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**LE CORBUSIER**  
**HISTORY** and **TRADITION**

Edited by

Armando Rabaça

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Le Corbusier, History and Tradition

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1. Le Corbusier  
“Palace of the Soviets of 1931, and its vindication, seen from the windows of the Paris-Rome express, on the 4th of June 1934, when passing the Campo Santo of Pisa.”  
*Le Modulor* (1950)



Armando Rabaça

ARCHITECTURE AS A WORK OF ART AND THE  
SENSE OF THE HISTORICAL WHOLE

an introduction to  
LE CORBUSIER, HISTORY AND TRADITION

I had a feeling, which became positively overpowering and could not find wonderful enough utterance, that the past and the present were one. I saw them in a way that brought something ghostly into the quality of the present. This feeling is expressed in many of my larger and smaller works, and always has a beneficial effect in my poems, although at the actual moment of direct expression in life it was bound to appear strange, inexplicable and perhaps even unpleasant to the reader.

Goethe (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*)

Tradition . . . involves, in the first place, the historical sense . . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity . . .

No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists . . . what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. . . . the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.

. . . He [the poet] must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country – . . . is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing *en route* . . . But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show . . . [The poet] is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

T. S. Eliot (“Tradition and the Individual Talent”)

Look at any building you like, as remote as you like from consciousness of aesthetic purposes, and you will notice how as soon as a choice of alternatives comes before the builder he inevitably conforms to some dimly perceived tradition of formal arrangement. There is no escape.

John Summerson (“The ‘Poetry’ of Le Corbusier”)

While in certain academic circles the anti-historical bias of the Modern Movement still presents few riddles, the view of modernism as representing an epistemological break between technology and history and tradition has long been challenged. The influence of the past is recognizable in, for example, the blending of classicism and organicism in Alvar Aalto's work, the legacy of Dutch town houses in Pieter Oud's domestic architecture, and the composition of Mies van der Rohe's buildings.<sup>1</sup> In Le Corbusier's work, however, this influence can be seen on the most abstract level. Le Corbusier's assimilation of the past is shaped by his creative process which, as John Summerson had already noted in the 1940s, is comparable to the processes of avant-garde poets and painters: his experimental architecture resulted from subverting the logic of every situation, bringing different fragments together and fusing them in a new synthesis. Summerson's comparison was made with specific reference to Picasso's belligerent process of creation through destruction and subsequent transformation in order to achieve "a more substantial result and profound possession of form."<sup>2</sup> "Just as in a painting by Picasso, Braque or Léger the appearance of a thing is torn to pieces, broken into bits and reconstituted in a ridiculous jigsaw which has, nevertheless, a perfect logic of its own," Summerson writes, "so a building by Le Corbusier is a ruthless dismemberment of the building *programme* and a reconstitution on a plane where the unexpected always, unfailingly, happens. Herein is Le Corbusier's poetry—or his wit."<sup>3</sup>

This comparison with avant-garde abstract art involves issues of form. For Summerson, for example, the tension in Le Corbusier's plans is comparable to that of Picasso's drawings.<sup>4</sup> More than a problem of form, however, the similarities concern a fundamental problem of method and attitude towards the creative process. It is the interaction between this creative process and the past that would seem to explain why Le Corbusier's work has proved to be an inexhaustible reference point in the debate on the relationship between modern architecture, history and tradition.

In fact, underlying the modernist "creation through destruction" is a deep historical consciousness that was common to Le Corbusier and his

modern contemporaries. He shared the same sense of the historical whole that can be found in T. S. Eliot's view of the new in artistic creation as the coexistence of past and present. The search for unity of past and present was translated into modern art through various aesthetic principles. Two aspects in particular are worth noting. On the one hand, the creation of the new implied the abandonment or subversion of former conventions and a new form of interaction between multiple past and present references and discourses through fragmentation and the subsequent juxtaposition of contradictory allusions. On the other hand, the re-equation and re-elaboration of these fragments in new formal arrangements was guided by the attempt to attain the timeless through fundamentals. In this endeavour, the past acquired ontological weight and symbolic dimensions. The focus on form as a bearer of meaning was a means to bring past and present together. This is expressed, for example, in the role attributed to myth, seen as a means to secure transhistorical and cross-cultural ties and to construct a new order through universal values.

Thus we find two complementary aspects of the fundamental involvement of history and tradition in modern art and architecture. On one level, the past provided modern aesthetics with raw material, i.e. with referents equated through their intrinsic and operative qualities independently of any historical or temporal sequentiality, which could be fused with present references through innovative creative processes. On another level, these processes were informed by a sense of the historical whole which established the basis of the modern narrative—a metanarrative that was humanistic in nature, operating as the lens through which past, present and future could be viewed.

Colin Rowe's seminal essay "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa" (1947) marks the beginning of the debate on the first aspect—Le Corbusier's use of history as a source of architectural referents. Since then, criticism has continued to reveal how Le Corbusier's architecture constitutes a re-elaboration of, rather than a rupture with, the past, extending Rowe's debate

on the links with the “high” tradition of architecture to include antiquity, the idea of origins, and the vernacular.<sup>5</sup>

One milestone in this debate is Alan Colquhoun’s “Displacements of Concepts in Le Corbusier.”<sup>6</sup> Colquhoun characterized Le Corbusier’s process of creation as a “displacement of concepts” which resulted from his approach to architecture as a work of art, consisting of an artistic reconciliation of opposites of two kinds. One kind of “displacement” occurred when elements of the “high” tradition of architecture were transformed, subverted and adapted to new solutions which contradicted their original use. In this process, the new was established with reference to a given tradition, knowledge of which was required in order to interpret its principles. To give one example, the rules prescribed in the “Five Points” entail a subversion of the tripartite division of podium, piano nobile, and entablature that characterizes the traditional articulation of building elements, and hence can only be fully understood with reference to the principles of classical composition.

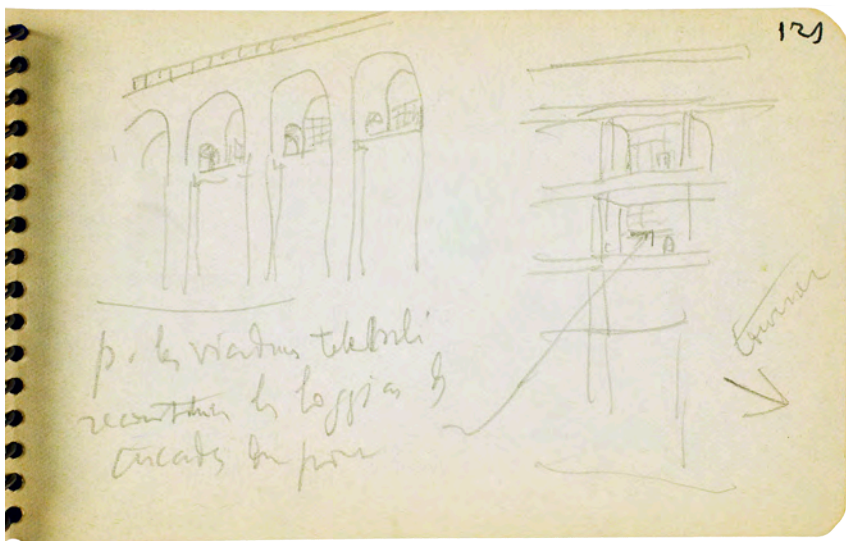
Another kind of displacement consisted of the assimilation into architecture of elements outside this tradition. Summerson had already noted that Le Corbusier had found “fragments of real architecture” outside the traditional realms of the discipline. His modern buildings resulted from fusing fragments from the worlds of engineering, shipbuilding, industrial construction and aircraft.<sup>7</sup> Continuing the thread opened up by Summerson, Colquhoun argued that Le Corbusier’s works achieved a new unity by bringing together opposite self-referential concepts and attempting to resolve the conflict generated by their dialogical juxtaposition. The self-referential concepts ranged from the vernacular to those from the “high” tradition of architecture, from antiquity to contemporary works of architecture and engineering, and from modern construction techniques to industrial equipments, i.e. the processes and grammar of industrial production.<sup>8</sup>

In this artistic reconciliation of opposites, then, referents from the past and present were not only emptied of historical sequentiality, but their operative value was equally devoid of any disciplinary framework.

The referents were not always submitted to such processes of “destruction” and “dismemberment,” however, and many have noted how, in Le Corbusier’s work, the past assumes other—perhaps more conventional—forms of allusion. This is markedly so from the 1930s onwards. If, as Rowe has noted, Palladio’s geometrical and proportional principles surface only implicitly and fragmentarily at Garches, shifting from symmetry to asymmetry, the dwellings in the Plan Obus and Rio de Janeiro building-viaducts are a more direct reference to the loggias in the arcades in the port of Algiers. If, as Francesco Passanti has shown, the ceremonial dimension of architecture in the Villa Savoye aims to re-conceptualize the vernacular relationship between people and their artefacts through the concepts of *Sachlichkeit* and *Typisierung*, the skyscrapers in the Montevideo plan openly quote the interplay between the vertical architectural thrust and the horizontal expanse of water at the fortress of Negotin which Le Corbusier photographed on his journey to the East.<sup>9</sup> And—one last example—if, as Jacques Lucan and others have noted, the projects for the Palace of the Soviets, the United Nations Headquarters and many of his buildings subversively translate the Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa into compositions of free elements, the lighting towers at Ronchamp are a re-appropriation of the Serapeum at Hadrian’s Villa.<sup>10</sup>

In order to characterize these comprehensive relationships between Le Corbusier’s work and the past, Bruno Reichlin has borrowed the poststructuralist notion of intertextuality from hermeneutics.<sup>11</sup> As in literature, every architectural creation consists of an elaborate process of cultural assimilation and transformation. Influence is the driving force behind artistic creation, establishing a dialogical relationship with existing works, whether through deformation, completion, rupture, re-appropriation or recreation. The sources of intertextuality extend far beyond architecture, ranging from the client and collaborators to the architectural programme, from folklore to real-world experiences, and from narratives and literature to the visual arts.<sup>12</sup>

Be it as it may, the modernist attitude towards the past is always framed by an undeniable attempt to escape from tradition. Yet the attempt itself



2. Le Corbusier

Sketch associating the dwellings in the Rio de Janeiro building-viaduct with the loggias in the arcades in the port of Algiers:

“p. les viaducs telemli reconstituer les loggias des arcades du port”

Carnet C12, 121 (1936)

See also C12, 123

For Algiers see C10, n.p.

constitutes a tradition, as Stanford Andersen has argued. Responding to Reyner Banham's critique of the Modern Movement for evidencing the influence of tradition, Anderson countered that the problem did not lie in seeing technology as the converse of tradition, but in recognizing a debt to the past without establishing it as an authority. The Modern Movement's attempt to shift from the authority of tradition to that of science and technology did not imply a rejection of the past, but a revised attitude towards it which had close affinities with the epistemology of science: the tradition of a critical attitude towards traditional theories in an attempt to address problems that older theories had been unable to solve.<sup>13</sup>

A similar position was held by Jürgen Habermas in the early 1980s. Reacting against the shift from the tradition of modernity to the postmodernist historicism of the works exhibited at the first Venice Architecture Biennale in 1980, Habermas noted that the term "modern" has appeared repeatedly in the history of Europe since antiquity whenever the consciousness of a new epoch is shaped through a renewed relationship with ancient civilisation. The difference in the twentieth-century modernist consciousness is that, rather than seeing antiquity as a model to be recovered through imitation, it established "an abstract opposition between tradition and the present" in an attempt to free itself from all historical ties. In this search for novelty through abstract opposition, Habermas concludes, the modernist consciousness preserves a secret tie to the past.<sup>14</sup> It is this secret tie that we find, for example, in the tripartite composition underlying Le Corbusier's formulation of the Five Points. In short, the modernist tie to the past is essentially formalized through abstract aesthetics and principles, through which former conventions are subverted and re-elaborated in new formal arrangements.

The second aspect of the fundamental involvement of history and tradition in modern art and architecture—the search for the timeless through fundamentals—lies in the grand narrative of modernity: the belief in historical progress leading to a higher human condition. As the words of Eliot reveal, for modernism the past meant something deeper than just



an escape from the impossibility of creating anew in a cultural void. The “grand narrative” of history provided the basis of modern architecture and its meaning, and in this meaning lay the message of modern art and architecture.

Postmodern discourses, rallying around the themes of history and tradition, claimed that architecture should have an allusive quality. A new communicative architectural language could be achieved by incorporating history and tradition into the realms of architecture, thus recovering recognizable forms by and symbolic dimensions broadly accessible to the populace. Reacting against the iconographic postmodernist exploration of architecture which would allegedly solve the semantically mute aesthetics of modernism, some have argued that the communicative dimension of modernist architecture went unnoticed by its critics. Modern architecture entailed a fundamental message that postmodernism failed to understand, namely that of a modern way of life, made possible by its functionalism and symbolically expressed through the aesthetics of the machine.<sup>15</sup> Herein lay, for William Jordy, the unifying principle and essence of the modern movement of the 1920s: the aesthetics of the machine consisted of a *symbolic objectivity*, encompassing both the technological aspirations and the metaphysical essence of modernism. Modern architecture was not only deemed to be modern (functional, mechanically produced, etc.), but also *symbolically modern*. In this regard, it involved the *symbolic objectification* of past monuments, reducing them to their elemental qualities to create a primal architecture through which the past would literally be reborn.<sup>16</sup>

What distinguishes postmodernity from modernity is, in Jean-François Lyotard’s analysis, the end of “grand narratives.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas the view of modern architecture as semantically mute results from the postmodernist disbelief in metanarratives, for modernists the most profound role of the past lay in this comprehensive historical vision and the attempt to communicate it. Modern architects considered modern architecture to be redemptive, and because they believed in a higher human condition, their message would naturally be accessible to the common man. Their endeavour, idealistic as

it was, involved communicating fundamentals through a new aesthetics, bringing the past and present together in an abstract, supratemporal language with universal meaning. The ultimate symbolic message of modern architecture was therefore the “grand narrative” of human history: the attainment of a higher human condition through the recovery of the timeless fundamentals of the past.

In order to understand this supratemporal, universal meaning, we have to look back at the preceding centuries. As the initial quotation from Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit* indicates, the attempt to combine past and present in one in artistic creation was not new. In fact, the modernist historical consciousness can be traced back to a new historical vision that began to take shape in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European thinking and that was consistently formulated in the nineteenth-century intellectual and spiritual revolution in Germany.<sup>18</sup>

Between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the positivist concept of world history as a chronological process of cultural and social progress and straightforward narration from the religious to the secular began to be challenged by a new sense of historical development imbued with nationalist and spiritual tones. The classical view of universal values derived from Natural Law was replaced by the idea that values change in different historical and environmental contexts. Each society, culture, and nation was seen as a dynamic, “organic” whole, submitted to internal laws of development and moral and spiritual values. The universal ideal of classical art was replaced by the view of art as an expression of a particular people, their morals and life as a whole, and thus dependent on specific features such as climate, political constitution, national character and the spirit of the age.

A sense of universal history was nonetheless present in this relativist view of history and art, shaped by a transhistorical ontological *idea* which bound together the various different organic societies. In his “Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibers” (1821), Wilhelm von Humboldt saw history as a chain of events linked in space and time.<sup>19</sup> Although organic societies were governed by dynamic, internal processes, they were nevertheless subject to

a more powerful active principle: original and eternal ideas which, although they were not directly visible since they lay beyond the finite, provided impetus and direction for world history. The historian's task was to reveal the essence of history by unveiling the *idea* or hidden spirit beneath the surface of historical events.

The polarity between organic societies and the supranational cause was further developed by the historian Leopold von Ranke who, despite arguing that history should focus on particular societies and their individual innate laws, nevertheless had a sense of the historical whole.<sup>20</sup> The individual (particular societies) and the general (the large-scale course of events) were inextricably interwoven, since although each society developed according to its own patterns and spiritual foundations, it was also subject to external influences which bound them together into one, defining the future of the western world. The historian therefore had to study each individual society whilst observing the large-scale course of events, examining the facts objectively but also seeking to capture the spirit of each society.

These discourses gave rise to the view of history as something endowed with a purposeful direction. The most extreme vision of the teleological view of history emerging from these pioneers can be found in Hegel's historical determinism. Despite the different variants of this historical reasoning, the essential is that the idealistic faith in a renewed western society that established the basis of the modern metanarrative rested on this sense of the historical whole and the belief in a transcendental, transhistorical *idea* that would unite individual societies.

One of Hegel's main opponents was Friedrich Nietzsche, whose ideas are of interest here due to the operative role he attributed to history. Drawing on Ranke's ideas, he criticized the excessive importance ascribed to history, seeing the nineteenth-century "consumptive historical fever" as inhibiting creative action, thus preventing the birth of modern culture. Writing in *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (*Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*, 1874), Nietzsche argued for a critical history that was capable of examining the past and revealing its fundamental, suprahistorical values.<sup>21</sup>

The recovery of a living culture and the creation of “a unity of the artistic style in all expressions of the life of the people” were to be achieved through a re-elaboration of these suprahistorical values. “To be sure, we need history,” Nietzsche argued, but “we need it for life and action,” and in thus standing “in the service of life, it stands in the service of an unhistorical power,” in a subordinate position that should not “be able to become pure science.” The purpose of understanding the past is to “serve the future and the present,” and this would be achieved by “being able to feel to a certain degree unhistorically.”<sup>22</sup>

Nietzsche was therefore paving the way for modernist thinking. He asserted that the goal of historical development should be the creation of a “living culture” rather than technology (a key feature of the Modern Movement greatly overlooked by canonical twentieth-century historians), argued for the operative quality of a non-authoritative history, and focused on “unhistorical” essentials. He looked to a suprahistorical time in search of an original living culture, finding its timeless essence in ancient Greece, as illustrated by his interpretation of the Greek tragedy in *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (*Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, 1872).

