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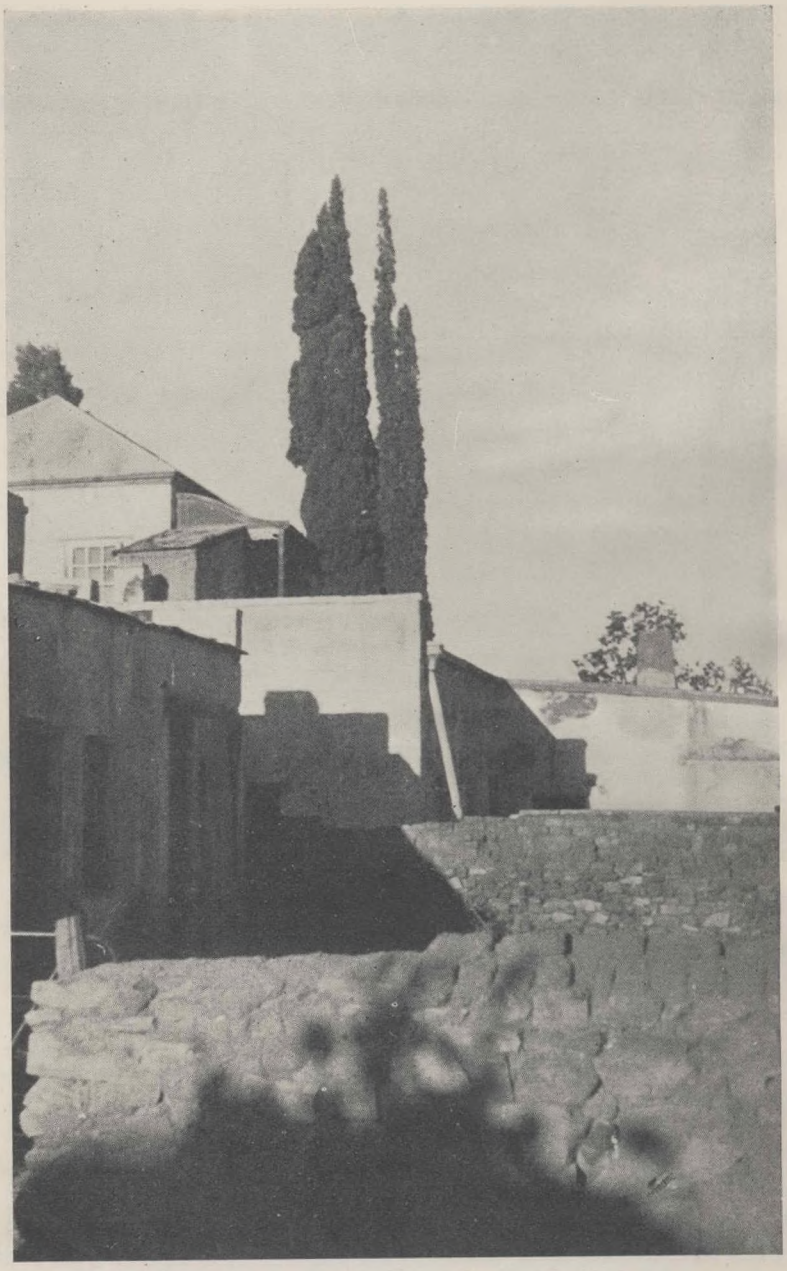
SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

The Journal of the Cape, Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal Provincial Institutes of South African Architects and the Chapter of South African Quantity Surveyors

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Honorary Editors: G. E. Pearse, R. D. Martienssen



A Tree Peeping Over a Neighbouring Wall

REDDERSBURG

By Betty Spence, B.Arch.

Reddersburg, situated some thirty miles from Bloemfontein, in the faintest declivity of the bald plane which is the Orange Free State, appears at first like any other South African dorp. There are the usual wide, dusty roads and wood and iron buildings. Its existence fades from the mind of the passing motorist as soon as he has navigated the last cow. If, however, some trick of circumstance should cause him to stop for a meal or perhaps a night he will find an atmosphere of peace creeping over him, a feeling of serenity which is almost unknown in the towns of our new continent.

Reddersburg, the town of the rescued, is the result of one of the inevitable treks of the early Afrikaaner. The first inhabitants left the town of Edenburg, seventeen miles to the North West, as a result of a religious feud between two sects of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Doppers, who were in a minority, felt that their religion was not allowed full sway, that their old men did not have enough say in town affairs, in fact, generally they suffered from an inferiority complex, so they trekked. Not that it did any good for in no time their antagonists followed them and now there are two colossi of stone between which God is divided.

Whatever may be said of these Churches as architecture they have definitely done one good turn to aesthetics. The scratching and scraping from this impoverished sheep farming district which must have gone on in order to raise the £18,000 for the building of each Church (the stone for both was imported from Ladybrand, eighty miles distant) has prevented money being spent on the destruction and rebuilding of the original settlers' houses. It is thus that the motorist turning from the main through road, inevitably lined with petrol pumps and advertisement placards, discovers a street of small white houses. It is interesting, too, to compare the charm of this indigenous architecture with the self-conscious appearance of the Churches. They are the most simple type of Cape Dutch town dwelling, flat roofed in contrast to the thatched country houses. They consist of only one room in which the cooking, eating and sleeping of each family takes place, their interest, as always in true town houses, lies in their facades which are considered in relationship to the street as a whole rather than to each individual house. Each facade is

formed of a simple rectangular wall, plastered and surmounted by a small cornice. In this is the door, centrally placed, with two flanking windows. At frequent intervals, forming an unconsciously charming decoration, are the iron staples which tie the roof beams into the walls.

I said a street and I should like to emphasise it. In our only too natural dislike of modern cities we have considered the street largely to blame and have cast it out from the residential quarter leaving it to the commercial exploitation of shops and offices. Instead we have adopted a fond imitation of a country road. But here, in this little old Dutch town there is nothing to dislike in the houses built right on the road, in the absence of visibile signs of vegetation, except perhaps in a spattering of grass on the low stoep to each house or a tree peeping over a neighbouring wall. The apparent absence of Mother Earth is contradicted by the lowing of cattle and cackle of hens kept in the back yards. In this simple street a sense of community is achieved which is denied by the scattered arrangement of our suburbs.

