

implants and disease.

Two FDA advisory panels had pointed out the absence of scientific evidence, but the FDA chief ignored their advice. Since then, studies have begun to pile up (including a major one of nearly 90,000 nurses) showing, in Angell's words, "that any risk of connective tissue [or autoimmune] disease from implants is so small that it has been impossible to detect."

Why did Kessler impose the ban? Angell says that, like some feminists, he "seemed disdainful of women who wanted breast implants for purely cosmetic reasons," and so may have held the devices to "an impossibly high standard: since there are no benefits, there should be no risks." But before the FDA ban, surveys indicated that the vast majority of women who had had breast implants were pleased with the results, notes Angell.

The effect of the accumulating scientific evidence on the legal situation is unclear. Dow Corning had agreed to pay half of the \$4.25 billion class-action settlement, but subsequently went bankrupt, and the settlement collapsed. Dow Chemical Company never made, tested, or sold the breast implants—but because it was one of Dow Corning's parent firms, it is a defendant in more than 13,000 breast-implant lawsuits. In October, a Nevada jury ordered Dow Chemical to pay \$14.1 million in damages to a breast-implant plaintiff.

The consequences of all the litigation set off by the FDA ban may be far-reaching, the authors say. If fearful manufacturers of other medical devices, with or without silicone, pull out of the business, warns Fumento, a science journalist, "the future health of millions of Americans" may be threatened.

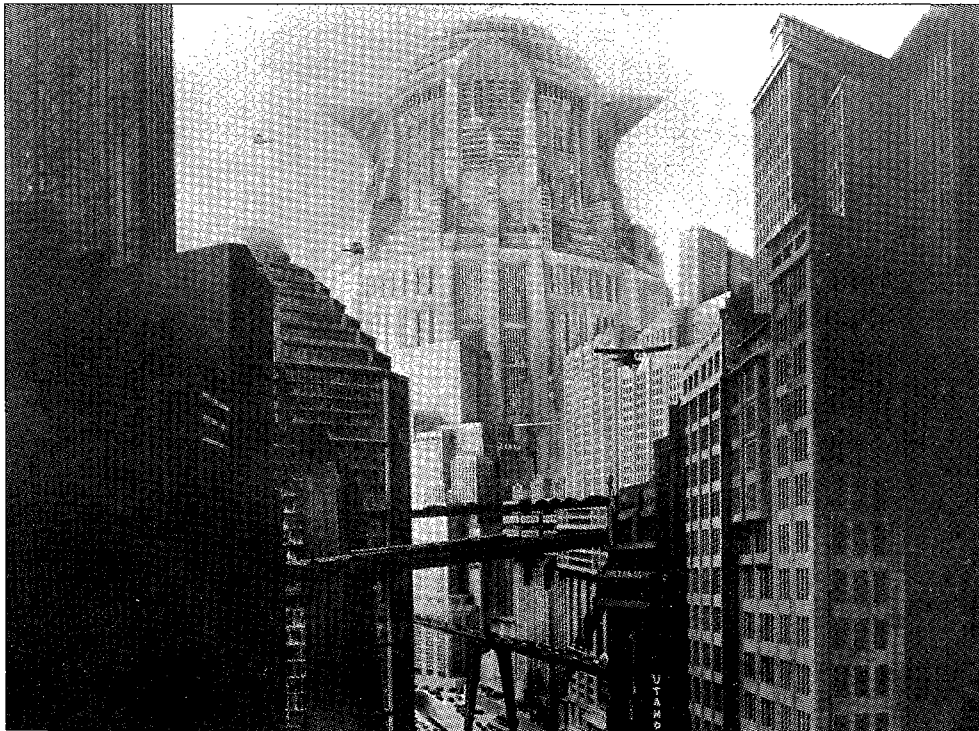
Toward the High-Tech City

"Bring Back the Urban Visionaries" by David Gelernter, in *City Journal* (Summer 1995),
Manhattan Institute, 52 Vanderbilt Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

In 1940, an express train could speed passengers from New Haven, Connecticut, to Grand Central Station in Manhattan in 90 minutes. In the 55 years since then, not only has no progress been made in reducing that time, but there is no express train—and the

trip takes an hour and 41 minutes. Gelernter, a computer scientist at Yale University, blames such failures to advance on the absence of urban visionaries.

