

Nathalie Régnier-Kagan (ed.)

The Metropolitan Tower

A Pedagogical
Research Initiated
by Michel Kagan



PARK BOOKS



The Metropolitan Tower

To Jean-Louis Cohen,
Nikos Ktenas,
Gwenaël Clément,
Edith Girard,
too soon gone.

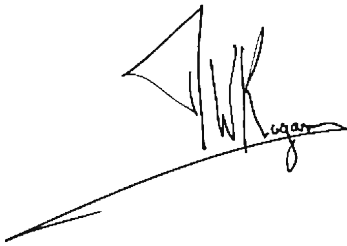
The Metropolitan Tower

**A Pedagogical Research
Initiated by Michel Kagan**

Edited by Nathalie Régnier-Kagan

Translated by Christian Hubert

D'un continent à un autre,
d'un individu à un autre individu, les idées
voyagent, sont modifiées par les médias, réinterprétées
par de nouveaux protagonistes, elles sont en constant
devenir. C'est en cela que l'on est moderne, dans
la mise en doute des vérités, dans cette mouvance
critique de l'expérience vécue et de celles à venir.



From one continent to another, from one individual to the other, ideas do travel, they are modified by the media, reinterpreted by new protagonists; they are in constant becoming. This is where we are modern, in the questioning of truths, in this critical movement of lived experience and the one to come.

— M.W.K.

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Foreword

Pierre-Alain Croset

This polyphonic book demonstrates the extent to which Michel Kagan's architectural work, thought and teaching continue to play a major guiding and reference role. It is based on a pedagogical experiment that he initiated in the 1980s across the Atlantic at the very start of his teaching career, and which he developed and refined during his years as a professor at the Belleville School of Architecture. The book's title—*The Metropolitan Tower* — should be interpreted not just as the title of a project exercise, but as a much broader notion that could be used to describe Michel Kagan's obsession with a profoundly urban and modern form of spatiality, at the service of the European city. His constant experimentation with new forms of 'vertical composition' of architecture goes well beyond purely typological research into the architecture of "towers". No longer seen as an isolated, self-referential object, the 'metropolitan tower' creates a critical tension with the urban context, introducing a parcel of density that enriches the spatial experience of the city interpreted as an opportunity for three-dimensional composition. In this respect, it would be fair to speak of a veritable strategy of urban acupuncture that reaches into the deepest stratifications of the city, all the way up to the sky, to link human beings together.

Originally published in French by Éditions Recherches in 2012, this book is now available in an English edition that has been extensively revised and expanded with new essays that demonstrate the extent to which Michel Kagan's architectural and urban thinking remains relevant today. Many architect-teachers continue to draw inspiration from his pedagogical research, in particular the group of teachers who continued this exercise at the École de Paris Val-de-Seine, from 2013 to 2023: Nathalie Régnier-Kagan, Jean Mas, Pierre-André Comte, Laurent Beaudouin and Jean-Michel Veillerot. A complete reading of all the texts shows how the rich network of relationships between architects, teachers and schools on both sides of the Atlantic, in Europe and around the world, in the cities visited by Michel Kagan and Nathalie Régnier-Kagan (New York, Montreal, Geneva, Turin, Milan, Seoul, and of course Paris), could develop a positive and creative energy around the

question of Towers, to improve their knowledge, and the ability of future architects to master their monumental and human scale.

To conclude this brief foreword, I would like to pay tribute to Jean-Louis Cohen, a mutual friend who, better than anyone else, found the right words to accurately describe the exceptional coherence between Michel Kagan's design practice and his pedagogical ethic:

*"The coherence between the strategies developed as designer and teacher, an attainment that remains an inaccessible objective for most architects, is something that he has built up over twenty-five years through the intertwining of a constructive imagination and a didactic discourse. Rare are the successful examples of such a combined approach that incorporates design methods, the underlying and justifying theories and the operations used to transmit the ideas, without reducing them to a simplifying catechism."*¹

It's in this spirit of "theoretical practice" that we need to approach this teaching, which allows free experimentation but is always rooted in reality.

1. Jean-Louis Cohen, "W for Wunderkind", in *Kagan Architectures 1986–2016*, ed. Nathalie Régnier-Kagan (Bruxelles-Paris: AAM-Ante Prima Editions, 2016), 14.