Here is an example of the primary consideration of function. These people came in families, so each family built a house. It was only necessary to build a small house, just one room to sleep in and an open stoep which acted as the living room where the family could rest in the evening after the day's work. There was no need of a garden because the veld was only a few hundred yards away, but the livestock must be penned at night so each house had its back yard.

Yet, though these people came in families they also came as a community, bound together by their persecuted religious faith. They believed in neighbourliness and brotherly love and also, doubtless in gossip and other mild amusements all of which are a part of community existence. Thus each house is also conscious of its place amongst the others, it is a member of a group and neither too proud nor too ashamed to admit its membership and to stand for comparison with its neighbour.

I spent only one night in this village but that was enough to charm me. It was as if unquestioningly we were made welcome by this little town, to rest and refresh ourselves before the morrow's journey. After we had washed and eaten we went for a walk in the warm night air. The stars were bright in a sky still luminous with the light of the vanished sun. Everywhere was alive with quiet movement. The inhabitants had left their houses and were sitting on the stoeps, discussing and chatting, resting and playing. Others were out walking like ourselves and, though we could not see each other's faces, we exchanged friendly greeting.

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The Church







''I said a street and I should like to emphasise it.''

''A street of small white houses.''



THE MODERN THEORISTS OF PLANNING; LE CORBUSIER FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT ETC.

by Roy Kantorowich, B.Arch.

INTRODUCTION

This essay is a discussion of the writings and works of the modern theorists in City Planning, and an attempt at an evaluation of their work, i.e., how significant it is both within the scope of their art and within the wider reaches of society as a whole. But before we undertake any detailed analysis, it would be as well if we examined the social background out of which these " planning Utopias " grew, and against which they are projected. It is felt that this would be the correct approach for, as it has been said, " it is not the forms of man's consciousness that determine the forms of his social being, but on the contrary, the forms of his social being that determine the forms of his consciousness."

In the early days of modern industrial society, towards the end of the 18th Century and during the first part of the 19th Century, many schemes for new communities, ideal communities, Utopias, made their appearance in Europe. These ideas found such a ready response in many quarters that scores of little Utopian colonies were started (the majority in America), where the new social theories could be tried out in the field of practice. The initiators of these movements were generally stimulated into action by either or both of two very characteristic qualities of the young Bourgeois society. These were, on the one hand, the amazing stimulus given to the development of science and technique, and on the other hand, the parallel degrading way in which these new resources were put into operation by the owners of the means of production. The new mastery of nature which should have brought greater freedom and happiness, brought in its place all the miseries of intensified labour, longer hours, filthy factory conditions, and reduction of vast masses of the people to mere automatons " appended " to the machine—a greater slavery than ever before.

Thinkers, philanthropists, members of religious groups, social reformers were aware of all these evils, and with an inexact analysis of the root causes, sought all manner of solutions in the organisation of better societies ; some were romantic and reactionary, founded on the feudal past, seeing the machine as the bringer of all evil ; some were idealistic, founded on the thought that all that was needed was a group of men free of the mean, cut-throat spirit of prevailing society.

Society was seething with these ideas at the time, but, despite this, it is interesting that the architects remained curiously unaffected by the contending issues—at any rate, those architects whom conventional history remembers. They were much too concerned with catering to the palatial demands of their new clients of the " Third Estate " to be bothered with the unprofitable and mundane problems of designing architectural Utopias. To be sure, there were designs galore for projects on a great civic scale, but these were uniformly concerned with the creation of a suitable setting for the display of pomp and circumstance. (It must be mentioned that in rare cases, embryo proposals for the layout of their communities were made by the Utopian leaders. We have Robert Owen's conception of his Utopian community, for instance. But these plans were little more than supplementary diagrams to the ideas, the addition of pictorial attraction to the prospectus, so to speak). A whole century had to elapse before these Utopian currents reached the architects, before the great architectural Utopias burst upon the world with full plastic glory and poetic verbiage—typical 20th century panaceas of society in the best Proudhon[1] manner.

Why, we must ask, this lag in architecture ? And, once this is explained, would not the intervening century between the two expressions of Utopian ideas have had its effect upon this last rose of the bourgeois summer ? The first question can be answered now—the second will be answered in the course of discussion.

Architecture for the most part received the impact of the technical discoveries and inventions of the machine age rather late. The structural possibilities of the newly-discovered steel and reinforced concrete were exploited for years by engineers before the conservative traditions of the academic architect could be assailed. For the architect was initially in no need of these inventions for his " art." He regarded the problems of such things as factories and commercial buildings as outside the province of the designer of City Halls and palaces. It was only later, when there developed the real social pressure of new architectural problems supplanting the old ones,

problems moreover utterly insoluble with the old and limited technique, that the Beaux Arts scholar had his reluctant hand forced. Grudgingly, he used the new materials, although in deference to the " eternal verities " of beauty-in-Architecture, he covered the naked and shameful steel with a thick encrustation of stone figleaves.

It was only towards the end of the 19th Century that the more advanced thinkers, Richardson and Sullivan in America notably, recognised that there were aesthetic possibilities in treating the new problems and the new materials on their merits. The first really radical departures from the eclecticism of the past 50 years came with the turn of the century, when such people as Wagner, Loos, Oud, Perret, and Behrens in Europe, and Frank Lloyd Wright in America, laid the foundations for a contemporary approach to architectural design. After the first World War had ended, the movement really gained momentum.

The War had a tremendous effect on society as a whole, and on its culture in particular. The War signalised the end of a whole epoch. Gone was the faith in the infinite expansion of industry. The world had been divided up amongst the great imperialist powers—all that remained was redivision. Gone, too, were all the liberal-bourgeois ideas—ideas that had steadily been decaying ever since Queen Victoria died. The War exposed society, stripped of all its trimmings, and thumbed its nose irreverently at all the moral and aesthetic codes and virtues.

