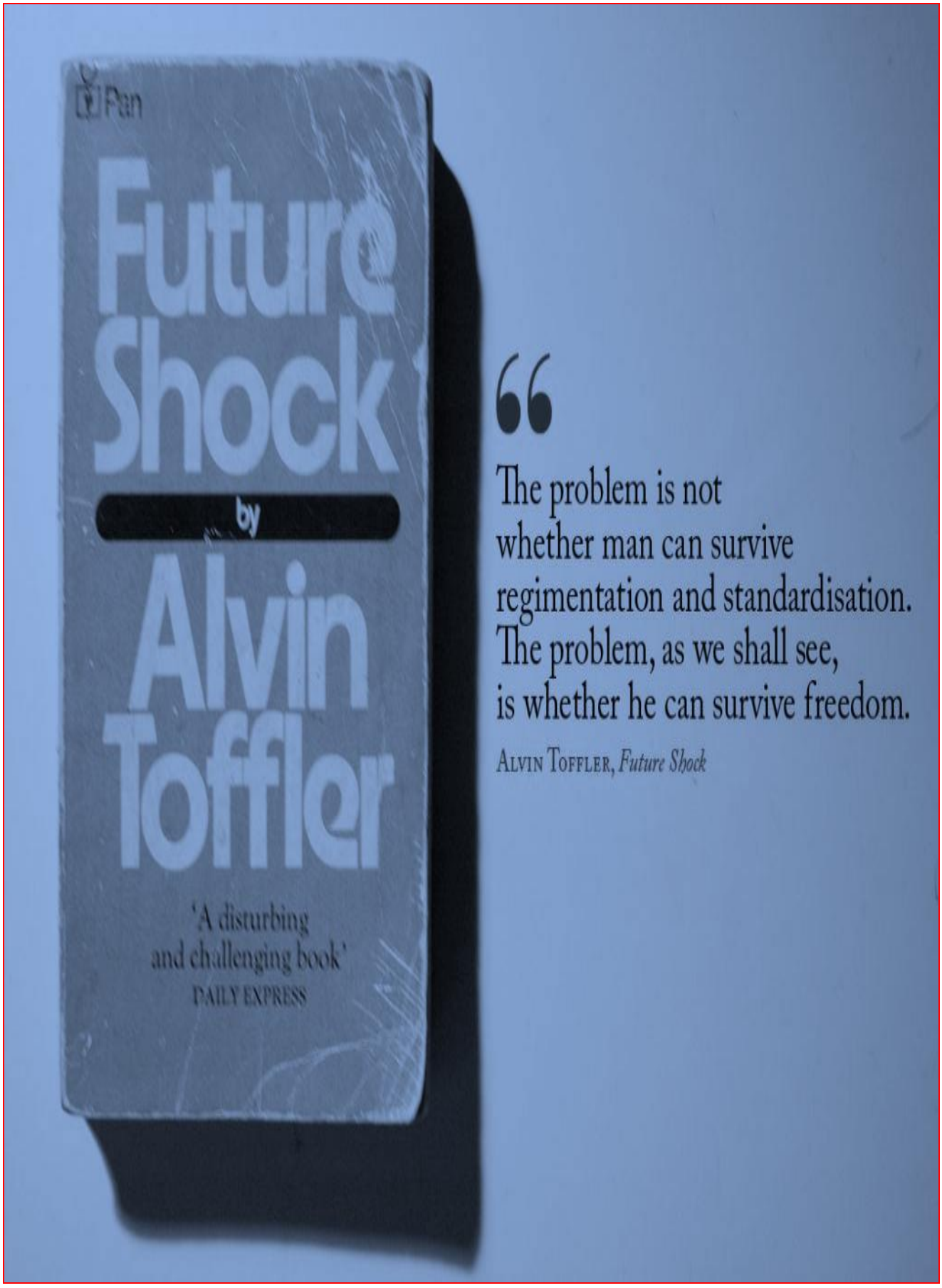

Future Shock

Unit: IV

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INTRODUCTION

This is a book about what happens to people when they are overwhelmed by change. It is about the ways in which we adapt—or fail to adapt—to the future. Much has been written about the future. Yet, for the most part, books about the world to come sound a harsh metallic note. These pages, by contrast, concern themselves with the "soft" or human side of tomorrow. Moreover, they concern themselves with the steps by which we are likely to reach tomorrow. They deal with common, everyday matters—the products we buy and discard, the places we leave behind, the corporations we inhabit, the people who pass at an ever faster clip through our lives. The future of friendship and family life is probed. Strange new subcultures and life styles are investigated, along with an array of other subjects from politics and playgrounds to skydiving and sex.

