

Summary

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Summary

Le Corbusier at 70 (pages 295—302)

Nobody who heard Le Corbusier's animated formulations at the recent opening of his great exhibition at the Zurich Kunsthau can believe that he is now 70 years old. The concern for human social conditions can be discerned in all his manifold ideas, projects and buildings—bearing witness to his untiring, searching and form-giving genius. His form principles are broadening into ever more plastic expression—how far they are from so-called "rational building!" In Ronchamp one can sense how the building was seemingly hand-formed as from a lump of clay and how, only later, was the attempt made to bring façades and plans out on paper. This is also true for his buildings in Chandigarh—a sculptor is at work here. We are decades away from the "machine for living" which caused such an earlier commotion. Is not the playful, almost accidental, artistic impulse of creative power more typical of his recent work than strict codification? We see, too, the consequences of his sketches and thoughts on urban design: instead of our crowded cities—Unités in the landscape; instead of death-dealing streets—multi-level systems separating autos from pedestrians. May our plans for the cities of the world profit from his eye and hand—so incisive, even in his quick urban sketches. They speak for themselves.

The City in the Automobile Age (pages 303—307)

With 4 to 6 million autos a year rolling off her assembly lines, America must now reckon with a huge auto population which is competing with the human population for space. Instead of the present city picture of streets forming narrow gaps in the mass of buildings, a future view might show human habitations as islands in a sea of streets and parking lots. The American city has taken on a certain structure as a result of the automobile invasion. A glance at the map of a typical mid-twentieth century city shows certain characteristics similar to the growth rings of a tree trunk. In the core, or downtown district, we find only business, office and municipal buildings. Around the core there is a ring where once the finest homes were located—now in a state of neglect, a semi-slum. As we approach the outskirts the ring gradually melts into a zone of no particular character—we are now in "Suburbia" with its endless subdivisions and countless one family houses. With the advent of the private automobile, the suburbs no longer were bound to the lines of public transportation. Their heretofore organic growth broke up into an amorphous expansion—resulting in the monotonous residential areas we see today. Here community social life no longer exists, for these new areas with their countless similar houses isolate the inhabitants from each other and from the social organism. They have practically lost the interest to be members of society—their best grasp of life in general seems to be what they see on their television screen. The radial cracks of the tree trunk have their analogy in the city's main traffic arteries—now choked with vehicles of all description: private autos, trucks, buses, streetcars moving in ever-chaotic tempo as they near the downtown district. When the city core, like that of the tree, can no longer freely receive its life sap, then it begins to rot.

In the last 10 years this economic and cultural decline has reached such alarming proportions that, as can be expected of a healthy democratic society, energetic counter-measures are now being taken.

In nearly every large city a new street building program is either under construction or in the planning stage. But while the enterprise is impressive, many measures are, in general, poorly thought out and poorly coordinated—limited in their ability to ease the most acute problems. They have been designed primarily to deal with a scapegoat called "traffic." But traffic is only a symptom of the sickness, dealing with it alone will not ease the real difficulties. What is lacking can be summed up in one word—planning. By planning we mean the conscientious effort to so arrange the manifold expressions of human life that they are meaningfully related to one another—resulting in an environment in which human beings can physically, aesthetically and intellectually enjoy their existences. Certainly Americans are excellent planners. The typical suburban home with its extremely functional layout and labor-saving devices, as well as the office buildings and production lines of our factories are triumphs of planning. But seldom do these concepts extend to the relation of different buildings to each other in a comprehensive architectural conception. The reason for this may lie in the fact that such integrated planning would require the cooperation and agreement of many people and groups. It is much easier for absolute rulers, or dictators to accomplish such works. In America, too, integrated planning has been hampered in the past by the spirit of "rugged individualism." If we want to set things in order we must plan. But this raises the question of whether large-scale planning is possible in a democratic society and still maintain freedom—a question which must be answered in the next 20 or 30 years. I personally believe the answer to be "yes." I am of the opinion that planning is indispensable for the economic health of our country. To show that it is possible to project integrated plans, I will now describe three current ones:

1. The Gratiot-Orlean Project (in collaboration with Minoru Yamasaki and Oscar Stonorov) will rehabilitate a slum district in the center of Detroit. Here, 10 minutes walking distance from the city center, 4000 dwelling units will be constructed. Schools, churches and stores can be reached without having to cross streets. There will be several types of buildings: 20 story high apartment blocks arranged around communal parking with many one- and two story dwellings distributed throughout. The project is for people of all income brackets, races and ethnic groups, and shall serve as a model for the planning of the 25 other districts of Detroit's slum belt.