All the repressed energies of a century burst the social fetters that were uable any longer to control them. A great wave of ambitious thinking started. After the destruction, the people wanted to build anew. But all this activity and spirit was thwarted at its source, for the basic structure of society, that which had precipitated the first collapse, still remained, if anything, in intensified form. In these early post-war years, all these energies could not externalise themselves in real service to the community. So the artist, with much trumpetting of the necessity for his action, turned introspectively to a fundamental re-examination of the technique of the Art-form itself.

It was out of this mood that the twenties received the great wave of art cults—to name but two, Cubism in painting ; Functionalism or Purism in architecture. This re-examination brought to architecture an almost puritanically rigid approach to design and at times a religious glorification of new materials merely because they were new. With all the limitations of this approach—its one-sidedness, for instance—the best modern architects certainly acquired the power to organise complicated large planning problems into extremely clean and straightforward solutions. Once the deadwood of the styles had been cleared away, architectural thought could apply itself with breezy confidence to the big problems of replanning society.

It is at this time, just after the war, that the architects became aware of the full horror, ugliness and decay of our contemporary cities. For once they looked behind the monumental facade, and beneath the romantic skyline. Not that this ugliness had not been recognised before by those " eyes that could see," but this new awareness of the young architects was different for they felt that they had the means, the power to create new and beautiful cities. The stage was set at last for the belated architectural Utopias.

Le Corbusier in France, and Frank Lloyd Wright in America were the foremost exponents of the new wave of city design. They had, however, entirely opposite approaches to the subject. Although they influenced many disciples, who have carried on the traditions, this discussion will be confined to the opposing stands of the two pioneers. The work of such as Norman Bel Geddes[2] who produces wonderful plastic stunts to meet the commercial ends of showmanship and display does not warrant discussion. The writings of theorists such as Lewis Mumford[3] will also be left aside so that the field can be confined to those who have actually produced designs to go with their theories.

LE CORBUSIER

Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret), an architect of Swiss descent practising in Paris, is perhaps the most prolific and also the most provocative of the modern theorists. He has designed innumerable projects, big and small, and has published many books containing his theories expounded in both words and designs. He has had an enormous influence on modern architecture everywhere, particularly in Europe. His City Planning work dates from the early twenties when he produced his Voisin plan for the redesign of Paris, and his design for an abstract city for 3,000,000 inhabitants. His basic theories were explained in a book called " Urbanisme " which was subsequently translated into English under the title, " The City of To-morrow." Let us commence with an examination of le Corbusier's thesis as presented in this book, and then see how the early theories were developed and modified in later years.

Le Corbusier starts with a section on what he calls General Considerations. He attempts to establish a general critical approach to the cities of the past and of present—to find the key to the puzzle why some have developed in a dis-

orderly haphazard way and others have not. "What," he asks, "is the essential difference between classicism and barbarism; between the cities of the Classic times and those of the Middle Ages; between Rome and Siena; between Pera and Stamboul?" He applies a picturesque comparison between those that follow the "Pack-donkey's way" and those that follow "Man's way." And man's way is above all distinguished by "geometry." "Geometry is the means created by ourselves, whereby we perceive the external world and express the world within us." Paris, Berlin, London are all chaotic for they have grown upon a non-geometrical, pack-donkey plan. This formal approach to the subject can be summed up by his statement that "culture is an orthogonal state of mind."

Criticism of our present-day cities follow. The source of our ills is deep-rooted. "The condition of the city lies in the condition of each of its cells." For order to be achieved we should therefore strive for uniformity in detail, in the small elements (the individual homes) and there can then be, for the whole, "a composition rich in contrapuntal elements like a fugue or symphony," "a wild variety in the general layout." The necessity for doing something about our cities is urgent, he feels, for the "great city of to-day is destroying itself." The problems of congestion are piling up at a far greater rate than the paltry reforms can cope with them. Only a fundamental reconsideration of all the problems can save our cities. The centre of the city where all the contradictions express themselves in their most intensified form is the heart of the problem that should be tackled—not reforms along the outskirts of the city, but changes right at its heart. We must decongest the centres." We must clear the old away complete, and begin de novo.

An examination of our technique is next necessary to see whether such an ambitious undertaking as the reconstruction of the whole centre portion of a great city is possible. A comparison with what Haussman did for Lous XIV with spade and shovel convinces us that our far superior technique would not be found wanting. All we need is the ability to put this technique at our service. "Where there's a will there's a way. This was the good old maxim my mother taught me."

So he comes to his proposals. That he might "create a firm theoretical scheme, and so arrive at the basic principles of modern town planning," he details the elements that go to make a city, and emerges with four basic principles.

1. We must de-congest the centres of our cities.
2. We must augment their density.
3. We must increase the means for getting about.
4. We must increase parks and open spaces.

The theoretical city that results from the application of these principles is illustrated on page 176. The most striking characteristics are as follows:

1. A strict zoning of the various elements from each other; in the centre, the twenty-four great cruciform skyscrapers for business; around the residential zones of apartment buildings of two basic types; to one side, all the industry grouped together; separated by protective park belts, the outlying garden cities.

2. A great increase in density. The skyscrapers each set in a park 400 yards square, have a density of 1,200 inhabitants to the acre; the surrounding residential areas, a density of 120 inhabitants to the acre.

3. A rigid grid of double-decker roads at approximately 400 yards intervals, with occasional diagonals.

4. A basic type of unit plan for each cell of the residential areas; homes plus hanging-gardens on "super-imposed" sites, the ground thus left free being pooled for communal use for games, parks, nurseries, schools, etc.

M. le Corbusier devotes two pages of lyrical description to the pleasurable response that the "direct consequence of purely geometrical considerations" would evoke in the beholder. "This is where, in a magnificent contrapuntal symphony, the forces of geometry come into play." "Their outline softened by distance, the skyscrapers raise immense geometrical facades of glass, and in them is reflected the blue glory of the sky." "As twilight falls the glass skyscrapers seem to flame." "Here is the City with its crowds living in peace and pure air, where noise is smothered under the foliage of green trees."

