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Experimental Discourse and Fourierist Settlements in the 1840s and 1850s

Abstract: This article examines Fourierism as a socio-epistemic program, specifically focusing on its experimental discourse encapsulated in Fourier's concept of the *phalanstère*. The study is systematically divided into three main sections, where the initial section introduces Fourier's social philosophy, elucidating its theoretical foundations and characterizing Fourierism as an experimental initiative merging theory and practice. The subsequent section delves into the establishment and evolution of the experimental discourse among Fourier's followers between the 1830s and the 1870s. The emphasis here is on the dynamic interplay between conceptual frameworks and practical applications. The third section, finally, explores the colonial dimension of Fourierism by using a case study of the Union agricole du Sig in Algeria to demonstrate the intersection of Fourier's experimental model with the complexities of colonial realities. The article concludes by underscoring the enduring legacy of Fourier's experimental practices and their significant impact on social organization and theory, particularly within the cooperative movement. The experimental discourse in Fourier's model is highlighted as a pivotal aspect, thereby emphasizing its role and legacy in shaping and redefining social norms and structures.

Keywords: Fourierism, Algeria, 1840s, Colonialism, Settlements, Intellectual Socialism, Early Social Science Ideas

Introduction

Since the 1960s, industrialized nations have deliberated on an experimental approach to social reform instigated by social scientists. This approach involves testing solutions to major societal problems in smaller, controlled environments and refining them based on the results.[1] Interestingly, this experimental approach does not exclusively exist in modern knowledge-based societies; it also resonates

1 For example, see D. T. Campbell, "Reforms as Experiments," *American Psychologist* 24, no. 4 (1969): 409–429; Noortje Marres, "The Experiment in Living," in *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*, eds. Celia Lury and Nina Wakeford (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 76–95.

with historical social reform endeavors in the early nineteenth century. Emerging as a response to the social question and the dual revolution, these movements, termed "early socialism," combined reform initiatives, political activism, social theory, and the creation of alternative communal and work structures, known as "associations." Although varied in form, these associations aimed to build prototypes of future societal models on a small scale.[2]

This article investigates Fourierist associations as experimental spaces encompassing physical, material, and discursive aspects. Originating in France in the 1830s, Fourierism gained prominence through mobilization campaigns, disputes, and highly mediatized debates in relation to the theory and practice of Charles Fourier's (1772–1837) socio-scientific project to establish an alternative social order. Fourier designed his associations as alternative communities to test and evaluate the principles of an emerging social order on a micro-scale, thus emphasizing the integration of theory and practice. Initial isolated realizations in these communities in the 1830s paved the way for a serial phenomenon in subsequent decades, particularly during the 1840s and 1850s, with over 40 communities established globally by adherents and former affiliates of the movement. Following Fourier's death in 1837, these community experiments were primarily carried out outside Europe, particularly in recently conquered territories or during colonial wars. Fourierists or ex-Fourierists founded more than 40 settlements around the world, including in Latin America, North Africa, New Caledonia, and approximately 30 settlements in the United States.[3] Flourishing during the July Monarchy, Fourierism gained political relevance during the 1848 revolution and persisted in various forms during the Second Empire.[4]

This process of establishing a new social order involved a thorough evaluation and reflection of the implementations in order to enhance and refine future model associations, examining both unachieved objectives and interim successes while considering environmental, human, and societal factors as explanatory variables.[5] It entailed an evolving discourse that transitioned toward the integration of practi-

2 *S'unir, travailler, résister. Les associations ouvrières au XIXe siècle*, eds. Carole Christen, Caroline Fayolle, and Samuel Hayat (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2021); Pamela Pilbeam, *French Socialists before Marx: Workers, Women and the Social Question in France* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

3 Otohiko Okugawa, "Annotated List of Communal and Utopian Societies, 1787–1919," in *Dictionary of American Communal and Utopian History*, ed. Robert S. Fogarty (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1980), 173–233.

4 Bernard Desmars, *Militants de l'utopie? Les fouriéristes dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2010).

5 On the processual character of experiments, see Anne-Sophie Reichert's article on Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's rhythm school in the garden city of Hellerau in this special section.

cal experiences and insights into the essential conditions to achieve a successful comprehensive or partial application of Fourierist principles. This iterative and reflective approach imbued Fourierist pursuits with a distinct "experimental" quality and positioned them as central topics for historical investigations into the generation and development of social knowledge in the early nineteenth century.[6]

The primary objective of this article is to demonstrate how this discourse of experimentation shaped the identity of the Fourierist movement. Hence, the article invokes the concept of the "laboratory" as conceptualized by Bruno Latour to examine the erasure of traditional boundaries between theory and practice in the experimental context represented by Fourierist settlements. Latour's interpretation of the "laboratory" deconstructs the traditional boundary between scientific and societal realms by conceiving it as a domain in which scientists actively reconfigure both scientific and social environments through experimental procedures.[7] Crucially, the laboratory transcends its function as a mere site of scientific inquiry. It emerges as a means through which science exerts influence upon the external world, including the social sphere. This influence is exerted by transposing actors (understood as acting entities creating associations) into the laboratory setting, regardless of whether these actors are microscopic organisms or social collectives.[8] This conceptualization implies that the laboratory not only serves as a space for scientific investigation but also as a nexus wherein scientific pursuits and social dynamics converge and interact, mutually shaping and being shaped by the broader societal context.

Based on these observations, this article systematically examines the experimental discourse within Fourierism, thus departing from metaphorical references to "experiments" and "laboratories" commonly found in existing research.[9] More importantly, the article challenges the prevalent classification of these initiatives as "utopias." Using the term "utopia" to describe these early social projects is fraught with complexities. First, it emphasizes the primacy of ideas and obscures the notable distinction that these "utopias" were, in fact, executed in practice, meaning that they diverged from the conventional utopian designs. Second, the historical deployment of "utopia" as a polemical and political epithet, something that Fourierists and other social thinkers actively defended themselves against in their writings,

6 Anne Kwaschik, "Gesellschaftswissen als Zukunftshandeln," *Francia* 44 (2017): 189–211.

7 Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 23–27.

8 Bruno Latour, "Give Me a Laboratory and I Will Raise the World," in *Science Observed*, eds. Karin D. Knorr-Cetina and Michael Mulkay (London and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983), 141–170, 158.

