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SUPPORTS:
an alternative to mass housing

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The housing process

Although everyone agrees that there is such a thing as a housing problem, it is not easy to put in a few words what the problem is. Is it simply an obstinate shortage of accommodation? Is it that there are too many complaints about quality and finish? Or does the impersonal character of the vast areas surrounding our cities give us a key to the problem? Can we learn from endless discussions going on about the living conditions of modern man and the way these shape people's lives? Has it to do with the questions which architects and town planners have to solve in fulfilling the tasks given to them? Or do the roots of the problem lie in the numerous attempts to provide dwellings according to the latest principles of prefabrication and factory production; attempts which refuse to succeed?

There are in fact plenty of problems in connexion with housing, but not one of these we can identify as the housing problem. This term, to be meaningful, must refer to housing as a whole, as a total concept. This is not the same as a large number of separate problems. Even the sum of all the difficulties mentioned above does not necessarily add up to a housing problem. We can only talk about a housing problem when all the difficulties connected with living and building slot together. That is when one problem causes another, or the solution of one problem depends on that of all the others.

Now this is indeed the case, and it could be underlined as follows. The engineer cannot hope for higher production without creating a swarm of problems of a non-technical nature which he, as engineer, cannot comprehend, let alone solve. The architect becomes more and more aware that in his design he cannot give a new impulse to housing because he conceives the dwelling as the result of technological and economic forces, and he can do little more than invent yet another variation on the theme given to him. If he tries to go beyond that, he steps outside his field, and encounters problems whose solution is not his business. The town planner may draw an ideal town, but knows that it could not be built because its realisation depends upon many other factors over which he has not, nor should have, any control. The inhabitant is aware that his personal wishes have no influence on what is happening because he is only asked to fill in questionnaires about dwelling requirements which deal with the provision of a dwelling in which he will never live. In short, those who are concerned with housing feel largely powerless to produce more and better results because action in their own field either appears to be insufficient or presupposes interrelated action on the part of many others. It looks as if the whole machinery for providing housing has seized up because the cog wheels do not mesh. But if this is so, we should not be examining some individual part of the whole, for in itself it is probably all right. The way in which it fits in with the others is what requires our attention. There is a problem because the relationship of the various forces acting upon housing is in a state of crisis.

Like all fundamental problems the housing question is one of mutual relationships.

It is therefore necessary that we consider housing as a totality of events which cannot be looked at meaningfully in isolation from each other. We are dealing with mutually related forces arising from all sides of society and which, if all goes well, act in equilibrium. The action of these forces is the concept we call housing and the tangible results we call towns and dwellings.

I stress the widespread and comprehensive side, not in order to hide behind generalisations and commonplaces, but because only thus can we realise the impulses and influences which contribute to the creation of towns and the building of dwellings. The total shape of the housing process deserves our attention; indeed, as a creative event of the first order, it has gone too long without being properly understood.

The housing process is the common action of a society to fulfil certain conditions without which its existence would not be possible. This process is a fascinating phenomenon and it involves both rational considerations like construction, finance and organisation and impulses of a biological nature which are rooted in fundamental relationships of human existence.

It has never yet been investigated what laws it obeys or how precisely it functions. Yet it is this process which must occupy us, not the architectural problem or production or design
questions. We know less about the forces resulting from the creation of cities and the housing of communities than we do about those which act upon the organisation of an ant heap. We do not even recognise the biological strategy underlying our building activity let alone control it or react to it.

It is true that in recent years several new factors have been introduced into the housing process, but these are little more than blind reactions to new technical possibilities. We should deceive ourselves in thinking that they are the result of the evolution of our way of life, which we understand mainly in terms of tradition and myth, and without knowledge beyond the technical and practical limits. It may be that the housing process has so far operated instinctively without raising any major objections but our society has reached a point where much that till now functioned as a matter of course has to be tackled consciously and rationally. As long as this is not done we should not be surprised to find that our housing is deficient, and we fail to solve one of our most fundamental problems.

A means of housing

One of the new factors recently introduced into the housing process is the system of mass housing. A quick glance in any direction will show that our society today employs this system for preference.