There follows, then, a description of how the principles developed in the design of the abstract theoretical city might be applied to a concrete case. The "Voisin" plan for the reconstruction of the centre of Paris shows all the elements (with the exception of the garden cities) applied within the limits of existing Paris. The existing centre is completely demolished with the exception of some buildings retained as monuments, and the new city is raised in its place.

At the end of the book, there is a small chapter on Finance and Realisation. It appears that the original idea was to "entrust some well-known economist" with the task of working out the financial details for effectuating the scheme. However, time did not make this possible, so M. le Corbusier gives us his own idea on the subject. His approach is that we draw up a credit and a debit side. On the debit side, we put the value of existing structures, etc., and the cost of demolition and reconstruction; on the credit side, we have the value of the new structures. Because the density is so

much increased in the new scheme, the value is correspondingly increased (M. le Corbusier says twenty times). Thus there is a gain in pulling the old city down and building the new one. " What an opportunity for capital, for almost incredible amounts would be created by such an attempt at revaluation." This unsurpassed opportunity should not be confined to French financiers. M. le Corbusier welcomes the " millions of international capital " to participate, for, in this step, he sees the guarantee that his flaming skyscrapers will not become smouldering ashes through aerial bombardment by foreign countries.

These would then have an interest rather in preserving than destroying the city. This chapter is altogether pathetically naive but perhaps we might excuse M. le Corbusier for the present, for, as he points out, " my rôle has been a technical one."

During the last fifteen to twenty years, le Corbusier has carried his theories on City Planning further. He has produced plans for numerous cities, for Paris, Algiers (there were three separate schemes for the latter), Barcelona, Moscow, Antwerp, Buenos Aires, to name only some of them. He has published two other books on the subject, La Ville Radieuse (1933), and Des Canons ! Des Munitions ! Merci ! ! Des Logis, S.V.P. ! !

La Ville Radieuse is an elaborate representation of le Corbusier's basic theories of city planning as they have matured since the publication of Urbanisme. The arguments for a more humane, a more " biologically " natural environment as M. le Corbusier would have it, are set forth with a great deal of typographical brilliance. The whole book is an exciting panorama of the many sides of natural life and man's effect upon it. It is an interesting book just to page through.

The central theme is the design of la Ville Radieuse, the radiant city. It is in the nature of a development of the scheme for 3,000,000 inhabitants previously reviewed, although the problem arose out of the request for a design of new Moscow. The scheme shows considerable advance over the earlier one. The zoning is clearer, and the possibilities for expansion are easier and more natural. The theories concerning the basic cellular unit (which " reflects the condition of the city ") are elaborated here. He maintains that there is a minimum area, 14 square metres, an " élément biologique," which is necessary for each individual. His unit plans for various size apartments are all multiples in area of this fundamental 14 square metres. The basic premises, however, on which the early design was founded, remain : there are still the skyscrapers, the buildings with set-backs, and the elaborate road system. In addition, several of the plans for the other cities are included and discussed. All exhibit le Corbusier's immense creative imagination, although some of the schemes (notably Algiers I where homes are grouped in the viaduct of an elevated highway, and Buenos Aires where the business centre floats in the Plate river bay) are as fantastic as they are undoubtedly ingenious. The book concludes with a brief examination of the problems of the country-side, and a plea for " urbanisme total " as a method of saving society from catastrophe and averting war.

Des Canons des Munitions, etc., was issued concurrently with a city planning exhibit sponsored by the C.I.A.M. (International Congress of Modern Architects) at the Paris World's Fair of 1937. This book continues the polemic against war and repeats the author's conviction that it is far better to construct. If we have the will to wage war, surely we can have will to build homes ! The most interesting new material is the further development of the agrarian reform ideas, especially in the design of a small co-operative village. (The latter is in my opinion the finest community scheme he has yet produced.)

Let us sum up le Corbusier's proposals and his standpoint. He accepts the city as something that is valid . . . that is, he brings no criticism of the city's right to continuing existence. He accepts the present economic system, and feels that his ideas can be readily translated into reality without any radical reorganisation of society beyond a change in spirit of those who have the capital. He would rebuild our cities de novo, finding their present pattern obsolete and inadequate for our present-day problems. " Not physic but surgery ! " he exclaims. He employs modern technique to the fullest extent to achieve his immense conceptions.

We will now take leave of M. le Corbusier until we have completed a similar exposition of the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, his " arch-antagonist " as Lewis Mumford has dubbed him. Then we can subject both to criticism and evaluation.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Frank Lloyd Wright, the much lionised American, came to city planning rather later than le Corbusier, and his "practical" work in the field has been confined to the design of one theoretical city, which he has named Broadacre City. He has, however, substantiated this plastic argument with a considerable amount of lecturing and writing. " The Disappearing City," published in 1932, is perhaps the fullest exposition of his approach to the subject. Let us repeat the procedure adopted in the description of the work of le Corbusier, and start by enumerating briefly the principles set forth in the book. Perhaps we will then be able to judge the extent of

Mr. Wright's modesty when he claims that " Broadacre City is clearly super-sense."

" Like some tumor grown malignant, the city, like some cancerous growth, is become a menace to the future of humanity. Not only is the city already grown so far out of human scale by way of commercial exploitation of the herd instinct that the human being as a unit is utterly lost, but the soul, properly citified, is so far gone as to mistake exaggeration for greatness, mistake a vicarious power for his own power, finding in the uproar and verticality of the great city a proof of his own great quality."

The foregoing could well stand as a typical Wright description of the city to-day. Wright hates the city and all it stands for, and there are many similar passages full of the same passionate hatred (and clumsy literary construction). They are dispersed at frequent intervals throughout the book. The word " vicarious " recurs like a leit-motif in a Wagner opera. What is the basis, then, of Wright's criticism of the city ? We remember that le Corbusier adopted a " geometrical " approach and contrasted the geometrical " man's way " with the arbitrary " pack-donkey's way." What does Wright use ?