9 For example, see Annick Osmont, "L'exportation des modèles utopiques Outre-Mer au XIXe siècle. La foi expérimentale des disciples," *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine* 42 (1989): 19–26.

adds further intricacy.[10] Third, the persistent use of "utopia" perpetuates Marx and Engels' dichotomy between utopian and scientific socialism,[11] which thereby obscures the scientific claims embedded within Fourierism. Paradoxically, however, Marx and Engels, while delegitimizing the Fourierist communal projects as the mere "experimental realization of [their social] Utopias," inadvertently acknowledged the experimental nature of these initiatives.[12]

This article builds on established research fields by basing its analysis on scholarly studies of Fourierist communal practices.[13] To gain a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of this discourse, it also delves into the extensive historiography of ideas encompassing both scientific and "utopian" domains.[14] In its exploration of experimental practices, the article draws attention to a commonly neglected facet of Fourierism to highlight the infrastructural impact of colonialism.[15] It underscores that a significant number of the Fourierist experiments were not merely facilitated by colonial conditions but were intricately shaped by them, often unfolding in territories having recently been colonized or undergoing colonial warfare. This perspective elucidates the complex interplay between colonial dynamics and the practical realization of Fourierist ideas, thereby adding a key dimension when it comes to understanding this social movement.

To summarize, this article offers a critical reevaluation of Fourierist associations by positing them as experiments. It is structured into three distinct sections:

10 Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 38. For a conceptual-historical classification, see Lucian Hölscher, "Utopie," in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 6, eds. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1990), 733–788.

11 Gregory Claeys, "Early Socialism as Intellectual History," *History of European Ideas* 40, no. 7 (2014): 893–904, 893–894; Roger Paden, "Marx's Critique of the Utopian Socialists," *Utopian Studies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 67–91.

12 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York and London: Norton, 1980 [1848]), 469–500, 499.

13 Michel Lallement, "Living in Utopia in the 19th Century: A Comparison of France and the United States," *Comparative Sociology* 20 (2021): 45–69; Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Henri Desroche, *La société-festive. Du fouriérisme écrit aux fouriérismes pratiqués* (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 1975).

14 Piotr Kuligowski and Quentin Schwanck, "Between Science and Utopia: Physical and Astronomical Notions within French and Polish Fourierism," *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques* 48, no. 2 (2022): 1–17, accessed February 15, 2024, doi: 10.3167/hrrh.2022.480201; John Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology After Napoleon* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

15 Michèle Madonna-Desbazeille, "L'Union agricole d'Afrique: Une communauté fouriériste à Saint-Denis du Sig, Algérie," *Cahiers Charles Fourier* 16 (2005): 51–63, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.charlesfourier.fr/spip.php?article284.

(1) an introduction to Fourier's social philosophy; (2) an analysis of the development and progression of the experimental discourse among his adherents between the 1830s and the 1870s; and (3) a discussion on the influence of colonialism in this context with a specific focus on the case study of Union agricole du Sig in Algeria. Each section contributes to a nuanced understanding of Fourierism as a social movement distinguished by its experimental discourse. This comprehensive examination of the Fourierist project not only illustrates the dynamics of social experimentation but also contributes significantly to our understanding of how early social theories were tested, adapted, and understood in their contemporary contexts.

Fourier's Experimental Approach

Fourier's social reform initiative, conceptualized as a novel social science program, was underpinned by a theoretical approach applying Cartesian doubt to the concept of civilization. Fourier challenged both the prevailing social order and the state of social philosophy, contending that the political and modern sciences of his era had not only lost their credibility but also made social issues even worse.[16] He argued for a radical rethinking of society:

> Doubt must therefore be applied to Civilisation: we must doubt its necessity, its excellence and its permanence. These are problems which the philosophers do not dare to consider because if they started being suspicious of Civilisation, they would risk invalidating their theories, which are all linked to Civilisation and which will all fall with it as soon as a better social order is found to replace it.[17]

Fourier's vision advocated integrating society and science while asserting that "social well-being" ("le bien social") could only be achieved by establishing a yet-to-be-developed science of society.[18] This understanding assigned a specific role to this science of society, which would enable examining current societal circumstances and developing future directions. By mediating between temporal horizons, this science merges lived realities and future aspirations, thereby clarifying, interpreting, and actively influencing transformative developments. Embracing this perspective marked a post-revolutionary rationality that fostered the devel-

16 Charles Fourier, *The Theory of the Four Movements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996 [1808]), 7.
17 Ibid., 8.
18 Ibid.

opment of social science ideas and foresight in social planning. Fourier's model was in stark contrast to the concept of "revolution" as a sharp turn, instead favoring a gradual, evolutionary approach over abrupt, revolutionary change. Disillusioned by the violence of revolutionary politics, notably the Lyon insurrection and the siege of the Convention in 1793, Fourier embarked on a more harmonious and stable path in his social reform project.

In his words, Fourier "discovered" the laws of attraction and associated them with experimental practices. He designed a plan centered on the concept of "natural association" where individual desires harmonize with the common good. Thus, his concept of passionate attraction, aligned with Saint-Simon's law of universal gravitation, posited human society under the governance of "social physics."[19] Fourier's design involved individuals voluntarily associating, organizing communities according to their own laws, needs, and desires, and uniting resources for the benefit of all. Members of the association would be "driven to work by competition, self-esteem and other stimuli compatible with self-interest."[20] He envisioned autonomous social units as the nucleus of his broader theory of social reorganization and social science. The "trial cantons," representing small profit-sharing social units, served as experimental models embodying the associative principle.

The cantons were themselves produced by a *phalange*, which was Fourier's term for an "association"[21] or communal group, and arranged around a social palace called *phalanstère* (phalanstery). While Fourier never produced a finalized design, his drawings of a three-winged Versailles-like building with courtyards became the accepted version of the social palace. Fourier's luxurious edifice constituted the local and experimental center of the envisioned community, while the "trial cantons" served as a model for any form of social (re)organization.[22]

In this setting, Fourierist experiments involved an intense analysis of a specific, limited segment of the community. Fourierists viewed this approach as a

19 John F. Beecher, *Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1987), 172–173. Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), known as Henri de Saint-Simon, was a French sociopolitical theorist and is regarded as one of the three "founding figures of utopian socialism," alongside Charles Fourier and Robert Owen. For an overview of differences and similarities, see Antoine Picon, "Utopian Socialism and Social Science," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 7, The Modern Social Sciences, eds. Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 71–82.