The new historical consciousness of the late nineteenth century became characterized by the association between the notion of human progress and the idea of a supratemporal unity of past and present—despite the conflicting tension between nationalism and universalism, and however it varied between Hegel’s historical determinism, Ranke’s notion of an upward movement in which individual societies continuously shape general development in new ways, Goethe’s notion of “circum-gress,” or Nietzsche’s concept of “eternal recurrence.”

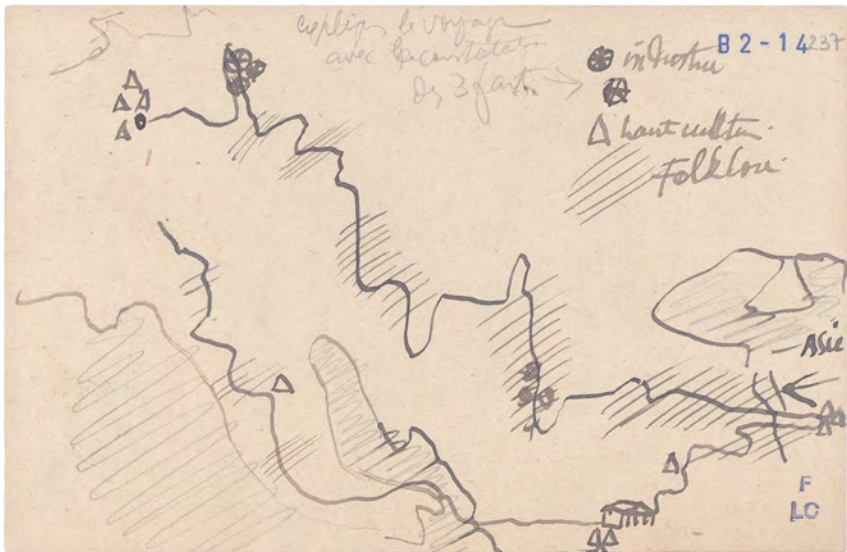
Through this nineteenth-century conception of history focused on supratemporal and cross-cultural values, on the one hand, and the Nietzschean operative role of history on the other, modernism could overcome Romantic eclecticism and shift from the formal attention to styles of past monuments towards their elemental qualities in search for a primal architecture; or as Jordy put it, towards *symbolic objectivity*.

Eliot's words illustrate the legacy of these discourses in modern art. "The historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones," he writes, "but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order." As for Le Corbusier, I have discussed elsewhere how he absorbed this nineteenth-century historical vision in a consistent way through books such as Edouard Schuré's *Santuaire d'Orient* (1898), which he read in 1908, and how his subsequent autodidactic agenda was driven by this.<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche was another key influence: by the same time, he had also read *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and been struck by Nietzsche's concept of the *Übermensch* and its allegorical representation of a higher human condition.<sup>24</sup>

From this early period onwards, history signified an ongoing process of cultural and social progress for Le Corbusier, driven by a transhistorical, ontological *idea* binding together the history and traditions of various different organic societies. The transcendental status of the *idea* which was to unite societies in a living cultural whole implied an original existence which was to be retrieved to renew life in a unified modern society. Thus he saw modern architecture as a "broad emerging crusade towards the universal thought" envisaging a "millennial relationship between man and nature."<sup>25</sup> This view was informed by the operative quality of history. Although artistic expression in the various organic societies and cultures differed, they nonetheless shared this ontological *idea*. In expressing this supratemporal essence, they were all equally valid sources for the creation of a new artistic expression. Hence Le Corbusier's interest in Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Gothic and peasant art and architecture; hence his interest in ancient mythology, a primal expression of the *idea*. Historical destiny, as Schuré put it in *Sanctuaires*, would be achieved by applying the old traditions and symbols to a new universal meaning.<sup>26</sup> This goes without saying that the artist had a key role in this humanist task: it is well known that Le Corbusier thought of himself as a redeemer of society and that this Nietzschean idea of the artist was first assimilated during this early period.<sup>27</sup>

Thus we find three complementary aspects in Le Corbusier that were inherited from nineteenth-century historicism: (1) a faith in and focus on an emerging future, understood as part of a historical evolutionary process, (2) a relativistic view of history in which art is an expression of the internal cultural laws of each society, which nonetheless share transhistorical and universal essentials, (3) the belief that these essentials, in relating to an original existence, were more faithfully expressed in the art of ancient civilizations and vernacular artefacts. *Le voyage utile*, a sketch by Le Corbusier published in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* showing the itinerary of his educational trips between 1907 and 1911 (from Tuscany to Paris, Germany, and the journey to the East) reflects these three aspects under the labels of culture, folklore, and industry.<sup>28</sup> Industry stands for the future of western civilization, culture for the high achievements of art history in the large-scale course of events, and folklore for vernacular art, expressing particular “organic wholes” within the course of the history of civilization, still uncorrupted by industrialization.<sup>29</sup> All these were framed, for Le Corbusier, by a common historical sense.

In the light of this idealist legacy, it becomes clear that the diverse aesthetic expressions in Le Corbusier’s work throughout his career are united by a common historical vision and essential attitude towards the past. The machine aesthetics of the 1920s aimed to convey the new historical era of the second machine age through *symbolic objectivity*. From the 1930s onwards, well before the postmodernist turn, this became informed by new aesthetic expressions associated with notions such as tradition, the primitive, or the vernacular, evident in works such as the Maison de Mandrot, the Swiss Pavilion at the Cité Universitaire in Paris, or the Petite Maison de Weekend in Celle-St-Cloud. This transitional period led to his subsequent work which reflects a growing focus on myth, as illustrated in the paradigmatic examples of the Unité d’Habitation in Marseilles, Ronchamp, and Chandigarh. The layering of fragments and their dialogical juxtaposition remained a characteristic of these works, with their mytho-poetic allegorical qualities still aiming for a primal universal language as much as the machine aesthetics of the 1920s.<sup>30</sup> All these aesthetic differences moved in one single direction,



3. Le Corbusier  
*Le voyage utile.*  
Sketch showing the itinerary of  
Le Corbusier's formative trips, labeled  
with three categories:  
industry, "high" culture, and folklore.  
A similar version was published in  
*L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (1925)

bound by the same fundamental creative process and philosophical idealistic positioning. Herein lies the fundamental meaning of history and tradition for Le Corbusier. The message of the *symbolic objectivity* of the 1920s and the later infatuation with the primitive, the archaic and the mythical is essentially the same: the renewal of human condition through the search for the timeless. Le Corbusier remained, in this sense, deeply modern. As Gianni Vattimo stated, for the moderns, the new was legitimated through a process of “appropriation and re-appropriation of its own ‘foundations,’” often understood as “origins,” presenting itself as ‘recovery’, rebirth, or return.<sup>31</sup>

#### CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEBATE

The essays gathered here contribute, in different ways, to the ongoing research into Le Corbusier’s relationship with history and tradition. They explore particular episodes which bring to light both the operative role of the past in his creation of a new abstract synthesis and his modernist historical consciousness. The legacy of nineteenth-century historicism and idealism is particularly explicit in the two opening essays. Ivan Zaknic offers a comparative analysis of Le Corbusier’s *Voyage d’Orient* and the journal of his travelling companion August Klipstein, revealing that the friendship between Le Corbusier and the art historian nurtured the influence of nineteenth-century German historicism in Le Corbusier during their 1911 trip. Klipstein believed that artistic traditions and styles should be juxtaposed, compared and interpreted using philosophical-aesthetic principles rather than in strict historical terms. His arguments echoed Worringer—under whom he studied—and his view of art as an expression of the psychological needs of a given organic society, which allowed him to assert that figurative and abstract categories are timeless and reflect different psychological worldviews, rather than being forcibly submitted to temporal sequentiality. While, as Zaknic argues, Klipstein helped Le Corbusier to objectify his “unstructured, sensual receptivity to his surroundings,” it is clear that, for Le Corbusier,



Klipstein’s—and Worringer’s—philosophy of art meant the consolidation of Schuré’s discourse, his assertions about supratemporal values shared by artistic expression in different epochs, the historical relativism associated with this, and the psychological-experiential dimension of art. In short, his friendship with Klipstein helped pave the way for a creative process of abstract synthesis involving judiciously selected fragments, independently of historical sequentiality.

This way of looking at different artistic expressions is further explored in Arthur Rüegg’s contribution. Rüegg investigates Le Corbusier’s intimate world, showing how the selection and display of Le Corbusier’s *collection particulière* in his Parisian apartments was not subjected to chronological criteria. Objects representing different worlds instead find affinities through their aesthetic qualities and meaning. The worlds of primitive, archaic, and vernacular objects, expressing collective memories—some of which collected during the journey to the East—share transhistorical values with contemporary art. The gradual development of a “technique of grouping” these objects by recognizing “patterns of unity across time,” and the understanding of a process of formal perfection over time through use and serial production, operating on a conceptual and formal level, illuminate the nature of a design strategy based on the “displacement of concepts” which ultimately resolves the opposition between tradition and utopia.

The third essay discusses monastic life, another concept displaced by Le Corbusier. David Leatherbarrow shows how, for Le Corbusier, the belief in a higher human condition underlying the modern metanarrative was reflected in the search for an ideal way of life. Leatherbarrow also reveals the extent to which, for Le Corbusier, utopia was humanist rather than technological in nature. The significance Le Corbusier attributed to monastic life developed from his 1907 visit to the Carthusian Monastery in Il Galluzzo, in val d’Ema, and has been discussed by other historians.<sup>32</sup> Leatherbarrow revisits this subject, showing that the individual-collective complementarity pursued and the way of life envisaged by Le Corbusier reinterprets a historical pattern that traverses the tradition of western monastic culture: the rejection of

contemporary culture, recovery of fundamental experiences through retreat, and re-articulation of a new way of life and balance between personal and communal life. It is a tradition that is revealed both in sacred and secular terms. This link to the past, the author concludes, is just one of the many ways in which modern architecture built upon history and tradition, as exemplified in the continuity of spatial ordering principles, building techniques, and even adaptation to the historical legacy of building location.

The two contributions which follow focus on specific aspects of the operative role of the past in Le Corbusier's work, one devoted to urban design and the other to architecture. Christoph Schnoor approaches the issue of town planning to show how, in this respect, Le Corbusier also instrumentalized history in his attempts to understand urban design. Schnoor focuses on the period between 1910 and 1915, when Le Corbusier acquired the basis for his future urban visions, revealing the operative value that he attributed to history. His research into urban history and theory during this period reveals his interest in principles through which the problems of the contemporary city could be addressed rather than in historical narratives. It was this interest in principles that enabled him to maintain and reconcile arguments pertaining to opposite aesthetic attitudes within the contemporary urban debate to which he was exposed. As the author shows, the categories of the picturesque and the monumental were gradually and simultaneously assimilated through these discourses and never completely discarded in Le Corbusier's work and ideas. On the contrary, ambivalences were part of his artistic conception.

With Francesco Passanti the focus shifts to the field of architectural space. One of the key aspects of the debate on urban design that influenced Le Corbusier during his research in Germany in 1910-1911 was, as Schnoor shows, the notion of space. Le Corbusier's approach to architecture gained a perspective on space during the 1911 journey to the East, influenced by the Sittesque debate on urban design. Passanti shows how this early attention to architectural space was assimilated and re-elaborated in his architectural explorations in the 1920s. The tension between continuity and individual

parts in Le Corbusier's architectural space was conceptualized by combining historical references, such as Pompeian villas and Hadrian's Villa, with the modern aesthetic discourses of Cubist painting and Symbolist poetry. The operative role of history in this process of synthesis through the combination of different references and discourses evolved from the notion of centrality to one of continuity achieved through the play of spatial volumes. This is demonstrated through the analysis of Le Corbusier's early sketches and architectural works and some of his villas of the 1920s, namely the Maison Cook, the Villa La Roche-Jeanneret and the Petite Maison in Vevey. Yet it brings to light the spatiality of perhaps even more puzzling cases, such as that of the Villa Stein's main floor.

In this demonstration of the operative role of history in Le Corbusier's spatial conception there is also a suggestion of the legacy of nineteenth-century historicism: the Petite Maison, as Passanti argues, illustrates how the play of spatial volumes is given symbolic and emotional meaning through the continuous ribbon window, which internalizes a contemplative landscape that evokes a primeval existence.

The extent to which the nineteenth-century tension between the idea of an evolving universal history and the specificity of organic societies and cultures—with obvious nationalist contours—endured in Le Corbusier's work surfaces in Johan Linton's essay. The universalizing nature of Le Corbusier's call for a new modern architecture and society scarcely needs to be mentioned. Yet he saw France as a leading culture and, as Linton shows, his early attraction to French culture and the city of Paris soon became a reference point for his theoretical and architectural work. Linton thus expands Schnoor's arguments on Le Corbusier's early adherence to French urbanism. The comparison between Le Corbusier's readings on French architecture and his writings and arguments shows that the proclaimed rupture with the models of the past accompanied his lifelong attempt to align with the French cultural heritage. Le Corbusier thought of himself and his own work as a rebirth of "the spirit of the French genius," continuing a tradition which, establishing autonomy from Italian art, linked the Abbé

Marc-Antoine Laugier to Viollet-le-Duc, Louis XIV to Napoleon III, and André Le Nôtre to Baron Haussman.

The continuing influence of history and tradition in Le Corbusier's late career is highlighted in the two concluding essays. Stanislaus von Moos provides us with a perceptive discussion on the period following World War II, characterized by the crisis in modern architecture and the emerging debate on the communicative capacity of architecture. This essay illuminates the extent to which Le Corbusier's historical vision remained unchallenged and how he remained deeply modern. With a truly modernist faith in the future—the same faith underlying the *tabula rasa* proposed in the 1920s—Le Corbusier saw the destructive consequences of World War II as an opportunity for the rebirth of a new civilization. The Platonic volumes of purism of the 1920s had given way to an expressive, symbolically charged language which, rather than following the emerging discourse on the aesthetic demands of ordinary people, found affinities with the “primitivism” and mythic allegories of Picasso's work. Similarly, he maintained his Nietzschean stance as the redeemer artist against the advocates of collective participation, seeing architecture as a redemptive art, as iconographically illustrated by the “Open Hand.” Even if, as von Moos argues, there is no simple key to deciphering the mytho-poetic quality of his late work, it seems clear that Le Corbusier was still in search of a primal universal idiom through the recovery of transhistorical, universal values.

María Candela Suárez's essay, in turn, explores the design for the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan in Ahmedabad. Suárez shows how the modern architectural lexicon that Le Corbusier developed and consolidated during his life was re-elaborated at a late stage through his contact with Indian architecture and culture. On the one hand, Indian tradition played an operative role in his relentless research, as demonstrated by the development of architectural elements such as the *brise-soleil*, redesigned through Indian tradition in order to adapt to the local climate and way of life. In Rüegg's words, the *brise-soleil*, is subjected to a process of formal and conceptual perfection through Indian tradition. On another level, for Le Corbusier India

meant a reencounter with an essential and timeless world and a spiritual way of life of a mythic past, bringing him back to his 1911 trip with Klipstein.

In short, the contributions to this book reveal the ongoing, vital significance of history and tradition in Le Corbusier's work, from his early study trip to the East to his late works in India. In accepting the fundamental role that history and tradition played in Le Corbusier's work, and given the complexity and richness of his creative process, a book of this nature cannot attempt a comprehensive approach to the subject. The essays gathered here are only fragments of the still developing story of Le Corbusier's modernism. Nevertheless, they illustrate how the past participated in the modernist creative process of abstract art, from the 1920s machine aesthetics to the late infatuation with myth. They also shed light on the extent to which the operative quality of the past was framed by a comprehensive historical vision that took the form of metanarrative. Neither the analytical studies on Le Corbusier's architecture nor the synthetic approaches to his philosophical thinking—nowadays involving countless inflammatory discourses on his political agenda—should dismiss such a historical vision, a quintessential characteristic of modernity, as Lyotard put it, which is crucial to understanding modernism in general and Le Corbusier in particular.

## NOTES

The idea for this book originated from two lectures on Le Corbusier, one by Francesco Passanti and the other by Arthur Rüegg, presented at the Department of Architecture of the University of Coimbra in July 2014. Although their subjects were different, both emphasized the significance of the past in Le Corbusier's work. I am deeply grateful for their enthusiasm and commitment to this publication. I am equally most thankful to all the contributors for accepting to embark on this project. Warm thanks to Nuno Nina from Nozzle for the unconditional support in test prints.