Architecture to Come

Édith Girard

This book is a tribute to the immense contribution of Michel Kagan, architect and professor, to the emergence of a future architecture, in which elegance and virtuosity are essential to make the earth more beautiful.

Through its formal qualities as a plastic object in resonance with its context, “The Metropolitan Tower” has the capacity to transform the surrounding space as a shining example of the vertical continuity of the public space. It makes a place through its porous habitability and the way it captures light.

Do the exemplary didactic qualities of this project exercise initiated by Michel Kagan constitute a pedagogical utopia? Asking the student to achieve the impossible, to confront the contradictions inherent in the subject, leads him to surpass his or herself, to resolve simultaneously conditions of use, the formal dimension, the relationship to the urban landscape, and structural logic.

From the menhir to the “Endless Tower”, vertical architecture is monolithic. In its singularity, the tower marks an anchoring spot, and as a finished totem, it becomes the center of the horizon, avid of the ground, marking the space of our lives. To reach the sky, which is not humanity’s natural habitat, housing and offices vie for maximum compactness in the face of mutant climates, that are even hostile to moving too far from the ground. In its solitude, the Skyscraper is intoxicated by its useful surface, makes the most of the extent of its base and sets out to conquer the sky, to be seen from afar and to reveal from above the territory that is offered to it. The texts gathered here should enlighten students, architects and critics on the question of vertical architecture and overcome the current debate, too simplistic, opposing the object to space, image to use.

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Credits

The Shadow of the Vertical

fig. 1., 2. and 3. Student photos, École d'architecture de Paris-Belleville.
fig. 4. Drawing Michel Kagan, Michel Kagan and Laurent Salomon diploma.
fig. 5., 6. Photos © J. M. Monthiers for M. Kagan Architecture & Ass.
fig. 7. Student photos, École d'architecture de Genève, projects of Corrado Alberi, Isabelle Claden, Liliana Collazos, François Dulon, Frédéric Floquet, Alain Gonin, François Guex, Astrid Hajrullahu, Éric Hugel, Ali Imanof, Annamaria Larghi, Gezim Pacarizi, Cinzia Rapetto, Raphaëlle Sestranetz.
fig. 8. Project photo Sandra Parvu, EAG.
fig. 9. to 13. Student photos, École d'architecture de Lille.
fig. 14. Notes and sketch, M. Kagan.
fig. 15 to 19. Students photos and drawings, Ensa PVS.

High-Rise Form in the Continuity of the City

Courtesy of Amy Gill, SOM Journal.
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fig. 4. Photo © Thomas Airviews. Source: S. Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, Harvard University Press, 1962.
fig. 5. Source: H. Ferriss, *The Metropolis of Tomorrow*, Ives Washburn, 1929.
fig. 6., 9., 10., 11. and 12. Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Archive.
fig. 13. and 14. Drawing Jacques Lambert in *L'Illustration*, 1922, n° 4. Source: G. Fanelli and R. Gargiani, *Auguste Perret*, Laterza, 1991.
fig. 15. Source: S. Maffioletti (dir.), BBPR, Zanichelli Ed., 1994.
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European Towers versus High-Rise Buildings

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Mental Structure, Constructive Structure

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A Tall Building in an Urban Zone: the Cimbéton Competition

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Designing an Innovative Structure for a Parisian Tower

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Open Dialogue

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The Standing City

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The New York Years 1981-1986

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On Verticality in the Korean Project

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Theoretical Practice

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At a time when the densification of the city is the order of the day, the metropolitan tower is becoming a recurring theme in the European city. In contrast to the individual expressionism of the isolated object, Michel Kagan proposes the idea of an 'architecture of relationship' based on taking into account the context, considering that 'place is the primary material of urban planning, without which the city does not exist'.

The metropolitan tower is an educational theme initiated by Michel Kagan, architect and professor, during ten years of teaching design at the Paris-Belleville School of Architecture. He has proposed an exercise with exemplary didactic qualities, nourished by his years of teaching in New York, Geneva and Lille, and his international affinities.

Originally published in French by Éditions Recherches, the English edition has been extensively revised and expanded in the light of new research carried out at the Paris Val de Seine School of Architecture by a group of teachers led by Nathalie Régnier Kagan.

The authors of this book, practising architects and teachers, shared key moments in this theoretical reflection. The texts gathered here form a nuanced picture to enlighten students, architects and critics on the question of vertical architecture.

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