20 Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 11.

21 Ibid., 318.

22 Victor Considérant, *Destinée sociale* (Paris: Libraires du Palais-Royal, 1834), vol. 1, 482; see Laurent Baridon, "The Fourierist Phalanstère: Building a New Society through Architecture?" in *The Companions to the History of Architecture*, vol. 3, Nineteenth-Century Architecture, eds. Martin Bressani and Christina Contandriopoulos (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 1–20.

method used to investigate and ultimately address social issues. However, contemporary critics of social experiments made a metaphorical comparison to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. They likened social experiments in general to the manner in which the king of Brobdingnag manipulated Gulliver, meticulously scrutinized him, and altered his position to observe different perspectives. They rejected the practicality of experiments in the social sphere and opposed the concept of manipulating a segment of the community, comparing it to "taking a portion of the community in our hand, as the king of Brobdingnag took Gulliver, viewing it from different aspects, and placing it in various positions, to solve social problems."[23]

Fourier developed his social theory within the naturalist framework of his time. In this context, the semantics of "discovery" and "invention" were part of empirical legitimization patterns. Using an empiricist language, he based his social science on established natural science laws: "I soon saw that the laws of passionate attraction agreed in all respects with the laws of material attraction as explained by Newton and Leibniz, and that there was *a unified system of movement for the spiritual and the material world.*"[24] Fourier expanded Newton's idea that every object in the universe attracts any other to the social sphere with a varying force,[25] thereby centering on the very ties and relationships between individuals that make something like society visible and explorable. By introducing his social theory as a succession and extension of Newton, he pursued a twofold goal. First, he intended to distinguish himself from other social projects by claiming a scientific understanding of association (against the "frauds" of his time, including the manufacturer and socialist Robert Owen (1771–1858) whose "associations" in some sense competed with those of Fourier).[26] Second, he sought to lay the foundations of a new science rooted in experimental practice, one that proved "useful to the social body."[27]

23 George Cornwall Lewis, *A Treatise on the Methods of Observation and Reasoning in Politics*, 2 vols. (London: Parker, 1852), vol. 1, 165. See Robert Brown, "Artificial Experiments on Society: Comte, G.C. Lewis and Mill," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1997): 74–97.

24 Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 16 (emphasis is original).

25 Charles Fourier, *Le nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire, ou invention du procédé d'industrie attrayante et naturelle distribuée en séries passionnées* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel (2001 [1829]), 31; Kuligowski and Schwanck, "Between Science and Utopia."

26 On Owenite settlements, see Claudia Roesch's article in this special section.

27 Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 8.

Fourier in *La théorie des quatre movements* (*The Theory of the Four Movements*) outlined the idea of the universe as a "pan-social" set of dependencies including nature and society within a quasi-cosmological system:[28]

> The animal, organic and material movements are co-ordinated with the social movement, which is primary. This means that the properties of an animal, a vegetable, a mineral, or even a vortex of stars represent an effect of the human passions in the social order, and that everything, from atoms to stars, is an image of the properties of the human passions.[29]

Fourier claimed that the social was not a specific domain of reality but a principle of connections and thus not to be separated from other forms of connections and attraction. Similar to Saint-Simon, his concept of society is thus more akin to a "sociology of association" as developed by Bruno Latour[30] than to August Comte (1798–1857) or Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), who conceived of the subject of social research as a structured whole of social relations, a "methodological entity."[31]

The use of "experiments" to establish a social science field also stemmed from the naturalist framework and was prevalent in numerous social science theories in the early nineteenth century.[32] Dating back to Bacon, experiments have played a pivotal role in advancing scientific knowledge and served as a recognized method for acquiring and validating insights in the natural sciences.[33] In the eighteenth century, "experiment" and "observation" became focal points in broader intellectual discourse catalyzed by the prize question posed by the Dutch Société des Sciences in Haarlem in 1769: "En quoi consiste l'art d'observer?" ("What does the art of

28 Volny Fages, "Ordonner le monde, changer la société. Les systèmes cosmologiques des socialistes du premier XIXe siècle," *Romantisme* 159, no. 1 (2013): 123–134, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.cairn.info/revue-romantisme-2013-1-page-123.htm.

29 Fourier, *Theory of the Four Movements*, 38.

30 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9.

31 Bruno Latour and Vincent A. Lépinay, *The Science of Passionate Interests: An Introduction to Gabriel Tarde's Economic Anthropology* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2009), 84.

32 Anne Kwaschik, "Zwischen Wissenschaft und Utopie. Zur Plausibilisierung von Gesellschaftswissen im frühen 19. Jahrhundert," in *Vorläufige Gewissheiten. Plausibilität als soziokulturelle Praxis*, eds. Thomas Kirsch and Christina Wald (Bielefeld: Transcript Publishing, 2024), 97–114; Brown, "Artificial Experiments."

33 A relevant aspect in this context is the research field on the history and epistemology of experimentation established by Rheinberger and his research group at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. See, for instance, Hans Jörg Rheinberger, "History of Science and the Practices of Experiment," *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 23, no. 1 (2001): 51–63.

observation consist of?").[34] Fourier's challenge to conventional knowledge paradigms—applying Cartesian doubt to societal structures—aimed to gain credibility for his theories through established scientific methodologies. He leveraged the epistemic authority of the natural sciences by invoking "observation" and "experiment" to legitimize and validate the social knowledge he proposed, akin to other social thinkers in their respective thinking. Unlike other social theorists such as John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) or Comte, who remained at the theoretical level, Fourier and his followers pursued actual experiments with social relations, thereby reconfiguring them into new arrangements. By conceptualizing the "social movement" as a research subject grounded in Newtonian principles, Fourierists placed social practice at the forefront of reflection.