What joins all these—in the book as in life—is the roaring current of change, a current so powerful today that it overturns institutions, shifts our values and shrivels our roots.

Change is the process by which the future invades our lives, and it is important to look at it closely, not merely from the grand perspectives of history, but also from the vantage point of the living, breathing individuals who experience it.

In 1965, in an article in Horizon, I coined the term **"future shock"** to describe the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time. Fascinated by this concept, I spent the next five years visiting scores of universities, research centers, laboratories, and government agencies, reading countless articles and scientific papers and interviewing literally hundreds of experts on different aspects of change, coping behavior, and the future. Nobel prizewinners, hippies, psychiatrists, physicians, businessmen, professional futurists, philosophers, and educators gave voice to their concern over change, their anxieties about adaptation, and their fears about the future. ***I came away from this experience with two disturbing convictions.***

First, it became clear that future shock is no longer a distantly potential danger, but a real sickness from which increasingly large numbers already suffer. It is the disease of change.

Second, I gradually came to be appalled by how little is actually known about adaptivity, either by those who call for and create vast changes in our society, or by those who supposedly prepare us to cope with those changes.

I not only found no ready answers to such questions, but discovered that we lack even an adequate theory of adaptation, without which it is extremely unlikely that we will ever find the answers.

The purpose of this book, therefore, is to help us come to terms with the future—to help us cope more effectively with both personal and social change by deepening our understanding of how men respond to it. Toward this end, it puts forward a broad new theory of adaptation.

The concept of future shock—and the theory of adaptation that derives from it—strongly suggests that there must be balance, not merely between rates of change in different sectors, but between the pace of environmental change and the limited pace of human response. For future shock grows out of the increasing lag between the two.

THINGS: THE THROW-AWAY SOCIETY

"Barbie," a twelve-inch plastic teen-ager, is the best-known and best-selling doll in history. Since its introduction in 1959, the Barbie doll population of the world has grown to 12,000,000—more than the human population of Los Angeles or London or Paris. Little girls adore Barbie because she is highly realistic and eminently dress-up able.

Mattel, Inc., makers of Barbie, also sells a complete wardrobe for her, including clothes for ordinary daytime wear, clothes for formal party wear, clothes for swimming and skiing. Recently Mattel announced a new improved Barbie doll. The new version has a slimmer figure, "real" eyelashes, and a twist-and-turn waist that makes her more humanoid than ever. Moreover, Mattel announced that, for the first time, any young lady wishing to purchase a new Barbie would receive a trade-in allowance for her old one.

What Mattel did not announce was that by trading in her old doll for a technologically improved model, the little girl of today, citizen of tomorrow's super-industrial world, would learn a fundamental lesson about the new society: that man's relationships with things are increasingly temporary.

The ocean of man-made physical objects that surrounds us is set within a larger ocean of natural objects. But increasingly, it is the technologically produced environment that matters for the individual. The texture of plastic or concrete, the iridescent glisten of an automobile under a streetlight, the staggering vision of a cityscape seen from the window of a jet—these are the intimate realities of his existence.

Man-made things enter into and color his consciousness. Their number is expanding with explosive force, both absolutely and relative to the natural environment. This will be even more true in super-industrial society than it is today. Anti-materialists tend to deride the importance of "things." Yet things are highly significant, not merely because of their functional utility, but also because of their psychological impact. We develop relationships with things. Things affect our sense of continuity or discontinuity.

They play a role in the structure of situations and the foreshortening of our relationships with things accelerates the pace of life. Moreover, our attitudes toward things reflect basic value judgments. Nothing could be more dramatic than the difference between the new breed of little girls who cheerfully turn in their Barbies for the new improved model and those who, like their mothers and grandmothers before them, clutch lingeringly and lovingly to the same doll until it disintegrates from sheer age**. In this difference lies the contrast between past and future, between societies based on permanence and the new, fast-forming society based on transience**.

