



Communicating Utopia: Facets of the Concept of Social Palace in 19th-Century France

PIOTR KULIGOWSKI 

STANISŁAW KNAPOWSKI 

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

RESEARCH

HUP HELSINKI
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ABSTRACT

The article offers insights into the intricate interplay between materiality and the semiotics, exploring the Fourierist visions of the social palace in 19th-century France. The concept, having roots at the epoch, is used comprehensively as an analytical category. As such, it merges a plethora of architectural ideas exposed by early socialists. The first section traces the concept's genealogy, situating it within its broader historical and contextual framework. The second section delves into the diverse manifestations of the social palace, examining its portrayal through illustrations, articles and brochures. The third section analyzes the ideological transformation of the concept as it gained additional meanings and dimensions, solidifying its status as a comprehensive ideology. The fourth section focusses on the spatial development of the social palace, in particular its integration into the industrial landscape. In conclusion, the article highlights the concept's temporal and spatial expansion, emphasizing the methodological insights contained in this case study. By offering a nuanced examination of the concept of social palace, this article enriches our understanding of utopian thought in 19th-century France and its broader implications.

CORRESPONDING

AUTHOR:

Piotr Kuligowski

Tadeusz Manteuffel
Institute of History of
the Polish Academy of
Sciences, Warsaw, Poland
pkuligowski@ihpan.edu.pl

KEYWORDS:

Charles Fourier; early
socialism; phalanstery;
social palace; 19th-century
France

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kuligowski, Piotr and
Stanisław Knapowski.
2024. "Communicating
Utopia: Facets of the
Concept of Social Palace
in 19th-Century France."
*Redescriptions: Political
Thought, Conceptual History
and Feminist Theory* 27(2):
143–163. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.33134/rds.415](https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.415)

The 19th century was a long timespan during which numerous intellectual and political novelties emerged. Among them, one may discern a number of concepts which were enriched with new social and political layers of meaning during the period. Such an intellectual evolution immediately recast them into new contexts, placing categories that earlier could have been seen as politically neutral at the centre of political frays. It was a time when architectural ideas developed in that direction. Because of the reflections expressed by, among others, the French Fourierist Victor Considerant, from the mid-19th century architecture was perceived as one of the crucial social questions of the day (Vidler 2015, 55). In this paper we undertake – on the basis of the ongoing delineation of the concept of social palace in 19th-century France – an effort to develop reflections on the entanglement of semiotics and materiality. To do so, we zoom into the transformation of phalanstery (*phalanstère*) as an architectural and social project and the concept of social palace (*palais social*) in its various facets. Undoubtedly, the different embodiments of social palaces occupied prominent positions in the twentieth century, which is reflected in examples such as the projected (though never built) Palace of the Soviets in Moscow, Parliament (formerly called Popular) Palace in Bucharest or the actual Palace of Science and Culture in Warsaw. The same concept is expressed (although under a different name) in the social-democrats' Maisons du Peuple as the famous one in Clichy (1935–1939) or in the suburban Parisian estate called Versailles du people in Montigny-le-Bretonneux (designed by Ricardo Bofill in 1976). Our goal, however, is to trace the genealogy of the concept of social palace in the making on the verge of the capitalist transformation in France. To achieve this, we investigate the various imaginings, publications and practical efforts of the early French socialist group known as the phalansterians.

The concept of social palace, in its various 19th-century facets, has to date not attracted much attention on the part of conceptual historians. Rather, the projects of phalansteries were analysed mostly by historians of architecture or the arts (Baridon 2017; Loire 2005; Vidler 1995; Van Zanten 1979), or from another perspective by social historians (Lallement 2012). Their works, inspiring as they are, prompt us to reframe the subject into the history of concepts to both shed new light on this particular case and to address certain methodological challenges inherent in this task. We believe that such a perspective may change the understanding of social palaces, inasmuch as any conceptual history hinges on contextual interpretation, uncovering the political stakes from the long-term perspective. In other words, we wish to provide a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between language, ideas, power, societies and objects and the tools typical for the history of concepts seem to offer precious ways of doing so. What additionally warrants our investigation is the fact that in dictionaries of socio-political concepts, objects as such typically play only a minor role,¹ while in some cases their influence on discourses and ideologies was significant.

Indeed, as noted by Stefan Halft: '[L]inguistics/semiotics do not limit their "objects" to real objects but analyse *Vorstellungsinhalte* (objects formed solely by language) that can exert tremendous influence on mentalities, ideologies, and eventually social practices' (Halft 2014, 77). In this light, the key concept for our study might be juxtaposed with numerous other architectural objects playing a role in discourses, such as Bastille, readapted as a political token by various revolutionary and anti-despotic

¹ See, for instance, volumes of *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* or *Handbuch politisch-sozialer Grundbegriffe in Frankreich 1680–1820*.

doctrines (Deseure 2023; Lüsebrink & Reichardt, 1997, 4–5). However, while the gloomy symbol of the ancien régime was toppled, in the case of the social palace, at stake was its construction and wider social transformation that was to occur. Paradoxically, however, what makes the social palace a political concept is the fact that Fourier and his close disciples failed when attempting to realise it.² The ambitious project that did not bear fruits triggered extensive debates, becoming a multi-layered concept.

In the paragraphs below we spell out how the concept, which seemed quite minor and even contingent at the outset, reached a crescendo, forging new layers of meaning and finally gaining the status of a ‘key’ concept, if only within a particular discourse (Ifversen 2011). The history of the concept, constituting a relatively coherent entity from the 1820s until the 1860s, is challenging because it encompasses not only conceptual changes, but also various forms of transfers. Those transfers occurred through either direct conversations, meetings, writings, or imitations and also took different forms, in which its intergenerational lineage played a prominent role (Feldhay & Hertz 2019; Kuligowski 2023). This was all the more marked because of the fact that the figure who cast the concept of palace into innovative socio-political reflections – Charles Fourier – and the figure who symbolically crowns the conceptual change we focus on – Jean-Baptiste Godin – never met in person. What’s more, Victor Considerant, who became a crucial theorist of the social palace in mid-19th-century France (Van Davidson 1988), and who represented the most influential branch of Fourierism, was by no means the only thinker undertaking further reflections on the social palace in its diverse forms.