Wright sees history as the working out of the opposing chraracteristics existing in two types or strains of our primitive ancestors. " Time was when mankind was divided between cave dwellers and wandering tribes." The cave dweller, who bred his young " in the shadow of the wall," was the original conservative ; the wanderer (roaming the plains on le Corbusier's pack-donkey ?) was the radical, " following the law of change." Man has to-day inherited both these primitive tendencies " as ingrained human instinct." For the present, it would seem that the city, a multiple artificial cave, expresses the way in which the " wandering tribes seem, gradually, to have been overcome by the material defences of the static forces . . . of the cave dwellers." However, the suppressed instinct of the wanderer finds expression in the " ideal of freedom that keeps breaking through our establishments." Having completed his little allegory, Wright tackles what he calls " the uneconomic basis of the city."

He ascribes this condition to " three major economic artificialities " which have been " grafted upon intrinsic production," and have grown into a legitimate economic system. Two of these three artificialities are obvious " extrinsic forms of unearned increment," or " rent," and the third is, although less obviously, also. They are :

1. Rent for land (the landlord).
2. Rent for money (interest on investments).
3. Unearned increment of the machine (" profits of imaginative ingenuity . . . funneled into the pockets of fewer and fewer captains of industry ").

Man himself is the " victim of the battle of the increments." But, despite all this, " the essential rightmindedness and decency of humanity—the artifex " has worked against the negative forces, and there has thus come out of this confusion, " the modern conception of God and man as growth—a concept called Democracy."

Wright sees in the development of this country so far, a frustration of the true purposes of the democracy that was founded here. The " three fortuitous money-getting systems " sabotaged the new concept and brought, instead, a society of " vicarious " standards with a " parasitic and impotent culture." Wright sees salvation in a society in which adequate expression of individuality is again possible. He refers us to Buddha, Jesus, Laotze, and Bahai as persons who " had a sense of individuality as achieved organic unity." What we must do, then, is to keep capitalism but purge it of the individualism that has " run riot." We must change " selfishness " into " selfhood " ; " sentimentality " into " sentiment " ; " license " into " liberty." The means for accomplishing this great spiritual change is . . . Broadacre City, " the city for the individual."

Broadacre City is the revolt against " centripetal centralisation." Its aim is to decentralise our cities. It derives its name from its proclaimed goal of providing each family with an acre of land. This enormous spreading of the population over the countryside Wright feels is feasible because of the " new standard of space measurement," or, in other words, the increased facility in getting about as a result of the developments in modern transportation. The utilisation of modern resources, according to Wright, makes Broadacre City realisable. Although we will not list, as he does, the resources he has in mind, we will at this stage merely draw attention to the way le Corbusier uses modern technique to preserve and rebuild the city as such, whilst Wright claims to use the same technique to end the city as we know it for all time.

The implementation of the Broadacre idea, according to Wright, requires no revolution despite its radical character. It needs two things : the nationalisation of the land, on the Henry Georgian principle, and a change of heart. " Let us learn to see life as organic architecture and learn to see organic architecture as life." The clue is in the three words we should remember—" democracy, integration, organic ! "

We may now rightly enquire, " What does Broadacre City look like ? " To find this out, we will have to refer to other sources for in the " Disappearing City," there is neither illustration nor plan of Broadacres, even if there is a fine portrait

of the author.

Broadacre City has been presented to the public both in the form of diagrammatic plans and also as an enormous and beautifully executed model. Because of the conventions adopted for the representation of the buildings and the trees, there is great difficulty at first in grasping the relationship between the various elements. However, simply stated, the arrangement is as follows:

At one end runs the main arterial connection with other communities and other parts of the country. Near it is located the industrial area, consisting of decentralised small industrial plants. Immediately behind this, are the vineyards and orchards. (The homes of some of the workers are in certain cases located upon the roofs of industrial buildings.) Beyond this first area, are the small and medium size homes all on their individual acre plots and, further still, are the county seat and various communal and recreational facilities. In one of the far corners, on a rising piece of ground, are the larger homes for the aristocracy of such a society, and this class, we understand, as an innovation, includes the architect. The climax of the scheme is what is termed an " automobile objective," and looks like a spiral ramp to the top of the hill where one can survey the whole scheme, and then descend. The layout, and the road system are based on a simple large grid system without diagonals. As Mr. Wright calculates approximately three cars per family so that there will be ample means of getting about in this widely dispersed project there seems to be rather a lack of consideration of the design of the roads bar an overpass at the crossings. The architectural qualities and the beauty to be found in such a scheme we are told comes in the conception of the city as landscaping. Thus there would be such an amount of greenery that the architecture, even if it were most offensive (which we are assured it will not be), would not obtrude. For a detailed description of how the various elements would appear, a reference back to the Disappearing City is in order. There many pages are devoted to a description of how the various functions of the new Broadacre society would operate. We will not repeat all this here, but will confine ourselves to a description of Mr. Wright's solution of but one problem, i.e., of the " poor man " as indicative of how he proposes to solve the problems of society as a whole.

Firstly, " by some form of exemption and subsequent sharing of increase in land values, make his acre available to each poor man." Thus the first part of the problem is " solved." Now the problem is, how our " poor man " is to get his house ? It is simple ! " Mobilisation is already his—by way of a fare in a bus or a second-hand Ford," so he can easily get to his work even if it is decentralised 10 miles off. Then, emancipated from the various forms of " rent " which he had to pay in the city, " poor man " can immediately invest in the first unit of what in the future will be his house. He buys " the modern, civilised, standardised privy," and " plants this first unit on his ground." A standardised kitchen unit " may " be added. In such picturesque surroundings, we take it, the poor man lives until " the rent saved may buy other standardised units, or as soon as he earns them by his work on the ground."

Through this development, the erstwhile " poor man " is now " planted (like his privy . . rk) square with his fellow-man to grow as he may grow on his own ground." " Where, now, would be your city slums ? " Wright exclaims in triumph ! !

CRITICISM AND EVALUATION

Having set forth at considerable length the principles of these two architects, and having refrained patiently from any comment so far, we can now proceed to some criticism and evaluation of their work.