Transformation and Reflection: Fourierist Implementations

Beginning in the early 1830s, the Fourierist movement focused on conceptualizing and establishing a model associative community. Victor Considérant (1808–1893), an engineer and army captain, played a pivotal role in propagating and reinterpreting Fourier's ideas, particularly after his affiliation with the École Polytechnique at Paris in 1826. Over the years, he increasingly adopted the "self-appointed role as a guardian of Fourierist orthodoxy."[35] The Saint-Simonians assimilating Fourier's social theory in the aftermath of the July Revolution facilitated the formation of a Fourierist "school." Considérant strategically presented the experimental *phalange* as a practical, achievable, and scientifically grounded objective, thereby broadening the movement's appeal. This led to increased engagement in the form of organizing conferences, creating groups in numerous cities, and extending the movement's influence on an international scale.[36]

Fourierist activists engaged in practical tests of the associative model by establishing small, self-governed communities. These communities resided in specifically designated experimental spaces, deliberately and to a significant degree insulated from external influences (with arrangements for guests typically at the

34 Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lundbeck, eds., *Histories of Scientific Observation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011). All translations from French are mine unless otherwise stated.

35 Jonathan Beecher, *Victor Considérant and the Rise and Fall of French Romantic Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 124.

36 Pilbeam, *French Socialists*; Desmars, *Militants de l'utopie*.

periphery or in specifically designated accommodations).[37] While the overarching ambition of constructing a phalanstery provided a unifying and defining purpose for the movement, the challenges encountered during early implementations precipitated divergent views on the path forward. The initial trials, notably at Condé-sur-Vesgre (1832–1833) and Scăeni (1835–1836), located in the Wallachia region of the Habsburg Empire, which is now part of Romania, served as both prototypes and subjects of analytical study.[38]

The brief existence of Condé-sur-Vesgre significantly influenced the subsequent implementation process and led to a recalibration and resizing of later trials. The group's following venture, the Colonie sociétaire de Citeaux (1841–1844), notably did not adopt the term *phalange*. In this phase, Scottish writer Arthur Young (1810–1897) and Belgian feminist Zoé Gatti de Gamond (1806–1854) emerged as key figures.[39] However, their initiatives met with resistance from Considérant, who, as the head of the Ecole sociétaire, was committed to preserving the purity of Fourierist doctrine. Considérant believed that the premature and potentially unsuccessful realization of these social ideas could damage their reputation. Therefore, following Condé-sur-Vesgre, he argued for first securing widespread public support for Fourierist principles prior to their practical application, as he was concerned that hasty and incomplete implementations might compromise the credibility of this social theory.

This divergence regarding the timing of realizing projects spawned a significant conflict. Networks around the Polish revolutionary Jean Czynski and Gatti di Gamond opposed the orthodox stance and argued for the immediate establishment of colonies as a step toward globally spreading and evaluating Fourier's social science. They believed in initiating phalanxes, albeit incomplete, to demonstrate the viability of the concept, thereby effectively validating the theory through its practical application. Their perspectives were propagated through various publications and guidebooks, with their journals bearing significant names such as *Le premier phalanstère* (The First Phalanstery, 1841) and *Le nouveau monde* (The New World, 1839–1844).

As a result, there was a comprehensive reevaluation of the implementation strategy. The scope of the "essais" was reconsidered, focusing on "essais partiels" (partial trials). During the 1840s, the merits and drawbacks of these partial trials, in

37 Charles Fourier, *Théorie de l'unité universelle*, vol. 2 (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2001 [1822]), 346–351.

38 Beecher, *Considérant*, 118–121; Dan Berindei, "Le Phalanstère de Scaieni en Valachie," *Cahier Charles Fourier* 2 (1991): 69–80.

39 Thomas Voet, *La Colonie phalanstérienne de Cîteaux, 1841–1846: Les Fouriéristes aux champs* (Dijon: Editions de l'Université de Dijon, 2001).

terms of their role in paving the way for the ultimate realization, were vigorously debated in the Fourierist journal *La démocratie pacifique* (Peaceful Democracy, 1843–1851) under Considérant's editorship. The key concept revolved around conducting a partial experiment of the theory—initially applying it to a specific location—and making the subsequent phase of the implementation contingent on the outcomes of this partial trial: "If the theory were condemned by practice, we would move on to other trials."[40]

The political developments in France in 1848 raised expectations that Fourierism could become a cornerstone of the republic. Considérant, elected to the Constituent Assembly after 1848, leveraged his role as the head of the Ecole sociétaire to endorse the experimental approach as a political strategy. In his parliamentary speech in 1849, he asserted the necessity of numerous partial experiments and continuous modifications to achieve the establishment of a single *phalange.* Employing a common and mechanistic imagery of progress, he aimed to clarify the "novel social mechanism":

> The creation of the first locomotive, in terms of the relationship between its components and the railway, was first an invention and then a series of studies, trials, and experiments. Once this had been achieved, the railroad enterprise was a simple business [affaire]. The organization of a first phalanx is necessarily itself a relatively costly and difficult experiment. Those that follow, as soon as we can study a model that works in the right proportions, will be nothing but business (affaires). [...] It is a great experiment, the experiment of a novel social mechanism.[41]

This quotation exemplifies the experimental discourse inherent in Fourierism, where Fourier's conception of a novel social mechanism undergoes a series of evaluations, adaptations, and adjustments in response to local conditions, thereby prompting further reflection on the mechanism itself. This iterative process, symbolically initiated by the inaugural *phalange* or "first locomotive," is driven by its momentum and was envisioned to cultivate a modern, global infrastructure. The railway metaphor underscores the significance of small social units as an innovative infrastructure for progress. However, this trajectory was disrupted by the political upheavals of the time, leading Considérant to leave France in 1849.

This turn of events led him to favor what he termed "new societies" as ideal settings for social experimentation. In his writings, Considérant emphasized the central role of the environment, construed broadly to encompass climatic condi-

40 *La démocratie pacifique*, August 1, 1844 ("si la théorie était condamnée par la pratique, on passerait à d'autres essais").

41 "Discours de Victor Considérant à l'Assemblée constituante," *La démocratie pacifique*, April 4, 1849.

tions, vegetation, natural resources, and local attitudes toward social innovation, along with the inherent traits of the population. Notably, he singled out the US-American context as particularly conducive to social experiments, justifying the establishment of a new colony there despite his prior reluctance in terms of further experimental initiatives.[42] Following an enlightening visit to the North American Phalanx (NAP) outside Freehold, New Jersey (1843–1855), which he deemed a "zoophyte sociétaire"[43] rather than a "realization," he established the short-lived colony of La Réunion (1855–1857) near Dallas, Texas.