Taking all these layers of meaning into account, in the paragraphs below we focus on several co-existing meanings that the Fourierist social palace – in numerous cases referred to as ‘*phalanstère*’ – gained over time. First and foremost, it became a catchword for a new political current, namely: *phalansterisme* (as Fourier’s followers did not use ‘ism’ based on his surname) or the *mouvement phalansterien*. This movement was not unanimously recognized though – its crucial locus was situated in Paris and was represented by the publishing house *Librairie sociétaire*. Nonetheless, the other centers – such as the *Union phalanstérienne* in Lyon; the phalansterian group in Burgundy; the redaction of *Nouveau Monde* run by Jan Czyński; and minor groups of dissidents should not go unnoticed, as they managed to establish original endeavours inspired by Fourier’s thought. Secondly, as an imagined and projected community, the phalanstery was depicted in numerous books, press articles, brochures and pictures, as well as in some more and less detailed plans. Last but not least, there were more than 40 recorded attempts to establish a phalanstery in Europe, Africa and the Americas (Guarneri 1991). However, in this article we focus on the French experiences, because phalansterians in other countries adapted the original ideas to the local circumstances, and thus introduced numerous changes that would require separate studies.

GENEALOGY AND CONTEXTS

The concept of ‘*phalanstère*’, taken in a diachronic perspective, may be seen as one link in the longer chain of proposed creations of spotless cities and enormous buildings to picture a better and just future. It is enough to mention here just one example:

² Stanisław Knapowski’s recently published paper on social palace explores different modes of how architecture might interact and transform political ideas. Deriving from the toolkit offered by actor–network theory, the paper seeks to elucidate how buildings may transform and transmit political ideas (Knapowski 2023).

the exquisite illustrations and covers of Thomas More's *Utopia*, which influenced the socio-political imagination of many generations. Indeed, it is a precious example of how a geographical name of (imagined) city situated on an island could become a concept. Parallel type of a conceptual innovation, as we intend to demonstrate, might be seen among phalansterians. In fact, certain resemblances among Fourier's visions to utopian ideas formulated in the 16th century were so evident that some critics accused him of plagiarism ([Redivivus 1850](#)). However, contrary to the early modern utopians – who willingly struck a chord in readers' imaginations using suggestive pictures of a future flawless reality depicted by breath-taking ideal cities ([Portolano 2012](#)) – Fourier's disciples rarely proposed exhaustive urban projects. Even if they did, they published them in specialist architectural journals, and not in the socialist press addressed to a wider audience (e.g. [Perreymond 1842–1843](#)).

In general, the idea of applying novel architectural solutions to organise various spheres of human activity in a better way started gaining popularity among social reformers at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries.³ Michel Foucault offered numerous examples of this widespread tendency in his classic work *Discipline and Punish*. In addition to the long list he enumerated, one may add several French theoreticians (mostly from the 1840s) who, although not being in favour of the phalansterian movement, propounded projects of housing estates that to some extent resemble the social palace. They coined different names to label their projects: *palais communal* or *communauté d'utopie* ([Dézamy 1842, 39, 43](#)), simply *cité* or *habitation* ([Pecqueur 1842, 709](#)), *Cités de l'union* ([Dameth 1849](#)) or *Humanisphère* ([Déjacque 1899](#); strongly inspired by Fourier's thought). Flora Tristan was one of the few who overtly used the word 'palace' (*palais de l'union ouvrière*) ([Tristan 1844, 80, 83, 92–95](#)), certainly inspired by phalansterianism, as evidenced by the financial support of several phalansterians ([Tristan 1844, XXIII–XXV, XXXIX–XLII](#)). Even young Friedrich Engels postulated 'construction, on public lands, of great palaces as communal dwellings for associated groups of citizens' ([Engels 2020, 29](#)). As may be seen, architectonic visions, inextricably connected with plans for far-reaching social reforms, were widespread in France (and Western Europe) at that time, engaging figures representing various intellectual currents.

The concept of social palace, as proposed by phalansterians, along with other blueprints from that time, reveals its full specificity only when put into its particular context, namely, France on the verge of the capitalist transformation. During this period, the historical role of the actually existing palaces was highly diverse; as in the aftermath of popular unrest they could be, as political symbols, both burned and destroyed or seized and politically redefined. For instance, Versailles was plundered during the French Revolution and the Palais de Tuileries was burned by the Paris Communards in 1871. In turn, in different European countries in the 19th century former royal residences were transformed into 'palaces of the people', with national congresses and parliaments taking their seats in them ([Aerts & Van den Berg 2019, 7](#)). This was also the case of the Palais Bourbon in Paris, which was transformed into the Assemblée Nationale. What's more, many old palaces in France were demolished for pragmatic reasons, despite renewed attention to the protection of historical heritage. They were replaced by new districts, wider and straighter streets and even industrial plants. Against this background, one may note that Fourier and his disciples

³ The prominent example here may be the Panopticon idea, first conceived by Samuel Bentham, renowned philosopher Jeremy Bentham's brother, in the 1780s ([Bartlett 2022, 18–22](#)).

attempted to propose an alternative solution, seizing the very conceptual token of the palace and reformatting it for innovative purposes.

To achieve this ambitious goal, they tried a word play, as ‘phalanstery’ was a neologism built upon the words ‘phalanx’ and ‘monastery’ (Brémand 2013). However, Fourier was at odds with any perspectives of social transformation using the model of monastery, and even accused Robert Owen of doing so in the project of New Harmony (Bouchet 2020).⁴ Thus, over time the phalanstery in Fourierist thought was dubbed with numerous alternative names, which complicates the overall picture. The second noteworthy expression used to name the structure desired by Fourierists, namely *palais sociétaire* (Considerant 1837, 494), provides an example of the seizure of the concept of palace, which usually invokes intuitive associations with monarchs, aristocrats or magnates. Another expression of Considerant: ‘the palace where MAN should reside’ (Considerant 1848, 56), shows the clear intellectual affinity with the social palace, which was not yet expressed in a well-established linguistic form. It is a palace for all of humanity, not just the former elites, embodying a ‘social’ vision where society is seen as self-organized humanity.