THE PAPER WEDDING GOWN

That man-thing relationships are growing more and more temporary may be illustrated by examining the culture surrounding the little girl who trades in her doll. This child soon learns that Barbie dolls are by **no means the only physical objects that pass into and out of her young life at a rapid clip**. Diapers, bibs, paper napkins, Kleenex, towels, non-returnable soda bottles—all are used up quickly in her home and ruthlessly eliminated. Corn muffins come in baking tins that are thrown away after one use. Spinach is encased in plastic sacks that can be dropped into a pan of boiling water for heating, and then thrown away. TV dinners are cooked and often served on throw-away trays.

Her home is a large processing machine through which objects flow, entering and leaving, at a faster and faster rate of speed. From birth on, she is inextricably embedded in a throw-away culture. The idea of using a product once or for a brief period and then replacing it, runs counter to the grain of societies or individuals steeped in a heritage of poverty.

Not long ago Uriel Rone, a market researcher for the French advertising agency Publicis, told me*: "The French housewife is not used to disposable products. She likes to keep things, even old things, rather than throw them away. We represented one company that wanted to introduce a kind of plastic throw-away curtain. We did a marketing study for them and found the resistance too strong."*

This resistance, however, is dying all over the developed world. Thus a writer, **Edward Maze**, has pointed out that many Americans visiting Sweden in the early 1950's **were astounded by its**

cleanliness. *"We were almost awed by the fact that there were no beer and soft drink bottles by the roadsides, as, much to our shame, there were in America. But by the 1960's, lo and behold, bottles were suddenly blooming along Swedish highways ... What happened? Sweden had become a buy, use and throw-away society, following the American pattern."*

In **Japan** today **throw-away tissues** are so universal that cloth handkerchiefs are regarded as old fashioned, not to say unsanitary. In **England** for six pence one may buy a "**Dentamatic throw-away toothbrush"** which comes already coated with toothpaste for its one-time use. And even in **France**, **disposable cigarette lighters** are common place.

From cardboard milk containers to the rockets that power space vehicles, products created for short-term or one-time use are becoming more numerous and crucial to our way of life. The recent introduction of paper and quasi-paper clothing carried the trend toward disposability a step further.

Fashionable boutiques and working-class clothing stores have sprouted whole departments devoted to gaily colored and imaginatively designed paper apparel. Fashion magazines display breathtakingly sumptuous gowns, coats, pajamas, even wedding dresses made of paper. The bride pictured in one of these wears a long white train of lace-like paper that, the caption writer notes, will make "great kitchen curtains" after the ceremony.

Paper clothes are particularly suitable for children. Writes one fashion expert: "Little girls will soon be able to spill ice cream, draw pictures and make cutouts on their clothes while their mothers smile benignly at their creativity." And for adults who want to express their own

creativity, there is even a "paint-yourself-dress" complete with brushes. Price: $2.00. **Price, of course, is a critical factor behind the paper explosion**.

Thus a department store features simple A-line dresses made of what it calls "devil-may-care cellulose fiber and nylon." At $1.29 each, it is almost cheaper for the consumer to buy and discard a new one than to send an ordinary dress to the cleaners. Soon it will be. But more than economics is involved, for the extension of the throw-away culture has important psychological consequences. We develop a throw-away mentality to match our throw-away products.

This mentality produces, among other things, a set of radically altered values with respect to property. But the spread of disposability through the society also implies decreased durations in man-thing relationships.

Instead of being linked with a single object over a relatively long span of time, we are linked for brief periods with the succession of objects that supplant it.

THE MISSING SUPERMARKET

The shift toward transience is even manifest in architecture—precisely that part of the physical environment that in the past contributed mostly heavily to man's sense of permanence. The child who trades in her Barbie doll cannot but also recognize the transience of buildings and other large structures that surround her. We raze landmarks. We tear down whole streets and cities and put new ones up at a mind-numbing rate.

"The average age of dwellings has steadily declined," writes E. F. Carter of the Stanford Research Institute, "from being virtually infinite in the days of caves to ... approximately a hundred years for houses built in United States colonial days, to about forty years at present." And Michael Wood, an English writer comments: The American "... made his world yesterday, and he knows exactly how fragile, how shifting it is. Buildings in New York literally disappear overnight, and the face of a city can change completely in a year."

Novelist Louis Auchincloss complains angrily that "The horror of living in New York is living in a city without a history ... All eight of my great-grandparents lived in the city ... and only one of the houses they lived in ... is still standing. That's what I mean by the vanishing past." Less patrician New Yorkers, whose ancestors landed in America more recently, arriving there from the barrios of Puerto Rico, the villages of Eastern Europe or the plantations of the South, might voice their feelings quite differently.