- 1 The literature is extensive. See, for example, on Aalto, Raija-Liisa Heinonen, "Some Aspects of 1920s Classicism and the Emergence of Functionalism in Finland," in David Dunster, ed., *Alvar Aalto*, Architectural Monographs 4 (London; New York: Academy Editions; St. Martin's Press, 1988), 20-27; on Oud, Stanford Anderson, "The Vernacular, Memory and Architecture," in Maiken Umbach and Bernd Hüppauf, eds., *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization, and the Built Environment* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 157-171; on Mies, Wolf Tegethoff, "Catching the Spirit: Mies's Early Work and the Impact of the 'Prussian Style,'" in Terence Riley and Barry Bergdoll, eds., *Mies in Berlin* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2001), 134-152.
- 2 John Summerson, "The 'Poetry' of Le Corbusier," *Architect and Building News* (April 1940), repr. in Irena Murray and Julian Osley, eds., *Le Corbusier in Britain: An Anthology* (Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2009), 117-21. See also Summerson's "Architecture, Painting and Le Corbusier," (1947) in *Heavenly Mansions and Other Essays on Architecture* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963), 177-94. Le Corbusier himself self-indulgently acknowledged Summerson's view. See his sketchbook F24, 14-15, from 1951, repr. in Françoise de Francieue, ed., *Le Corbusier: Sketchbooks 1950-1954*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass. and London; New York: MIT Press; Architectural History Foundation), ill. 710, 711.
- 3 Summerson, "Architecture, Painting and Le Corbusier," 189-190.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 191-192. For an acute discussion on the links between Le Corbusier's architecture, his paintings and cubism see Bruno Riechlin, "Jeanneret-Le Corbusier, Painter-Architect," in Eve Blau and Nancy J. Troy, eds., *Architecture and Cubism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 195-218.
- 5 Colin Rowe's "The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa" (1947) was followed by "Mannerism and Modern Architecture" (1950). They were both reprinted in Rowe, *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays* (1976; repr., Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 1-27, 29-57. The literature is too vast to list here, although some key texts in addition to Rowe should be mentioned. On antiquity see Kurt Forster, "Antiquity and Modernity in the La Roche-Jeanneret Houses of 1923," *Oppositions*, no. 15-16 (Winter/Spring 1979): 131-53; on the vernacular the seminal work is Francesco Passanti, "The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56, no. 4 (December 1997): 438-51, and a different version of this essay published in Umbach and Hüppauf, *Vernacular Modernism*, 141-56, a book offering a broader approach to modernism and the vernacular. For an overall view see Pierre Saddy and

- Claude Malécot, eds. *Le Corbusier, le passé à réaction poétique*, exh. cat. (Paris: Caisse nationale des Monuments historiques, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 1988); Stanislaus von Moos and Arthur Rüegg, eds., *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier. Applied Arts, Architecture, Painting, Photography 1907–1922* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001); Danièle Pauly, ed., *Le Corbusier et la Méditerranée* (Marseille: Éditions Parenthèses, Musées de Marseille, 1987); Marida Talamona, ed., *L'Italia di Le Corbusier* (Milan: Electa, 2012); Giuliano Gresleri, *Le Corbusier, viaggio in Oriente. Gli inediti di Charles-Edouard Jeanneret fotografo e scrittore* (Venice: Marsilio, 1985), and the extensive literature on the journey to the East published in more recent years.
- 6 Alan Colquhoun, “Displacements of Concepts in Le Corbusier,” *Architectural Design* 43 (April 1972): 220-243, repr. in *Essays and Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change*, Oppositions Books (Cambridge, London: MIT Press, 1991), 51–66.
  - 7 Summerson, “Architecture, Painting and Le Corbusier,” 192.
  - 8 Colquhoun, “Displacements of Concepts.”
  - 9 Passanti, “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier.”
  - 10 Jacques Lucan, “Athènes et Pisa. Deux modèles pour l’espace convexe du plan libre,” *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale et urbaine*, no. 22–23 (February 2008): 59–78. See also Lucan’s *Composition, Non-composition: architecture et theories, XIXe–XXe siècles* (Lausanne: Presses polytechniques et universitaires romandes, 2009), esp. 349-65. The comparison between Pisa, the Palace of the Soviets and the United Nations Headquarters was advanced by Le Corbusier himself in his book *Le Modulor* (Boulogne: Éditions de l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, 1950), 167-169.
  - 11 Reichlin, “Introduction: Architecture et intertextualité,” *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale et urbaine*, no. 22–23 (February 2008): 11–20.
  - 12 Ibid., “L’œuvre n’est plus faite seulement d’elle-même,” 119–50.
  - 13 Anderson, “Architecture and Tradition That Isn’t ‘Trad, Dad,’” in *The History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture*, papers from the 1964 AIA-ACSA Teacher Seminar; Cranbrook, ed. Marcus Whiffen (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965).
  - 14 Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity—An Incomplete Project,” in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 3-15.
  - 15 Anderson, “The Fiction of Function,” *Assemblage*, no. 2 (February 1987): 18–31.
  - 16 William H. Jordy, “The Symbolic Essence of Modern European Architecture of the Twenties and Its Continuing Influence,” *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 22, no. 3 (October 1963): 177–87.

- 17 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Originally published in French as *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur les savoir* (1979).
- 18 On the nineteenth-century German historical conception and its predecessors, see Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972); Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, rev. ed. (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983).
- 19 Wilhelm von Humboldt, "Über die Aufgabe des Geschichtschreibers" (1821), translated into English as "On the Historian's Task," *History and Theory* 6, no. 1 (1967): 57–71.
- 20 On Ranke see Meinecke, *Historism*, 496–511.
- 21 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in Daniel Breazale, ed., *Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 57-124.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 57 ff.
- 23 Armando Rabaça, "The Philosophical Framework of Le Corbusier's Education: Schuré and German Idealism," in Jorge Torres Cueco, ed., *Le Corbusier, 50 Years Later* (Valencia: Editorial Universitat Politècnica de València, 2015), 1765–83. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/LC2015.2015.671>. Edouard Schuré's *Santuaire d'Orient* is a paradigmatic and important case because it expounds this German idealistic historical vision in a clear and operative way. Yet this was a widespread vision that characterized the turn of the century, which was expressed in different degrees in other sources available to Le Corbusier during his formative years. These sources, which were preparatory to his reading of Schuré, range from practical design sourcebooks such as Owen Jones's *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856) to literature on art theory and general philosophical questions such as Henry Provensal's *L'Art de demain: vers l'harmonie intégrale* (1904) and Charles Blanc's *Grammaire des arts du dessin, architecture, sculpture, peinture* (1867). On the influence of Provensal in Le Corbusier, see Paul Venable Turner, *The Education of Le Corbusier* (New York: Garland, 1977), 10-24. For Blanc see Passanti, "The Aesthetic Dimension in Le Corbusier's Urban Planning," in Eric Munford, Hashim Sarkis, and Neyran Turan, eds., *Josep Lluís Sert: The Architect of Urban Design, 1953-1969* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), esp. 28, 36n8; *Idem.*, "Toscane," in Talamona, ed., *L'Italie de Le Corbusier, XVe Rencontres de la Fondation Le Corbusier* (Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, Éditions de La Villette, 2010), 25-26. During the subsequent period in Paris (1908-1909), Le Corbusier consolidated



- the deterministic views of history in the field of architectural history through authors such as Viollet-le-Duc, Auguste Choisy and Edouard Corroyer. See Rabaça, “Ordering code and Mediating Machine. Le Corbusier and the Roots of the Architectural Promenade,” (Doctoral thesis, Coimbra University, 2013), 99, 117-131, *passim*.
- 24 On Le Corbusier and Nietzsche see Turner, *The Education of Le Corbusier*, 56-61; Jean-Louis Cohen, “Le Corbusier’s Nietzschean Metaphors,” in *Nietzsche and “An Architecture of Our Minds,”* ed. Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), 311-332; Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the Continual Revolution in Architecture* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2000), 354-355; H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier’s Formative Years: Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 174-175.
- 25 Le Corbusier, *Croisade; Ou, le crépuscule des académies* (Paris: G. Crès, 1933), 17-18, 25-26.
- 26 See Rabaça, “The Philosophical Framework of Le Corbusier’s Education.”
- 27 See note 24.
- 28 Le Corbusier, *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* (Paris: G. Crès, 1925), 216.
- 29 The extent to which the association between vernacular art and the notion of the “organic whole” lingered in Le Corbusier can be seen, for instance, in his book *Manière de penser l’urbanisme* (Boulogne: Éditions de l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, 1946), 180. The main discussion is still Passanti’s “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier.”
- 30 See Stanislaus von Moos’s essay in this volume.
- 31 See Gianni Vattimo’s introduction to *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 1–15.
- 32 The significance of monasticism in Le Corbusier’s work has been discussed by several authors since Peter Serenyi, “Le Corbusier, Fourier, and the Monastery of Ema,” *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 4 (December 1967): 277–86. See, for example, von Moos, *Le Corbusier, Elements of a Synthesis*, rev. ed. (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 140-143, originally published in German as *Le Corbusier. Elemente einer Synthese* (Frauenfeld: Huber Verlag, 1968); Ivan Zaknic, “Epiphany on Mount Athos,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 43, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 27–36 and the passage about Le Corbusier’s attraction to ascetic life in his essay in this volume; Passanti, “Toscane,” 22–23.



1. Portrait of August Klipstein.  
Photo attributed to Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, ca. 1911.

AUGUSTE KLIPSTEIN'S *ORIENT-REISE*,  
COMPANION TO  
LE CORBUSIER'S *JOURNEY TO THE EAST*, 1911

This essay argues for the importance of the art historian and art dealer August Klipstein (1885-1951) to the education, and perhaps the publishing history, of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). In 1911, the two friends decided to take a “Journey to the East.” Le Corbusier’s account of their joint journey is well-known. His *Le Voyage d’Orient* was the first book he wrote (between 1911 and 1914) and the last he approved for publication—in 1965, a little over a month before his death.<sup>1</sup> But the travel diary that Klipstein kept in his native German during this year has never been published. Known as *Orient-Reise*, it has received some scholarly attention, but it has never been studied as a whole.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, Klipstein’s account of their travels has remained in the shadow cast by Le Corbusier’s later world-wide fame. In 1911, however, Jeanneret was the junior party. Klipstein was completing a PhD dissertation in art history at the University of Munich. As elder mentor and daily interlocutor to the young and professionally still unsettled Jeanneret, he surely exercised considerable influence on their common journey—even if Le Corbusier had the habit, later in life, of downplaying the influence of those people who helped shape his maturing aesthetic worldview and first forays into writing.<sup>3</sup> The “companion” in the essay’s title thus plays a dual role. It refers both to the text and to the man: *Orient-Reise* as a companion volume to *Le Voyage d’Orient*, and Klipstein as an ideal travel companion for Le Corbusier during his formative years (Fig. 1).

The genre of “travel notes in diary format” was for both men their first attempt at a chronicle of artistic witnessing. Neither was an experienced writer. Of the two travellers, Jeanneret was the more impulsive and impressionable. He undertook the “Eastern journey” as a coming-of-age ritual in the tradition of the Grand European Tour, hoping to absorb through sight and touch the great artistic traditions of the past. Klipstein, two years older than Jeanneret and already a seasoned traveller, was more goal-oriented, professional and academic in his pursuits. His dissertation, under the mentorship of William Worringer, dealt with the influence of Byzantine art on the artist El Greco.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the wealth of material Klipstein hoped to see in Bucharest (some important paintings by El Greco were to be on display at the Royal Court of Rumania), in Constantinople, and on Mount Athos, there were many sites en route he needed to visit.<sup>5</sup> Klipstein's imprint on the final trip was probably decisive. There is no indication, for example, that Jeanneret, in his early drafts of an itinerary, ever thought of including the Greek-and-Russian Orthodox enclave of Mount Athos. For the most part, Jeanneret's interest was in the great urban capitals and sites of classical architecture: Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, Constantinople, Athens, Rome.<sup>6</sup> The two-week sojourn on Mount Athos was in its own way shattering for both men, but of immediate artistic value only for one of them. The monastery ideal would surface only much later in Le Corbusier's architectural imagination. At the time, even as the two friends were not indifferent to the peasant culture of the Balkans, Jeanneret was thinking overall in terms of a young man's Grand Tour. Klipstein, understandably, was thinking in terms of his doctoral thesis.

Klipstein's sketchbooks demonstrate his interest not only in traditional art but also in details of classical Greek architecture, Byzantine monasteries, and their mosaics, frescos, and illustrated codexes with miniatures (Fig. 2). He sketched very skilfully, was competent with a camera, and had a keen eye for high art as well as traditional motifs in local culture that had survived in contemporary art. The eye of a visual artist was important to Jeanneret on this journey. A short time before their departure, on March 10, 1911,



2. August Klipstein.  
Sketchbook, Tagebuch, 79.

he wrote to Klipstein, reminding him that he, Klipstein, “would be dealing with an architect, a person determined to fill his sketchbooks with drawings.” He hoped his friend was planning to do the same. And then he added: “I remember the several sketches you made while in Spain. You can be my drawing master [*mon maître*]” (Figs. 3, 4).

Jeanneret was right to see a potentially useful, and perhaps a stern, pedagogue in his friend. As his travel diary makes clear, Klipstein could be opinionated, dismissive, and quick to negative judgment in his writing. Although he was no sentimental Romantic, Klipstein was critical of art historians and their “dry explorations.” We don’t need such history any more, he wrote in the opening pages of his travel diary; “we need a philosophy of art,” a “philosophical-aesthetic interpretation” that will permit us to appreciate, for example, the magnificence of Muslim art without applying to it our own Western criteria (diary entry of May 11, 1911). By temperament Klipstein was a comparativist. For him, history (or histories) was interesting when studied “laterally” rather than linearly. But lateral comparisons between cultural traditions also revealed careless borrowings and hybrid monsters. As he jotted down during their stay in Constantinople (June-July 1911), Western influence (and particularly the Baroque) on Turkish sensitivities had produced “the most loathsome things one can imagine.” But then these same traditional “sensitivities,” pure and unpolluted, would unexpectedly emerge in the local vernacular: in a piece of pottery, a simple household utensil, or in Turkish house (the *konak*).

This essay focuses on one aspect of the complex, productive, at times sardonic friendship between these two quite different personalities. Drawing on *Orient-Reise*, it speculates on Klipstein’s quest for “philosophical-aesthetic interpretations”—which he felt could be realized better through the juxtaposition of artistic traditions rather than by mere “dry history”—in light of Jeanneret’s more unstructured, sensual receptivity to his surroundings. The two men often describe the same physical item or event. On the plane of day-by-day events, both get seasick, bitten by bedbugs, irritated by hagglers at the bazaar, or suddenly charmed by the sight of some beautiful



3. August Klipstein.  
Drawing of Toledo and  
St. Martin Bridge.
4. August Klipstein.  
Drawing of Toledo near  
St. Martin Bridge.

local pots or veiled Turkish women.<sup>7</sup> But Klipstein's descriptions are sober, abstract, and analytic. He was not easily carried away and always sought to grasp the principles of the artistic whole. In Pera, the European district of Constantinople, Klipstein jotted down the following cautious note, which is very characteristic of his approach:

No matter what, the whole of the city is complicated in every way. But I will be able to move towards judgment once I've been here a few days and have had a chance to take a thorough and systematic look at the architecture. You must be able to move from details to the whole here. On the other hand, the whole is too chaotic to take in at a glance. It will take a long time . . .<sup>8</sup>

Jeanneret, in contrast, tends to be more immediate, emotional, personal, and poetic in response to events and stimuli. Overall, he moves from the impression of the whole to its artistically worthy details. In his description of the catastrophic fire in Constantinople that the two travellers witnessed on July 24, 1911 ("The Stamboul Disaster" in *Journey to the East*, 153-58), Jeanneret placed himself squarely inside the event, and marveled at the impassive fatalism of the city's inhabitants. "The nightmare is over. What a tragic night!" he begins. His evocative chapter recalls a "colossal sacrifice," a "fantastic plume of fire," a night leaving them "stupefied, overcome by a great melancholy," like in a theatre.

Klipstein was not inclined to record events in this highly-wrought theatrical register, although he did try his own hand at a description, over a full four pages. With his historian's eye, he puts the event in perspective and in the context of earlier conflagrations: "Fires are no rarity in Constantinople . . . Yesterday a fire of extraordinary dimensions was announced, with which even the fire in Çirçir in 1908 cannot compare . . . Yesterday's fire stretched all the way to the Sea of Marmara, as far as the eye can see (*Orient-Reise*, 16, 16b). Klipstein provides data from an official report as it appeared in some unidentified press release: 2,650 houses, 600 shops, 16 mosques. Throughout his account of the Fire, Klipstein uses the pronoun "we." "We



could recognize very well the Turkish national character, and in particular the marked fatalism that allows them to accept their immutable fate with the greatest calm . . .” But ultimately his context is a static one, the horizon of the entire city’s architecture.

Anyway, we feel good here, we have a great dwelling, with a magnificent view of the Golden Horn, Istanbul with the Hagia Sofia, the Sultan Ahmet, the Sultan Süleyman, the Sultan Mehmet, and a whole bunch of smaller mosques. Beyond them all you can see a small strip of the Sea of Marmara and then, on the horizon, the high walls of the Asiatic mountains, with the snow-crowned peak of Mt. Olympus. It’s all a little too panoramic; still, we do have here the highly praised beauty of Constantinople. You’ll have read about the Istanbul fire. You’ll find our impressions in Jeanneret’s article, which, by the way, is very good in itself.<sup>9</sup>

Klipstein recommends that the reader of his *Orient-Reise*—whomever that might be—read Jeanneret’s account of the fire, soon to appear in the local newspaper of La-Chaux-de-Fonds. Klipstein claims to share his friend’s impressions. But he could not himself describe the emotion-charged *art* of that spectacle. Among the often noted paradoxes of Le Corbusier’s early period is that the greatest modernist architect of the 20th century left such an intensely subjective, Romantic account of his first prolonged exposure to the artistic genius of the past.<sup>10</sup> The counterpoint of a cool-minded travel companion like Klipstein, who was looking for other forms of aesthetic expression, might have kept Jeanneret’s effusive enthusiasms in check. Or, on the contrary, the continual presence of Klipstein might have prompted Jeanneret to even higher flights of imaginative fantasy. Jeanneret was a creative artist *par excellence*. Klipstein was an observer, an analyst; what moved him was not the passion of participation but the voice of ironic detachment. Both men often loved the same things, but they internalized them differently. Consider this description by Klipstein from early in the journey (June 5, Budapest), of one excursion in search of authentic folk art:

When it's windy there's unbelievable dust, and when it rains there's unbelievable muck. The potter did not disappoint us. After going through a charming garden, we had to climb up a steep and narrow staircase to get to his loft, where we almost suffocated from the heat, but we discovered a whole mountain of wonderful black-glazed vessels with yellowish and brick-red flowers. Edouard sank into pure ecstasy and began right away to select what to buy. The potter's old mother lived in his room; she was 102 years old. She shrieked for joy, because for the first time in thirty years she was hearing German words. She came from the Frankfurt region . . .