La Réunion was part of a foundational wave that peaked in the 1840s and 1850s with settlements predominantly established in the Americas. Experimental communities tended to be smaller and more limited in scope. By the mid-1840s, the discourse had evolved from questioning the feasibility of experiments to exploring the conditions and lessons learned from case studies. Activists engaged in discussions on implementing an alternative world while considering global scales. In essence, the Fourierists' experimental discourse revolved around the value of practice over theory, thus highlighting a shift in focus from theoretical considerations to the practical implementation of their social ideas.

In accordance with the utopian tradition, the experimental space was delimited, defined, and organized. The "trial cantons" were arranged based on sociopetal architecture, which is meant to foster human interactions, ranging from brief and chance encounters at intersections to emotional engagements in the peristyles of the social palace's arcades. It is notable that only a few settlements actually constructed the central social palace, the *phalanstère*. It was only in 1853, with the secession of the Raritan Bay Union from the NAP, that a more substantial four-story *phalanstère* was actually built.[44] In most instances, the community functions of the edifice were fulfilled by modest structures, such as the Hive community house at Brook Farm in West Roxbury, Massachusetts (1841–1847)—a two-story farmhouse that served as the organizational hub of community life. According to personal accounts, members would gather at their "hive" coming from all directions for meals or evening dances, following the rhythm of the day.[45]

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42 Victor Considérant, *Au Texas* (Paris: Librairie Phalanstérienne, 1854). For the English version, see Victor Considérant, *The Great West: A New Social and Industrial Life in Its Fertile Regions* (New York, 1854). The text is abridged and modified for public relations purposes in the United States.

43 Considérant, *Au Texas*, 12.

44 Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 322–326.

45 John T. Codman, *Brook Farm: Historic and Personal Memoirs* (Boston: Arena Publishing Company, 1894), e.g. 61, 92, 97. The transcendentalist community Brook Farm (1841–1847) adopted Fourierist ideas starting in 1844. Brook Farm is one of the best-known communities due to the

The case of the United States illustrates that constructing the edifice was contingent upon local regulations, adaptation, and communal negotiations. Plans for expanding existing structures were devised, and transitional modes were implemented; for instance, the NAP enhanced its 1851 phalanstery with a covered piazza, verandas, and galleries, where interconnected buildings were accessible through covered passageways. However, community members specifically argued against opting for a lavish architectural style. Nationally, the decision to forgo a *phalanstère* was rationalized as an US-American manifestation of communal practice, showcasing a juxtaposition between scientific Fourierism and pragmatic Fourierism at the grassroots level. This decision was not perceived as a critique of social reorganization but rather as its partial realization and a transitional form labeled as "practical partial reform."[46]

Communal life in Fourierist communities adhered to serial laws, where Fourier aimed to determine the optimal number and combination of individuals based on intricate calculations of series of attractions and passions, predominantly outlined in *Le nouveau monde industriel et sociétaire* (The New Industrial and Societary World).[47] These series governed the composition of various collective working groups and the daily rotation of group members between different activities. This approach was partially applied in communities such as the NAP, which established six series, covering aspects from agriculture to recreation (agricultural, stock, manufacturing, domestic, educational, and festal series).[48]

Beyond organizing experimental community life, serial laws were also envisioned as a means to generate the new social science. This programmatic perspective is explicitly articulated in the inaugural editorial of Considérant's theoretical journal *La Phalange. Journal de la science sociale* (The Phalanx. Journal of Social Science):

> The SERIES is the graded, regular, and natural mode of classification of all the inequalities which constitute a system of varieties; it combines *variety* in *unity*. The SERIES is the mode of combinations and *harmonic* relations. TO ORGANIZE, TO PUT IN ORDER, is to form SERIES. Outside the SERIES there is no order.[49]

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fact that Nathaniel Hawthorne, one of its founding members, fictionalized his experience in his novel *The Blithedale Romance* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1852).

46 Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 242.

47 He calculated the number of 1,620 members, which, however, was never considered in the implementations. Fourier, *Le nouveau monde industriel*, 85–133.

48 Charles Sears, *The North American Phalanx: An Historical and Descriptive Sketch* (Prescott: John M. Pryse, Publisher, 1886), 5–6. Considérant did not consider the principle implemented when he visited the NAP before establishing his own colony in Texas, Considérant, *Au Texas*, 12.

49 *La Phalange* 1 (1836): 1 (emphasis in original). See John Tresch, "The Order of the Prophets: Series in Early French Social Science and Socialism," *History of Science* 48 (2010): 315–342.

While Fourierists viewed serial laws as a dynamic foundation for community experiments based on social science,[50] contemporary skeptics and later critics found nothing but a flawed implementation of Fourier's concepts. They often mocked the organization of labor[51] and cited the short-lived nature and limited spread of these experiments as proof of the practical failure of this theoretical framework. However, these implementations were integral to an experimental series for social change, as outlined in the communities' writings. Fourier himself regarded the initial communal groups as preliminary "drafts, sketches," acknowledging that "the distributive theory will need to be informed by local practice" in such novel foundations.[52] He envisioned the first communities as "compasses" guiding future societal transformation through an extensive, long-term process.

Although the evolution of these settlements after the 1850s did not align with the initial plans, the experimental series arguably persisted beyond La Réunion. Subsequent undertakings, regardless of their distinct presentations, continued to enrich the collective experience. A notable example is Jean-Baptiste André Godin (1817–1888), a French industrialist involved in the La Réunion attempt and manager of the Société de colonisation européo-américaine du Texas. Starting in 1859, Godin initiated a new associative form with the Familistère de Guise in Picardie, Northern France.[53] This community housed industrial workers in family units within a Fourier-inspired, profit-sharing work environment. Despite Godin's increasing tendency, common among many, to distance his project from Fourier,[54] the Familistère's central pavilion, featuring a vast glass courtyard completed in 1865, unmistakably drew inspiration from Fourier's experiments.

50 See, for instance, the NAP experience. Community members described the effects of the serial work organization as the beginning of the new society, Sears, *NAP*.

51 Wilhelm Roscher, "Betrachtungen über den Socialismus und Kommunismus," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 3 (1845): 418–461, 540–564, 456–457.