Yet the "Vanishing past" is a real phenomenon, and it is likely to become far more widespread, engulfing even many of the history-drenched cities of Europe. Buckminster Fuller, the designer-

philosopher, once described New York as a "continual evolutionary process of evacuations, demolitions, removals, temporarily vacant lots, new installations and repeat. This process is identical in principle to the annual rotation of crops in farm acreage—plowing, planting the new seed, harvesting, plowing under, and putting in another type of crop ... Most people look upon the building operations blocking New York's streets ... as temporary annoyances, soon to disappear in a static peace.

They still think of permanence as normal, a hangover from the Newtonian view of the universe. But those who have lived in and with New York since the beginning of the century have literally experienced living with Einsteinian relativity." That children, in fact, internalize this "Einsteinian relativity" was brought home to me forcibly by a personal experience. Some time ago my wife sent my daughter, then twelve, to a supermarket a few blocks from our Manhattan apartment. Our little girl had been there only once or twice before. Half an hour later she returned perplexed. "It must have been torn down," she said, "I couldn't find it." It hadn't been.

New to the neighborhood, Karen had merely looked on the wrong block. But she is a child of the Age of Transience, and her immediate assumption—that the building had been razed and replaced—was a natural one for a twelve-year-old growing up in the United States at this time. Such an idea would probably never have occurred to a child faced with a similar predicament even half a century ago. The physical environment was far more durable, our links with it less transient.

THE ECONOMICS OF IMPERMANENCE

In the past, permanence was the ideal. Whether engaged in handcrafting a pair of boots or in constructing a cathedral, all man's creative and productive energies went toward maximizing the durability of the product. Man built to last. He had to. As long as the society around him was relatively unchanging each object had clearly defined functions, and economic logic dictated the policy of permanence. Even if they had to be repaired now and then, the boots that cost fifty dollars and lasted ten years were less expensive than those that cost ten dollars and lasted only a year.

As the general rate of change in society accelerates, however, the economics of permanence are—and must be—replaced by the economics of transience.

First, advancing technology tends to lower the costs of manufacture much more rapidly than the costs of repair work. The one is automated; the other remains largely a handcraft operation. This means that it often becomes cheaper to replace than to repair. It is economically sensible to build cheap, unrepairable, throwaway objects, even though they may not last as long as repairable objects.

Second, advancing technology makes it possible to improve the object as time goes by. The second generation computer is better than the first, and the third is better than the second. Since we can anticipate further technological advance, more improvements coming at ever shorter intervals, it often makes hard economic sense to build for the short term rather than the long.

David Lewis, an architect and city planner with Urban Design Associates in Pittsburgh, tells of certain apartment houses in Miami that are torn down after only ten years of existence. Improved air conditioning systems in newer buildings hurt the rentability of these "old" buildings. All things considered, it becomes cheaper to tear down the ten-year-old buildings than to modify them.

Third, as change accelerates and reaches into more and more remote corners of the society, uncertainty about future needs increases. Recognizing the inevitability of change, but unsure as to the demands it will impose on us, we hesitate to commit large resources for rigidly fixed objects intended to serve unchanging purposes. Avoiding commitment to fixed forms and functions, we build for short-term use or, alternatively, attempt to make the product itself adaptable. We "play it cool" technologically.

The rise of disposability—the spread of the throw-away culture—is a response to these powerful pressures. As change accelerates and complexities multiply, we can expect to see further extensions of the principle of disposability, further curtailment of man's relationships with things.

THE PORTABLE PLAYGROUND

There are other responses besides disposability that also lead to the same psychological effect. For example, we are now witnessing the wholesale creation of objects designed to serve a series of short-term purposes instead of a single one. These are not throw-away items. They are usually too big and expensive to discard. But they are so constructed that they may be dismantled, if necessary, and relocated after each use.

Thus the board of education of Los Angeles has decided that fully 25 percent of that city's classrooms will, in the future, be temporary structures that can be moved around as needed. Every major United States school district today uses some temporary classrooms. More are on the way. Indeed, temporary classrooms are to the school construction industry what paper dresses are to the clothing industry—a foretaste of the future.

The purpose of temporary classrooms is to help school systems cope with rapidly shifting population densities. But temporary classrooms, like disposable clothes, imply man thing relationships of shorter duration than in the past. Thus the temporary classroom teaches something even in the absence of a teacher.