2. The Northland Shopping Center, also near Detroit, manifests a new element in urban planning and serves the needs of a suburban population of 500,000. Here one million square feet of rentable space is visited daily by 40,000 shoppers. There is parking space for 8,600 cars and reserve space for 3,000 more. Deliveries are made through basement tunnels. A zone of arcaded courts and paths has been built for the exclusive use of pedestrians. In addition, there are children's playgrounds, countless restaurants and landscaped sculpture courts. Business men are amazed that such a pleasing and attractive environment can also be financially successful.

3. The urban renewal project for the center of Fort Worth, Texas involved a comprehensive replanning of the business district of this city of 500,000 people. The basic concepts of the plan arise from the fact that present conditions will no longer serve the needs of a growing population (both human and automotive) by 1970. It also acknowledges that a healthy city core must attract suburban dwellers to its shopping, recreational and cultural facilities. Although the plan requires the destruction of only a very few existing buildings, it radically changes the functions of streets—they will be excluded from normal traffic and given over to the pedestrian. This will be accomplished in the following manner: a belt of broad streets will surround the center providing direct access to six multi-story parking garages, capable of holding a total of 60,000 autos, while the roofs will be used as helicopter landing decks. A few short streets will partially enter the center—for the use of buses, taxis and airport buses. From the ends of these streets and the exits of the parking garages it will be possible to walk to all points of the Center in a few minutes. All delivery traffic will be confined to basement tunnels which will also contain all necessary utility lines. With the disappearance of the auto from the inner city, 4½ million square feet of present street area can be used for construction of new buildings, parks and gardens. The present real estate value of

this land, some 40 million dollars, is enough to pay for the subterranean tunnel network. The character of this new center will be marked by a variety of parks, gardens and shopping courts between new and old buildings, as well as covered promenades and arcades. A new cultural center is projected: Theaters, lecture and concert halls and exhibition areas.

The renewal of our cities requires more than the energetic initiative of progressive businessmen. We need new and more efficient expropriation and zoning laws, as well as government financial aid. Architectural schools must include a stronger emphasis on integrated planning in their curricula. Furthermore, we need the active participation of artists and creative people in all fields in order to realize an aesthetic order worthy of our country.

Stockholm—From Housing to Urban Planning (pages 308—315)

The outbreak of the Second World War and suspension of building activity provided an opportunity for a critical evaluation of Stockholm's suburban housing developments built in the pre-war decade. These were found to be merely dormitory towns without a commercial or cultural life of their own. Also, the industrially-inspired repetition of building elements and sunlight-shadow studies tended, in the prewar projects, to result in uniformity. It was said: "We have a new urban system, but no new urban art." While the family remained the primary module, dwelling zones had to be made humanly comprehensible—centers had to be concentrated and made architecturally dominant. The unexpected growth of the city was now to be distributed in independent cells of 10,000 people each, with their own employment and social facilities, within a 10—15 km. radius from downtown Stockholm. So the rowhouses and high-rise buildings were bent and angled around communal spaces and related to Nature—cities were being built instead of housing projects.

The Master Plan for Greater Stockholm speaks of a "Humanization of Goals." A progression was formulated: dwelling units of 500—700, neighborhood units of 1000—3000, townships of 7000—15,000, and finally city sectors or new cities of 25,000—50,000.

A solution to the dilemma of residential vs. work facilities has been sought in the new cities of Vällingby and Farsta; the former already completed, the latter just under way. In Vällingby a large area has been reserved for industrial and office use. The new city has its own life. As yet not much has been said concerning the feeling of Vällingby's citizens towards their new city. "Town and neighborhood unity is more a psychological than an architectural reality."

The regeneration of a modern metropolis cannot be limited to its periphery—new legislation is enabling a comprehensive rehabilitation of Stockholm's street and mass transit networks.

Will this striving for a humanization of the metropolis succeed? Will it become a reality—a tradition? Such constant criticism of achieved results will lead not to architectural dogmas, but rather to a grasp of actual requirements and living needs of the Swedish people.