The provision of a large number of dwellings is seen as one project; similarly the design of a large number of dwellings becomes a single problem. It is an approach which at first sight seems the obvious solution. But its application has such far-reaching consequences that without close investigation we cannot form a clear picture of the nature of our housing, nor of the effect of our action in this field.

However, mass housing is generally considered merely as a method—which it sets out to be—and thus appears to be only a factor in the organisation and technique of housing. Its influence on other aspects is indeed recognised but its influence on the sum of these aspects, on the emerging process, is not seen. There is much confusion about this influence. Its true nature is hidden behind misconceptions and prejudice which makes any dialogue on housing a source of misunderstanding. It is therefore essential that it should be investigated more closely.

As has been said, the first point we notice about mass housing is its universal application, so universal indeed that housing generally and mass housing are regarded as almost synonymous concepts. If anyone, therefore, puts forward his notion about housing it is automatically assumed that he is speaking about the way in which he wishes to apply mass housing. Any proposal for the solution of the housing problem is expected to mean yet another way of doing the same thing.

This is not an assumption we can permit ourselves, for mass housing is only one particular way to provide housing: dwelling and mass housing are related as end and means. When thinking about the housing process we may therefore regard MH (mass housing) as a means only, but not the sole and inevitable one. For if we consider MH and housing as synonymous, we can only discuss the application of an a priori accepted technique. By being caught within the limitations of one aspect of housing we lose sight of the process in its entirety. If only to prevent this it becomes necessary to question MH as a means: not only whether it is the only means, but even whether it is the correct one.

Any particular method of providing dwellings is the result of the forces acting within the process, and may be seen more or less as the representation of technical and organisational factors. With MH this is indeed the case, only with one important proviso: namely the removal of one factor altogether. For MH is possible only if the individual inhabitant is not consulted about the manner in which his dwelling is realised. The influence which the individual, the layman, can bring to bear upon the process must be eliminated to make MH possible. The means of operation is therefore the result of a deliberate and clear interference with the forces acting on the housing process; a fact of the greatest importance for the form of our contemporary housing and our judgment on it. It cannot be denied that in thinking of the user we are dealing with an actual force in the total process, for if this were not so there would be no reason to fear his involvement as a disturbing and intractable influence. To those who cannot separate the notions of MH and housing the introduction of the user in the process is the beginning of chaos. It seems certain that to realise that this is not so would mean the end of MH.

MH as a work method is not new: the idea of building several dwellings as one project is quite ancient and was, I believe, well known to the Romans. But the situation in which we find ourselves is different because only now is MH seen as the universal way, and the fact is that in housing the whole of society the involvement of the individual is deemed to be undesirable. The general application of this method distinguishes us fundamentally from the way man has built earlier in history. It is not the fact that we have adopted new materials and tech-
nologies which separates us from our forefathers, but the simple decision regarding the position of the inhabitant. Our ideas of housing reduce him, in essence, to a statistic. Certainly it is hard to imagine how our society could have accomplished the genuine improvements in housing which have taken place over the last 50 years without the energetic application of 

From this point of view the method, at least in the recent past, has proved effective. But because only now are we confronted with the notion of an entire society living in 

Therefore any inquiries into the usefulness of the method acquires a new and greater depth and reaches much further than measures concerning quality and quantity. Confronted with 

To this may be added that in a practical sense the effectiveness of 

For new influences on the housing process have appeared which require a reorientation of method. For instance, it should be remembered that 

Nevertheless there are still too few dwellings. So if 

So if 

The conclusion to be drawn from this is that in effect there is as yet no industrialisation of housing. It is therefore a mistake to believe that 

The introduction of the machine has given us an industrial apparatus enabling us to produce so much that in many respects consumption becomes a greater problem than production. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that in effect there is as yet no industrialisation of housing. It is therefore a mistake to believe that 

It will appear, as I hope to demonstrate, that the potential of industrialisation and standardisation will be realised only after abandoning 

This rejection of 

For whatever reason, does not necessarily mean a step back into the past. It will appear, as I hope to demonstrate, that the potential of industrialisation and standardisation will be realised only after abandoning 

Within the housing process.