52 Fourier, *Théorie de l'unité universelle*, vol. 2, 337.

53 He had also enquired about the serial organization of the NAP, where the members could assign themselves freely. Charles Sears to Jean Baptiste Godin April 22, 1853. Bibliothèque centrale du Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers, Papiers de Jean-Baptiste André Godin FG 17/2.

54 Jean Baptiste Godin to Joseph Pouliquen (Condé-sur-Vesgre), December 7, 1865: "Le Familistère ne réalise ni l'harmonie des passions, ni l'association des forces et des facultés humaines, ni l'éducation rationnelle, ni le travail attrayant. Ce n'est donc pas la découverte de Fourier que j'ai mise en pratique, aussi n'ai-je pas voulu que l'on s'y méprenne. Le Familistère n'est pas le Phalanstère." Bibliothèque centrale du Conservatoire national des Arts et Métiers, Papiers de Jean-Baptiste André Godin FG 15/8.

Algeria as Experimental Space

When Fourierists concurred regarding the imperative of initiating the new social program, they envisioned their experimental space as unoccupied, untouched land, presupposing that the "specimen of the new world" would be established "upon these soils, today a wilderness."[55] However, this "wilderness" pertained to a foreign culture and constituted part of a distinct spatial configuration and imagination.[56] In most instances, the land was inhabited by indigenous populations, and the Fourierist implementation program in reality hinged on acquiring land and organizing the social unit as a "contact zone" structured by the colonial situation. These issues were pivotal given the global dissemination of these experiments, and they coalesced into a more cohesive discourse when the Fourierists identified Algeria as an experimental space.

Since the landing of the Armée d'Afrique in the coastal town of Sidi-Fredj in 1830, Fourierist circles campaigned to establish communities in Algeria in accordance with Fourier's social theory. In 1838, Gatti de Gamond was among the first to outline Fourier's theories as the basis for a systematic colonization of Algeria, proposing an extension of this plan to encompass the entirety of Africa. Following the modular and mechanical logic of social change, the "nucleus of the new society" was manifested as a cooperative farm of 300–400 families: "Starting from the foundation of a first societal farm in this region, the imagination sees no limits to the conquest and propaganda. The whole of Africa covered with phalanxes subject to a unitary regime."[57] She was supported by Czynski, who dedicated himself to popularizing a "natural association" and advocated for "scientific exploration" in *Le nouveau monde*. He integrated this concept into a phased model for the colonization of Algeria, proposing that capitalists should only proceed with implementation once scientists had thoroughly explored the country and developed a plan.[58] Fourier's concept was construed as a tangible and conducive guide for colonizing Algeria. Consequently, questions of "native politics" and colonialism were

55 Considérant, *The Great West*, 58.

56 Norbert Finzsch, "The Smooth Space of the Nomads: Indigenous Outopia, Indigenous Heterotopia and the Example of Australia," in *Ecocritical Concerns and the Australian Continent*, eds. Beate Neumeier and Helen Tiffin (Lanham, Boulder, New York and London: Lexington Books, 2020), 27–41.

57 Zoé Gatti de Gamond, *Fourier et son système* (Paris: Librairie sociale, 1838), 322.

58 He published the articles collected in a book: Jean Czynski, *La Colonisation d'Alger d'après la théorie de Charles Fourier* (Paris: Librairie sociale, 1839). See Piotr Kuligowski, "Un fouriériste dans la vie politique polonaise: polémiques de Jan Czyński (1801–1867)," *Cahiers Charles Fourier* 30 (2019): 125–142.

intricately linked to the experimental discourse, an aspect often underestimated in research due to its focus on Saint-Simonian Orientalism.[59]

In the context of community implementation,[60] the Union agricole d'Afrique, situated southeast of Oran in Saint-Denis-du-Sig, emerged as an exemplar of a "natural association." Granted the status of a "civil colonization company" by a royal order in November 1846, it spanned an expanse of approximately 2,000–2,500 hectares in the Oran region, adjacent to the Sig River and near a dam. The original blueprint aimed to accommodate roughly 300 families, totaling some 1,500 individuals. However, only five families had settled by February 1847. The Union saw a gradual influx of 150–200 people between 1849 and 1851, and despite challenges such as diseases and fatalities, it slowly stabilized. The early settlers more resembled a metropolitan missionary elite than a fraternal collective, with backgrounds primarily found in bourgeois and military circles: twelve were professionals such as doctors, surgeons, lawyers, or merchants, sixteen were army officers from Lyon and Besançon, Fourier's birthplace, and only one hailed from Paris.[61] Internal strife persisted, leading to the 1847 establishment of a supervisory committee by the general assembly of shareholders, which comprised officers, civil servants, and notables from Oran. After five years, the community nearly dissolved but underwent several revivals until Fourierist influences were completely erased from its statutes in the early 1890s.[62]

Despite later transformations, the agricultural union in its formative years prided itself on presenting an alternative model of colonization rooted in the associative approach. This model aimed to foster a synergy of interests between capitalists and workers as an antidote to the social "fragmentation" ("morcellement")—a central Fourierist concept symbolizing the *malaise* of modern capitalist society.[63] This fragmentation referred to various tangible aspects, such as private property, or more abstract notions of social isolation and individualism. A cornerstone principle of the Union was the indivisibility of ownership, organized through shares, with land, buildings, and equipment collectively belonging to the shareholders. This approach was in stark contrast to the prevalent colonial model based on the

59 For example, Osama Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Magali Morsy, *Les Saint-Simoniens et l'Orient: Vers la modernité* (Aix-en-Provence: Édisud, 1990).

60 Almi mentions a previous attempt to establish a *phalanstère* in Sidi Ferruch by Adrien Berbrugger in 1833, Said Almi, *Urbanisme et colonisation. Présence française en Algérie* (Liège: Mardaga, 2002), 41.

61 Bernard Desmars, "Liste des actionnaires de l'Union Agricole d'Afrique (1847)," *Cahiers Charles Fourier*, accessed February 15, 2024, https://www.charlesfourier.fr/spip.php?article1312.