It appears, however, that in this case the use of the French word *palais* has multiple and complex associations. According to the Le Robert, TLFi and CNRTL online dictionaries, it means not only a vast edifice or a residence of kings, but also the seat of tribunals, and even a large public building (e.g. *Le palais des Sports*). Certainly, the second type of definition is much closer to the Fourierist perspective; but one may wonder whether during the epoch the word had any tangible socio-political flavour. French dictionaries from the 19th century define the entry ‘*palais*’ as ‘a great building’ belonging to emperors, kings magnates, etc., or just ‘a gorgeous edifice’, without invoking its possible public functions other than ‘a place of court proceedings’ (e.g. Landais 1846, 410; de Rivarol 1828, 693). Given this, one may posit that the terminological change spawned by Fourierists may be seen as one more dimension of their utopia.

By introducing such changes at the lexical and conceptual levels, Fourier intended to create an intellectual space in which everything desirable could be seen as possible (Jean 2005). This is one of the reasons why his compelling vision attracted the attention of a wider public, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s. Once more, however, it should be emphasised that some of Fourier’s supporters still preferred to apply alternative labels. A good example is Zoé Gatti de Gamond, who popularized Fourier’s ideas in a more moderate form. When discussing the phalanstery, she applied the terms *ménage sociétaire* or *commune sociétaire*, avoiding any use of the term ‘palace’ (Gatti de Gamond 1840). The phalanstery in Cîteaux, which was founded on her initiative, was referred to as ‘phalanstery’ only by regional authorities or journalists, while its main funder, Arthur Young, never referred to it as either *palais social* or *phalanstère* (Voet 2001, 15). Representatives of the other currents of French early socialism also did not follow the path paved by Fourier. Figures such as Étienne Cabet, Henri de Saint-Simon and their disciples did not use the metaphor of palace, although they did not strive to abandon urban structures as such, but rather sought to reform them, or even build them, following novel patterns.⁵

⁴ Fourier wrote: ‘Owen a précisément choisi la forme de bâtiment qu’il fallait éviter, le carré ou monotonie parfaite (...) son carré peut être bon pour des réunions monastiques, telles qu’il en fonde, la monotonie étant leur essence’ (Fourier 1973, 169).

⁵ Perhaps the temple proposed by Saint-Simonians bears certain features typical for the social palace. Sketches of it can be seen in *Album de dessins par Machereau*. BnF Arsenal, Fonds Enfantin Ms. 13 910.

In turn, Fourier and his followers used the word ‘palace’ to refer to a large building, synonymous with an edifice capable of housing 400 families or 2,000 people (Aucaigne 1841, 85; Berbrugger 1833, 58–60; Fourier IV 1966, 462). The term ‘palace’, used interchangeably with ‘phalanstery’, perhaps aimed to make this innovative idea more relatable by associating it with a familiar word. Referring to examples such as the Palais-Royal in Paris was meant to promise the transformation of all impoverished towns into places as grand as the current royal residence (Lechevalier 1834). The most subversive aspect of this concept lies in dedicating the palace to all people, a point often emphasized by Phalansterians: ‘How I wish I were king so I could house all my people in palaces.’ (Cantagrel 1841, 17). Flora Tristan considered a Palace for workers a matter of dignity, replacing the shameful institutions of the almshouse and the *dépôt de mendicité* with a building reflecting the wealth they produced and could enjoy fully. Furthermore, she claimed that the workers themselves, with whom she frequently conversed and corresponded, raised this issue: ‘In all the letters from workers, the Palace is the main question.’ (Tristan 1844, X–XI). All this indicates that it was a concept in the making, with the palace symbol gradually being imbued with social content by actors representing various social layers.

TACKLING ASYMMETRIES: VISIONS AND INSPIRATIONS

The new type of palace, the social one, was to abolish social inequalities. Fourier firmly stated that in the harmonious future luxury and wellbeing would be accessible to each and every person living in social palaces. In stating this, he was simultaneously highly critical towards the socio-political realities all around him. In particular, various French cities that he visited made a bad impression on him for both aesthetic and hygienic reasons, as they were chaotic with narrow and dirty streets. Comparing them with his ideal visions, he searched for what is presumed in all comparisons, that is, their underlying common characteristics. What he actually found, however, were striking inequalities and asymmetries. The enormous and imposing edifices such as El Escorial and the Versailles Palace served only for the vanity and glory of a few persons. In particular, Fourier provided a raw account of his visit in Rouen, the mediaeval buildings and urban layout of which he called simply ‘dirty slums’ (Fourier 1967, 17). At the same time, however, Fourier was equally critical towards the modern cities, whether rebuilt or built anew, in the symmetrical and regular style of the Enlightenment. He listed many examples of such monotonous cities: Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Philadelphia, St. Petersburg or Nancy (Fourier 1966, 298–9). All the dysfunctional architectural forms that existed in various places were to be transformed and wiped out in the future world of a realised utopia which Fourier called Harmony (Fourier, 1968, 707).

Even in dreaming about the establishment of a social palace, the French theoretician stressed that monarchic residences could not be simply transformed into phalansteries. Fourier was at odds with numerous 19th-century revolutionaries, who demanded that the shift of sovereignty should happen also on the symbolic level; namely through the transformation of former monarchic residences into representative assemblies. Fourier’s intention was not to detach, following the liberal pattern, the sovereignty from the king and embed it in the people. Instead, he proposed a radical alternative to the solutions advocated by the partisans of parliamentarianism. Thus the reluctance of Fourier and his supporters to use monarchic palaces in the new way mirrors their general indifference towards political reforms. This may be illustrated by the fact that

one of the Fourierists dubbed the prospective federalist country comprising numerous successfully established phalansteries as ‘a kingdom’ (Briancourt 1848, 287). Clearly, reforms of the political system were not at stake in such a movement, but a change consisting in building an alternative society that would live in a parallel world of phalansteries.