Despite the many respects in which Frank Lloyd Wright and le Corbusier differ, the respects in which they are " arch-antagonists " in the eyes of a Mumford, there is nevertheless a basic similarity to be found in their approach to their problems. This similarity shows itself most vividly in the social aspect of their work, whilst the so-called antagonism expresses itself in the different methods by which they carry out the common social standpoint in design.

It will be remembered that at the outset we called these architects " Utopians," and their work, the architectural Utopias. Such an epithet constitutes both a label and a criticism. We should now substantiate this statement for both architects would vigourously object to being tarred with such a brush, especially if they were acquainted with Webster's definition of a Utopia. Webster defines a Utopia as an " impractical scheme of social regeneration," and it is in this very sense that we apply the epithet to le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright.

A scheme for social regeneration ! ! This is the key to the similarity between the two. Both see in their plans this Messianic importance. For Wright, " Broadacre City is organic capitalism " and thus the way to the future life. For le Corbusier, the reconstruction of the centres of our great cities is the means whereby war can be averted and society saved. For both, our society's ills are traceable as much to the non-appearance up till this century of an architectural Siegfried as to any other cause. Once such a hero appears, once he has presented his ideas and educated his public

into accepting them, then will society at last be able to march as a whole.

This point of view arises from the incorrect belief that it is the " great idea " that is the driving force in history—that man's consciousness determines his social being " and not vice versa. This is Idealism,[4] and Utopias are invariably and notoriously Idealistic. From Idealism naturally stems the mistaken and exaggerated notions of the rôle of the individual in history.

Armed with this unjustified confidence in the importance of their work, Wright and le Corbusier can proceed to design while making only the scantiest references to the people for whom they are designing, and to the people's objective social relationships. Where such reference is secondary and trivial and not basic, it is easy to see how such " antagonistic " plastic schemes can result from the application of the essentially common Idealist approach. In fact, where there are no more determining constants than the whim of the individual will, it would be most surprising if the solutions were anything else but " antagonistic." This type of antagonism is moreover not peculiar to architecture and city planning, and we find it arising wherever a (pseudo-) science is founded on such an Idealist or Metaphysical base. We might mention the mortal conflicts between the " gods " of psycho-analysis, Freud, Adler, and Jung as an illustration of the same tendency.

It would be incorrect and unjust to say that Wright and le Corbusier neglect the material reality of society entirely. Much as he would have it otherwise, an Idealist is an Idealist in a real and very material society. Both are loud in their claim that their motives are " humane," for " Man," etc. But through inverting the superstructural relationship of art to the socio-economic base, we get all the absurdities from such a putting the cart before the horse, or perhaps, more logically, above the horse. It is in this inverted sense that we find in le Corbusier lyric pages in praise of " geometry " preceding the pathetic apology for a chapter on Finance and Realisation ; that we find in Wright the vast expanses of mystic verbiage on " architecture as organic life " preceding the pathetic picture of the " poor man " squatting in the wilderness on his lonely privy.

Whatever the extent of the good intentions of such people might be initially, it is obvious that they must inevitably shoot wide of the mark. Whatever value we might find in a detailed examination of their work, must always be tempered by this recognition that the basic approach is wrong from the start.

We have yet to deal fully with the word " impractical " in the Webster definition of Utopia. For this purpose, nothing could be better than to see how Wright and le Corbusier react when faced with a practical problem. We are lucky in this respect for the Soviet Government approached le Corbusier (as well as many other foreign architects) for suggestions for the re-design of Moscow, and at a later date, Wright, on a visit to the U.S.S.R., was asked for his opinion of the design actually adopted for the new city. Thus we have an interesting comparison of the reaction of the two to the same practical problem.

Le Corbusier produced the famous abstract plan, later known as la Ville Radieuse, and suggested that the Soviets do away with the original city completely (with the exception of a few buildings retained as monuments) and erect, instead, his city. He was heartily upset when the plan was summarily rejected and his bitter disappointment blinded him to the fact that his design had taken into no account whatsoever the objective social, economic and technical conditions existing in the U.S.S.R. at the time (1931). Russian Building technique was not at such a level (nor is it yet) that it could have been able to construct the scheme as proposed. But more fundamentally, the really pressing demands, for which a planner was needed were not even considered. A plan, that could take advantage of what was inherited from the old regime in the way of usable buildings and existing utilities (even if they would eventually be replaced) ; a plan, that could have a short range programme for improvement of the existing bad conditions and acute housing shortage ; a plan, that taking into consideration these short-term requirements, could have nevertheless the inherent life and breadth of vision that it could develop organically with time and the development of the country as a whole ; a plan, that would be so close to the real struggle of the people to rebuild their civilisation, that it would be an expression of, a monument to, their achievements in architectural form—this was the problem posed ! ! And le Corbusier replied with a geometrical abstraction whose only life was its ability to perpetuate and increase its monotony in time ! ! The Soviets with perfect justification rejected the plan. Although they admitted its undoubted technical ingenuity, they denounced it in the most vigourous terms they knew, labelling it as a typical "bourgeois," " capitalist " creation. Le Corbusier claimed that his art was above such words as " capitalisme, bourgeoisisme, prolétariat." As he said, " Tel est mon devoir professionel d'architecte et d'urbanisme : humain." We can only agree with the Soviets that if anything were lacking, it was just this humanity, and a common sense of the practical.

In the case of Wright, the story is a good deal shorter, for by the time he visited the Soviet Union, the Moscow plan that was adopted was already under construction. However,

his attitude was surprisingly similar to that of le Corbusier in that he considered nothing worth saving bar the Kremlin and one ecclesiastical building. For the rest, he felt that the Soviets would be far better advised to raze the city to the ground, and start again from scratch—of course, following the Broadacre thesis. Here Wright's unmitigated and unqualified opposition to the city per se, an opposition that knows neither time nor place, expressed itself in an exactly similar comment to that made by the glorifier and perpetuator of the city. Once again, we may note the lack of practicality. I think that we can at this stage safely say that we have applied the term Utopian to the work of both Wright and le Corbusier with perfect justification.