62 Ibid., 146.

63 Beecher, *Considérant*, 127.

individual ownership of land parcels and houses, a common practice in other parts of Algeria.[64]

From the perspective of the activists, the associative model was deemed crucial for what they believed to be optimal colonial practice, particularly in terms of fostering connections between "diverse elements."[65] These connections were envisioned to be forged through shared interests and habitual interactions, rather than through force and suppression.[66] As indicated in the administrative reports, "Human ambition could not conceive of a more splendid stage or drama than to organize, in accordance with unified plans, both production and population across an expanse of two square leagues."[67] This vision included the creation of an intercultural social palace, which blended Moorish and "civilized" architectural styles, thus diverging from the ideal type proposed by Considérant.[68]

The Fourierists' approach to civil colonization differed greatly from other colonial methods, particularly in its vehement opposition to military strategies. They contended that in a civil colony, where individuals are free, excessive pressure would lead to resistance and withdrawal. Hence, it was essential for them to govern and motivate without exerting too much pressure ("squeezing too much").[69] They further asserted that military action was antithetical to the associative model, arguing that "while repression of the natives might be a regrettable necessity in fragmented cultures, the grand associated culture, which harmonizes the most diverse elements, does not have these harsh imperatives."[70]

In line with this philosophy, the French settlers chose not to displace the indigenous population. Instead, they transformed their supposed right of conquest into a "favorable rental contract."[71] Consequently, the indigenous population remained on their ancestral lands while maintaining their agricultural practices; however, they were obliged to pay for the right to stay on this land. They established their tents, forming two douars of the Gharabas and "about a dozen douars of the Thallaïtes," and were granted access to all facilities in an effort to demon-

64 Union agricole d'Afrique, société civile de colonisation. Compte rendu par le Conseil d'administration et le rapport de l'administration de la colonie pour l'exercice de 1847–1848 (Besançon: Imprimerie de Sainte-Agatha Ainé, 1849), 49.

65 This is a dominant conceptual figure, see the following argument in this section. For a direct quote, see, for example, ibid., 21.

66 Ibid., 20.

67 Ibid., 58.

68 Ibid., 49.

69 Ibid., 42.

70 Ibid., 21.

71 Ibid., 20.

strate the benefits of French governance.[72] This strategy of "integration by rent" proved successful, as evidenced by the annual renewal of contracts by the Arab leaders.

It is imperative to acknowledge that the Union's daily operations were marked by hierarchical structures and an assumed superiority of French culture. The envisioned fraternal society fell short of achieving a state of equality among its members. Notably, the Arab populations were not fully integrated. The settler community only constituted a minority, whereas the majority consisted of salaried workers, some residing in the nearby town of Saint-Denis. Segregation was evident in communal life and manifested in practices such as separate dining arrangements.[73]

Moreover, the settlers' actions demonstrate a clear orientation toward colonial concepts of civilization. Although they acknowledged and valued indigenous traditions, similar to the Saint-Simonian circles, they endorsed particular civilizational ideals. These included advocating for nomadic populations transitioning to sedentary lifestyles and for advancing integrated educational initiatives for Arab and French children within the Union's institutions.[74] Furthermore, they supported more unconventional ideas, such as "a more significant improvement" of women's "destiny" in Algeria.[75] This position aligned with Fourierists advocating for the emancipation of women in Europe.

Just like in the European and transatlantic contexts, the associative model in Algeria was not fully realized. A significant example illustrating the limitations in community building is the failure to implement the practice of collective property, despite the nomadic traditions in the region. Barthélemy-Prosper Enfantin, known as "Father Enfantin" (1796–1854), the leader of the dissolved Saint-Simonian circles, in his seminal work on Algerian colonization elucidated how the absence of private property in nomadic cultures favored a communal approach to colonization.[76] He drew on the arguments of Amédée Marion (1800–1868), who since the early 1840s had been devising plans for the Bône region in western Algeria.[77] Discussions en-

72 Union 1849, 41. The colony followed the governor's colonization project for the province of Oran. Lieutenant General Lamoricière, himself a former Saint-Simonian and acting governor in 1845 (when Marshal Bugeaud requested a leave of absence), specifically asked for colonies not to "entail the displacement of a considerable portion of the Gharrabas tribe," Projets de colonisation pour les provinces d'Oran et de Constantine (Paris: Imprimérie royale 1847), 10, 12.

73 Ibid., 45.

74 Ibid., 42.

75 Ibid., 15.

76 Madonna-Desbazeille, "L'Union agricole d'Afrique."

77 Adrien Berbrugger, "M. Marion," *Revue africaine. Journal des travaux de la Société historique algérienne* 12 (1868): 139–143.

sued concerning the parallels between Algeria's tradition of collective property and the *système sociétaire*, especially during the establishment of the farming group in Sig.[78] However, these ideas failed to materialize in both the Oran and the Bône regions. Nonetheless, the subscription of some Arab dignitaries as shareholders was seen as an initial step toward achieving the agricultural union's envisioned "mixed Franco-African character":

> The very inclusion of Arab chiefs within the Union will endow it with a blended Franco-African character. Given that the Union's association will not be exclusively capitalist, it is hoped that the colony will eventually showcase a number of Arab workers integrated with European families. Such an alliance example, and the Union's success, could be critically influential in terms of colonization and the African question.[79]

The community project evidently did not meet the criteria of a *phalange*, which prompted reflections and discussions regarding the practical implications of the associative principle. During a commemorative banquet in Algiers in April 1848, 72 colonists and Fourierists gathered to reaffirm and assess the status of the communal initiative in Algeria. The majority recognized the disheartening results; however, there was no fundamental questioning of either the specific project or the broader social experiment. The challenges were ascribed to local conditions, thus necessitating adaptations and pragmatic, partial solutions:

> We have adopted aspects from Phalansterian theories that seemed suitable for the specific context [. . .] What we have accomplished possesses a lesser degree of perfection; however, these very imperfections might appeal to those numerous individuals who seek a guiding principle rather than a rigid system in associative ventures, as well as to those who are apprehensive that their ideal may not be realized in the near future.[80]

Examining the reflections of Fourierists in Algiers on the community's character as a half-realized phalanx reveals the significance of the process in which these experiments were embedded. This perspective suggests that experiments cannot inherently "fail." Recent research has shifted the focus away from viewing the dissolution of a community as a historical failure toward exploring different legacies.[81] In the experimental discourse, self-reflexivity was vital for revising theoreti-

78 *L'Union agricole d'Afrique. Nouveau système de colonisation de l'Algérie* (Lyon: Imprimerie de Léon Boitel, 1846).