Interestingly, Fourier presented a more positive stance towards the Palais-Royal in Paris (Beecher 1986, 33–4). While visiting this place, he was impressed by the character of its architecture, which he called unitarian, for it allowed to combine numerous functions, hitherto performed by various buildings, under one roof. Its most characteristic elements – galleries with shops surrounding the palace gardens – were built in 1780–1784 on the commission of the royal nephew, who later became famous as Philip Égalité. Thenceforth it was actually a commercial centre, and in addition, during the *ancien régime* was excluded from the royal jurisdiction, thus favouring the organisation of opposition activities there (McMahon 1996). For Fourier it was a showcase of unitary architecture aimed at offering, in its covered galleries, space for spontaneous interactions – even though it served commerce, which, as is well known, Fourier hated so much (Beecher 1986, 25–6).

For these reasons, Fourier and his followers chose the Palais-Royal in Paris as one of the patterns of the unitary architecture which they advocated. For example, the phalansterian and journalist François-Felix Cantagrel appreciated its ‘great feeling of unity’, which allowed people to use all commercial and entertainment establishments without leaving home (Cantagrel 1841, 17). In this way, phalansterians were at odds with the views of other socialists of the epoch (especially with the Saint-Simonians), who assessed this first ‘shopping and entertainment centre’ negatively. According to the famous description penned by the Saint-Simonianist Charles Duveyrier, the Palais-Royal was a place of moral corruption, gambling and prostitution (Duveyrier 1832; more about gambling in Palais-Royal: Barnhart 1992). This means that, contrary to the representatives of other early socialist currents, phalansterians believed in the possibility of ‘playing’ with architecture, shifting meanings, transforming functions and harnessing it for their political purposes.

The same unitarian aspect struck Fourier at two, no longer existent, *hôtels particuliers* near the Boulevard des Invalides in Paris. They were projected by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, who was the only architect whom Fourier mentioned directly, and with admiration, in his works (Vidler 1995, 308–9). Ledoux’s classical style probably affected the palatial style of the phalanstery. Despite not having direct evidence, Fourier could have visited the ‘ideal city’ of Arc-et-Senans designed by Ledoux, located near his family town Besançon. The estate indeed shares common features with a projected phalanstery from the aesthetic point of view, but not the social dimension. For instance, Ledoux provided a central observation point controlling the entire neighborhood, as well as decided to situate workers’ dwellings close to the workshops. Last but not least, an important source of inspiration for Fourier were the glass-covered passages in Paris (Benjamin 1969), as they made human activities possible regardless of the weather.

Therefore, the resemblance between phalansteries and royal palaces may not be due to spatial or material similarities. Rather, the aspect that plays a prominent role here is turning the existing social asymmetries upside-down to invigorate readers’ imaginations. In this way, Fourier’s social palace was a concept born out of asymmetries, as existing oppositions and contradictions allowed for endorsing a given posture in a relational way, which simultaneously served as both an index for oneself, as well as for the prospective social movement (Junge 2011, 35–6). Therefore,

his gesture was not a simple attempt to seize the image of existing edifices and use them for alternative purposes, but rather an effect of searching for instances capable of expressing the most splendid, and the most universal, type of luxury that one could imagine at that time.

VISUAL AND ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CONCEPT

Socio-political concepts, however, are inherently unstable and unable to fully reconcile existing asymmetries. What's more, theoreticians seeking to find a universal applicability in certain concepts may simultaneously influence their position within a broader ideological framework, gradually pushing them into more prominent roles. This dynamic becomes evident when we examine the depictions of the phalanstery, whether in text or graphics. Consequently, the search for an appropriate graphic representation of the social palace concept was, at the epoch, not without challenges and uncertainties. As early as 1822, Fourier, in his *Traite d'unité universelle*, expressed the necessity of publishing a splendid graphic design of a phalanstery, but in the same work he complained that it would be a very expensive endeavour. The early illustrations of a phalanstery were nothing more than bare architectonic plans, published by Fourier for the first time in 1829 (Fourier 1829, 146), while his earlier and more precise sketches can be found only in the archival fonds (ANF 10 AS 23, dossier 18) or in current secondary sources (Vidler 1995).

Despite their lack of a greater aesthetic value, these plans were republished in subsequent years by other phalansterians (Pérusson 1843), perhaps because of the high costs required to prepare a new design. Finally, the very first published illustration proper of a phalanstery was a vignette of the *Phalanstère* journal from 28 June 1832, in which the low quality of print and design is palpable (Fourier 1832; *Le Phalanstère* 1832). In turn, 'Perspective d'un Phalanstère' – an illustration decorating Considerant's *Considérations sociales sur l'architectonique* (Considerant 1834) and included later in *Destinée sociale* – was architecturally very precise but also purist and classical in its style, surrounded by unspecified nature, trees and a pasture where goats graze. The agricultural character of the early models of the phalanstery can be understood as an effect of the influence of the ideas of the physiocrats on Fourier himself and his followers (Beecher 1986, 70). For the physiocrats, agriculture was obviously the basis of the economy, therefore the agricultural production-oriented phalanstery was a proposal implemented within this framework.

It was only in the second half of the 1840s that the *Librairie phalanstérienne* began to publish, in the form of separate and additionally paid booklets, artistic images of phalansteries, which Considerant described as the best way to propagate the idea (Considerant 1849). Their propagandist purpose is also tangible in the fact that representations of a social palace were displayed during the banquets organized by phalansterians yearly on 7 April, that is, on Fourier's birthday. Generally, all the illustrations show a huge edifice with a vast central palatial-style building alongside two symmetrical wings, with covered street galleries traversing the inside courts. They were to facilitate moving around and strengthening the daily relationships of inhabitants by providing cover to them on rainy days.⁶ Fourier and his supporters skilfully combined in the projected structure functions typical of monarchic or

⁶ For a similar description of galleries in the phalanstery, see: *La Phalange*, janvier 1838, no 2, 25.

aristocratic residences: representative, official and residential ones. The phalanstery, depending on its dimensions, was to be the administrative centre of the commune, or even a whole canton (Briancourt 1848, 38). It was to contain a meaningful symbol of power – the tower of order (*tour de l'ordre*), with a clock and telegraph, supposed to rule over time, space and the flow of information. The layout of the central pavilion with its two wings is thus clearly hierarchical. Although it is a building symbolically characteristic of the aristocracy of the *ancien régime*, it realizes and reflects the lifestyle characteristic of the Parisian bourgeoisie of the July Monarchy era. At the same time, a palace housing apartments and dining rooms, ballrooms, a theatre and a private chapel or church is a scheme characteristic of aristocratic residences. In this way the phalanstery combines an aristocratic *château* and an extract of a modern city in the form of a compact estate. The structure was therefore to be a locus of the synthesis of the *ancien régime* with modernity, for overcoming contradictions was seen as a pivotal precondition for establishing an association, ultimately merging all the social classes into a harmonious organism. This ambition reflects the widespread conviction of the early socialists that the historical progress of humankind leads towards higher forms of association.