Garden City of Tapiola near Helsinki (pages 316—320)

In 1918 Eiel Saarinen worked out a master plan for Greater Helsinki in which he foresaw a number of independent municipal units organically connected to both the central city and to each other. Had this plan been realized, Greater Helsinki today would be one of the most modern of the world's large cities—but the city's development went in other directions. In 1946 Prof. Meurmann received the commission to make a development plan for the Hagalund municipality. The Garden City Tapiola published here, only 15 minutes away by bus from the center of Helsinki, represents the first stage in the construction of Hagalund. A density of 65 persons/hectare has been envisaged—necessitating the construction of dwellings for about 15,000 people. Tapiola comprises three neighborhood units separated by green zones, with an administrative, business and cultural center for a total population of 30,000. A competition for the design of the Center was held in 1954, in which Aarne Ervi, in collaboration with Olli Kuusi and Tapani Nironen, won first prize. The following buildings are to be erected around a large artificial lake: theater, library, church with meeting halls, primary school, gymnasium and a few vocational schools. Automobile traffic

will not cross through the Center, but instead will remain on the periphery—resulting in a true pedestrian's quarter. For the dwelling areas a mixed scheme of one family houses, low row houses and eleven story high blocks of small apartments has been chosen. In all multi-family buildings and scattered throughout the single family house areas are public laundries with drying rooms, steam baths and recreational facilities. A central steam power plant will supply heat and electricity for the entire area. So that Tapiola does not become a dormitory city, an area has been set aside for small industry and handwork shops. A much larger industrial area has been planned west of Tapiola, so that in the future most of the inhabitants will either work there or in Tapiola itself.

Skoleparken Colony at Gladsaxe near Copenhagen (pages 321—325)

On a 100,000 m² tract in Gladsaxe, a suburb of Copenhagen, the Skoleparken Development consists of mainly row-houses with a few multi-family houses containing 1—4 room apartments. Community facilities include: laundry, central heating plant, maid agency, day nursery, steam bath, meeting rooms, hobby shops, garages, stores and a small residential hotel. The buildings are laid out in two zig-zag chains of row-houses supplemented by a long straight chain—forming two large interconnected green areas. In all there are 273 apartments, the majority having direct access to gardens or small garden terraces. The construction consists of load-bearing lightweight concrete outer walls coated in white plaster topped by a timber roof. All wood exposed to the weather is left rough and unplanned and provided with a sunresistant protective coating. Garden walls are of prefabricated concrete elements.

Skoleparken is, like all Danish social housing, state subsidized—up to 97% of the construction costs. The tenants receive rent reductions depending on the number of children they have. The project's administration has published a pamphlet describing everything from the operation of communal facilities to such technical details as the care of floors and gardening tips—providing an excellent picture of how this project serves the Scandinavian way of life.

Nine Personnel Houses of an Australian Oil Refinery (pages 326—328)

These are one-family houses for the employees of an oil refinery. The architect has varied the plans of each while maintaining a similarity in exterior appearance—resulting in an overall strength and consistency. All windows, closets and sanitary blocks have been economically standardized. Exterior walls are of lightly colored brick with touches of coldly bright colors in places. Floors are constructed of pre-stressed concrete slabs with either asphalt or cork tile flooring.

Single Family Housing at Halen near Berne (pages 329—332)

The Bremgarten Woods northwest of Bern provide a wonderful location for a self-contained housing development with regular bus service ensuring good connections to the cultural, shopping and work centers of the city. The "one-family house in the country" has always been an ideal of the Bern citizenry. The Halen Development provides for 66 one-family houses lined up in two terrace rows so that each house has a view of the River Aare, the woods and distant Alps. The row arrangement has the further advantage of shielding each family's privacy from the noise and view of neighbors. Communal facilities consist of a swimming pool, park and sport grounds, garage with filling station, laundry automat; as well as a central boiler plant and individually metered electrical and hot water distribution.

The individual houses are to be of 2 types, 9 m. and 12 m. long respectively, with several variations available for each type. In general they shall occupy three stories: the middle, or street, level for living area, upper level for bedrooms and studio, and lower, or garden, level for another bedroom and either a workshop or playroom. A pergola and covered sitting area are provided in the garden. The northern row of houses are entered from the street through small enclosed patios.

The homeowner acquires, in addition to his house, a 1/66th share in the communal facilities—streets, paths, heating plant, etc. The café and food stores on the village square are to be privately operated.