HASS 02.130 – History and Theory of City Planning

Writing Assignment 1

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2a) The key characteristics of Wright’s ideal city are:

* “Form and function are one in Broadacres” (Wright, 1935, p. 348), with “decentralization as an applied principle as an applied principle and architectural reintegration of all units into one fabric” (p. 349).
* Land in the Broadacre City would be county-managed and distributed under a “minor government” (p. 347), with “a minimum of one acre going to the childless family and more to the larger family” (p. 347).
* Decentralized industries and public services promote a “subsistence living” (p. 348). If implemented as planned, Broadacre City would “automatically end unemployment and all its evils forever” (p. 348)
* Transport within the city is “safe and enjoyable”, made possible by means of personal automobiles and small flying machines. Long-distance travel fis solely by high-speed train. (p. 349).
* Architecture thrives as each county would “develop an individuality of its own”, under “an architect chosen by the county” (p. 348). Houses would be built and customized using modular, “prefabricated utility stacks or units” (p. 349). Organic architecture is promoted.

6/6

2b) Wright has an interesting, seemingly conflicting, position with regard to technology. In his work While he was aware of the promises of the technologies of his time, he saw how a society centered around production through machines led to life being “exaggarated but sterilized by machinery and medicine” (Wright, 1932, p. 4). Superficially, his proposals of decentralized industry and society might seem to suggest his opposition toward them. Nevertheless, in conceiving Broadacre City, Wright tells us about three pieces of technology that enable his decentralized society: the automobile, the radio, and the workshop (Wright, 1935, p. 346). Of the three, the former two are space-shrinking technologies that serve to reduce distance between individuals or communities; and the latter allows individuals to own their personal, albeit small, means of production. Therefore, I would consider Wright an advocate for the technologies that enable the dispersion of activities (residence, production, etc.) within the city and a fervent disbeliever in those that aid its centralization.

6/6

2c) One of the critiques I would offer Wright’s idea: Wright’s ideal city assumes favourable land that can be equally and equitably distributed. In reality, some parts of the land are more equal than others. Natural resources (ore deposits, aquifers), terrain features like hills and meandering rivers that over tens of years cut into private land, microclimates and variable land fertility are some examples of the many factors that make owning a specific acre, or acres, of land more favourable than owning another. In Wright’s city, who gets the prime plot of flat land with fertile land over an aquifer they can build a water pump on, and who gets the uneven plot of land infested with insects and pests and has to build their house at an angle?

8/8

20/20

4) The term Industrial Revolution refers to the machine-enabled transition of the manufacturing process that occurred from the mid 1700s to the mid 1800s. Important changes included the shift from hand-manufactured products to machine-produced ones, the harnessing of water and steam energy to automate processes, and inventions including tools, machines and the steam engine.

In some sense, the Fordism of the late 1800s and early 1900s was the apotheosis of the Industrial Revolution, in which specialization and competitive advantage dictated the structure of economy and society. Traditionally-skilled workers would be displaced from their jobs in favour of machinery, which did their jobs with multiple-fold efficiency and output. For example, the cotton gin increased the efficiency of removing seed from cotton by a factor of 50 (Roe, 1916).

This is a nice description of the industrial revolution but I think you missed the second part of the question which asks you to describe some of the effects.. unless you mean displacement as the effect… 6/10

6) What is meant by the term socialism? If a city’s government is run by socialists, do you think they would propose the provision of government housing or other services?

Socialism is an economic and political system where the means of production is owned by the State, actually, can be owned in common, not by the state. Govt generally then has to manage the stuff…equally, rather than private companies. Workers thus contribute as much as possible to a shared economy. The State would then allocate basic needs to the people. A good socialist city government would probably propose the provision of housing, a basic need and entitlement excluded from being a commodity with an exchange value. Public services such as healthcare and education would be provided.

