincidence that Don Lee Broadcasting (a major station group in LA and parts of the West Coast) began as an offshoot of Lee's California automobile dealerships. His branch dealership model for auto showrooms up and down the coast operated much like his eventual merger with CBS for his networking of radio stations. After his death the company created TV stations. For more see Fischer, "Don Lee and the Transformation of Los Angeles," 87–115.
55. *Broadcasting*, March 7, 1949, 41.
56. This announcement can be viewed along with other similar examples at www.tv-signoffs.com. Note, too, the voice of the station announcer (and in TV also "station identification" graphics) punctuated program flows throughout the daily schedule.
57. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
58. For more on early theaters, as well as the use of set design to create an illusion of space and depth onscreen, see Spigel, *TV by Design*, 112–17.
59. Jack Gould, "Working in a Closet: Cramped Settings Destroy Video's Perspective," *New York Times*, August 16, 1953, X9.
60. Before New York's Radio City opened in 1933, NBC's Merchandising Mart studio billed itself as the nation's largest radio facility. The TV conversion took place in 1949.
61. Gleich, "Lost Studio of Atlantis," 5–6. Bel Geddes was actually more interested in creating a TV studio that also served as a public venue for live events that people might attend much as they went to the movies or theater.
62. Sol Cornberg, "Television City," *Interiors* 110, no. 12 (July 1951): 93–108.
63. For discussions of Cornberg's design for *Home* and his later designs for university media, see Harwood, "TV University ca. 1964," 24–31.
64. Cornberg, "Television City," 93 (these statements are in the introduction by the *Interiors* editors).
65. Cornberg, 95.
66. Cornberg, 97.

67. Cornberg, 101.
68. Wade, *Designing for TV*, 26.
69. Editors, "TV Stations," *Progressive Architecture*, Sept. 1953, 90, 86.
70. Florence Crowther, "The Video Temples of Hollywood," *New York Times*, July 27, 1952, X9.
71. For my more detailed discussion of Television City see Spigel, *TV by Design*, 110–43. The first to go west was the fledgling ABC network, which purchased the old Vitagraph lot from Warner Bros. in East Hollywood in 1948. The studio was essentially two film stages rather than an expansive television city. Later, in 1972, ABC established (now demolished) West Coast business headquarters in Century City on land that had once belonged to Twentieth Century Fox. Century City, which opened in 1962, was itself conceived as a "city within a city." For more on ABC TV studios see Bobby Ellerbee and Eyes of a Generation.com, "ABC Studios—West Coast," <https://eyesofageneration.com/studios-page/abc-studios-west-coast>; and Anderson, *Hollywood TV*, 138.
72. See Spigel, *TV by Design*, 68–109; and Doordan, "Design at CBS."
73. Separately, Pereira's designs dominated the look of the Southland for the next thirty years. See Steele, *William Pereira*.
74. William Pereira and Charles Luckman, "CBS Television City," *Arts & Architecture*, Jan. 1953, 21.
75. When president of Lever Brothers in the 1940s, Luckman commissioned and worked with architects for Manhattan's Lever House, a classic midcentury curtainwall skyscraper. In his analysis of the midcentury curtain wall, Reinhold Martin likens the glass facade to a television screen. See Martin, "Atrocities," 70–72.
76. Colomina, "Media as Modern Architecture," 66, 68.
77. David J. Jacobson, "I Remember a Monster," *Variety*, Nov. 12, 1952, 29.
78. An ad for the program is in the *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 15, 1953, D12. The program is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5YdyY8IM9M.
79. William Pereira and Charles Luckman, "Take a Sandwich Loaf Idea, Add Some Imagination, and Presto—CBS TV City," *Variety*, Nov. 12, 1952, 29, 54; Pereira and Luckman, "CBS Television City," 22.
80. Pereira and Luckman, "CBS Television City," 22.
81. Carroll Carroll, "The Ultimate in Push-Button Entertainment Needs Writers Too," *Variety*, Nov. 12, 1952, 23. See also, Val Adams, "The Izenour Board: TV's Lighting Wonder," *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 1954, X13; and "TV City: A Picture Report," *Architectural Forum*, March 1953, 148.
82. Virilio, *Speed and Politics*.
83. "Some Vital Statistics on CBS Television City," *Variety*, Nov. 12, 1952, 36.
84. "NBC Studios," *Progressive Architecture*, Sept. 1953, 111. NBC purchased the land from the City of Burbank and Warner Bros., adding to the then ongoing archaeological layering of TV architecture on top of Hollywood's cinematic past.
85. Murray, *Bright Signals*, 158. As Murray notes, NBC had already opened less elaborate color studios in New York by the time the Hollywood location was completed. NBC publicity was a carbon copy of the CBS fanfare. For its opening in 1955 NBC aired the star-studded variety show *Entertainment 1955*. California governor Goodwin Knight welcomed the studio by declaring "NBC color week."
86. "TV City: A Picture Report," *Architectural Forum*, March 1953, 146–49.
87. See Spigel, *TV by Design*, 140.
88. See Gleich, "Lost Studio of Atlantis."
89. Sol Cornberg, "Space-Control Production Area," *RCA Broadcast News* 86 (Dec. 1955): 33, 44.
90. Kruse, "The Lost City of Trump."
91. Koolhaas, "Junkspace," 319, 125, 202, 273.
92. Koolhaas, 421.