The social palace was thus to be an object offering many facilities, and its inhabitants – carefully selected using Fourier's personality categories – were to obey a set of specific rules, including controversial ones such as the principle of free love (Debout-Oleszkiewicz 1978). Fourier also emphasized that the phalanstery would have nothing of the monotony of modern cities (Fourier 1966, 298–9). For this reason, the dominant classical style in Considerant's drawing was reminiscent of Napoleon I's plans for the reconstruction of Versailles rather than the baroque, decorated palace of Louis XIV. However, the monotonous architecture in Considerant's illustration strikingly contrasts with *Le Phalanstère*'s vignette, which is dominated by neo-Gothic ornaments, soaring turrets and ogival windows, designed with a certain flavour of classicizing peristyle, and the theatre building is an imitation of an ancient temple. For this reason, it is difficult to reconcile Fourier's aversion to monotony and regularity in architecture with Considerant's illustration.

The fact that the function of the various parts of the *phalanstère* cannot be discerned from the ornamentation and detailing also distances it from the tradition of the French Enlightenment's visionary architects (including Ledoux), who developed the principle of architecture, which showcases its purpose through either specific forms or symbolic ornamentation (Vidler 1995, 172), later called by romantic architecture critics as *l'architecture parlante* (Molok 1996, 43). Aside from the theatre and the church, visible only in the 1832 vignette and later only in illustrations from the mid-1840s, nothing reveals the destination of each part of the projected phalanstery. The edifice is monolithic and unitarian, and thus resembles a royal residence rather than a workers' housing estate. It seems that the phalanstery on the lithograph was meant to arouse awe by association with a royal palace, rather than meticulously illustrate the structure in great detail. Although Considerant and other phalansterians were cautious about openly drawing comparisons with the Versailles palace, the illustrations unmistakably reveal significant similarities.

Fourier proposed establishing the trial phalanstery near a city to maintain contact with the outside world and ensure a source of supplies (Fourier 1966, 427). The only realisation of this concept during Fourier's lifetime, the 'colony' at Condé-sur-Vesgre, was built close to the town of Rambouillet, approximately 60 kilometres from Paris (Vauthier 1925). Despite the failure to construct this phalanstery, the very concept

remained prominent in public discourse, particularly in the 1840s. It appeared in caricatures critiquing Fourier's and his followers' megalomania (Balzac 1842, 165), as well as in literary works unrelated to politics. An example is Eugène Sue's novel *The Wandering Jew* (1844/45), in which one of the protagonists, an industrialist and philanthropist, constructs a factory and workers' estate clearly inspired by the phalanstery. In this way, the concept of the social palace became a literary motif.

Over the course of time, the number of illustrations displaying a successfully realised phalanstery grew in number, and the differences between them offer a valuable insight into the conceptual changes related to the social palace. In particular, the problematic question worthy of discussion is the resemblance between the visions of a phalanstery with the model of the Palace of Versailles. As was stressed above, the actually existing palaces were important for Fourier for two reasons. First, they brought the promise of luxury and wellbeing that he strived to provide for all. Second, edifices such as the Palace of Versailles or the Palais-Royal in Paris provided examples of successfully applied solutions proposed in the most recent architectural projects. As such, from Fourier's perspective the technological innovations successfully tested in those residences should be applied for the sake of entire cities, and not only in selected buildings for elites. It appears that the phalanstery visually resembles the Versailles Palais for quite contingent reasons, related to short-term gains and tangible mostly in the synchronic perspective, rather than as a result of overarching intellectual affinities.

The turn towards a more systematic interest in technology among the phalansterians is visible in the illustrations from the mid-1840s. These are lithographs in which one may discern, besides communal-cum-palatial edifices, such elements as a steamboat moored on the river, a factory chimney emitting smoke in one part of the social palace or a steam locomotive on the horizon. The first picture which illustrated well this turn was published in the journal *l'Illustration* (Le Phalanstère 1846, 5), and it still uses Considerant's classical architectural scheme. Besides that, one may find two lithographs from 1847, which combine new architectural visions with technological improvement (Arnout 1847; Daubigny 1847). This was quite a breakthrough for the phalansterians, among whom Considerant initially hesitated over whether the railroad was not too expensive and redundant (Considerant 1838). Fourier, in turn, considered technology to be ambivalent, as it could be beneficial for humankind only in a future desired social system – Harmony (Jarrige 2016, 43).

The experiment that convinced phalansterians to support technological progress was Condé-sur-Vesgre's failed attempt to establish a phalanstery focussed on agricultural production (Jarrige 2016, 47). This was the first attempt to establish a phalanstery in France, and it was completely unsuccessful in practical terms because it went bankrupt. In the aftermath of that failure, phalansterians realised that there was no chance for an experimental colony to be successful without technological innovations. This is why the second attempt at establishing a phalanstery, in Condé-sur-Vesgre, included a small factory (Desmars 2010, 184). These examples illustrate the overall trends which took place after Fourier's death, namely: the growing hope of phalansterians that technical devices would contribute to better living conditions (Jarrige 2016, 35–6). In the broader picture, this shows how socialists in France during this period got rid of their early fears vis-à-vis technical innovations and began to perceive them as guarantors of progress. Indeed, descriptions of phalansteries from the second half of the 1840s are full of technical innovations such as central heating and steam engines, which were to improve living standards.