Technology could improve transportation and otherwise make city life better, Gelernter



A vision of the city in the year 2000, from Fritz Lang's Metropolis, a 1926 German film.

ter contends, but imaginative proposals are not forthcoming, chiefly because "today's technology visionaries know little and care less about the mundane problems of daily urban life." To an earlier generation of thinkers, including Norman Bel Geddes and others, these were central concerns. To contemporary thinkers such as George Gilder, George Keyworth, and Esther Dyson, using powerful computers and the information highway to telecommute and teleconference is more important than mere physical transportation.

To improve city life, Gelernter argues, visionaries should be tackling such everyday problems as how to cut the New Haven-to-Grand Central commute to an hour or less.

The conventional wisdom is that better tracks and fancy new trains, perhaps magnetic-levitation models, are needed. Gelernter instead proposes paving over the tracks and running buses on the right-of-way. "Suppose they ran on two-lane busroads, the outer lane for high-speed express travel and the inner for station stops." Not only would such buses be faster, they could—with the aid of central computers that swiftly responded to requests from riders—be scheduled more flexibly.

Such ideas might or might not prove economically practical, Gelernter argues, but they certainly are worth considering—and that, he says, is precisely the problem: they are not even being put on the public agenda.

ARTS & LETTERS

Abstract Art's Mystical Heart

"Mondrian & Mysticism: 'My Long Search Is Over'" by Hilton Kramer, in *The New Criterion* (Sept. 1995), 850 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10019.

Art historians who revere abstract art tend to tiptoe around the role that mysticism played in its genesis. Occult beliefs were so common among abstract art's pioneers, such as the Dutch painter Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), that it was "a basic component of their vision," argues Kramer, editor of the *New Criterion*.

Mondrian and the Russians Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944) and Kazimir Malevich (1878–1935) were very heavily influenced by theosophy. The mystical philosophy's high priestess, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891), claimed that the conflict between science and religion could be resolved by applying evolutionary theory to the "spiritual" aspects of existence. The soul was born and reborn countless times until it achieved earthly perfection.

Mondrian was a working artist before he turned to the occult, Kramer notes, "but it was as a dedicated theosophist that he created his first abstractions." The influence is clear in the notebooks he began to keep in 1914. "To approach the spiritual in art," Mondrian wrote, "one will make as little use as possible of reality, because reality is opposed to the spiritual. Thus the use of elementary forms is logically accounted for. These forms being abstract, we find ourselves in the presence of an abstract art."

The influential avant-garde movement called De Stijl (the Style) that Mondrian and other artists founded in 1917 was more than an art movement, Kramer points out. "Its ambition was to redesign the world by imposing straight lines, primary colors, and geometric form—and thus an ideal of impersonal order and rationality—upon the production of every man-made object essential to the modern human environment. Rejecting tradition, it envisioned the rebirth of the world as a kind of technological Eden from which all trace of individualism and the conflicts it generates would be permanently banished."

Where did these ambitious ideas come from? Chiefly, says Kramer, from the Dutch writer and mystic M. H. J. Schoenmaekers. Kramer says that Schoenmaekers even "specified the nature of the forms (rectilinear structures of the horizontal and the vertical) and the colors (the primaries: red, yellow, and blue) to be used in this artistic quest for the absolute."

The evolution of art was part of the larger evolution of the spirit, Mondrian and the others in the De Stijl group believed. In their abstract art, they were determined to get ever closer to what the mystic Schoenmaekers described as an "earthly heaven."