Klipstein bemusedly observes his friend Jeanneret, who is in "pure ecstasy." Out of these differing temperaments watching each other, step by step and stop by stop, both men furthered their own education and, consciously or not, their own modes of self-expression.

#### KLIPSTEIN'S POSTHUMOUS LEGACY

Klipstein believed in travelling as a prerequisite for aesthetic education. He had previously visited Spain, Morocco, Italy, France and Belgium, always with an academic agenda and occasionally sketching what he saw. As we saw, Jeanneret appreciated his friend's drawings of Toledo, referring to them in a letter at the end of September, 1910. There are also hints that Jeanneret had urged Klipstein to purchase a Kodak Brownie camera; he took many pictures with it, especially of subjects related to his dissertation research. However *Orient-Reise*, as it was eventually formatted in typescript, did not include any images. Only in 2015 did the original notebook for the diary become available.<sup>11</sup> It resembles a "Tagebuch" [daybook] compiled of three sketchbooks containing 109 double pages with notes and descriptions, interspersed with illustrations in a manner similar to Jeanneret's own carnets *Le Voyage d'Orient*. This Tagebuch records impressions jointly experienced by him and Jeanneret, alongside anecdotal events and historical information that also appears in *Orient-Reise* (Fig. 5).



5. August Klipstein's "Tagebuch."  
Volume compiled from three sketchbooks.

Beyond serving as a diary and memory prompt, it is not clear for what purpose Klipstein documented these 1911 travels, or what target audience he had in mind. At times in *Orient-Reise* he addresses a direct identifiable audience, as on his first page, where he seems to be speaking to Jeanneret in a sort of open letter. At other times the addressee is more difficult to determine. Sometimes Klipstein's tone suggests he is writing notes for a guidebook, or notes taken down *from* a guidebook; other sections more resemble notes to himself. Unlike Jeanneret, who was sending his diary "dispatches" home for serial publication in the local La-Chaux-de-Fonds newspaper *La Feuille d'Avis* to be read by a close circle of his parents, neighbours, and friends, Klipstein made no known attempts to publish *Orient-Reise* during his lifetime. Upon completing his doctorate in Art History in 1916, he became a professional art dealer in Bern.<sup>12</sup>

In 1951, Klipstein died at age 66 of a heart attack. His widow, Frieda Klipstein, began to take an interest in his travel notes and correspondence between the two friends from almost a half-century before. The distant journey, seemingly forgotten by both sides, began to be revived. For reasons doubtless connected with her own mourning, Frieda began a nostalgic and respectful correspondence with Le Corbusier, now at the peak of his fame, that might have exercised a certain sentimentalizing pressure on the architect. Le Corbusier would always respond politely to these letters, which in turn encouraged Frieda to provide more details, about Klipstein's writings and his commercial business (Gutenkust & Klipstein), which continued after his death. Frieda continued to correspond with Le Corbusier until 1965, exchanging momentos (images and artefacts) with him relating to the eastern journey and sharing the occasional tantalizing detail of her husband's life. The last known exchange is dated May 2, 1965, a few months before Le Corbusier's own death at Cap Martin.

The available correspondence between Le Corbusier and Frieda Klipstein makes no specific mention of the typescript that August had left behind. It is possible that Le Corbusier was not even aware that his friend's travel diary had survived. We know that Frieda was eager that her late husband's literary

legacy be published; there are indications that she hoped the famous Le Corbusier would help her in this task. Le Corbusier did not. But this tender and constant pressure from his friend's widow appears to have rekindled Le Corbusier's interest in his own long-dormant travel articles from 1911, assembled into a book before the Great War but collecting dust since 1914. When Jean Petit, the indefatigable entrepreneur and businessman, asked Le Corbusier for fresh material from the master's hand that he could publish and market, Le Corbusier offered his own unpublished travel manuscript. Frieda, meanwhile, continued to re-read her husband's correspondence and his version of the journey, and to enter an occasional marginal comment into the typescript. This typescript eventually ended up in various European libraries.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE CRITICAL ANALYST AND THE ROMANTIC POET

Klipstein, in the self-portrait he provides in the diary, complained and found fault with a great deal. He did not modify or soften his immediate reactions. He was writing these travel notes mostly for himself, rather like "footnotes" to a future research experiment, with no distinct outside audience in mind that had to be informed, educated, or amused. Jeanneret had larger ambitions. His approach from the start was subjective. He must have felt what every artist feels: that the best way to turn strong, negative, even painful experiences into something positive and inspirational is to turn it into art. This is what Jeanneret did with the peak experiences of his journey—whether it was the Fire of Stamboul, his illness on Mount Athos, or the Grand Bazaar. He aestheticized the experience. Klipstein, a far more sober eye, is the foil and "control" for his companion's poetic visions. He rarely "aestheticizes" and does not add colour, melody, or theatrical frame to the events he describes. (He does add irony and irritation). If Jeanneret represents the essential artist as transfigurer of reality, then Klipstein is the traveller-chronicler. Both testimonies are valuable to the historian, but they

are also necessary to each other. For six months, they mutually shaped each other in their daily rituals, dialogues, and observations.

Often the mix of voices and worldviews is only implicit: both men were curious about other cultures and respond eagerly to the same stimulus. At times the interaction is more explicit: the same event is written up in the two diaries. Overall Klipstein is serious, as befits a PhD candidate in search of academically useful information. Jeanneret, on the other hand, can be very jocular, especially when describing Klip—perhaps to amuse his friends at La Chaux-de-Fonds, perhaps to gain some distance on his own sentimental tone and provide comic relief, perhaps even to play off his friend as a sort of alter-ego. The younger man, seemed to enjoy “sketching” the more sophisticated Klipstein in a satirical vein as a prankster or eccentric. Here are several examples from *Journey to the East* of Jeanneret “moulding” his friend into a sketch.

In the chapter “A Jumble of Recollections and Regrets” we read:

Sometimes I have quoted the remarks of my august companion, and yet I have never described him. Here is his portrait. Ancestry: Flemish, but crazy about modern Paris. His people tighten the lips on the letter ‘b,’ which they obliterate. As to his personality: a decent fellow. And here are a few small revealing details about him. He dares to love Jordaens, Brouwer, and Van Ostäde, about whom he says: Long may they live! They drink, laugh, eat!<sup>14</sup> At those times when we were in agonizing misery, reduced literally to nothing but black bread, he would disappear furtively behind street corners to buy cigars. He nearly died when all we could fill our drinking glasses and coffee cup with was water! Another revelation of his real self (once when we spent the night on a bench): he awakes, sits up, rolls his eyes heavy with sleep which he fixes on me in a long gaze, and after a seeming eternity, and while regaining consciousness, he wonders out loud: ‘Maype we could have a *peer!* (as if there were a keg right there under the bench!’<sup>15</sup>

Comments on the eating and drinking habits of his friend begin early in their journey, during their stop in Negotin, Serbia, witnessing a marriage celebration.

They drink a lot of this ruby-red wine to overcome their uneasiness; they want either to feel happy on a day designated as festive, or simply to sink into a reassuring torpor. I also drank my part of the good little wine of Negotin, and was lost in a reverie . . . Auguste continued to extract the ruby-red wine from the little vials. But oddly enough he couldn't take it and was sick that evening!<sup>16</sup>

Or later:

Auguste, physically: the build of a fakir . . . He eats with the conviction of a sleeping cat and the seriousness of a drinking cow! Jordaens, Brouwer! Auguste, when I send these articles to the editor of this little journal, I will beg him to omit this defamatory information!<sup>17</sup>

But in the end Jeanneret did not omit it.<sup>18</sup> This alter-ego was an important part of his own self-portrait.

For example: viewed through Jeanneret, the image of Klipstein (with his dry tone and continual fault-finding), often comes together into something like an aesthete, a dandy: “. . . Auguste listens to my complaints; smoking his pipe, he philosophizes, and, philosophizing, he puffs on his pipe.”<sup>19</sup> He had a sense of the theatrical about him:

Another revealing event in Pera (this time Auguste has all the bedbugs in his bed): at three in the morning he lights the candle and starts roasting them. He gets all excited in pursuit of these mean little vermin, who burrow under his long fingernails (because he has style, this art historian, this theoretician!) He taps his fingernails on the marble table top, and the tiny beasts drop out; he runs them through with his writing pen, then fries them; the cadavers drown in the hot wax, next day forming a nougat, conspicuously Turkish. Auguste

perspires, and once the massacre is accomplished, he cannot help but conclude: — Oh, la, la, let's roll a little cigarette. He goes back to sleep, the pacifier in his mouth, happy about the carnage, and complacent with his smoke!<sup>20</sup>

Klipstein had exacting standards and strong opinions, about both folk and academic art. Jeanneret wrote to his friends from the Ateliers d'Art at La Chaux-de-Fonds about their common search for Balkan pottery: “. . . Auguste caught sight of a flash of enamel and cried out, just like Columbus's lookout-man: Pots!”<sup>21</sup> Jeanneret could admire his friend while making affectionately light fun of his pedantic and academic approach.

Auguste, who is preparing for his doctorate in Art History, suddenly felt overcome by the birth of a revelatory theory [Jeanneret writes in his *Journey to the East*]. He had perceived this ultimate crisis evident in the pottery of Hungary and Serbia, and, envisaging in one stroke all the arts and all the epochs, he formulated the theory of ‘the psychological moment in popular pottery in the twentieth-century arts.’ In German it sounds much better: ‘Der psychologische Moment,’ etc. Auguste, I swear to you, never was able to finish it. Nor could I have helped him.<sup>22</sup>

Jeanneret affectionately mocks Klipstein's tendency to turn the most modest things into a momentous theory. But in his *Orient-Reise*, Klipstein is not in the least embarrassed to take seriously his own gift for formal theorizing, extending his occasional insight into a theory about the psychology of the applied arts.

In these fragments of a theory, one can detect traces of Klipstein's teacher and mentor William Worringer. A telling example from the journey, one focused on a single artwork, comes from their visit to the Valide Mosque in Istanbul. Jeanneret took the time to draw in detail a small decorative tile (Fig. 6). At the centre was the black stone of the Kaaba, about which Jeanneret wrote in the tone of an ethno-architect: “The orientation of the axis of every mosque on Moslem soil toward the black stone of the Kaaba





6. Le Corbusier.  
Valide Mosque, Istanbul.  
Drawing with a note  
referring to Klipstein.

is an awe-inspiring symbol of the unity of the faith.”<sup>23</sup> Embedded in the caption to the same image is a reference to Klipstein’s reaction to this iconic image: “Intellektualistische Vorstellung, ainsi parle Auguste” [an intellectual representation, thus speaks Auguste]. Klipstein will also refer to a similar detail in his *Orient-Reise*, not in the emotional tones of a tourist’s on-the-spot observation but in the language of theory appropriate to an art historian and apprentice academic.<sup>24</sup> Elementary, abstract geometry still plays a role, but it is bolstered by a quote from Wilhelm Worringer’s 1907 *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* [Abstraction and Empathy]:

The instinct for ancient art has nothing to do with reproducing nature. It seeks pure abstraction as the only way of establishing coherence in the confusion and obscurity of the world picture, and it creates out of itself, from pure, instinctive necessity, a geometric abstraction.<sup>25</sup>

Worringer, as noted above, taught at the University of Munich and was a sponsor at Klipstein’s dissertation defense (that PhD study was later published as *Die Persistenz gotischer Kunstanschauung und gotische Rückfallserscheinungen in der Entwicklung der Renaissance des italienischen Quattrocento* [The persistence of Gothic views on art and relapses into the Gothic in the development of the Renaissance in the Italian Quattrocento], Bern, 1916).

The ideological relationship between Worringer and Klipstein—and by extension, the possible influence of Worringer’s ideas on Jeanneret during this journey—is a topic that has received only slight attention.<sup>26</sup> *Abstraction and Empathy* is now classic in the psychology of aesthetics. Among its more provocative statements is that “the aesthetic sense is an objectivised sense of the self.” Human beings need art for two basic reasons, Worringer suggests: to tell us “who we are” (this is accomplished through mimetic or representational art), and to establish communication patterns with what we are not and what we do not know (this through stylized or abstract art). Mimetic art stimulates sympathy and empathy. It fosters a sense of community, domesticity, and comfort. What rules it is human creativity,

variety, a sense of “being at home among familiar shapes,” and thus freedom. Abstract art, such as is often produced by non-Western cultures, represents a different relationship of the soul to reality and to higher powers. It is more severe, less empirical and self-explanatory. What rules this type of art is not freedom but necessity. Worringer believed that these two psychological worldviews were not sequential—that is, one was not “progressive,” nor was the other “primitive”; both co-exist in every society because each responds to a different psychological need.

It is intriguing to note that the elementary abstract geometry as described by Worringer begins to play an ever more important role in Jeanneret’s drawings during this 1911 journey, especially if compared to his earlier *Voyage d’Italie* of 1907. In 1911, this abstraction is evident not only in Jeanneret’s drawings, but also in his verbal descriptions: in his chapter titled “The Mosques,” he writes “. . . an elementary geometry orders these masses: the square, the cube, the sphere.”<sup>27</sup> Perhaps Jeanneret’s most unexpected use of volumetric abstraction comes in his description of the music he heard at a wedding celebration in the town of Negotin. In describing the unusual voices and harmonic arrangements, Jeanneret wrote the following: “Suddenly the group takes off, and a cube of music comes out of it . . . Everything has ended in an awesome geometry . . . the hymns were like huge squares laid down, or like towers.”<sup>28</sup> The eruption of these pure geometric metaphors into Jeanneret’s otherwise Romantic and impressionistic prose evidently owes something to Worringer and to his doctoral student August Klipstein, a travelling companion with a sharp, intellectual, abstracting eye.

As an art historian, Klipstein displayed a special interest in painting in his diary. In Paris he had studied such modern painters as Cézanne, Manet, Vuillard, Toulouse-Lautrec. In his travels through Spain, he focused on El Greco. As early in the Eastern journey as Vienna, Klipstein began his evaluation of the El Greco canvases located in the Imperial Art History museum, its collection of the Spanish School (16th-17th century): “El Greco, Gastmahl bei Simons [Feast at the House of Simon].” The El Greco collection at the Royal Court of Romania was a mandatory stop.<sup>29</sup> But both

were disappointed with what they saw—and Klipstein's negative opinions, sustained throughout his diary, surely infected the judgment of his travel companion.

These mutually-conditioned judgments “infected” genres of literary expression as well. In his *Journey to the East*, Jeanneret composed a short chapter in the conventional literary-sentimental form of a letter to an unidentified lady, who expressed her admiration for Carmen Sylva, Queen of Romania.<sup>30</sup> He was not averse to adorning an event with some imported culture. As Jeanneret records his friend's reaction to this same collection, however, the picture is different: Klipstein, he noted, disliked both the quality of the art and its architectural setting, and among the collection he was even certain there was a “fake.”<sup>31</sup> In his own *Orient-Reise*, August dismissed the flawed exhibit the way a researcher would dismiss a disappointing archive: “Christ with a cross (at least a copy of it) . . . We saw only one El Greco, and I got so involved in it that I hardly noticed any of the rest of the paintings.” And as regards the entire collection, Klipstein did not mince words: “It borders on the highest kitsch and shows how little the El Grecos are valued . . . they are displayed together with the crappiest German pictures . . . and El Greco's Christ must be called into question.”<sup>32</sup>

The two men were also in agreement about an exhibit of Romanian Art Nouveau, which Jeanneret refers to as the “secessionist group.” But in this instance, Jeanneret was more critical than his art-critic friend. “Well, those imbeciles! They have allowed themselves to be assassinated by Europe! We had to put up with entire walls of Munich academicism . . .”<sup>33</sup> Klipstein was more sober, detached, but reflected the same basic sentiments, declaring that “the modern Romanian painters are kitsch and undistinguished descendants of the Munichers,” adding: “. . . It's sad.”<sup>34</sup>

The two travellers were also interested not only in high art or the Modern Art movement, but in popular art as well. They visited ethnographic museums, and in their diaries they describe folk objects and methods of their production. They also amassed a collection of peasant pottery, which they pack up and send back home. Jeanneret devotes an entire chapter, “A Letter to Friends at

the Ateliers d'Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds" to the discovery of vases. He calls the art of the peasant "a striking creation of aesthetic sensuality"<sup>35</sup> adding, in an interesting variant on Worringer's binary paradigm, that "considered from a certain point of view, folk art outlives the highest of civilizations. It remains a norm, a sort of measure whose standard is man's ancestor—the savage, if you will."<sup>36</sup> Klipstein too notes, with a certain pedantic familiarity and always thinking as the historian, that "Western Romania seems to have the richest folk art . . . In the last five years, Transylvanian ceramics have undergone a substantial change in the area of colour . . . Still decorative, but no longer with its distinctive elegance and sophisticated use of space."<sup>37</sup> This interest in the history of folk art extended into Romanian embroidery and other painstaking craftsmanship such as wood-carvings, which Klipstein saw as essentially Byzantine forms.