Simultaneously with jettisoning their hesitancy related to technological progress, Fourier's followers decided to abandon the most awkward components of his thought and focussed instead mostly on its associationist aspect. In this regard, phalanstery transformed into the concept of palace was becoming, to a growing extent, a flagship for the entire social movement – phalansterism. This path was certainly supported wholeheartedly by Considerant and Godin – two figures who had a decisive impact on the evolution of the concept of the social palace in mid-19th-century France. The former popularized it as a symbol, while the latter made it a model for cooperative enterprises and for workers' housing estates, which were characteristic of the second half of the 19th century. The subsequent failures of Fourierists' attempts to establish a successful social palace prompted them to reevaluate their goals and methods, and Considerant was the first to make serious efforts in this direction. His crucial contribution was to concretize Fourier's thoughts and to ground them in a more solid theoretical base. In this way, phalansterism attained the status of a social theory.

Considerant's task was ambitious and difficult, because Fourier's thought in most aspects was not fully elaborated. Thus, drawing inferences from Fourier's scattered reflections, Considerant strove to create a full-blown theory out of the original idea of a phalanstery. He managed to present such a theory first in his *Considérations sociales sur l'architectonique* (1834), and several years later in *Destinée sociale* (1837). The latter work was epochal and republished numerous times as well as further modified by the author, though even its first edition contains the crucial elements of the theory of phalansterism. Similarly to Fourier, Considerant provided an insight into the existing, striking asymmetries in social life. He asserted that the current state of human civilisation resembled a big pile of ruins, and that the phalansterian movement could turn the debris into a palace (*La Phalange*, 10 juillet 1836). In the same way, Considerant declared that '[W]e will bring the palaces there, where the Civilisation [that is, the deplorable state of affairs in which humanity was stuck] created only huts made of mud and saliva.' (Considerant 1848, 53).

At the same time however, he did not limit himself to emphasising the defectiveness of the contemporary model of society. On the contrary, he tried to understand the actual relationships between architecture and ways of life, modes of production and social relations in certain historical epochs. To reach this goal, Considerant provided a historical insight into different human shelters: houses, flats, buildings and the specific roles they played in given societies. As a theoretician who coined the term 'social engineering' and defined it in a clearly positive way (Rignol 2008), the French thinker perceived architecture as a force able to modify the moulds of human existence. In his view, different stages of the development of humankind required different types of architecture, and the mayhem and filth of cities in the 19th century illustrated the defectiveness of the existing socio-political model, and could be overcome in the future harmonious society (Considerant 1848, 6–28). On the theoretical level, he was convinced that all matter is inert, and what is active and may shape it is a powerful human idea or a creative spirit, which may be freed only in phalansteries.

All these reflections also affected his vision of the successfully established social palace. Considerant stressed that there was no such thing as one overarching model of a phalanstery, because going global would make it necessary in each and every instance to adapt to local and regional conditions (including climate or land formations). In his view, a phalanstery was to encompass all the spheres of human activity, ensuring

for its inhabitants all the places and spaces necessary for different kinds of work, life, sleep and leisure. He likewise strongly believed in the above-mentioned creative spirit of the phalanstery's inhabitants, and for this reason he was convinced that their constructions would differ from each other concerning elements such as decoration of the facade and interior (Considerant 1848, 60). In other words, he openly encouraged phalansterians to experiment and he supported bottom-up creativity.

Indeed, the latter element was of high importance to him, because after the initial failures in Condé-sur-Vesgre, phalansterians focussed on theoretical and propagandist activities, temporarily abandoning attempts to immediately implement Fourier's ideas. Considerant even tried to prevent undertakings establishing a phalanstery, which he considered premature and which he feared would disperse the forces, attention and above all, the meagre financial resources needed to maintain the Paris office of the *Librairie phalanstérienne*, along with the books and newspapers it published. This is why he was disappointed in Arthur Young, an English businessman financially supporting the Paris phalansterians, who at some point invested all his financial resources into an unfortunate phalanstery in Cîteaux in 1841–1846 (Voet 2001). Outside of Paris, however, certain of Fourier's followers attempted to establish minor endeavours inspired by his thought, for instance: nurseries (Barrier 1847), orphanages (Aucaigne 1841, 260), boarding schools (Desmars 2010, 157), hospitals (Aucaigne 1841, 248) and hydrotherapy centres, often coupled with agricultural schools or other forms of work. It is worth noting that while these activities confirm the vividness of the movement and the attractiveness of the phalansterian banner, they were simultaneously far from Fourier's initial idea of a unitarian architecture, in which all those facilities could be situated under one roof.

All in all, while not abandoning their hopes and desires despite subsequent failures, the theorists of the phalansterian movement, such as Considerant, managed to coin a novel social theory. In doing so, they transformed the phalanstery into a new 'ism', turning it into a conceptual box in which one may discern complicated and divergent matters (Cuttica 2015). However, by adding this suffix they could rethink and synthesise all the apparently separate phenomena – such as architecture in the past, present social issues and dreams of luxury in the future – in a new way. These conceptual changes paved the way for calling on supporters to adopt bottom-up activities directed at changing the given reality. Such an ideologization led inescapably to polysemization, for along with the subsequent failures in establishing a model phalanstery, Fourier's followers made constant efforts at readapting it to changing realities.

MIGRATING PHALANSTERY

In this way, the concept of *palais sociale* – which once occupied the central place of the actual social movement and accompanying social theory – migrated within the phalansterian discourse, over time offering answers to an increasing number of issues. However, one may also discern its more palpable migrations in space. The literature concerning Fourierist colonies in the Americas is abundant (Cordillot 2013; Jennings 2017; Guarneri 1991; Güttler 1993), which well illustrates the transfer of the general idea to other parts of the globe. At the same time, in the winding road of evolution of the concept, one may also discern its migration from rural to industrial areas. Such a vision had already been forged in the 1840s, but its realization came true in the 1850s as a result of Godin's efforts.

Contrary to numerous phalansterians, Godin was neither an intellectual nor a merchant, but an artisan. He thus well understood the importance of technical innovations, as thanks to them he made his fortune. Generally, he represented the generation of Fourierists who turned the colourful doctrine into cooperativism, abandoning many of its most questionable elements (Desmars 2010). Among the experiences that influenced Godin, one may principally indicate his visit to Robert Owen's cotton mills in New Lanark. The factory was, in fact, a showcase for Owen's experimental social theories, which gained popularity during the epoch, even becoming a recognised tourist attraction with several thousands of visitors each year (La Phalange, 15 février 1838; Siméon 2017, 4). Another experience that touched Godin was the deep crisis that Fourierism (alongside other currents of early socialism) found itself in after 1848, when the wave of social struggles in Europe was finally crushed. Last but not least, he made an effort to rethink the failure of the Fourierist colony La Réunion, established in 1855 in Texas by Considerant and dissolved in 1857. This ill-fated endeavour failed owing to numerous shortcomings, among which the unfavourable climate in the region and the chaotic organisation of the colony came to the fore (Cordillot 2018, 118–33). All these experiments and experiences provoked Godin to reflect, blazing the trail for new re-articulations of the concept of the social palace (Lallement 2012).