To be a belated Utopian to-day does not only mean that one is behind the times ; that one is doing now what Fourier, St. Simone, and Owen did more than a century ago. The lack of understanding that the latter had of what was necessary to achieve a better society was historically justified. In their time, the hidden processes that underlie the chaotic surface of the young capitalist society were yet to be discovered ; more than that, the new social processes had not yet worked themselves out to such a point where they could be clearly recognised, let alone analysed. Thus we find the Utopians playing often an essentially progressive rôle, formulating many valuable and advanced ideas on social reconstruction. To-day, however, the Utopian stand can be adopted solely by creating for oneself an elaborate set of blinkers that shut not only the scientific analysis of contemporary society that has arisen in the last hundred years, but for the most part, the harsh realities of a maladjusted social order. To-day to be a Utopian means either to be ignorant, or to be a reactionary. If ignorance persists in the face of the rebuffs that reality inevitably gives to one's Utopian ideas, then the alternative reactionary rôle will in all likelihood follow. In the development of both Frank Lloyd Wright and le Corbusier, this tendency can be readily seen.

As we pointed out in the introductory section, le Corbusier was one of those " Leftists " in art who were a product of the immediate post-war years. Having re-examined the "methods," or outward " form," of his art without tackling the essential " content," he applied the results of this incomplete investigation to the problems of cities and society with a naive enthusiasm and the highest ideals. Finding himself baulked by an unresponsive audience, he took the first and easiest line, and laid the blame on the academicians of the Beaux Arts, the architectural dictators of Paris. He next turned to Finance Capital to reform itself and to redesign the cities of its own masterly creation. Failing to be accepted here, and later, by the Soviets, there remained but one alternative—the Fascist " solution." Although there is no direct evidence available (although plenty of hearsay) of his espousal of the Fascist cause, le Corbusier has endorsed the organisation of the notorious Bata shoe factory in Czecho-Slovakia, run on concentration-camp lines ; has endorsed the Fiat motor factory in Fascist Italy, and also Henry Ford's little Fascist Empire on the banks of the River Rouge in America. In addition, in la Ville Radieuse, he quotes with approval statements on national organisation made by none other than Marshal Petain, and others of the same order. There is enough evidence to depict a distinct trend towards the Fascist camp.

In any case, the majority of his city plans exhibit just that attitude to the people, that arrogant contempt for their individuality which is so typical of Fascism. The greatest virtue of the schemes seems to lie more than anything in the aesthetic satisfaction that an architectural, or political dictator would derive from surveying the human bees scurrying mechanically within the confines of their " flaming " steel and glass hives. Only a Fascist society could conceivably have any use for such a scheme ; and yet, taking into account the internal decay that is Fascism, it is unlikely that such a form of political oppression, even loving display as it does, will have the time yet for such a project.

With Wright, the development is rather easier to trace, for seeing that he is not nearly so prolific a designer of city plans as le Corbusier, he has relied more on writing for the elaboration an development of his ideas. Thus, instead of having to diagnose political trends in the contentious field of aesthetics, we have the written word to support our thesis.

By the time Wright wrote his " Disappearing City," he had already achieved considerable fame for his undoubted contributions at the beginning of his career to the art of architecture. He had by this time achieved that superlative inflated opinion of his own importance which has persisted as his main personal characteristics. This arrogance expressed itself initially in the book as an Anarchic attitude to society ; Wright desired to destroy the city and the " rent " system on which it was " founded." To develop this architectural Bakuininism[5] further, he had to resort next to mysticism to substantiate his arguments. This attitude heralds the appearance of his crackpot theory of the two primitive strains in man, and the endorsement of the great mystics. In later years, a flirtation with the land theories of Henry George precedes an adoption of the C. H. Douglas, Social Credit System as the panacea. The final step towards Fascism can be clearly recognised in the latest Wright publication, " Taliesin," issued

with the recently concluded (January, 1941) exhibition of his work in New York City. Here are some choice samples of the latest Wright tendency. " The idea of the new system is a form of true " Economic Nationalism." (See Mein Kampf for further details.) " The dictators were the first to throw off the old economics and to take on the new economics." " A nation such as this, of small individual capitalists, strongly armed, would be the best defence against dictators from without or revolution from within." (No imported brands of Fascism ; what we want is pure American Economic Nationalism ! !) " Broadacre City is ' capitalism ' carried to a humane conclusion." " Broadacre City is Organic Capitalism . . ."

Here we have Wright following in the inglorious footsteps of the Eugen Dührings[6] of history, those creators of " world shattering " schemes for an organic capitalism whilst preserving intact in their schemes all those inherent contradictions which would rapidly negate their proclaimed humane intentions. This social demagoguery has an all too familiar ring, and has to-day become inextricably bound-up and associated with the way in which Fascism comes to power.

This is the reactionary end to which both these theorists come. Sergei Eisenstein[7] has summed-up in a striking passage the inevitable outcome of the persistence of the " leftist " modern artists in their early misconceptions.

" On the one hand, there is a firm belief in the permanency of the existing order, and hence a conviction of the limitations of man.

" On the other hand, the arts experience a need to transcend their own limitations.

" But for the most part this is only an explosion, and it is not directed outwards, towards the boundaries of the art, which can be achieved by extending its content in an anti-imperialist and revolutionary direction, but inwards, towards the methods, and not the content. The explosion is not creative and progressive, but destructive."[8]

There is more than a measure of tragedy in the development of such undoubted genius as possessed by both Wright and le Corbusier. It is a tragedy that reflects far less on their personal limitations than it does upon the objective state of the society in which they work. To be sure, if they had both been greater men (and thus more modest in the rôle they assumed) their end would not have been in this curious architectural megalomania. But there must be in this society of ours that which frustrates the creative ability of our artists, and, not being able to suppress it entirely, distorts it into these crude manifestations.