Both travellers were interested in cities as architectural ensembles—in city planning, loosely conceived—and the urban stops throughout their travels provided exemplary raw material. In 1910 the young Jeanneret was writing a text to be titled "La Construction des villes," which was left incomplete and consequently abandoned. His interest in urbanism, however, continued throughout his life, leading to the 1924 publication of *The City of Tomorrow* and in 1933 to his most elaborate and authoritative statement, *The Radiant City*. Chapter 5 of *The City of Tomorrow* begins with a sketch from the 1911 Journey, with a caption (which also might reflect the influence of Worringer's binary distinction in art) that reads: "Pisa: cylinders, spheres, cones, cubes"<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 7).

Klipstein does not shy away from critical forays into the architectural field and even into urbanism. Many of his descriptions remain no more than a jotting-down of his immediate impressions, saturated with his colourful personal biases. He also made comments at the other stylistic extreme, in the style of a neutral narration reminiscent of a guide-book. An example of the former type is Klipstein's reaction to the city of Budapest: "There are few cities that offer as panoramic a view of all sides as Buda does. If only the grimy mass of Pest weren't over there. I can't get rid of this feeling;



7. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of Pisa, October 1911.  
“Pisa: cylinders, spheres, cones, cubes,”  
wrote Le Corbusier.

Pest simply repels me.”<sup>39</sup> Another city that received devastatingly negative criticism (from both men, but from Klipstein especially) was the Serbian capital of Belgrade.<sup>40</sup>

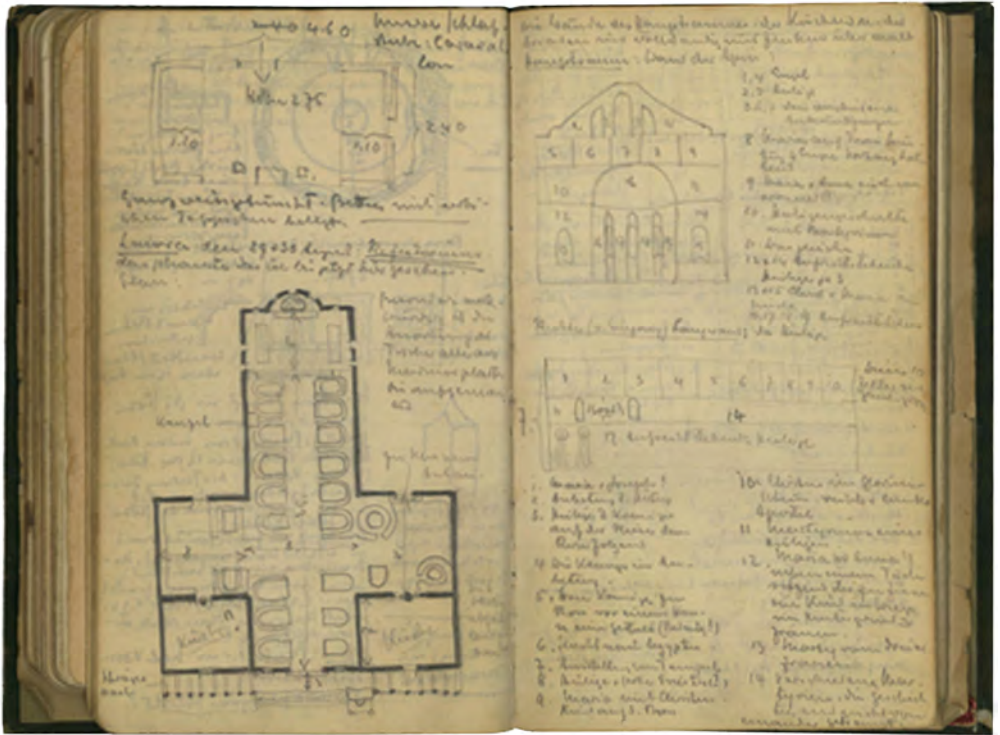
Klipstein characteristically sought the measured, sober images and was fascinated by repeating patterns. He was not very familiar with Turkish art, however. Partly for that reason he disapproved of it, claiming that the really good things were actually “not Turkish, but came from the East.”<sup>41</sup> “The West,” he wrote, “has had a devastating influence here.” He points out the great influence wielded by Hagia Sophia on the subsequent forms of the mosques: “Eternal representations of Hagia Sophia, yet ingenious and often brilliant repetitions, which very often surpass the original.”<sup>42</sup> Klipstein’s predisposition is always to favour the Byzantine and Greek period. While still in Istanbul, he was already anticipating their future visit to Mount Athos, especially the opportunity to see “Byzantine miniatures.” The Istanbul portion of *Orient-Reise*—and even its historically-oriented discussion of the city’s history of fires—is written in a disjointed, conflated, prosaic style.

After Istanbul, the two companions travelled by sea to Mount Athos, where they arrived on August 23. They stayed for two weeks, visiting various monasteries on the Holy Mountain. Jeanneret was sick through most of it, which could have been a serious matter, since cholera was sweeping the East at this time. Klipstein observes that just a few days after they left Istanbul, this region was closed and quarantined off by the military. Jeanneret’s severe digestive problems (chronic diarrhea) throughout the Mount Athos sojourn was the most likely reason why he did not write up this stage of their journey until 1914, three years later. He did, however, make a series of sketches in his notebook. In contrast, during this peak spiritual pilgrimage, Klipstein was profoundly active and writing continually, sustained by his passion for Byzantine art. His commentary about Mount Athos takes up over eight pages of *Orient-Reise*. Throughout his account of events and impressions he uses the pronoun “we,” perhaps co-speaking for his temporarily silenced, enfeebled friend.

Klipstein's most detailed descriptions are devoted to works of Byzantine art (Fig. 8). Prominent among these were icons, iconostases, miniatures, frescos, and illuminated books on the Life of the Virgin Mary, to whom the entire peninsula and mountain of Athos is devoted (it is for her chaste sake that all other female humans or animals are denied access to the Mountain). But even an adoration of art had its limits. Interspersed among length descriptions of artworks and Biblical references, Klipstein cannot refrain from noting the painful prosaic details of their daily physical survival. Special attention is given to the meals offered them by the monks. This young German, it appeared, was not attracted to a Mediterranean diet: "For lunch there were anchovies, though only for us, boiled green vegetables in oil; miserable . . . In a piece of skin, sausage-shaped, boiled fish eyes."<sup>43</sup> August complained even about the hospitality offered them, which inevitably included food, and he seems unaware of the poverty (and thus the generosity) of these humble monastic folk. As a historian, he was clearly more comfortable among the relics of the past than the necessities of the present. "For supper we were served rice soup and scrambled eggs with wine. The monastery, and also the few people there, made a wretched, miserable, unfriendly, almost hostile impression on us. I was glad to be outside again the next morning."<sup>44</sup>

The culmination of their misery came with their visit to the Monastery of Lavras on August 29-30, which possibly they had assumed would be like a tourist hotel rather than a spiritual retreat or house of worship under a vow of poverty. "We have just complained to the gatekeeper and other monks about how badly we were received," Klipstein writes. "They wouldn't open the churches, we hardly got fed, they asked us five times when we were planning to leave . . . In the evening and at noon we had to run to the kitchen and shout into the head cook's ear that we were hungry . . . God knows, here on Athos you learn what hunger is . . . You can have these idiotic monasteries any time you want them."<sup>45</sup> Klipstein, it appears, was sour about any institution that contained art but wasn't organized as a museum. In contrast, Jeanneret, writing about the Athos experience three years later from his comfortable home in La Chaux-de-Fonds, was far more reflective and appreciative.





8. August Klipstein's "Tagebuch," 76. Sketches and notes.

Jeanneret-Le Corbusier's emotional and architectural relationship to the monastery was entirely different than his travel companion's. Ever since 1907, when he spent some time at the Carthusian Monastery of Ema near Florence and been powerfully inspired by it, very possibly he had dreamed of visiting others, such as those on Mount Athos. In his chapter "Recollections of Athos," the longest in *Journey to the East*, Jeanneret had written about this remote, desolate, and fragile spiritual environment not in terms of its lack of Epicurean delights but precisely because of this deprivation. The invitation to an ascetic life—outside the context of any religious conversion—attracted Le Corbusier to the end of his days.<sup>46</sup> One of the more remarkable aspects of Jeanneret's text is the number of times he refers to Athos as a radiant, inexpressible experience, which shines especially brightly in his memory now that he is back in a small town. He recalls the two weeks, even weakened by illness, with admiration, respect, perhaps even envy. He confessed that the "hours spent on the mountain were the happiest he had ever experienced." This monastic ideal might be found later in many of Le Corbusier's dwellings, including, of course, the one he built for himself at Cap Martin.

After Mount Athos, the two friends travelled through Salonika on the way to Athens. Despite their short stay for one day, both were serious students of the local landmarks. Klipstein records his impressions, and sketches (among other buildings) Hagia Sophia, St. Demetrius Church, the Arch of Galerius, St. Parasceva Church (being restored at this time), and the St. George Rotunda. Jeanneret jots down a few descriptive notes and draws in his sketchbook (no. 3, 87; see also *Orient-Reise*, 65) the plan and perspective of the Roman Rotunda—the mausoleum of Galerius converted to a church in the 5th century and to a mosque in the 16th. Before reaching Athens, however, they were taken into quarantine. Along with all the passengers on their point, they are held on the island of St. George, "a stinking quarantine on a desolate island about the size of a public square. A stupid quarantine, administered against all the laws of common sense: a hotbed for cholera," as Le Corbusier wrote in *Journey to the East*.<sup>47</sup> After the feverish heights of Mount Athos, this unpleasant dangerous delay in their travels must have

seemed galling. Both were anticipating, with great impatience, their visit to the Parthenon (Fig. 9).

Klipstein's reactions to the quarantine were succinct and more to the point. "The Devil's Island couldn't be much worse," he wrote.<sup>48</sup> He then recorded the short poem in French that someone had left in the Visitor's Book:

Un jour de fête,  
 Un jour de deuil  
 La vie est faite  
 en un clin d'oeil  
 L'île Saint Georges?  
 Quelle coupe-gorge  
 quelle saleté  
 En vérité.<sup>49</sup>

This summed up the impressions of those who visited, or where detained, there. Klipstein did not feel well. His body was weak; he had been reduced to a skeleton by this journey, weighing in at 104 English pounds (94 German). He had also developed gall-bladder problems. After spending a few days in bed, he concludes that he must try to return home as soon as possible. At this point the two part company. Klipstein set off from the port of Pireus toward Brindisi on September 27, 1911. He visited Paestum on September 30, Pompeii on October 2, then Rome, to see what he considered "absolutely necessary." Finally he arrived in Munich and then home to Laubach, just before the outbreak of the Balkan War. He was anxious about his travelling companion's fate; but Jeanneret followed him a month later, arriving safely at La Chaux-de-Fonds on November 1, 1911.

What was the enduring legacy of this journey in the minds of these two friends? In closing, we might return to Worringer's two psychological-aesthetic categories for human personality, and apply them to these two travellers. Worringer considered these categories timeless, neither modern



9. August Klipstein.  
Le Corbusier in Athens, September 1911.  
From Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier lui-même* (1970).



10. August Klipstein's "Tagebuch," 95. Sketches and notes. August 1911.

nor primitive in essence but mental orientations relevant to all people everywhere. He contrasts the “abstracters,” who pursue an objectified, stylized sense of the self that serve necessity, with the “empathizers,” who are more receptive to mimetic art, which fosters creative freedom. At this stage in his life, if we are to trust his ecstatic and pathos-laden travel letters home, Jeanneret was seeking above all artistic freedom; he was open to empathy, spontaneity, creative response. Klipstein, from the beginning, had been more interested in necessity: in abstract geometry, repetition, stylization and constraint. As a parallel study of their two travel diaries attests, elements of both these psychological responses to the world of art are interwoven in their stories (Fig. 10).

#### NOTES

- 1 Le Corbusier, *Le Voyage d'Orient* (Paris: Forces Vives, 1966). Why precisely Le Corbusier chose to return to this early text in 1965 is a matter of scholarly speculation. In my longer book-length treatment of this topic, *Eastern Journeys, 1911: The dual diaries and legacies of Auguste Klipstein and Le Corbusier*, which includes a full annotated translation of Klipstein's *Orient-Reise* and juxtaposes many moments between the two travel diaries, I provide more documentation for the argument that one crucial prompt for returning to the 1911 travel notes was his long friendship with August Klipstein, and especially his correspondence in the 1950s with Klipstein's widowed wife Frieda. This thesis is discussed only briefly in the present article.
- 2 See, for example, Tim Benton, *LC Foto. Le Corbusier Secret Photographer* (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2013), the chapter “Handheld Photography,” 100-120, and Adolf Max Vogt, “Remarks on the ‘Reversed’ Grand Tour of Le Corbusier and Auguste Klipstein,” *Assemblage* no. 4 (October 1987, MIT Press): 39-51.
- 3 In the case of *Le Voyage d'Orient*, a very special role was played by William Ritter, who not only urged his young protégé to complete the account of his travels, but proposed to publish it in 1914, in a German translation by his companion Montadon and with an introduction and epilogue

by Ritter himself. See Marie-Jeanne Dumont, ed., *Le Corbusier – William Ritter correspondence croisée 1910-1955* (Éditions du Linteau, 2014), 272.

- 4 Klipstein was a student of Wilhelm Worringer, who taught at the University of Munich and was a sponsor at the oral defense of Klipstein's dissertation, later to be published as *Die Persistenz gotischer Kunstanschauung und gotische Rückfallserscheinungen in der Entwicklung der Renaissance des italienischen Quattrocento* [The persistence of Gothic views on art and relapses into the Gothic in the development of the Renaissance in the Italian Quattrocento], Bern, 1916. In his August 3 diary entry on some disturbing aspects of Turkish painting, Klipstein cites Worringer: "The instinct for ancient art has nothing to do with reproducing nature. It seeks pure abstraction as the only way of establishing coherence in the confusion and obscurity of the world picture, and it creates out of itself, from pure, instinctive necessity, a geometric abstraction (from Worringer, Empathy and Abstraction)."
- 5 In his *Orient-Reise* Klipstein often notes his dissertation research. Among the Constantinople entries (mid-summer 1911), musing about upcoming Mount Athos, he writes: "We'll probably have to stay in Athos a long time. The only thing is that it will be awkward with the language. They only speak Modern Greek and Russian there. I would particularly like to get a close look at the Byzantine miniatures." A handwritten note appears to the left in the typescript on this page, in what appears to be Klipstein's hand: "and see the frescoes and compare them to El Greco."
- 6 These cities were recommended to Jeanneret by his mentors, Charles L'Épplatenier and William Ritter, who had provided him with contacts and letters of recommendation.
- 7 The Grand Bazaar, for example, fascinated and infuriated both travellers. Their mutual reactions, recorded in their separate accounts, reinforce a single reaction, although Jeanneret is the more irritable, Klipstein more philosophical. "So far I haven't bought too much," Klipstein noted in his diary, "since the prices are colossally high . . . I found only two pieces that I really liked. One costs at least 500, the other 600, although the dealer was asking thousands . . . I saw some very nice Persian brocade with gold, marvellous pieces. I did buy two scraps of that, and also two carpets from Anatolia . . ." And then he adds: "Edouard is in a bad mood. The antiquities dealer swindled him; he hung up in front of him a galvanized plastic instead of something handmade from Cambodia . . . he is incensed." (*Orient-Reise*, 13-14). Jeanneret was indeed outraged, and the experience of being cheated would inspire an entire chapter, "Sesame," in *Journey to the East*, where he describes with relish how he got his revenge for this incident. Jeanneret appreciated his friend's support on the matter: "Concerning this subject,

Auguste remarked gravely: 'I believe these characters dream of the same hunger as do the bedbugs, during our absence from Bursa, but for gold!'" (*Journey*, 142).

- 8 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, Ch. 3, 34-35.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 10 For a recent discussion that confronts this issue directly and persuasively, see Armando Rabaça, "The Philosophical Framework of Le Corbusier's Education: Schuré and German Idealism," delivered at *Le Corbusier, 50 Years Later*, International Congress, Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, 2015 (DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/LC2015.2015.671>).
- 11 After many inquiries, beginning in 2009, with surviving family members and friends, in 2015 I was able to locate in a private collection the sketchbook with annotations and many drawings, some of which are used as illustrations to the present article. The images recall Jeanneret's own *cahiers d'Orient*, 1911. But differences in approach and quality should be noted, given Klipstein's careful attention to details.
- 12 A concise biography of August-Maria Klipstein (1885-1951) was written by Giuliano Gresleri for the 1987 Centenary exhibition at Centre Pompidou, Paris, and in the companion publication: *Le Corbusier: une encyclopédie*, published by Éditions du Centre Pompidou, CCI, Paris, 1987, 216. See also Erhard Göpel, "Der Kupferstichhändler und Auktionator Dr. August Klipstein," in *Ein Jahrbuch für Bücherfreunde* Bd. XI. O. O. Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen 1952/53, Bern, 1953. The biography is speculative and contains several inaccuracies. More recently, Rolf Haaser has edited a collection of writings on the Spanish travels of Felix Klipstein (August's elder brother) that includes a sketch titled "Mein Bruder und andere" [My brother and others]; see Felix Klipstein. *Spanische Erinnerungen* (1907-1909), herausgegeben und kommentiert von Rolf Haaser (Litblockin, 2011): 79-86. A brief biography of brother August is included in the Commentary to the volume, 185-187.
- 13 Versions of the typescripts were deposited in the Bibliothèque de Ville-La-Chaux-de-Fonds, the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, and ETH Zurich.
- 14 The reference here is most probably to the Flemish Baroque master Jacob Jordaens, and his series titled *Le Roi Boit* [The King Drinks], ca. 1640.
- 15 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 160-161.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 48-49.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 162.
- 18 This passage appears in all versions of his manuscript, including *Le Voyage d'Orient* as published. We can only assume that the promise to delete was a stylistic deceit.