No one has ever inquired what the presence or absence of the individual means. That he represents a force has only been recognised because 

What influence does it exercise on other forces in the process?

How can one establish a system of forces which will relate harmoniously to it? All these are absurd questions to those who confuse 

It is time, then, to break the bonds of 

For we consider housing as a task people will have to perform during their term in this world, it can be held that this task requires that the forces concerned in the provision of housing must be collected and directed by people blessed with intelligence. What is remarkable about 

That the involvement of the individual and all that it implies simply ought not to exist. The provision of housing therefore cannot be called a process of man housing himself. Man no longer houses himself: he is housed.

If we investigate the nature of the influence which the inhabitant can exercise it will soon appear that it is not negligible, for because it arises from the everyday actions of people it is closely connected with essential human activities. These activities of the individual turn out not to be the undesirable interference which 

At the same time they are so interwoven with human happiness and human dignity that they are far more than merely an influence in the housing process.

A dual requirement

In considering the role of the layman it is necessary at once to state that it is not in the first place his creature comforts which we are discussing.

It may be that the individual will be asked to make a certain
sacrifice to enable society as a whole to fulfil its housing task. It may also be that the immediate satisfaction of the dweller is not the main criterion because in one way or another the price society has to pay for this is too high. The desires and comforts of the individual, however important, as will presently appear, do not by themselves constitute a criterion. What matters is to what extent society can do without the involvement of the individual. Only when it is shown that this involvement is essential can we talk about an unacceptable limitation in our present situation.

That this is so will be seen when we consider certain of man's most essential requirements. It will then appear that only by means of active intervention on the part of the individual can certain requirements related to housing be satisfied. But—and this is most important—it further appears that the fulfilling of these requirements calls up those very forces whose absence in the housing process I have already referred to.

Let me explain this. When talking about man's requirements we might accept that as a work method would be effective if, in its ideal application, it provides the form of dwelling which fulfils all these requirements. And we are literally considering a form, a tangible structure, in which man is housed, and which assures for him the satisfaction of his requirements; for that is how the idea postulates it. The history of modern housing is therefore a search for ideal form. The greatest talents in the field of architecture and town planning have sought the liberating, all-providing design. Of course we need not criticise the fact that this ideal form has not yet been found, but the search is regrettable for other reasons. The ideal which has been pursued is not only unattainable because, like all ideals, it is subject to the imperfection of man's existence, but especially because the posing of the problem in itself excludes a solution. The brief of architecture is paradoxical because a whole group of human requirements cannot be approached in this way. For it is not impossible to predetermine requirements which can only become apparent through the activity of the individual to be housed?

If this is accepted it follows that society cannot fulfil its task in the way it tries at present.

What then is the situation? The way in which approaches man's requirements assumes without question the possibility of translating these requirements into actual solid shapes, into architectural designs. These shapes can then be reproduced, and it is assumed that the success of the effort then lies in ever closer research into requirements, followed by an ever better solution in terms of form.

All this would be fine if it were indeed possible to deal with requirements in purely material terms. In fact this is only so in the case of requirements which today rate highly: consumer goods, where production is followed by consumption. But there are totally different requirements to be fulfilled in the field of housing: requirements which do not ask for products, but which are themselves productive or creative. If makes these activities impossible, does not that mean that a complete answer to the housing problem eludes us?

It is one of the wonders of our existence that the satisfaction of some requirements demands a very positive, personal, almost creative action on our part. Even today no one would maintain that we can live merely by consumption, no matter how attractively or skilfully consumer goods are presented. But reduces the dwelling to a consumer article and the dweller to consumer. For only in this way can it be expected that the consumer waits until he is offered a completed product.

It need not surprise us if this approach proves wrong because individual human action forms part of the housing brief. We are after all dealing with an important expression of human civilisation: to build dwellings is excellence a civilised activity, and our civilisation is by no means confined to the activities of a number of more or less talented architects. That is perhaps the least part of it, for civilisation is first and foremost rooted in everyday actions of ordinary people going about their business. The material forms in which civilisation is expressed result in the first place from these simple daily tasks. But we are by now so accustomed to these forms that we tend to mistake them for civilisation itself. We imagine that, to produce, no matter how, or why, or by whom, means civilisation, whereas on the contrary civilisation is concerned with the interaction between people and their activities in terms of each other and their environment. When these activities result in tangible forms, these are symbols of a civilisation only by virtue of the manner in which they came about and which is reflected in their form.