The entrepreneur Godin stumbled upon the phalansterian idea for the first time in one of the local periodicals from Saint-Quentin, the main town in the region of his industrial activity. However, it was more likely that what spurred him to the actual realization of a new form of phalanstery were inspirations derived from the architectonic conceptions of Victor Calland, firstly announced as a *Palais de société* in his ephemeral journal *Revue du socialisme chrétien* (Calland 1850). Calland, along with Albert Lenoir, was interested in the rationality and potential advantages of the residential function of a phalanstery. Being professional architects, both experimented with communal housing and unitarian architecture, and eventually set up a joint-stock company to build the Palace of Families (Calland & Albert 1855), interestingly, putting aside the reference to society in the name of the structure. While retaining all the rational facilities of the phalanstery (including a common kitchen or dining and laundry rooms), the Palace of Families was devoid of a productive and social dimension. According to Calland's and Lenoir's conception, it was to be used only for inhabiting, and not for work or repose (although Godin included a theatre, and the inner courtyards were used for dance parties). Godin and Calland exchanged numerous letters (Godin 2011), and an architect was involved in designing the *Familistère* in Guise, but the cooperation was eventually broken off. Calland may therefore be seen as one more figure involved in the long process of transforming the idea of phalanstery from a coherent economic, social and architectural project into a cooperative 'housing machine', which contained slightly different functions and had a different social constitution. He is probably also the author of the innovation of three glazed courtyards, which in the *Familistère* served the function that Fourier had planned for the street-gallery (Baridon 2017, 14). From a conceptual point of view, it is important that he openly and consistently used the word *palace* (Calland 1850, 1853, 1858; Calland & Albert 1855).

Thus the overall idea of *Familistère* resulted from the accumulation of divergent experiences and reformulations of Fourier's initial idea. First and foremost, it was not to be a structure serving the purposes of all social classes, for in Godin's view the *Familistère* was supposed to become a workers' housing estate built right next to his factory in Guise. For this reason, contrary to earlier articulations of the social palace, Godin dubbed the structure more specifically as 'the palace of labour, that

is to say, the social palace of the future.’ (Godin 1871, 433–4). In this regard, he was in line with the era’s tendencies to provide workers with settlements close to their workplaces. Godin, however, criticised paternalistic estates such as the Cité Napoléon in Paris, calling them state subsidies to capitalists, who made much money from these allegedly philanthropic endeavours (Godin 1871, 156). He believed that the reform of architecture must be complementary with building on the foundations of freedom and independence (Godin 1871, 158) – which was guaranteed by the cooperative nature of the *Familistère*. The form of this non-standard workers’ housing estate resembled a simplified phalanstery, divided into three pavilions surrounding an interior courtyard open at the front. At the same time, not only the material form, but also the social system distinguished the *Familistère* from a workers’ housing estate. After his death in 1888, Godin handed over the entire factory at Guise to the workers and composed for them a complicated constitution containing the principles of the cooperative movement, thanks to which the cooperative housing estate survived until 1968, when it fell due to economic difficulties (Draperi 2010; Lallement 2009; dos Santos 2012).

The *Familistère* was able to become a prosperous endeavour because it was structurally coupled with a modern factory. Godin was conscious of the fact that the second half of the 19th century, with its growing industrial monopolies and oligopolies, was no longer a fortunate time for the prosperity of small artisan workshops. At that time, while modern industry could guarantee economic successes, progress and profit, it also profoundly transformed society, spawning new social classes with their specific demands. To address them, Godin, similarly to Considerant and numerous other phalansterians, abandoned the most unusual aspects of Fourier’s thought, such as obscure psychology with selection by character types or the rule of free love – aspects that threatened to eliminate the institution of family. The very name *Familistère* itself manifests this rupture, and as such, honours family values. Thus, despite preserving the original unitary architectural form, many social practices that were supposed to accompany the original social palace disappeared.

Nevertheless, there is a noticeable emphasis on the model of *architecture unitaire* in the workers’ housing estate in Guise. This model, which integrates multiple functions within a single architectural complex, was effectively put into practice. The associative potential of the unitary building distinguished it strongly from the more ‘individualistic’ workers’ housing estates, composed of tiny houses divided into a few apartments or terraced houses such as in Mulhouse from 1853 or Noisiel from 1874. Godin firmly underscored the importance of this difference (Godin 1871). In the ‘individualistic’ workers’ housing estates, each family could take care only of their tiny private garden and there was no space for a greater reunion, while the *Familisterians* had at their disposal – apart from the courtyards and the theatre – one sizeable communal garden. Moreover, this estate was different from the working-class districts of Paris in the first half of the 19th century, where houses were mixed with workshops in narrow streets (Gribaudo 2014, 182–9).

Godin’s *Familistère* thus appears to be a transformed model of a phalanstery, enriched with a set of new ideas, enlarging it with new contexts in a snowball fashion. The glazed courtyard with internal galleries is reminiscent of the Cité Napoléon in Paris, which was based, amongst others, on Henry Roberts’ treatise *The Dwellings of the Laboring Classes* (Roberts 1850) – a work that Godin knew and directly quoted in his *Solutions sociales* (Bruant 2011; Godin 1871, 161). In the typical ‘*cité ouvrière*’ of the French Second Empire, not only did the architecture remind their inhabitants of a prison (with glazed courtyards as one of the distinguishing features of the 19th-

century panoptic-style prisons⁷), but also the regime of a daily schedule, with the main gate closing at 10 p.m. (Harvey 2003, 195).