9/10

8) Modernism refers to the reactionary this is an interesting term to use… they saw themselves as revolutionary not reactionary… movement against the traditional forms of philosophy, art, religion, science, economics and society, including the effects of industrial societies and cities, and war, during the late 19th to mid 20th century, and the concurrent search for new forms of expression. I believe Wright incorporated some degree of modernism in his philosophy, but his city plan cannot be fully considered a modernist work. Wright’s ideas could be considered modernist in the sense that they were also a reaction to the seemingly soulless machines that were the industrial cities. In his book *The Disappearing City*, Wright writes a lengthy commentary on the value of the Earth, the perils of centralization and the sad state of industrial city-dwellers and things in the early 1900s: “So no healthy human-soul may longer grow or long survive in the vicarious life of the machine-made city because life, there, must be a surrender of true correlation of the human faculties to the expedient in some form; expedient imposed senselessly upon every soul in it to no purpose at all – except as they may be found to be some form of rent” (Wright, 1932, p. 19). His ideas were driven by a desire to get others to reject the pollution and soullessness of the city of his day, and embrace freedom through decentralization. However, in other aspects of his plan, there was some degree of practicality through conserving the traditions of his time. Technology (the automobile and the radio) was embraced instead of shunned as Wright saw their potential in creating a decentralized city structure. Architecturally, his city plan probably would not be considered modernist, as individuals were still free to design their property however they wanted, embellished or not.

10/10

10) What is at the center of an ideal city in Ebenezer Howard’s garden city plan? What is at the center of a city in LeCourbousier’s plan? What about Frank Lloyd Wright’s plan? What, if anything, can this tell us about what each planner thought was important about human settlements?

* Central garden surrounded by town hall, museums, library, theatre (Howard)
* A subterranean railway station (Le Corbusier)
* A school building group with spaces for education and leisure (Wright)

In principle, the center of a city is the economic, political and social heart. At least it is now… In my opinion, people go to the center to for work, for leisure, and sometimes for no reason at all, but the center is more than a space. It is a representative icon – visually, and conceptually – and a nucleus in which the culture of the city is built around, representing the ideals of its dwellers. Howard placed a garden at the heart of his city, presumably wanting the beauty of trees and flowers in constant sight, a simulation of the country-magnet’s appeal of fresh air, lush greenery and tranquility. Placing a multi-level subterrenean railway station in the center and saying “there is no reason for putting it anywhere else” (LeCorbusier, 1929, p. 340) seems to have prioritized efficiency over everything else, wanting to give people the means to be physically mobile, while optimizing the usage of space in the expensive city center. Wright’s ideals of decentralization and socialist-like ideas are reflected in his city center – a statement saying, ‘the provision of education is the hallmark of this city’.

18/20

12) Wright was an advocate of democracy, building his decentralized model according to the hope that society would consist of “many units free in themselves built up high in the quality of individuality, functioning together in freedom” (Wright, 1932, p. 32). Wright further explains three fundamental human rights: social currency, the right to own land, and the right to ideas. Wright then declares that “public utilities are concentrated in the hands of the state and county government as are matters of administration, patrol, fire, post, banking, license and record, making politics a vital matter to everyone in the new city instead of the old case where hopeless indifference makes “politics” a grafter’s profession” (Wright, 1935, p. 347). All these hints suggest a socialistic government or at least one that is in charge of allocating the resources of the people, while the people reserve their ownership of their work, their property and their ideas. Given that the idea for Broadacre was born of disgust for the industrial city of his day, as seen in his savage and systematic dismantling of this manifestation of capitalism, in the first half of *The Disappearing City*, I think Wright would be a strong disbeliever in capitalism, although he acknowledges its products of technology.

14) The “city of today is dying” because “it is not geometrical” (Le Corbusier, in City Reader, p. 342). What Le Corbusier means is that the city is not optimized through repetition, industrialization and modularization. He suggests architecture with geometry as influence, as standardizing and mass production is simplified. His notion of design has perfectionist undercurrents, one attuned to mathematical precision and design by deduction rather than context. 7/10

90/100

References

Frank Lloyd Wright, “Broadacre City: A New Community Plan, 1935,” in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, eds., The City Reader (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 346-350.

Frank Lloyd Wright, “The Disappearing City”, (New York: W. F. Payson, [c1932]).­­­­

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Joseph Wickham Roe, “English and American Tool Builders”, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1916).

LeCorbusier, Excerpt from "Contemporary City," in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, eds., The City Reader (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 337-343.