When searching for the essence of an important aspect of our civilisation we should not only consider what is being done, but above all who does it, and why. In a sense it is, as will appear, much more important to understand how a dwelling comes about than what it looks like. S takes away a man's act, and presents him with a form; it seeks to provide a comfortable form to be used by people who do not have to lift a finger to influence it. Does this not place , however skillful.
it may be, beyond our civilisation? Following this line of thought, it is therefore justified to direct attention to the initiative and activities of the individual. In order to regain control over our housing we must rediscover what has been lost through a long preoccupation with Mr, and regard it with a fresh eye.

The activity of the occupant
The activities which Mr has rendered impossible are, to say it again, not of an architectural nature, for those we may safely leave to the professional. We are dealing with activities related to building and dwelling. It is about personal considerations and decisions, the formulating of one's own desires, and the coming to a judgment about a given work. It concerns the assessing and choosing of innumerable small details, the manifestation of preferences and whims. It concerns the freedom to know better than others, or to do the same as others. It has to do with the care to maintain, or the carelessness about private possessions, with the sudden urge to change as well as the stubborn desire to conserve and keep. It is related to the need to display and to create one's own environment, but also the desire to share that of others, or to follow a fashion. The need to give one's personal stamp is as important as the inclination to be unobtrusive. In short, it all has to do with the need for a personal environment where one can do as one likes; indeed it concerns one of the strongest urges of mankind: the desire for possession.

Now possession is different from property. We may possess something which is not our property, and conversely something may be our property which we do not possess. Property is a legal term, but the idea of possession is deeply rooted in us. In the light of our subject, it is therefore important to realise that possession is inextricably connected with action. To possess something we have to take possession. We have to make it part of ourselves, and it is therefore necessary to reach out for it. To possess something we have to take it in our hand, touch it, test it, put our stamp on it. Something becomes our possession because we make a sign on it, because we give it our name, or defile it, because it shows traces of our existence.

If, for instance, somebody borrows one of my books and smudges it, my annoyance would not be the same as it would be if the book did not belong to me. I am not annoyed because something has been damaged, for I too misuse my books, but because my possession has been interfered with. Only I have the right to destroy what belongs to me!

We have the need to concern ourselves with that which touches us daily. Through this concern it begins to belong to us, and becomes a part of our lives. There is therefore nothing worse than to have to live among what is indifferent to our actions. We simply cannot get used to what appears intangible, to what receives no imprint from our hand. Above all we want to comprehend our environment. It is known that if this urge for possession has no other means of expression it would rather become destructive than look on passively. A child will destroy a toy with which he can do nothing, and content himself with playing with the pieces. A good educator therefore does not tell a child not to touch anything, but teaches it activities such as constructing, building, or maintenance and care. He gives a box of building blocks rather than a finished doll’s house.

An invisible hand drives us to our environment without which we cannot experience our existence. If the contact which emerges from this is formless and irrational, we speak of barbarism; if it is ordered and sensible, we speak of civilisation. So what can we make of a manner of housing which denies this basic force, and in its intention is neither barbarism nor civilisation, but prefers a vacuum, a scientifically and organisationally justified nothing of material comfort which tries to satisfy the need for dwelling?

A means of self-expression
The inhabitants of a Mr town cannot possess their town. They remain lodged in an environment which is no part of themselves. To identify with such an environment they will have to change; there is no other possible way. It is therefore said sometimes that the inhabitants ‘are not yet ready for what is offered them’, and that they ‘have to grow into it’. Such an assertion is a complete reversal of the intention of all housing. It may occasionally be suitable in the case of a few minorities which are yet to be classified, but it has nothing to do with the normal town dweller with whom we are concerned. The question is not whether we have to adjust with difficulty to what has been produced with even more difficulty, but whether we make something which from the beginning is totally part of ourselves, for better or worse. Therefore what happens today is nothing but the production of perfected barracks. The tenement concept has been dragged out of the slums, provided with sanitation, light and air, and placed in the open. Important though it is that sanitation, light and air
be available to all, the fact is that we only provided them in a gigantic barracks situation. The only way in which the population can make its impression on the immense armada of housing blocks which have got stranded around our city centres is to wear them out. Destruction is the only way left.