- 19 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 70.
- 20 Ibid., 161.
- 21 Ibid., 21.
- 22 Ibid., 19.
- 23 Ibid., 104.
- 24 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, 18.
- 25 In this reference in his travel diary, Klipstein reverses the nouns in the title of Worringer's most famous book, which was also a doctoral dissertation. See also Jeanneret's sketchbook no. 1, 43, for a reference to Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy*. The note reads: "à lire dit Klipstein" [Klipstein says, this should be read]. Later, on June 1, 1914, Jeanneret wrote to Klipstein concerning his mentor: "So where's the publication of the thesis? . . . I'm very interested in reading your work. Worringer was very smart to guide your research toward that theme. An abundance of facts and tendencies will be explained, and a tighter connection made between architecture and painting during those periods. I'm curious to see the illustrations which you're using to enlighten your text." (FLC E2-6 155-6)
- 26 One exception is noted by Tim Benton, *Le Corbusier Secret Photographer*, 13: the Portuguese architectural historian Armando Rabaça and his article "Documental Language and Abstraction in the Photographs of Le Corbusier," *Jornal dos Arquitectos*, no. 243 (December 2011). See also H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 256.
- 27 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 104.
- 28 Ibid., 47-48.
- 29 Through the intercession of William Ritter, both men carried letter of introduction that would provide access to the two regal locations, Bucharest and the royal summer residence of Sinaia.
- 30 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 50-56. This "unidentified lady" has now been identified as Editha Klipstein (1880-1953), the wife of August Klipstein's brother Felix. I am grateful to Dr. Rolf Haaser, who kindly read a draft of this manuscript in April 2015, for clarifying the reference in his e-mail of May 10, 2015: "Before the *Orient-Reise*, the four of them were together for a few days. Editha and Felix met each other in Madrid in 1908 when the *El Greco*-mania reached the Spanish capital in the person of the art critic Julius Meier-Gräfe, with whom Felix traveled through Spain after the traces of *El Greco*. It was this milieu . . . into which August Klipstein entered when he joined Felix and Editha in Spain . . . Editha also showed interest in *Carmen Sylva* . . ." This might explain August's infatuation with *El Greco*, as well as Jeanneret's letter to

“a lady who told him of her admiration for the queen of Romania.”

- 31 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 52-53.
- 32 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, ms., 10-1, 10-2.
- 33 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 55.
- 34 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, 10-a.
- 35 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 15.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 37 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, 10-1.
- 38 In his letter to William Ritter on November 1, 1911, Jeanneret wrote: “Je suis fou de couleur blanche, du cube, de la sphere, du cylindre et de la pyramide du disque . . .” [FLC R3-18-130]
- 39 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, 6.
- 40 Jeanneret’s reaction to this city was negative as well, but limited mostly to its location and layout: “It is a ridiculous capital, worse even: a dishonest city, dirty and disorganized . . .” (*Journey to the East*, 43). Later, when re-reading his own notes in 1965, Le Corbusier commented on this passage with an apologetic footnote, explaining that he was only 23 years old, that Serbia at the time was “enslaved by the Hapsburgs,” and that the revolt in Sarajevo had triggered World War I, thus darkening the reputation of the entire region and giving rise to the hostile epithet “the Balkans.” Klipstein is both more precise and less generous, expanding his judgment from the city of Belgrade to the people and the country as a whole. “Serbia is a tiny military state which goes with the warlike spirit of the landscape,” he wrote. “Part of the Serbian character is to see enemies both on the left and on the right . . . everything that is not connected with the military seems in a bad way . . . All the public works, undertaken at huge financial cost, are only half-finished or not finished at all . . . Belgrade seems to have united in itself all possible negative characteristics . . . and there is a terrible lack of culture. You can hardly take one step in the city when disappointment begins to follow disappointment” (*Orient-Reise*, 6c-9).
- 41 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, 11.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 26.
- 46 See Ivan Zaknic, “Le Corbusier’s Epiphany on Mount Athos,” *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 43, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 27-36.

- 47 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 214-215.
- 48 Klipstein, *Orient-Reise*, 29.
- 49 “A day of celebration / a day of mourning / Life is made / in the blink of an eye / St. George Island? / What a cut-throat place / What filth / In truth.” See also *Orient-Reise*, 65.



1. Window wall with paintings from Le Corbusier's collection in the apartment at 20 rue Jacob, ca. 1931.

Above: Georges Braque, *Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantlepiece*, 1911 (Tate Modern, London).

Below: Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with a Bottle of Rum*, 1911 (Metropolitan Museum, New York).

Photo: Brassai

## LIVING WITH OBJECTS-LEARNING FROM OBJECTS: LE CORBUSIER'S "COLLECTION PARTICULIÈRE"

La poésie n'est pas que dans le verbe. Plus forte est la poésie des faits. Des objets qui signifient quelque chose et qui sont disposés avec tact et talent créent un fait poétique.

Le Corbusier<sup>1</sup>

From the 1920s to the 1930s, Le Corbusier's visionary reform of the polluted traditional city underwent a number of changes. In the final version of his studies, he proposed meandering high-rise ribbons where workers might live high up in the fresh air, surrounded by sunlit green spaces, and far away from their workplace. Their transformable living units of only 14 square meters per occupant were to be artificially ventilated, according to the most recent knowledge of the *respiration exacte*. The conception of these spartan minimalistic apartments was not primarily determined by the pressures of the global economic crisis as one might assume, but—as Le Corbusier firmly stressed—“by the fundamental notion of human happiness, which is: *a man in the city, a man at home*, comfortable at home, happy in that home.”<sup>2</sup> In fact, he could not think of a more convincing justification for the unrelenting logic of his urban studies “than their own origin, the cell,”<sup>3</sup> and he himself would have lived in one of those cells “destined for the proletarians if you like, with the greatest of pleasure.”<sup>4</sup> Le Corbusier's rigor was frightening, not only for the general public: “That his curiosity for cities and for city building

should have resulted in the bureaucratic abstraction of the Plan Voisin or the Ville Radieuse was the most irritating aspect of his entire work,” summarizes even Stanislaus von Moos.<sup>5</sup> In spite of this, it is quite a surprise to catch, right at the beginning of the opulent album that documented the studies of the Ville Radieuse (The Radiant City) in 1935, the very first glimpse that Le Corbusier ever allowed of his own old-fashioned and sympathetically messy living quarters, which represent quite the opposite of the tiny “machines for living” he was proposing to the inhabitants of his new city (Fig. 6). The subtitle is “The Free Man,” and the unerring comment to the photograph: “When the door is shut, I can freely enter my own world . . . At certain times I need solitude.”<sup>6</sup>

#### RUE JACOB 20: A WORLD OF OBJECTS

During the whole of the heroic phase of modern architecture and city planning, Le Corbusier was still living in an old, narrow, back-lot house at 20 rue Jacob, in the heart of the Latin Quarter, which had been the Parisian residence of the legendary tragic actress Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692-1730), as he liked to point out. He had settled there in early 1917 after his move from La Chaux-de-Fonds.<sup>7</sup> From his three-room apartment under the steep mansard roof—probably the lodgings of Lecouvreur’s valet or chambermaid—he had an unexpected view of tree-filled gardens beyond the back façade of the courtyard, complete with a small temple built for the actress by Maurice de Saxe<sup>8</sup>: an idyllic setting right in the midst of intellectual Paris that did not hide the reality of a mercilessly frugal lifestyle. It was in this austere historical building that the young Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (his legal name) lived, wrote, and painted until 1934, giving little heed to his own radical postulates for all of 17 years.

Jeanneret had spent most of the first thirty years of his life in Switzerland, where he had achieved some measure of success with the construction of six private homes (several quite luxurious), a movie theatre, and numerous

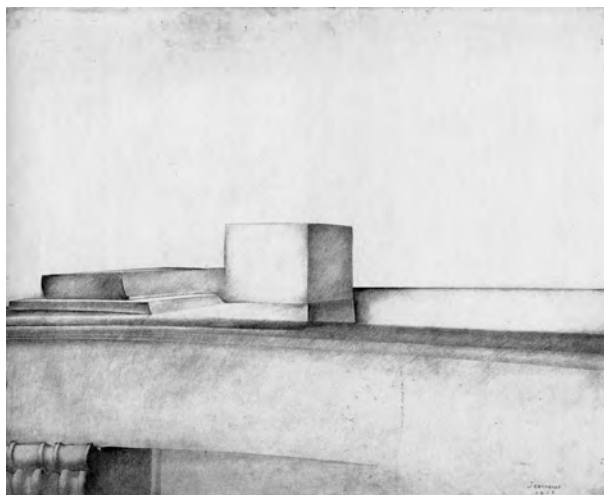


2. 20, rue Jacob, Paris.  
Le Corbusier lived in the attic and second floor of the courtyard building (left)
3. Second floor at 20 rue Jacob with *bergères à paille*, ca. 1920.

elegant interiors for the elite circles in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a city of watchmakers. Educational and acquisitional travels frequently took the *décorateur* to Paris, where an essential refinement of his repertoire, which had been largely influenced by German sources until that time, took place.<sup>9</sup> In 1917, while Switzerland was increasingly experiencing the distinction between Francophile and Germanophile zones along its linguistic borders during World War I, Jeanneret made a definitive decision in favour of French culture and, after several career setbacks, moved enthusiastically to the French capital. Here he began to work on establishing a new identity, for which he invented the pseudonym Le Corbusier in 1920.<sup>10</sup>

The telling iconic photograph published in *La Ville Radieuse* had been taken by the illustrious Hungarian photographer Brassai (Gyula Halász) in around 1931. Le Corbusier was now living on the second floor of the same house, having already assumed the rental contract in October of 1919.<sup>11</sup> Part of the attic storey still served as a painting studio. He was no longer living alone; in 1930 he had married his girlfriend of many years, Yvonne (Victorine) Gallis, and his cousin and business partner Pierre Jeanneret had also moved into the courtyard building. A considerable number of “private” photographs exist which almost always show the architect—now world-famous—in leisure poses; for example, reading the newspaper while lying on his wooden sofa, with indescribable slippers dangling from his feet and a pipe in his mouth. In contrast, Brassai captures Le Corbusier in a moment of total solitude and concentration, in the act of thinking and writing. His desk is almost completely covered with papers and an issue of the monthly *Plans*—his new mouthpiece, where the articles on the Ville Radieuse project appeared.<sup>12</sup> This iconic photograph is doubtlessly posed, which is common in the work of Brassai, but it looks like a snapshot that offers a privileged view into the intimate world of the artist-cum-architect and allows the viewer to share in the creative process. The photographer positions the protagonist to one side of the picture, thereby drawing attention to the objects that surround him. Brassai obviously wanted to portray the artist-architect as a literary “intellectual”—an *homme de lettres*, as stated in his passport—but he





4. The research for a plastic order.  
Charles-Edouard Jeanneret.  
Study for *La Cheminée*, 1918, pencil on card  
mounted on paper, 57.7 x 71.3 cm.
  
5. Purist “still life” arrangement on the  
mantelpiece at 20, rue Jacob, early 1920’s.  
Fragment of an antique stone head and a  
small antique teracotta, probably bought  
in 1911; guitar; panorama lémanique,  
watercolour, ca.1921.



6. Le Corbusier amidst his collection particulière on the second floor at 20 rue Jacob, ca. 1931. The new interest in things “rustic, biological, and archaic” in the early 1930’s. The mantelpiece at 20, rue Jacob, ca. 1931, with a botijo bola from Agost, a spotted pot from Alsace, a piece of molten metal in front of an old ridge tile, a sculpture from Dahomey, a flint stone from Normandy. Photo: Brassai

also aimed to achieve a vivid portrayal of his mental and spiritual cosmos with a complex pictorial arrangement.

The setting itself is not arranged. Years later, Brassai still recalled the stacks of books and pictures shown in the photograph, the meaningful hotchpotch of objects which Le Corbusier fondly referred to as his *collection particulière*: “I expected to find an ultramodern apartment with huge expanses of window and bare, brightly lit walls, an apartment similar to the ones he had designed for the millionaire Charles de Beistégui, the painter Ozenfant, the sculptor Lipchitz, and many others. Imagine my surprise when I entered a fairly messy apartment with odd pieces of furniture and a weird collection of bric-à-brac . . . I even wondered whether the old apartment had a bathroom. However, Madame Le Corbusier adored the apartment in the heart of Saint Germain . . . She loved the rustic shutters that opened onto a tiny tree-filled garden in which the birds began to chirp at dawn.”<sup>13</sup>

Brassai’s photograph shows the chimney wall as a pars pro toto for the multi-purpose living room, dining room and study, with which we are already familiar from a photo taken in the early twenties (Fig. 6). At that time it was empty, except for a small ancient figure on the mantelpiece. Through one of the twin doors on either side of the fireplace, there was a view of the ‘Guitare Verticale’ from the year 1920, hanging low on a darkly painted wall. Next to this stringent Purist painting, the only objects to be seen were a wooden oval table recovered from La Chaux-de-Fonds<sup>14</sup> and a pair of anonymous straw armchairs like the ones the young architect had purchased for his parents in around 1915.<sup>15</sup> If this Bohemian condition at least corresponded to the Purist ideal of emptiness, the photograph taken by Brassai ten years later shows the exact opposite: now the wall is almost completely covered with layers of disparate artefacts—not much different from Walter Benjamin’s famous historicist interior, where an “impression of the individual” is generated by the accumulation of things which represent certain ideas and moods, or are reminiscent of important moments in the inhabitant’s biography.<sup>16</sup> In 1900, Georg Simmel had criticised in such habitations “the sheer number of highly specific objects, which hinders a close relationship to any single one” and



7. Jealously protected assemblages of meaningful objects.  
Mantelpiece in Le Corbusier's apartment at 20, rue Jacob, ca. 1931.  
Photo: Brassai



8. Jealously protected assemblages of meaningful objects.  
Mantelpiece in Pablo Picasso's studio  
at 23, rue La Boétie, 1932.  
Photo: Brassäi

“the number of different styles with which we are confronted by the visible objects of daily life.”<sup>17</sup> One could make the same assertion in reference to Le Corbusier’s miscellaneous collection of artefacts. Yet he evidently found stimulation in that initially irritating jumble of iconographic references, and in the simultaneousness and equality of their presence—not unlike the bourgeois citizen of the nineteenth century.

The nonchalance of the assemblage, however, is not at all typical of a bourgeois interior. Framed and unframed paintings, objects and furniture are condensed in a complex, somewhat chaotic composition, which at first sight might remind the viewer of a late-medieval scholar’s chamber of art and curiosities. We should not neglect to point out the striking similarity with the photos of Pablo Picasso’s studio taken by Brassai at roughly the same time. Already successful and wealthy, Picasso had transformed several rooms in his dwelling at 23 rue La Boétie “into a combination of junk shop and old-curiosity shop rather than into an atelier,” as Brassai remarked of the painter’s “studio.”<sup>18</sup> Picasso jealously protected the layer of dust that covered the objects in his atelier, for, by remaining intact, it bore witness to the untouchable character of his arrangement: this was his personal realm, which he successfully defended even from incursions by his wife Olga. Similarly, in Le Corbusier’s study—which also served as the married couple’s living and dining room—there was no evidence of a female presence. The analogy might be inconsequential if it were not for typical characteristics of the two artists’ acquisitiveness: it was a way of possessing the world by means of objects and pictures.

Quite early on, Jeanneret had savvily begun to engage his customers in the expansion of his visual repertoire. He combined his interior decorating commissions with customer credit, which not only made it necessary to systematically browse through galleries, antique shops and furniture stores, but also gave internal and external legitimacy to this activity.<sup>19</sup> In the process he acquired essential pieces for his own collection, such as the two major Cubist paintings<sup>20</sup>—probably purchases from the Kahnweiler sales (followed by Le Corbusier on behalf of Swiss banker Raoul La Roche)<sup>21</sup>—which were

hung on the exterior wall across from the oval table, crowded by high stacks of books.

Le Corbusier's mania for collecting corresponded perfectly with his ability to intuitively recognise changing trends and apply them to a personal context. However, this obsessive acquisitiveness also reflected the complex, sometimes contradictory nature of his research and explorations. The essential aspect of his accumulated objects was their image-based representation of different worlds, and the relation of these worlds to the concept of a 'new' art and architecture. Brassai's photograph shows predominantly recent discoveries on the mantelpiece which substantiate Le Corbusier's newly awakened interest in things "rustic, biological and archaic."<sup>22</sup> A *botijo bolo* from somewhere near Valencia,<sup>23</sup> a spotted pot from Alsace, a piece of molten metal in front of an old roof ridge tile, a sculpture from Dahomey purchased at the Hôtel Drouot,<sup>24</sup> a large piece of flint from the region of Normandy<sup>25</sup>—such are the motifs found in art after 1930, like the visual references in Jeanne Léger's wedding gift, "Nature Morte/1<sup>er</sup> Etat," painted by Fernand Léger in 1928 (on the right, partial view).<sup>26</sup> Next to Léger's late-Purist "Composition avec Profil" from the year 1926<sup>27</sup>—doubtless a prominent piece in the *collection particulière*—hang two paintings by "naïve" artists: one of them by West-African artist Kalifala Sidibé (discovered at the Galerie Georges Bernheim in 1929),<sup>28</sup> the other by André Bauchant, a painter he had been promoting since the late 1920s.<sup>29</sup> These paintings equally reflect Le Corbusier's new passion for *les choses primitives* in 1930, which had surely been enhanced by previous educational journeys to Spain, Morocco and Algeria. However, Bauchant's delicate bouquet of flowers as well as the "Low Art" composition of bottles on the Pernod calendar visible on the right still bear witness to the early Biedermeier influences on Le Corbusier.