Architectural megalomania is a symptom of, an expression of the basic contradictions existing in our society. On the one hand there is the enormous resourcefulness of modern production, firing the imagination of the artist to tackle great project ; on the other hand, there is the impotence of this society to use these resources to plan anything better than international mass destruction. So the imagination, frustrated at once, has this distorted outlet in megalomania.

This is the tragedy of le Corbusier and Wright ; that they are unable to surmount these hurdles that separate service to a dying social order from service to the forces of the future. For we must recognise that City Planning is not possible under Capitalism . . . City Planning, that is, that involves more than the niggardly reforms that are the total extent of City Planning activity under capitalism. The years of growing unemployment and misery for ever greater masses of the people ; the years of crises and slumps—of want in the midst of plenty ; and the final tragic years of continuous international anarchy and war . . . this is the grim harvest of capitalism.

In a socialist society, where the ownership of the means of production is vested in the whole people that they might operate them to the greatest good of the greatest number, and not for the benefit of the few, planning becomes axiomatic and implicit. Even Wright was forced to recognise the identity of planning with socialism. His article written for the October issue of the Architectural Record for 1937 bears eloquent testimony to this. It is unfortunate that he was unable to overcome his deep-rooted prejudices and his back-ground sufficiently to enable him to offer a positive comment on the redesign of Moscow.

The duty of City Planners, just as it is the duty of all creative artists to-day, who can recognise the limitations of the old and the scope of the new society, must be to seek out the means by which the new society can be attained. Having discovered those forces, they must harness the destiny of their art with them, for there lies the only way of salvation for the artists and for their art. We have witnessed " the plight of those artists . . . who, by not daring to associate themselves with the revolutionary and advancing trends in history, sign their own death warrant. They are only beating their heads against a wall, but think they are breaking through the limits to their potentialities."[9]

A future society will not forget the work of le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. It will recognise, as we do, the valid criticism of our existing order that they have made. In the plastic skill and inventive genius of le Corbusier, we have had furthermore brilliant demonstrations of the aesthetic potentialities of our new technique in building. This

is a contribution even if the demonstrations were often mechanical abstractions. A future society could use this heritage in a positive sense. In the decentralisation theories of Wright, there is the germ of a future unity of town and country, in which the gulf between the two, and created essentially by the industrial revolution, will at last be bridged. This is a contribution even if it was combined with more than a smattering of the reactionary subsistence-homestead idea.

That both were unable to rise above their personal limitations is, as we have said, a great tragedy. This does, however, not prevent us from recognising their positive aspects, and from learning a great deal from the work that they have done.

An essay submitted to the City Planning and Housing Division of the School of Architecture, Columbia University, New York City.

NOTES

[1] Reformist philosopher of the mid-19th Century. Criticised severely by Friedrich Engels in "The Housing Question" (1872).

[2] New York display artist and play promoter and producer. Designed the General Motors exhibit at the New York World's Fair, 1939/40, an enormous "Futurama" of the city and countryside to come.

[3] Author of "Technics and Civilisation" and "Culture of Cities," critical works on society and city planning. Latterday exponent of a form of American Economic Nationalism.

[4] "Idealism" is used throughout in the philosophical sense, i.e., as opposed to Materialism. This must be made clear in order that the incorrect idea that a materialistic philosophy is one that has no "ideals" (in the common sense of the word) may not arise.

[5] Russian Anarchist of the last century.

[6] German "socialist" of the last century, "inventor" of a complete scheme for a perfect society. Vulgar plagiarist, exposed very fully by Friedrich Engels in the famous "Anti-Dühring."

[7] Leading Soviet motion picture producer. Responsible for the world famous film, "Thunder over Mexico," and many other great films.

[8] Quoted from "International Literature," 1940.

[9] Eisenstein, ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

For information on the standpoint of Wright and le Corbusier in the City Planning field, I would refer the reader to the following best-known works of the two architects.

le Corbusier:

The City of To-Morrow.

la Ville Radieuse.

Des Canons ! Des Munitions ! Merci ! Des Logis, S.V.P.

The three volumes of the collected works should be referred to for drawings of the designs.

Frank Lloyd Wright:

The Disappearing City.

Taliesin . . . pamphlet issued with the exhibition of his work at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1940.

Other biographical works of Wright should be referred to.

EDITORS' NOTE:

The views expressed by Mr. Kantorowich in the foregoing article are not necessarily supported by the Editors, who do not, for instance, accept conclusions arrived at through "plenty of hearsay."

PROFESSIONAL NOTES AND NEWS

NEW BUILDING BY-LAWS JOHANNESBURG

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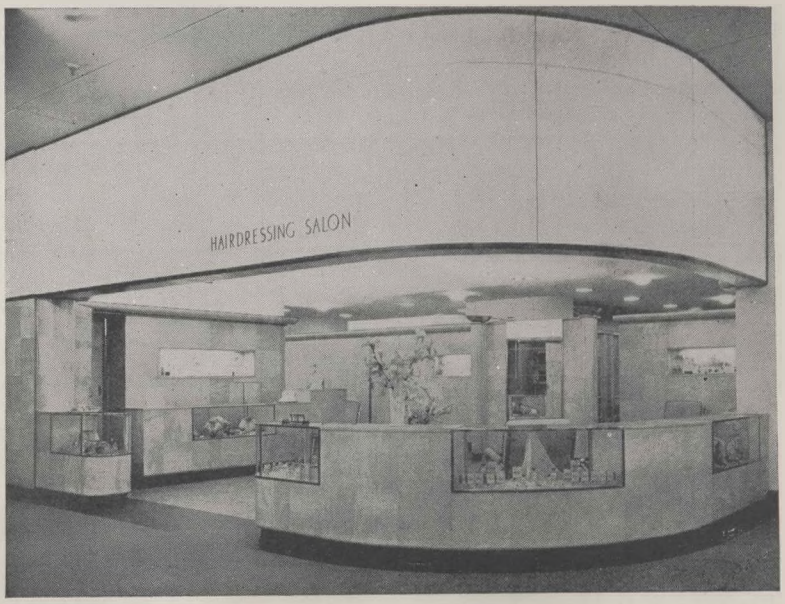
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