The initiatives I referred to have always come into operation when dwellers and dwelling found each other. The old houses left to us from the past bear witness to this. Each generation, each occupant, changed what he found. That is why in restorations more than one ceiling is found, or why panelling hides earlier, often more beautiful, wall decorations, why conservatories are added, doors blocked up and others formed, balconies removed or added, mullioned windows replaced by sash windows, window bars removed, gables replaced by cornices. These alterations were not always done for functional purposes. They were done to keep up with the times or because notions about living changed, because one could not identify with what one took over or because it belonged to a different generation. The occupant would rarely have been interested in aesthetic values, and anyway such considerations would change as much as the houses. But the house was an important means of illustrating his position in life. It was his social expression, his way of establishing his ego. For this it was necessary that the occupant should possess his dwelling in the fullest sense of the word. If changes were made it was not in order to preserve the building, but because one could not afford to pull down and start afresh. The occupant would not be interested in the original appearance of the house he now lived in. He only asked himself if the total corresponded with his idea of how a house ought to look, and if it did not, he would attempt to improve it. Only now are we concerned with the original appearance of houses, and we rebuild to restore. It is interesting to see how this urge to restoration increases in proportion to the decline of building as social activity. It would even be possible to interpret restoration of old buildings as a lack of self-confidence in our own building activity, and as a sign of the degeneration of building as a means of self-expression on the part of the user.

We cannot, moreover, draw the conclusion that the initiative to construct, improve or change is to be found only among the more affluent members of society. One has only to look at the backs of the poorer housing districts of some 40 years ago. The quantity of extensions, balconies, pigeon lofts, sheds, conservatories and roof houses come, in their chaotic character, as a relief to the observer who would rather see people than stones. They are the expressions, the primitive expressions, of the energy I spoke of.

Only few are able to occupy themselves with their possessions without affecting them. How many palaces and castles do we not find which bear the traces of a building urge for non-utilitarian motives. This building fever may far exceed the boundaries of reason. Old Europe is strewn with unfinished projects; works which outlived their initiators, or which had to be abandoned because the necessary means were exhausted. Building is an impulse which much prefers the act to the finished product. The wealthy patron, either as person or as institution, is a necessary phenomenon in society. But he is not the norm. The difference between him and the builder in the allotment is one of degree. Both decide, choose, test, make demands, and seek criteria, take initiative and perform actions. The one uses his hands, the other does not. What kings did, their subjects did also, only the kings' decisions were for architectural prestige, and this is preserved for posterity. But the history of building is quite a different story from the history of architecture. The latter concerns itself with forms, the former with a process, of actions taken which ultimately makes artistic endeavour possible. The creation of a building is sometimes an artistic event, but it is always an identification, and therefore it is of importance to us to note that this identification is closely connected with the urge to possess, which in our is purposely frustrated.

The function of a dwelling

When the occupier is mentioned, as has just been done, we do not, of course, think only of the occupier as such, but also of that which is affected by his action. We therefore no longer talked about forces in the abstract, but rather about the interdependence between dweller and dwelling. In trying to understand the influence of the user on the housing process, this interdependence is of the utmost importance, for one can hardly think of dwellers and dwelling as separate. The notion that they are strangers who come together more or less at random after the completion of the dwelling fits only the theory behind it, but not reality. To see this we only have to ask what the idea 'dwelling' in fact means, and how it is used. Man himself, by his very presence, determines what a dwelling is. A dwelling is only a dwelling, not when it has a certain form, not when it fulfils certain conditions which have been written down after long study, but when certain dimensions and provisions have been made to comply with municipal by-laws, but
only and exclusively when people come to live in it. The igloo is as much the dwelling of the Eskimo as the bamboo hut that of the Javanese. The notion 'dwelling' is entirely subjective and is certainly not related to any particular form.