## ECLECTICISM, FOLKLORE, AND THE DISPLACEMENT OF CONCEPTS

If Le Corbusier did indeed use his own home as a laboratory for selecting, arranging, analyzing and orchestrating a heterogeneous assortment of memorabilia of diverse provenance (as Brassai's photograph suggests), one is tempted to ask what role these objects played in his concept of modernist architecture, interior design, and even urbanism.

Take the furniture, for example. After the catharsis of his German experience in 1910, Jeanneret showed little interest in reinventing objects of everyday use.<sup>30</sup> Instead of developing "true-to-style machine-made products," to use Muthesius's term,<sup>31</sup> he tried to select serially produced items which had proved their formal perfection and legitimacy through decades of practical use. This search for a product form deeply rooted in the collective memory was part of a program which had its origin in his triage and refinement of elegant classicist French furniture types from the end of the 18th century.<sup>32</sup> That this renewal rested on a clearly eclectic principle, is evident. When he began the long process of furnishing his parents' house in 1913, he was still a long way from the industrial products that he would later be famous for. But since he was able to design only a few eclectic pieces himself—among them the large Biedermeier sofa—much of the Maison Blanche came to be furnished with low-priced antiques, essentially various types of comfortable nineteenth-century rush-seat chairs (*bergères à paille*).<sup>33</sup> Why these anonymous vernacular chair types—which are especially widespread in Provence—should have been such an important discovery to him is clear: they were precursors of the anonymous industrial culture of the present, or so he might have believed. Once installed in his Paris home at rue Jacob 20, he bought a few of those rush-seat chairs and a two-seater sofa, which were still in production at that time, and kept them in use for the rest of his life, perhaps as a reminder of this important find. They go with the simple oval wood frame table Jeanneret urgently reclaimed when the Maison Blanche was sold in 1919: "I hang onto this table that I have always had; it is not expensive, by the way, and if its form pleases you, the



cabinetmaker can produce another one at a very low price.”<sup>34</sup>

Francesco Passanti has argued that Jeanneret first sought the vernacular on his trip through the Balkans in 1911, when he was looking at typical local courtyard houses and “found” his collection of wonderful Serbian pottery<sup>35</sup> (not present in Brassai’s photograph). Jeanneret, he notes, “sought not his own vernacular, but that of other people. In today’s parlance, he sought the *other*, a pure and natural man, in contrast to a Western man corrupted by the turmoil of the nineteenth century.”<sup>36</sup> Jeanneret, learning from precedent throughout his life, was keenly “interested in solutions of great elementarity; and sought these in vernacular or ancient settings like the Balkans or Pompeii, or in examples of functional minimalism like railway sleeping cars, ship cabins, and airplanes.”<sup>37</sup> The vernacular model was, according to Passanti, a constant in Le Corbusier’s work, not so much as a source of motifs, but as a conceptual model for a natural relationship between society and its artefacts.<sup>38</sup>

If Passanti’s brilliant essay “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier” puts the seating furniture of 20 rue Jacob into a larger context, it does not necessarily explain the presence of the piece of flint and some other “found” *natural* objects on the mantelpiece. Some years after the trip to the Balkans, Le Corbusier adopted two additional principles that helped to transform the purely eclectic approach of his beginnings into a conspicuous forward-looking design strategy. The first one was described by Alan Colquhoun in 1971: the “displacement of concepts.”<sup>39</sup> What Colquhoun meant was “that a concept belonging to one field or associated with one set of functions becomes transferred to another. For instance, machine-made objects of everyday use undergo a displacement when they become converted into an already existent architectural meaning.”<sup>40</sup> Only in his early Paris years did Le Corbusier discover and subsequently exploit this concept systematically, making a demonstration of it with his equipment of the Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau in 1925, where hospital tables or laboratory vessels were integrated in the bourgeois Bohemian home—in contrast to the art deco artists who stuck to their eclectic design method.<sup>41</sup> In this sense, the

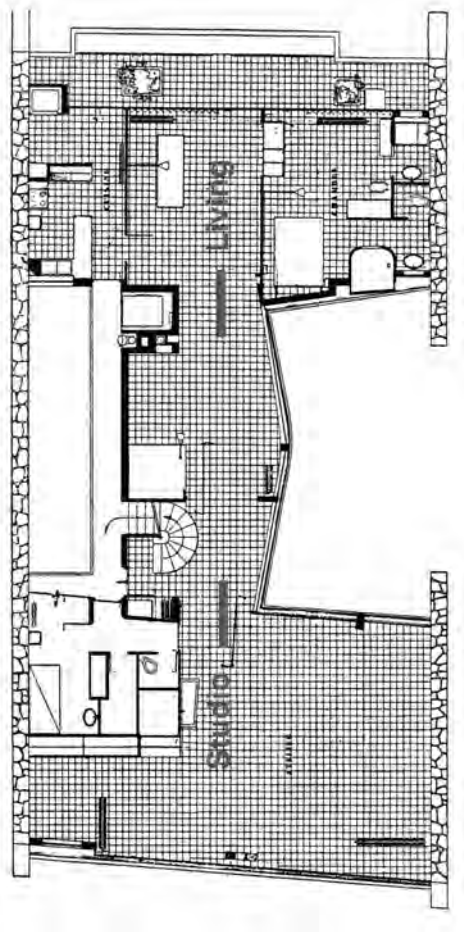
objects on the mantelpiece testify to Le Corbusier's ability to cross boundaries and oppose the prevailing conventions at will. Colquhoun even sees the *à redents* composition of the Ville Radieuse as being "derived from the Baroque Palace, of which we take the Château Richelieu as a suitable example, by way, probably, of Fournier's Phalanstères"<sup>42</sup> (note that Stanislaus von Moos also recalled "the entrance court of the château of Versailles or its derivation in the form of Victor Considérant's version of the Phalanstère"<sup>43</sup>). Passanti's description of the rather ceremonial entrance of the Villa Savoye as being composed of industrial elements found in a different context perfectly fits this image.<sup>44</sup> Years later, the work of the Team X generation of artists and architects would closely echo the "As Found" principle,<sup>45</sup> and equally combine it with a displacement of concepts (as well as perhaps even the more recent production of designers like Jasper Morrison or artists like Fischli/Weiss).

The second issue concerns the observation that the objects of the "weird collection of bric-à-brac" visible in Brassai's photographic tableau interact not only on a conceptual, but also on a formal level. They are all the result of a merciless "Darwinian process of 'mechanical selection'" of "those objects that best expressed and responded to the modern conditions," as Nancy I. Troy puts it.<sup>46</sup> Le Corbusier "was of course writing the aesthetic rules of Purist design to corroborate his choices as a designer, and the process of mechanical selection he extolled always remained firmly under his guidance and control."<sup>47</sup> Although the concept of selection had been adopted by Jeanneret already in the 1910s, distinct aesthetic rules could only be written after 1918, when the principles of Le Corbusier's first truly original contribution to art had been formulated in collaboration with Amédée Ozenfant. The transfer from Purist art to the object world guaranteed the optical cohesion of the wildly heterogeneous components of his *musée imaginaire*.<sup>48</sup> If the concept of selection remained a constant throughout his life, the rules were open to redefinition. In the rue Jacob apartment, the choice of the objects was associated with a radical renewal of the visual idiom of the architect-artist. Found things like the large piece of flint, the old roof tile or the piece of molten metal—actually a gift from Charlotte

Perriand, recalling her own search for an “Art brut”<sup>49</sup>—signalled a shift away from the cult of the Purist *objet-type*, from classicism and from the machine aesthetic. Organic forms would henceforth supply the points of reference for his pictorial and architectural research (a displacement of concept again), for which the two paintings by Fernand Léger—one of them very recent—set the tone. To be sure, the vernacular model still kept its validity in this phase of transition between “machine aesthetic” and “brutalist aesthetic” (and the following ones, as Passanti remarks).<sup>50</sup> The paintings by Sidibé and Bauchant substantiate this assertion, as well as the African sculpture and the perfectly shaped *botijo bola*, which not only reflects a disappearing vernacular culture but also the experiences and discussions with Léger on a common study trip to Spain in 1930.<sup>51</sup>

RUE NUNGESSER-ET-COLI 24:  
LES ARTS DITS PRIMITIFS DANS LA MAISON MODERNE

In October 1934, a few months before the publication of *La Ville radieuse*,<sup>52</sup> Le Corbusier moved to his own penthouse, which he had been able to build in the expanding 16th arrondissement, not far from the houses he had designed for La Roche/Jeanneret, Cook, Lipchitz, Miestchaninoff and TERNISIEN. Although he emphasised the “conditions de ‘Ville Radieuse’” in the *Œuvre Complète*<sup>53</sup>—thereby invoking the model-like character of the project—the design of his own residence is again far from the standardised dwelling that conformed to his visionary urban plan. On the contrary, he vehemently rejected Charlotte Perriand’s Taylorist recommendations, including the versatile tubular steel furnishings that had been developed in the office, which ultimately contributed to the dissolution of their previously harmonious collaboration.<sup>54</sup> The final result was a customised edifice that suited both his artistic work and private life, and also provided a new home for the *collection particulière* from rue Jacob.



Immeuble Molitor, 24, rue Nungesser-et-Coli,  
Paris, 1931–1934.

9. Front view.  
Le Corbusier's new apartment occupied both  
upper stories.  
Photo: René Burri, 1959
10. Plan of the eighth floor.  
From *Œuvre Complète 1910-1929*.

The architect had to fight for the privilege of constructing a seventh storey in a vigorous campaign against “peculiar regulations with regard to roof profiles.” Yet he seems to have relished this contest as a means of encouraging, as he put it, the “tireless spirit of invention to discover every useful fragment of space and every usable surface area.”<sup>55</sup> The value of his extra effort, both intellectual and pecuniary, became manifest in a complex, distinctively barrel-vaulted and unexpectedly spacious urban residence, which, in spite of adverse building codes, offered the everyday enjoyment of open sky, nearby trees and new building materials—i.e., conditions of the *Ville Radieuse*—as well as an unrestricted view of Paris and Mont Valérien. Even the famously high bed of Le Corbusier is a special case deriving from these specific circumstances: it is not just a variation of a Greco-Roman type, but also provided a view over the top of the balcony balustrade toward a broad horizon of *banlieue* greenery.<sup>56</sup> Le Corbusier designated the eastern side, which was oriented in the direction of Paris, as his painting studio, while the western side facing Boulogne served purely domestic functions. This plan was analogous to an idealised design entitled “Ma Maison” from 1929, which featured a bipolar layout with a factory-like space for working and a domestic wing that resembled a villa. Large pivoting doors regulated the interaction between the two strictly distinct functions of the building and concentrated it on the small entrance hall, where a spiral staircase also led to the guest room and roof garden.

Arising from the momentary status of Le Corbusier’s work and sometimes assembled in conscious arrangements, a varying assortment of artefacts, painting utensils, pictures and sculptures celebrated a merry reunion in the artist’s studio. In the domestic spaces, however, we observe a very different approach to the objects in the *collection particulière*. The paintings are displayed on the walls as if they were part of an exhibition. Le Corbusier made use of the building’s complex spatial volumes by reserving numerous niches in which his artefacts could be shown in alternating configurations. We now see not only his newest finds on display—such as a finely perforated brick developed in around 1932 for the construction of a new hospital,<sup>57</sup> or rustic couscous



11. Two different kinds of order.  
An informal arrangement in Le Corbusier's studio (left)  
and formal exhibition devices in the living room (right).

bowls with geometric Berber patterns which were probably purchased in Morocco in 1931<sup>58</sup>—but also the antiques and vases of Serbian and West Anatolian provenance brought back from the *Voyage d'Orient* in 1911.<sup>59</sup> The entire dwelling at rue Nungesser-et-Coli was designed from the very outset as a repository for the disparate objects in his collections, and also as an instrument of autobiographical reflection—an exhibition space in which ideas and principles could simultaneously be shown and recalled. In late photographs by René Burri (ca. 1960)<sup>60</sup> or in a tape-recorded conversation with the headmaster Robert Mallet (1951),<sup>61</sup> the architect assumes the manner of a museum tour guide. Once again, Brassai's description of Picasso's main living quarters at 23 rue La Boétie could also apply to the residence of Le Corbusier: "There everything was orderly and carefully arranged . . . Entering the white drawing room was like entering the salon of some great art collector . . . Olga jealously saw to it that Picasso did not bring his calculated and eternal disorder into her part of the apartment, where she was determined to preserve an elegant and chic atmosphere." For her part, Yvonne Le Corbusier always made sure that fresh bouquets of flowers added a touch of domestic refinement to her own "territory."

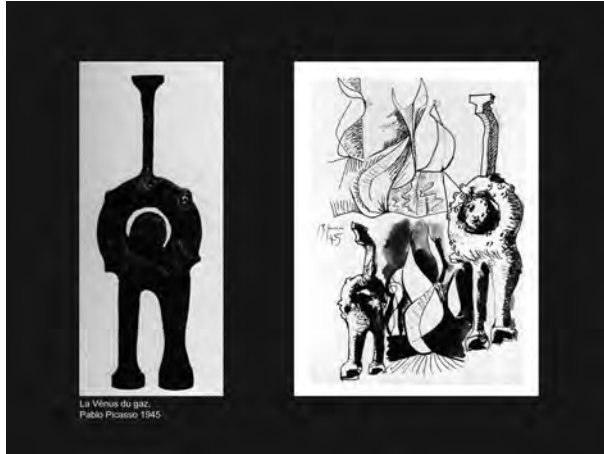
All of these observations point to the fact that the artist-cum-architect now regarded not only his personal dwelling but also his gradually consolidated collection in a new light. He even let the art dealer Louis Carré organize an exhibition in his new apartment, entitled *Les Arts dits primitifs dans la maison d'aujourd'hui*, in which contemporary cultural objects were deliberately juxtaposed with ancient artefacts. An organizer of several exhibitions on African, Pre-Columbian, and Oceanic Art since 1930, the gallerist and former lawyer Louis Carré shared Le Corbusier's emphasis on the archaic and the primitive. He even believed in the return of "a new archaic *Pleiade*. The cycle begins again."<sup>62</sup> Le Corbusier reported to his mother:

I lent my apartment to Louis Carré, tenant of the 4th floor and expert in African and American Art, etc., in order to install an exhibition here (and in his apartment, too). The theme: In an apartment. The studio has been emptied



12. Detail of the living area at 24, rue Nungesser-et-Coli. Left, sculpture by Jacques Lipchitz, exhibited in the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau in 1925; in the niche, fragment of antique stone head from the time of Marcus Aurelius, probably a souvenir from Le Corbusier's journey to the Orient, 1911; right, Thonet B 9 desk chair, an "objet-type."  
Photo: René Burri





13. Le Corbusier presents his collection particulière in the living area at rue Nungesser-et-Coli, ca. 1960.  
Left, the botijo bola from Agost, probably a souvenir from Le Corbusier's trip to Spain, 1930; in the middle, fragment of a gas burner.  
Photo: René Burri
  
14. Pablo Picasso, *Vénus du gaz*, metal, 25 x 9 x 4 cm, 1945, and sketch for the *Vénus du gaz*.  
Collection particulière.  
An objet trouvé—an iron burner and pipe from a gas stove—turned into a vertical position.  
From Werner Spies, *Picasso: The Sculptures* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2000).

of its canvases. I was keen on having moderns: a splendid tapestry by Léger, 4 sculptures by Laurens. I painted, in strong colours applied on plaster, an ancient Greek statue: the highlight of the show. The whole apartment has a great look.<sup>63</sup>

In the studio, a plaster copy of the *Calf Bearer* from the Acropolis in Athens (ca. 560 B.C.)—which Le Corbusier painted in light blue and red tones according to the latest findings of the Musée du Louvre—was placed in front of the rubble wall, in close proximity to Fernand Léger’s predominantly yellow tapestry, woven by the ateliers of Marie Cuttoli in 1935 after the painting *Composition aux trois figures* of 1932.<sup>64</sup> A plaster study of *La Nègresse* by Henri Laurens (1934), a bronze cast from Benin (15th century), a piece of ancient Peruvian pottery, and Le Corbusier’s predominantly pink painting *La Pêcheuse d’huitres* (1935) underscored the play of free-form framed and unframed biomorphic forms. On the marble table of the dining room, however, a magnificent Baoule statue and a compact Pre-Columbian jade head carefully placed in front of Le Corbusier’s *Nature morte aux nombreux objets* (1923) evoked the more severe Purist formal predilections. Nearby was a freestanding Alexandrian marble statue and a rectangular niche with a bronze from Benin, as well as the finely perforated Dizzy-Iso brick and a large pebble granite from Le Corbusier’s *collection particulière*.