Like the Barbie doll, it provides the child with a vivid lesson in the impermanence of her surroundings. No sooner does the child internalize a thorough knowledge of the classroom—the way it fits into the surrounding architecture, the way the desks feel on a hot day, the way sound reverberates in it, all the subtle smells and textures that individualize any structure and lend it

reality—than the structure itself may be physically removed from her environment to serve other children in another place. Nor are mobile classrooms a purely American phenomenon.

In England, architect Cedric Price has designed what he calls a "thinkbelt"—an entirely mobile university intended to serve 20,000 students in North Staffordshire. "It will," he says, "rely on temporary buildings rather than permanent ones." It will make "great use of mobile and variable physical enclosures"—classrooms, for example, built inside railroad cars so that they may be shunted anywhere along the four-mile campus.

Geodesic domes to house expositions, air-inflated plastic bubbles for use as command posts or construction headquarters, a whole array of pick-up-and-move temporary structures are flowing from the drawing boards of engineers and architects. In New York City, the Department of Parks has decided to build twelve "portable playgrounds"—small, temporary playgrounds to be installed on vacant city lots until other uses are found for the land, at which time the playgrounds can be dismounted and moved elsewhere.

There was a time when a playground was a reasonably permanent fixture in a neighborhood, when one's children and even, perhaps, one's children's children might, each in their turn, experience it in roughly the same way. Super-industrial playgrounds, however, refuse to stay put. They are temporary by design.

THE MODULAR "FUN PALACE"

The reduction in the duration of man-thing relationships brought about by the proliferation of throw-away items and temporary structures is further intensified by the rapid spread of "modularism."

Modularism may be defined as the attempt to lend whole structures greater permanence at the cost of making their sub-structures less permanent. Thus Cedric Price's "thinkbelt" plan proposes that faculty and student apartments consist of pressed-steel modules that can be hoisted by crane and plugged into building frames.

The frames become the only relatively permanent parts of the structure. The apartment modules can be shifted around as needed, or even, in theory, completely discarded and replaced. It needs to be emphasized here that the distinction between disposability and mobility is, from the point of view of the duration of relationships, a thin one.

Even when modules are not discarded, but merely rearranged, the result is a new configuration, a new entity. It is as if one physical structure had, in reality, been discarded and a new one created, even though some or all of the components remain the same. Even many supposedly "permanent" buildings today are constructed on a modular plan so that interior walls and partitions may be shifted at will to form new enclosure patterns inside.

The mobile partition, indeed, might well serve as a symbol of the transient society. One scarcely ever enters a large office today without tripping over a crew of workers busily moving desks and rearranging interior space by reorganizing the partitions. In Sweden a new triumph of

modularism has recently been achieved: in a model apartment house in Uppsala all walls and closets are movable. The tenant needs only a screwdriver to transform his living space completely, to create, in effect, a new apartment.

Sometimes, however, modularity is directly combined with disposability. The simple, ubiquitous ballpoint pen provides an example. The original goose-quill pen had a long life expectancy. Barring accident, it lasted a long time and could be resharpened (i.e., repaired) from time to time to extend its life.

The fountain pen, however, was a great technological advance because it gave the user mobility. It provided a writing tool that carried its own inkwell, thus vastly increasing its range of usefulness. The invention of the ball point consolidated and extended this advance. It provided a pen that carried its own ink supply, but that, in addition, was so cheap it could be thrown away when empty.

The first truly disposable pen-and-ink combination had been created. We have, however, not yet outgrown the psychological attitudes that accompany scarcity. Thus there are still many people today who feel a twinge of guilt at discarding even a spent ball-point pen. The response of the pen industry to this psychological reality was the creation of a ball-point pen built on the modular principle—an outer frame that the user could keep, and an inner ink module or cartridge that he could throw away and replace. By making the ink cartridge expendable, the whole structure is given extended life at the expense of the sub-structure.

There are, however, more parts than wholes. And whether he is shifting them around to create new wholes or discarding and replacing them, the user experiences a more rapid through-put of things through his life, a generalized decline in the average duration of his relationship with things. The result is a new fluidity, mobility and transience.

One of the most extreme examples of architecture designed to embody these principles was the plan put forward by the English theatrical producer Joan Littlewood with the help of Frank Newby, a structural engineer, Gordon Pask, a systems consultant, and Cedric Price, the "thinkbelt" architect. Miss Littlewood wanted a theater in which versatility might be maximized, in which she might present anything from an ordinary play to a political rally, from a performance of dance to a wrestling match—preferably all at the same time. She wanted, as the critic Reyner Banham has put it, a "zone of total probability."