The human act, in this case the act of dwelling, determines what a dwelling is. But this single truth is totally meaningless in this, for to employ this method the tangible form of the dwelling must be known beforehand; it has to be determined unconditionally what the dwelling is which is to be produced in such large quantities. This demands in advance what a dwelling is before the occupier is in any way concerned. Again it appears that the mass housing brief is a paradox. To avoid this dilemma accepts expressly that a dwelling is nothing but a particular object which can in itself be recognised as a dwelling. We might say that every dwelling has discovered the dwelling as thing insomuch as the existence of such a thing may be supposed.

But put like this, what is 'the dwelling'? It is a perplexing question if we are not allowed to answer that a dwelling is a place in which people live. What answer can we give then? If we build chicken coops, stables or barracks, and for lack of alternative people inhabit them, we have built dwellings. Any form I may propose and produce, for aesthetic, structural or moral reasons, becomes a dwelling the moment I can persuade people to live in them. What is a dwelling? This quasi-philosophical question is now being posed in all seriousness, and everything depends upon its answer. The demands which a dwelling has to satisfy are the basis of much serious research. Numerous forms are justified, numerous theories put forward, but who shall answer a question which is merely rhetorical? A question which has no answer, and which, were it not for us, does not require answering?

If the housing issue were in a healthy state the need to question the nature and appearance of the dwelling would not arise; the contemporary dwelling would provide its own answer. But this does not do that; in fact, by excluding the user from the equation it actually causes the question. One might even put it that not only does this provide no answer, but it is in itself the question. That this is almost literally true will appear presently, when uniformity as characteristic of the dwelling itself comes to the fore. This is the case now and in the past, but this does not mean that the dwelling is a solution; it may be merely a symbol of the crisis situation.

Whatever the case may be, the fact is that in this everyone is conditioned to the dwelling as 'thing', and to producing this

"thing". All that is done, written or said, betrays this remarkable preoccupation. The simple assertion that the dwelling is the result of a process, and that it is this process which requires our attention in the first place, finds no hearing. Everyone wants to build dwellings, regardless of what is meant by the term; no one is prepared to regard housing in the light of a social activity preceding house building, especially as this activity conditions the act of building. The search for the dwelling is in full spate, and follows a direction which is characteristic of the thought process underlying it. For the question is posed in terms of production: the problem is approached 'functionally'. The question: what is a dwelling? is replaced by the question: what conditions are to be satisfied by the dwelling we want to make to fulfil its purpose? We have already seen that the question in this form is deceptive because it is only concerned with a part of human housing needs. But the idea that these needs can be exclusively defined meets at present no opposition. On the contrary: it creates the impression that we are standing on firm ground and disturbing questions about 'the dwelling' are confined within a known scheme. A programme of requirements is set up and, after due study and interpretation, the dwelling will emerge. There is much concern for the occupant: he is questioned and studied, lists of his needs and desires are drawn up; in short, he is treated as consumer of a product.

In harmony with all this we sometimes hear the remark that the dwelling is a 'machine for living'.* Not that anyone would seriously defend this notion, but the term is full of attractive associations of ideas because it creates the comforting impression that the dwelling poses no more complicated problems than the machine; in other words they are merely of a technical nature. There is no need to worry as long as our approach is functional. In its literal intention the slogan interprets the desire for a dwelling, for only if the dwelling is a machine can it be designed according to a strictly impersonal definition of functions; the whole complicated relationship between dweller and dwelling can be, if not ignored, at least collectivised.

And yet no two things are further apart than the dwelling and the machine. For the purpose of the machine is to perform certain actions for us, while the dwelling should enable us to

*It was, I think, Le Corbusier who first spoke of a 'machine a habiter'. Le Corbusier, as he repeatedly said himself, was 'un poete'; his remark was meant purely poetically and forms part of his poetic sayings about the machine age, with the artist as its interpreter. It was functionalism which appropriated his metaphor, and turned it into a slogan, although Le Corbusier never was a functionalist.
perform certain actions ourselves. We live in it, a great part of our lives is 'performed' in it. If the dwelling has a function, it is that it exists to allow man to function, while the machine aims at the opposite. The machine does what we cannot or will not do, it performs actions which do not interest us as such, but which produce something we want. In this respect the machine is our materialised indifference; it is our stand-in in the production process and as such is the better the less we have to do with it. It presupposes our absence.