79 Ibid., 126.

80 *Phalanstère en Algérie* (Algiers: A. Bourget, 1848), 40.

81 Michel Antony, "Les communautés utopiques sont-elles toujours condamnées à disparaître?" *Cahiers d'histoire. Revue d'histoire critique* 133 (2016): 19–42; Michel Cordillot, "Rethinking the failure of the French Fourierist colony in Dallas," *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 3, no. 29 (2018): 118–133.

cal reasoning through exposure to various practical settings and external conditions. Establishing a small core community under unfavorable conditions affirmed the viability and validity of the social reform program for activists. It also allowed for future changes and extensions, as seen in the enduring Sig community. The ongoing crises and revivals until the 1890s fueled and sustained the experimental discourse.

During one of the last crises, Considérant joined the board of directors of Sig in 1873. Opposing the impending sale of Sig in 1879, he emphasized the unique comprehensive character of the community compared to the locally and thematically limited endeavors of the Familistère in Guise and Leclaire's profit-sharing house painting company in Paris.[82] While these two were the most developed social experiments, he explained, they had reached the limits of their development due to their overly narrow base, which, at the same time, was the reason for their success and exemplary character. Bound to one specialty—producing enameled cast iron and painting buildings, respectively—they now experienced an end to their development ("arrêt de développement"), and they no longer had the potential to represent a cell ("alvéole") of the new society. Even if these attempts seemed more advanced, Considérant concluded, only Sig would have the potential to further develop the system into a full community by adding other elements.[83]

Considérant developed this idea in the face of a political situation having undergone considerable changes compared to the 1840s. In the 1870s, his suggestion to extend the experiment in Sig included a critique of other established forms of social reform and socialism from which Considérant explicitly distanced his program. As a non-revolutionary and peaceful response to the social question, he was convinced that the associative model was more likely to be implemented in the coming decades, whereas the brutal and revolutionary forms of socialism would only lead to a violent apocalypse of capitalism.[84]

82 The house painting enterprise Maison Leclaire was founded in Paris in 1826 as a profit-sharing business. On the positive reception of Leclaire, see Helen McCabe, "John Stuart Mill and Fourierism: 'Association', 'friendly rivalry' and distributive justice," *Global Intellectual History* 4, no. 1 (2019): 35–61.

83 Lettre de M. Considérant à M. le commandant Gautier, secrétaire de l'Union du Sig, *Bulletin de l'Union agricole de l'Afrique (*1879): 93–124; 110, 111.

84 Ibid, 111.

Conclusion

This article posits Fourierism as a socio-epistemic program integrating theory and practice. It utilizes the concept of the laboratory to explore the *phalanstère* as a space in which social organizational forms undergo reconfiguration, thus challenging divisions between the history of science and the history of politics. The distinction between theory and practice dissolves in the "social laboratories" of Fourier, which blur the scientific and non-scientific boundaries. This reconfiguration is central, especially in the context of the early nineteenth century, a time when the social sciences were not yet formally established and social reform was intertwined with developing social epistemology. It allows for sidestepping inquiries into the "scientificity" of early nineteenth-century social thought.

The historical significance of Fourierism transcends its theoretical contributions. It played an active role in shaping a realm of social knowledge existing beyond the bounds of academic legitimacy while interconnecting its various facets. This understanding of society facilitated analyzing contemporary societal conditions and formulating future trajectories. Aligned with concepts such as "horizons of expectation" and "spaces of experience,"[85] this knowledge served as a mediator between lived experiences and future aspirations, thereby elucidating, interpreting, and actively impacting transformative processes.

Its significance becomes apparent when examining its practical implementations, particularly in the colonial context of Algeria. The Union agricole du Sig serves as a key example of Fourierist principles meeting the complexities of indigenous cultures and populations. The Algerian experience, with its blend of idealism and practical challenges, showcases the dynamic interaction between Fourierist ideals and the realities of colonial administration. Despite hierarchical structures and cultural disparities, the experiment in Algeria reflected Fourier's commitment to a cooperative, non-military approach while envisioning a mixed Franco-African character. The enduring lessons from this colonial experiment contributed to a nuanced understanding of Fourierism's viability and adaptability, thereby showcasing its relevance as a non-revolutionary response to the evolving social question in the 1870s.

By drawing parallels with Latour's concept of the laboratory, it emphasizes the transformative potential of small-scale experiments in relation to reconfiguring societal patterns. The relatively closed structure of Fourier's sites can be lik-

85 Reinhart Koselleck, "Space of Experience and Horizon of Expectation: Two Historical Categories," in Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

ened to Latour's description of the strength of laboratory sites in Pasteur's universal vaccination project. Latour argues that the essence of the laboratory is not found in its scale but in testing possible modes of operation and the "modifying of scale."[86] Ultimately, this involves the dissemination of new patterns in society. Similarly, Fourier utilized elements from the social reality of industrial capitalism to forge a new social framework, emphasizing social cohesion in associations by unifying passions and affects. Fourier aimed to "invent" a model of social life applicable on a broader scale with the *phalanstère* serving as a cooperative form of life.

To summarize, Fourier's experimental practice in his associative model was key to its legacy. His vision of social units, as part of a social science, anticipated a new form of society and shared an interest in theorizing the transition toward societal transformation. This approach contrasted with Marxism's state-centered concept and offered a unique perspective on social change. Fourier's model, which was focused on harmonizing individual passions and affections within cooperative associations, sought to "invent" a new social framework applicable on a broader scale. This legacy significantly influenced the cooperative movement at the end of the nineteenth century, as recognized by cooperative activists and Marxist critics alike.[87] Fourierism thus emerges not as one of the undeveloped precursors to socialism but as an independent social epistemology combining social theory with small-scale practical experiments. In this context, Fourier's "expériences sociétaires"[88] targeted societal reform on a grand scale, thus positioning his work as a serious alternative in the realm of social organization and theory.

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86 Latour, "Give Me a Laboratory," 67.

87 Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *Common: On Revolution in the 21st Century* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 250; Charles Gide, *Fourier, précurseur de la coopération* (Paris: Association pour l'enseignement de la Coopération, 1924), 13–20; Minsun Ji, "With or Without Class? Resolving Marx's Janus-Faced Interpretation of Worker owned Cooperatives," *Capital and Class* 13 (2019): 1–25.

88 Lettre de M. Considérant, 111.