The result was a fantastic plan for "The Fun Palace," otherwise known as the "First Giant Space Mobile in the World." The plan calls not for a multi-purpose building, but for what is, in effect, a larger than life-sized Erector Set, a collection of modular parts that can be hung together in an almost infinite variety of ways. More or less "permanent" vertical towers house various services—such as toilets and electronic control units—and are topped by gantry cranes that lift the modules into position and assemble them to form any temporary configuration desired.

After an evening's entertainment, the cranes come out, disassemble the auditoria, exhibition halls and restaurants, and store them away. Here is the way Reyner Banham describes it: "... the Fun Palace is a piece of ten-year expendable urban equipment ... Day by day this giant neo-Futurist machine will stir and reshuffle its movable parts—walls and floors, ramps and walks, steerable

escalators, seating and roofing, stages and movie screens, lighting and sound systems—sometimes with only a small part walled in, but with the public poking about the exposed walks and stairs, pressing buttons to make things happen themselves."This, when it happens (and it is on the cards that it will, somewhere, soon) will be indeterminacy raised to a new power: no permanent monumental interior space or heroic silhouette against the sky will survive for posterity ... For the only permanently visible elements of the Fun Palace will be the 'life-support' structure on which the transient architecture will be parasitic."

Proponents of what has become known as "plug-in" or "clip-on" architecture have designed whole cities based on the idea of "transient architecture." Extending the concepts on which the Fun Palace plan is based, they propose the construction of different types of modules which would be assigned different life expectancies. Thus the core of a "building" might be engineered to last twenty-five years, while the plug-in room modules are built to last only three years. Letting their imaginations roam still further, they have conjured up mobile skyscrapers that rest not on fixed foundations but on gigantic "ground effect" machines or hovercraft.

The ultimate is an entire urban agglomeration freed of fixed position, floating on a cushion of air, powered by nuclear energy, and changing its inner shape even more rapidly than New York does today. Whether or not precisely these visions become reality, the fact is that society is moving in this direction. The extension of the throw-away culture, the creation of more and more temporary structures, the spread of modularism are proceeding apace, and they all conspire toward the same psychological end: the ephemeralization of man's links with the things that surround him.

THE RENTAL REVOLUTION

Still another development is drastically altering the man-thing nexus: the rental revolution. The spread of rentalism, a characteristic of societies rocketing toward super-industrialism, is intimately connected with all the tendencies described above.

The link between Hertz cars, disposable diapers, and Joan Littlewoods's "Fun Palace," may seem obscure at first glance, but closer inspection reveals strong inner similarities. For rentalism, too, intensifies transience.

During the depression, when millions were jobless and homeless, the yearning for a home of one's own was one of the most powerful economic motivations in capitalist societies. In the United States today the desire for home ownership is still strong, but ever since the end of World War II the percentage of new housing devoted to rental apartments has been soaring.

As late as 1955 apartments accounted for only 8 percent of new housing starts. By 1961 it reached 24 percent. By 1969, for the first time in the United States, more building permits were being issued for apartment construction than for private homes. Apartment living, for a variety of reasons, is "in." It is particularly in among young people who, in the words of MIT Professor Burnham Kelly, want "minimum-involvement housing." Minimum involvement is precisely what the user of a throw-away product gets for his money. It is also what temporary structures and modular components foster.

Commitments to apartments are, almost by definition, shorter term commitments than those made by a homeowner to his home. The trend toward residential renting thus underscores the

tendency toward ever-briefer relationships with the physical environment.* More striking than this, however, has been the recent upsurge of rental activity in fields in which it was all but unknown in the past.

David Riesman has written: "People are fond of their cars; they like to talk about them—something that comes out very clearly in interviews—but their affection for any one in particular rarely reaches enough intensity to become long-term." This is reflected in the fact that the average car owner in the United States keeps his automobile only three and a half years; many of the more affluent trade in their automobiles every year or two.

In turn, this accounts for the existence of a twenty billion-dollar used car business in the United States. It was the automotive industry that first succeeded in destroying the traditional notion that a major purchase had to be a permanent commitment. The annual model changeover, high-powered advertising, backed by the industry's willingness to offer trade-in allowances, made the purchase of a new (or new used) car a relatively frequent occurrence in the life of the average American male.