How then can the machine be compared with the dwelling which only becomes a dwelling by virtue of man's presence?

**The natural relationship**

I have tried to indicate how dwelling is first and foremost a relationship between people and environment, and because the relationship arises from the most common actions of daily life it is rooted in the foundations of our existence. I shall now attempt to show how this relationship can be an indispensable factor in the housing process.

A relationship relies upon actions, and dwelling is after all doing something; it is the sum of human actions within a certain framework, within the protective environment created by man. These human actions affect the environment itself. Because man wishes to possess his environment he takes hold of it. He decorates his walls, knocks nails in them, pushes chairs around, hangs curtains. Presently he does some carpentry, renews a floor, improves the heating, changes the lighting. From this point we can no longer draw a line which denotes the change to an activity we call building. Dwelling is indissolubly connected with building, with forming the protective environment. These two notions cannot be separated, but together comprise the notion man housing himself; dwelling is building. We are constantly faced with the results of the same relation between man and matter.

*This relationship therefore is the basis for all that has to be done in the matter of human habitation. It is the outcome of human nature, and I will therefore call it the 'natural relationship'.*

The natural relationship, thus defined, places us before the kernel of the housing process. From it spring the enormous activities, the specialisations of techniques and areas of knowledge, the thousand aspects of building and building organisation. It all started at a primitive stage when this relationship expressed itself directly in the action of man who by himself, without any help, built his protective environment. For although nowadays virtually everything necessary for the creation of a protective environment can take place outside the immediate influence of the natural relationship, the latter remains nonetheless the criterion for all that happens.

I do not mean to say that we have to reject everything which is being done at present in the field of housing, but that room has to be found within the whole complex of activities for the natural relationship.

Man must relate to matter: a new order has to be created. That is why I spoke of a force in the play of forces of our way of housing, for the natural relationship is a central force round which the whole system moves. The natural relationship is a source of energy and of impulses. It is multi-sided, accidental, capricious and possibly elusive, but must try to hold the housing process in a firm grip, to give it direction, and constantly to feed it.

I propose to illustrate the influence of this force by indicating the evil results of its absence in all aspects of present-day housing. Briefly, today's situation burdens society in two ways. Firstly, in the absence of the contribution of the natural relationship, it has to be replaced by something else. This requires builders to imagine what would happen if the natural relationship did in fact operate, and therefore places him before a chain of guesses. All impulsive variation, all everyday inventiveness, all spontaneity, the whole growth of testing and searching for more and better, which is what the natural relationship consists of, is now to be introduced, as it were, artificially, from outside.

But, secondly, it is not only necessary to substitute what has been lost in energy, but as much energy again is needed to prevent this guessing game being contaminated by the influence of the individual, for the interruption of the natural relationship does not mean that these forces are no longer present. The natural sources of energy cannot be checked. Great pains have to be taken to prevent the whims of daily life from interfering with the chosen method or preventing its effectiveness. To oppose people's idiosyncratic desires and maintain a reasonable collectivity more restrictions are necessary and greater friction is produced than can be guessed at. And I am not even speaking of the frustrations in human society which, as will appear, cannot be estimated.

It is evident that if in an equilibrium of forces one of these forces is neutralised, the mutual relations of the remaining forces will be disturbed. It may happen that a new equilibrium will be attained, but it may also be that this will not occur
because the remaining forces will predominate, so that the whole system begins to move in one direction, and drives towards an even more extreme situation. Something like this has happened with our housing. The tendencies we can observe in housing and house building are moving in only one direction. It need not surprise us if it appears that this direction points away from man and is drawing slowly but surely away from the human condition, like an ocean liner leaving a quay.

If all this happens in the simple relationship between man and dwelling, we shall find it multiplied a thousandfold in the relationship between society and the city; between men and dwellings, for the housing process has to be considered on that scale. Or rather we see the lack of the natural relationship immeasurably magnified in the town of today. This will become evident when we see the phenomenon of the present-day town in its true light; characterised by a want; a town where the natural relationship is absent.