Last but not least, Godin recast the concept, moving it from the rural landscape into the industrial one. Therefore, while the very first sketches of a phalanstery resembled the classic manor complex (palace and outbuildings), the *Familistère* in Guise became a specific factory complex, with a palatial-style workers communal hotel, service complex and factory situated in the neighbourhood. In this way, the phalanstery in its new form was no longer to serve the entire society, but was specifically dedicated to industrial workers, preserving their necessities and habits as well, such as a desire to live in a private, spacious apartment, in architectural order; outside of both peculiar utopian rules and strict regulations controlling their daily life.

CONTINUATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The conceptual evolution of ‘social palace’ did not end with Godin’s initiative. The concept influenced, among others, rather epigonic philanthropists’ realisations in France (Marconnet, Toletti & Ladoux 2011; Söderström 1997). In the 20th century, one may discern the intellectual affinity between phalansterism and modern architecture, which manifests itself as mushrooming blocks of flats. Indeed, the father of modern architecture, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, better known as Le Corbusier, was familiar with Fourier’s works, as evidenced by his quotations in, for example, *Manière de penser l’urbanisme* (Le Corbusier 1963, 87). As Peter Serenyi argues, Le Corbusier was inspired chiefly by Fourier’s architectural and anthropological views (Serenyi 1967). Le Corbusier undertook an ambitious endeavour to harmonize private and public places in mass constructions to provide light, air and sanitary facilities for all inhabitants. However, contrary to the efforts (and dreams) of the 19th-century phalansterians, the multi-story and multi-apartment buildings were built mostly in modern, loosely structured cities. Le Corbusier also followed Fourier insofar as the anthropological principle of human character is concerned (Serenyi 1967, 279). In fact, the father of architectural modernism did not use the name ‘palace’ to dub his flagship projects, such as the famous *Unité d’habitation* in Marseille, yet he implemented the assumptions of the concept as developed by the phalansterians. This demonstrates once more that concepts are not closely related to specific words and can function outside of their original lexical forms. The concept of social palace, together with its subsequent rearticulations, became not only a token of a future better society, but also spawned an accompanying philosophical system, in which the relationship between what is abstract and what is material is espoused in a novel way. This suggests that those who effectuated the evolution of the concept were conscious of the meaning of their intellectual activities, although in the broader perspective they were trapped into superior transformations ongoing in France at that time. This is the reason why the history of the concept of the social palace mirrors well the changing socio-economic landscape in France, which at the epoch in question had entered into capitalism.

The history of the concept of social palace in 19th-century France seems to reveal certain particularities which may be seen as more or less typical of concepts stretched between materiality and semiotics. First of all, in its history – full of reformulations, discontinuities and frictions – one may discern reciprocal interdependencies within the feedback loop between words, images and actual realisations. They were stretched

7 The plans of the Cité Napoléon buildings were created by Marie-Gabriel Veugny, whose source of inspiration was the above-quoted book by Henry Roberts (Bruant 2011, 26).

in two temporal directions. Indeed, failed attempts at establishing a phalanstery in the present affected the visions of the future, while at the same time evolutions of the forward-moving projects influenced the daily practices of the movement. This is why over time, when the very political doctrine of Fourierism became more and more narrow and concrete, the concept of phalanstery was, on the contrary, achieving a multidimensional sense, turning into a new ideological ism.

What is more, in examining this conceptual history, it is worth paying particular attention to the way in which a material object may become a socio-political concept, able to re-establish reality. It seems that this is possible only when the status of a given object is questioned, challenged and modified by external factors. Palaces, due to the pending crisis facing monarchic and noble authorities, both actual and symbolic, resulting from social unrest, were pushed into new circumstances. However, none of such processes are automatic. On the contrary, material objects may turn into concepts only when they can address certain existing issues. A palace, being for centuries the symbol of might, sovereignty and luxury, was useful when new generations of thinkers attempted to rethink the socio-political vacuum existing after the failure of the *ancien régime*. Therefore, on the basis of the case of *palais sociale*, one may discern the Janus-faced character of the concepts situated in between the material and ideational realms. From this angle, concepts might act as vehicles through which buildings can travel. They serve as bags in which one can ‘pack’ architecture, which is immobile as such, and ‘unpack’ its variety of meanings at the destination (Knapowski 2023, 11; Whyte 2006). For this reason, so too Fourier’s original conceptions may, in conducive circumstances, look like reliable remedies to tackle existing issues and reconcile asymmetries. However, their universality is illusive, and being reused in new contexts, material-cum-semiotic objects lose such a universal character, which is well illustrated by the case of *Familistère*, which served the industrial workers and not the entire society.

Last but not least, in expressing their political premises using palaces, phalansterians managed to express their desire for a better, more harmonious world. Their utopia, being based on an object such as a social palace, to a great extent called for imitation of the first successfully established experimental colony, while at the same time neglected the struggle for political reforms and political power. In this way, the phalansterians escaped the danger of establishing a dogmatic authority imposing given socio-political goals from above. One could dub it naïvete; however, it seems rather to reflect the ambitions of phalansterians and their conviction that bottom-up creations, readaptations and imitations may be more effective than top-down political reforms. In the end, this bottom-up perspective may be seen as one of few constant elements in the twisting history of the concept of the social palace.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This work was supported by the National Science Centre, Poland, under Grant no. 2020/36/C/HS3/00037.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Piotr Kuligowski  orcid.org/0000-0002-6251-0482

Tadeusz Manteuffel Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

Stanisław Knapowski  orcid.org/0000-0002-3730-8688

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland

Kuligowski and
Knapowski

*Redescriptions: Political
Thought, Conceptual
History and Feminist
Theory*

DOI: 10.33134/rds.415

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Knapowski
*Redescriptions: Political
Thought, Conceptual
History and Feminist
Theory*
DOI: 10.33134/rds.415

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kuligowski, Piotr and
Stanisław Knapowski.
2024. "Communicating
Utopia: Facets of the
Concept of Social Palace
in 19th-Century France."
*Redescriptions: Political
Thought, Conceptual
History and Feminist Theory*
27(2):143–163. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.415>

Submitted: 17 October
2023

Accepted: 22 October 2024

Published: 04 December
2024

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*Redescriptions: Political
Thought, Conceptual
History and Feminist Theory*
is a peer-reviewed open
access journal published by
Helsinki University Press.