In effect, it shortened the interval between purchases, thereby shortening the duration of the relationship between an owner and any one vehicle. In recent years, however, a spectacular new force has emerged to challenge many of the most deeply ingrained patterns of the automotive industry. This is the auto rental business.

Today in the United States millions of motorists rent automobiles from time to time for periods of a few hours up to several months. Many big-city dwellers, especially in New York where

parking is a nightmare, refuse to own a car, preferring to rent one for weekend trips to the country, or even for in-town trips that are inconvenient by public transit. Autos today can be rented with a minimum of red tape at almost any US airport, railroad station or hotel.

Moreover, Americans have carried the rental habit abroad with them. Nearly half a million of them rent cars while overseas each year. This figure is expected to rise to nearly a million by 1975, and the big American rental companies, operating now in some fifty countries around the globe, are beginning to run into foreign competitors.

Simultaneously, European motorists are beginning to emulate the Americans. A cartoon in Paris Match shows a creature from outer space standing next to his flying saucer and asking a gendarme where he can rent an auto. The idea is catching on. The rise of auto rentals, meanwhile, has been paralleled by the emergence in the United States of a new kind of general store—one which sells nothing but rents everything.

There are now some 9000 such stores in the United States with an annual rental volume on the order of one billion dollars and a growth rate of from 10 to 20 percent per year. Virtually 50 percent of these stores were not in business five years ago. Today, there is scarcely a product that cannot be rented, from ladders and lawn equipment to mink coats and originals Rouaults.

In Los Angeles, rental firms provide live shrubs and trees for real estate developers who wish to landscape model homes temporarily. "Plants enhance—rent living plants," says the sign on the side of a truck in San Francisco.

In Philadelphia one may rent shirts. Elsewhere, Americans now rent everything from gowns, crutches, jewels, TV sets, camping equipment, air conditioners, wheelchairs, linens, skis, tape recorders, champagne fountains, and silverware.

A West Coast men's club rented a human skeleton for a demonstration, and an ad in the Wall Street Journal even urges: "Rent-a-Cow." Not long ago the Swedish women's magazine Svensk Damtidning ran a five-part series about the world of 1985. Among other things, it suggested that by then "we will sleep in built-in sleeping furniture with buttons for when we eat breakfast or read, or else we will rent a bed at the same place that we rent the table and the paintings and the washing machine."

Impatient Americans are not waiting for 1985. Indeed, one of the most significant aspects of the booming rental business is the rise of furniture rental. Some manufacturers and many rental firms will now furnish entire small apartments for as little as twenty to fifty dollars per month, down to the drapes, rugs and ashtrays. "You arrive in town in the morning," says one airline stewardess, "and by evening you've got a swinging pad." Says a Canadian transferred to New York: "It's new, it's colorful, and I don't have to worry about carting it all over the world when I'm transferred." William James once wrote that "lives based on having are less free than lives based either on doing or on being."

The rise of rentalism is a move away from lives based on having and it reflects the increase in doing and being. If the people of the future live faster than the people of the past, they must also be far more flexible. They are like broken field runners— and it is hard to sidestep a tackle when loaded down with possessions. They want the advantage of affluence and the latest that

technology has to offer, but not the responsibility that has, until now, accompanied the accumulation of possessions. They recognize that to survive among the uncertainties of rapid change they must learn to travel light.

Whatever its broader effects, however, rentalism shortens still further the duration of the relationships between man and the things that he uses. This is made clear by asking a simple question: How many cars—rented, borrowed or owned—pass through the hands of the average American male in a lifetime? The answer for car owners might be in the range of twenty to fifty. For active car renters, however, the figure might run as high as 200 or more.

While the buyer's average relationship with a particular vehicle extends over many months or years, the renter's average link with any one particular car is extremely short-lived. Renting has the net effect of multiplying the number of people with successive relationships to the same object, and thus reducing, on average, the duration of such relationships. When we extend this principle to a very wide range of products, it becomes clear that the rise of rentalism parallels and reinforces the impact of throw-away items, temporary structures and modularism. *

It might be noted that millions of American home "owners," having purchased a home with a down payment of 10 percent or less, are actually no more than surrogate owners for banks and other lending institutions. For these families, the monthly check to the bank is no different from the rent check to the landlord. Their ownership is essentially metaphorical, and since they lack a strong financial stake in their property, they also frequently lack the homeowner's strong psychological commitment to it.