The show opened on July 3rd 1935,<sup>65</sup> the *Ville Radieuse* publication appearing only weeks later. The coincidence is purely accidental but nonetheless telling. On the one hand, the wealth of meaningful artefacts assembled in the apartment virtually represents the “flesh” that was frequently missing in the framework of the theoretical urban studies and their built equivalents. On the other hand, Le Corbusier’s *collection privée* combined with a choice of extravagant pieces provided by the Louis Carré gallery strikes one as a sort of ideal museum, set up temporarily for the private pleasure of the organizers. But for Le Corbusier, the ten-day show had pre-eminently the character of a manifesto, as he was to stress in the *Œuvre complète*: “The technique of grouping is a sort of manifestation of the modern sensibility



15. Le Corbusier's atelier turned into an ideal museum.  
The exhibition "Les Arts dits primitifs dans la maison d'aujourd'hui," 1935.  
A view of the studio with a tapestry by Fernand Léger, a statue by Henri Laurens, a bronze from Benin, a Peruvian ceramic piece, and a painting by Le Corbusier.  
Photo: Albin Salaün
  
16. Le Corbusier's collection particulière today.  
Detail of archival boxes at the Fondation le Corbusier, Paris.

towards the past, the exotic, or the present. Recognize where “series” arise, create patterns of unity across time and space, invigorate the view of things in which man has inscribed his presence.”<sup>66</sup> Reflecting on the exhibition some years later, he specified: “I would sacrifice everything to life . . . I wanted to oppose the feeling of construction, the walk looking forward, to a consideration of the defunct, the defunctment [sic.], the remembrance.”<sup>67</sup> This was clearly a programmatic statement, and it was also an expression of accountability with regard to Le Corbusier’s personal working methods: for years he had disregarded chronological sequences, thematic bonds and spatial distinctions in order to make unpredictable discoveries and merge them in an entirely new whole. As a propagandist and prophet of progressive architecture and urbanism, this must have placed him in a strange light. However, in this way he was able to resolve the problematic opposition of tradition and utopia—contrary to those Modernist apologists who found their sole justification in future progress. The apartment at rue Nungesser-et-Coli, therefore, is more than just evidence of exalted expectations of personal domesticity or the diversity of Le Corbusier’s approach to residential architecture: as a home to the collection particulière, it reflects a development that had begun as a quest to gain “possession of the world” during his early itinerant education in Italy, France, Germany, and the Orient.

## NOTES

This article is dedicated to Francesco Passanti. It is built around some fragments of my earlier essay “Autobiographical interiors: Le Corbusier at home,” in Alexander von Vege sack, Stanislaus von Moos, Arthur Rüegg, Mateo Kries, *Le Corbusier – The Art of Architecture* (Weil am Rhein: Vitra Design Museum, 2002), 117–162.

- 1 “Poetry is not just in the word. Stronger is the poetry of facts. Objects that mean something, disposed with tact and talent, create a poetic fact.” Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Crès, 1923), 113. Cited after the original and after the translation of Francesco Passanti, who made a point of this passage in his inspired study “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier;” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56, no. 4 (December 1997): 446–447.
- 2 Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City* (New York: The Orion Press, 1967), 143. First published under the title *La Ville radieuse* (Boulogne: Éditions de l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, 1935).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Le Corbusier, “La ‘Ville Radieuse’. 8. L’élément biologique: la cellule de 14 m<sup>2</sup> par habitant,” *Plans*, no. 9 (November 1931), 53.
- 5 Von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 147. Originally published in German as *Le Corbusier. Elemente einer Synthese* (Frauenfeld: Huber Verlag, 1968).
- 6 Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, 9.
- 7 According to the “Extrait du registre d’immatriculation” (FLC R 1-13-10), the rental contract of “Edouard-Jeanneret” at 20 rue Jacob commenced on 22 February 1917.
- 8 After a letter from Jeanneret to William Ritter, 26 January 1917. FLC R 3-19-113.
- 9 See Rüegg, “La fin de l’Art nouveau. Perspectives nouvelles: Charles-Edouard Jeanneret,” in Helen Bieri-Thomson, ed., *Une expérience Art nouveau. Le Style sapin à La Chaux-de-Fonds* (Paris: Somogy, 2006), 154–164.
- 10 See von Moos and Rüegg, “Le Corbusier, la Suisse et les Suisses,” in *Le Corbusier. Les Suisses* (Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, Éditions de La Villette, 2006), 12–29.
- 11 Correspondence: FLC E 2-8. Albert Jeanneret subsequently lived in the attic apartment (until spring 1925).
- 12 Thirteen issues of the monthly journal *Plans*, which addressed political and cultural topics, appeared in 1931–32. Le Corbusier’s articles in vols. 1–10 and 13 were reprinted in *La Ville radieuse*.

- 13 Brassai (Gyula Halász), *The Artists of My Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), 84. French edition: *Les Artistes de ma vie* (Paris: Denoël, 1982).
- 14 Jeanneret to father, 8 October 1919, published in Rémi Baudouï and Arnaud Dercelles, eds., *Le Corbusier. Correspondance. Lettres à la famille 1900–1925* (Paris; Gollion: Fondation Le Corbusier; Infolio, 2011), 560.
- 15 See Rüegg, “Antiques: Bergères à paille,” in von Moos and Rüegg, eds., *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier. Applied Arts, Architecture, Painting, Photography 1907–1922* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 253ff.
- 16 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. H. Eiland and L. McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999), 220.
- 17 Georg Simmel, *Die Philosophie des Geldes* (Leipzig, 1900), 494, quoted in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. V. 1: *Das Passagen-Werk*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 297.
- 18 Brassai, *The Artists of My Life*, 156.
- 19 See Rüegg, “Marcel Levaillant and ‘La question du mobilier,’” in von Moos and Rüegg, *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, esp. 124–128.
- 20 Georges Braque, *Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantlepiece*, 1911, oil on canvas, 81 x 60 cm, Tate Modern, London; Pablo Picasso, *Still Life with a Bottle of Rum*, 1911, oil on canvas, 61.3 x 50.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.
- 21 See Katharina Schmidt, “Raoul La Roche,” in Katharina Schmidt and Hartwig Fischer, ed., *Ein Haus für den Kubismus. Die Sammlung La Roche* (Basle, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje, 1998), 14. The *Ventes Kahnweiler* began on 12 June 1921; the final auction took place on 8 May 1923. In several places, Le Corbusier mentioned the purchase of Cubist paintings in the year 1922.
- 22 Von Moos, “Star-Krise. Le Corbusier in New York,” in *Horizonte, horizons, orizzonti, horizons : Essays on Art and Art Research – 50 Years Swiss Institute for Art Research* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje-Cantz, 2001), 302.
- 23 There was also a duck-shaped *botijo pato*. Bearing the stamp of a manufacturer in Agost (Alicante), it was probably brought home from the trip to Spain in 1930. See Francisco G. Seijo Alonso, *Cerámica popular en la región valenciana* (Alicante: Villa-Catral, 1977).
- 24 No. 369, Auction title “Art primitif africain et océanien” at the Hôtel Drouot, 19–20 May 1927 (Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, FLC V 441). See Pierre Saddy, ed., *Le Corbusier et le passé à réaction poétique*, exh. cat. (Paris: Caisse nationale des Monuments historiques et des Sites, 1988), 133.

- 25 Charlotte Perriand indicated that the pieces of flint she collected herself came from the coastal resort of Dieppe; see Perriand, *Une vie de création* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998), 105.
- 26 Fernand Léger, *Nature morte*, 1928, oil on canvas, 69.5 x 96.5 cm, Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. Notation on the reverse: “Nature morte/1er Etat/F. Léger/à Yvonne Le Corbusier en souvenir de son mariage, tendrement, Jeanne Léger, 18/12/30” (FLC)
- 27 Fernand Léger, *Composition avec profil*, 1926, oil on canvas, 139 x 97 cm, Von der Heydt-Museum Wuppertal.
- 28 The painting is at the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. See Le Corbusier, “Der Negermaler Kalifala Sidibe,” *Der Querschnitt* 9, no.12 (December 1929), 888.
- 29 André Bauchant, *Le Bouquet* (“*Bouquet Le Corbusier*”), 1927, oil on canvas, 80 x 62 cm, Fondation Dina Vierny – Musée Maillol, Paris. Le Corbusier owned an important collection of Bauchant’s paintings.
- 30 See Rüegg in collaboration with Klaus Spechtenhauser, *Le Corbusier – Furniture and Interiors 1905–1965* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2012), 8, 33ff. See also Passanti’s convincing analysis of the concept of “Sachlichkeit” (factualness), in “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier,” 442–444.
- 31 Hermann Muthesius, *Wirtschaftsformen im Kunstgewerbe*, Vortrag gehalten am 30. Januar 1908 in der Volkswirtschaftlichen Gesellschaft in Berlin (Berlin, 1908), 10.
- 32 See Rüegg, *Le Corbusier – Furniture and Interiors 1905–1965*, 45ff.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 56–58.
- 34 Jeanneret to Fritz-Ernst Jeker (purchaser of the Maison Blanche), 11 September 1919, FLC E 2-2.
- 35 In fact, the ceramic pieces brought back from the Voyage d’Orient did not originate exclusively in the Balkans (primarily Serbia). Jeanneret also bought some of the eccentric pieces produced in Çanakkale, Turkey (Dardanelles), as well as simpler ones from Pécs, Hungary.
- 36 Passanti, “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier,” 438.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 439.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 447.
- 39 Alan Colquhoun, “Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier,” *Architectural Design* 43 (April 1972), 236.
- 40 *Ibid.*
- 41 See Rüegg, “Le Pavillon de l’Esprit nouveau en tant que musée imaginaire,” in von Moos, ed., *L’Esprit nouveau. Le Corbusier et l’industrie 1920–1925*, exh. cat. (Strasbourg; Berlin: Musées de la

- Ville de Strasbourg; Ernst und Sohn, 1987), 134–151.
- 42 Colquhoun, “Displacement of concepts,” 236.
- 43 Von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis*, 147.
- 44 Passanti, “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier,” 441–442.
- 45 See Claude Lichtenstein and Thomas Schreggenberger, eds., *As Found. Die Entdeckung des Gewöhnlichen* (Zurich: Museum für Gestaltung Zürich; Verlag Lars Müller, 2001).
- 46 Nancy J. Troy, *Modernism and the decorative arts in France: art nouveau to Le Corbusier* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.
- 47 Ibid, 5–6.
- 48 See Rüegg, “Le Pavillon de l’Esprit nouveau en tant que musée imaginaire,” 138–139.
- 49 Charlotte Perriand kept two of the fragments of molten metal for herself (Archives Charlotte Perriand, Paris). For a photograph see: Jacques Barsac, *Charlotte Perriand et la photographie: L’œil en éventail* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2011), 187.
- 50 Passanti, “The Vernacular, Modernism, and Le Corbusier,” 447.
- 51 In July 1930, Le Corbusier made a round trip of Spain together with Albert Jeanneret, Pierre Jeanneret and Fernand Léger. They also passed through Valencia; Agost—where the *botijo* was produced—is nearby.
- 52 Le Corbusier only finalised the text in March 1935, but in September 1935 he already dedicated a copy to André Bloc, the editor (collection Arthur Rüegg).
- 53 See Willy Boesiger, ed., *Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret. Œuvre complète de 1929–1934* (Zurich: Girsberger, 1935), 144.
- 54 “Or mon appartement a été conçu *minutieusement* par moi, totalement (sauf la cuisine). Charlotte a tenu le crayon à l’atelier” (emphasis in original), letter from Le Corbusier to Pierre Jeanneret, 23 December 1940 (copy in Perriand archive).
- 55 *Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret. Œuvre complète 1929–1934*, 148.
- 56 As Roger Aujame emphasised repeatedly in conversation with the author.
- 57 See advertisement by Tuileries & Briqueteries de la Marne in *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* 3, no.9 (December 1932): n.p., for “Briques de parement Dizy-Iso: . . . nouveau matériau isolant, mis en œuvre pour la construction du nouvel Hôpital Beaujon.” The block preserved at the Fondation Le Corbusier bears the stamp of the manufacturer.
- 58 Le Corbusier owned a *mofkia* bowl and two platters with typical *tafilalet* patterns.
- 59 See note 35.



- 60 See Rüegg, ed., *Le Corbusier. Moments in the Life of a Great Architect. Photographs by René Burri/Magnum* (Basle, Boston, Berlin: Birkhäuser, 1999), 146–179.
- 61 Entretiens – Le Corbusier avec le recteur Mallet, 1951, etc., enregistrements extraits des Archives de l’Institut National de l’Audiovisuel, Paris 1987/Didakhé 2007 (CD).
- 62 Louis Carré, quoted in *Paris-Midi* (April 8, 1934), cited after Mathew Affron, “Léger’s Modernism: Subjects and Objects,” in Carolyn Lanchner, ed., *Fernand Léger*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998), 137.
- 63 Le Corbusier à sa mère, 23 June 1935, in Baudouï and Dercelles, eds., *Le Corbusier. Correspondance. Lettres à la famille 1926–1946* (Paris; Gollion: Fondation Le Corbusier; Infolio, 2013), 506. Yvonne Le Corbusier seems to have been proud of her shining apartment, too, as other letters confirm.
- 64 Marie Cuttoli, an Algerian-born French entrepreneur and a patron of modern tapestry, worked first in Algeria, then in Paris. She opened her gallery Maison Myrbor in 1925 and commissioned tapestry cartoons from Braque, Léger, Miró and Picasso, then from Dufy, Lurçat, Matisse, Rouault and Le Corbusier, whose Cuttoli tapestry of 1936 is in the FLC.
- 65 July 3 to 13, 1935: see the flyer printed for the occasion, whose text was reprinted in *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui* 7, no. 7 (1935), 83.
- 66 Le Corbusier, in Max Bill, ed., *Le Corbusier & Pierre Jeanneret, Œuvre complète 1934–1938* (Zurich: Girsberger, 1939), 157.
- 67 Le Corbusier, “L’Espace indicible,” *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, numéro hors série (*Art*), (November–December 1946), 14.



1. Swiss Pavilion, Paris, 1930-32.  
Upper level window view.

## Le Corbusier: a Modern Monk

. . . devoting yourself to architecture is like entering a religious order.

*Le Corbusier Talks With Students.*<sup>1</sup>

For Le Corbusier, moving forward in time, out of the recent past into the modern world, was often preceded by movement in backward in time, toward some earlier period, often much earlier, an age of radical beginnings, *mythical* though they often were. Even though recursive movements were hardly *modern*, in the progressive sense of the word, it was indeed to the past that Le Corbusier regularly turned in his projects, art works, and writings, despite his no less common advocacy of *l'Esprit Nouveau*. The facts speak for themselves, and do so more loudly than the strident assertions of the apologists who announced a fully emancipated *modernism*, as did some of the movement's protagonists.

The instance of Le Corbusier's *historically-grounded-modernism* to be addressed in this study is his lifelong preoccupation with monastic culture and its reinterpretation in the modern period, the monastic *tradition* one could say, even if the history that animated its chronology was discontinuous and its several manifestations alternately sacred and secular.<sup>2</sup>

Rather than pursue this opening consideration of Le Corbusier's modernity in broad and inclusive terms, I shall start with what might

seem a rather minor issue in one of his projects: his strong—though not completely successful—resistance to the suggestion that he open a window in the upper level of the façade of the Swiss Pavilion in Paris' *Cité Universitaire*. That this little controversy bears on the question concerning his monastic vision of living in the modern world should be apparent in the following two quotations, neither of which was, however, offered in defense of his stance concerning the Swiss Pavilion window:

What the student wants is a monk's cell, well lit and well heated, with a corner to gaze at the stars.<sup>3</sup>

monks' cells . . . secret gardens . . . an infinity of landscape . . . a *tele-à-tele* with oneself. A sensation of extraordinary harmony comes over me.<sup>4</sup>

#### STUDENT MONKS

It was not just one student's room that Le Corbusier refused to illuminate through an opening in the upper level or *fascia* of the south façade of his *Pavillon Suisse*, but rooms for five.<sup>5</sup> The request came as a result of a mid-project increase in the number of students to be accommodated in the building, from forty-five to fifty.<sup>6</sup> Because the design of the lower three levels of student rooms had been fixed (an *enfilade* of fifteen rooms per floor) there was no place to locate the additional rooms other than the roof level, which had been initially planned to accommodate (and inwardly orient) a range of non-residential settings: rooms for physical exercise, a space for music, and a small ensemble of study rooms, including a library. There was also to be a small shared garden (in some phases of the project it was called the solarium), and the director's rooms, together with those allotted to the domestic help.

Here's the problem: throughout the entire history of the project these settings were largely hidden behind the *fascia*, open only the enclosed garden court, and thus to the sky (Fig. 1).<sup>7</sup> This last condition was, of course, imagined to be no small pleasure, as indicated in the first quotation above. Le Corbusier's resistance to the suggestion that windows could be "easily opened" in the façade's upper surface was a matter of principle, or perhaps one should say of principles, for when he explained himself in detail it became clear that many issues were in play, partly aesthetic and partly cultural—the culture of the student-monk.

First, there was the matter of visual harmony. Were he to extend the floor-to-ceiling glazing (window walls) of the three lower levels up to the fourth a great "obstacle" would have appeared: "architecturally, the façade would become *inordinately high* [he argued]. . . our building would be *out of scale*." More specifically, he maintained it was a question of the "harmony" of scale (Fig. 2). With this basic principle of architectural order at risk, the question about change was answered with a resounding *no*: "We hesitate no longer: the rooms shall open *behind the fascia*, onto small gardens . . . here [on the front face] it is the proportion that counts."<sup>8</sup>

He sought to secure a second point in defense against any accusation of insufficiency—insufficient light, air and view for the roof-level rooms—which would have been, ironically, the sort of criticism he himself would have leveled against recent architectures. It was at precisely this point in the controversy that the matter of tradition came into focus, for he buttressed his argument with references to much earlier examples of student room or cell design: "during our educational travels, we often appreciated . . . just such an architectural device [a room's aperture onto "the serenity of" a small garden] within the famous monasteries! And we are therefore convinced that these five rooms will be the most beautiful within the entire pavilion."<sup>9</sup> Even for a writer prone to overstatement, this claim about windowless rooms being the most beautiful in the building comes as something of a surprise.

The travels to which he referred were visits to Carthusian monasteries. The encounter he mentioned most frequently was with the Certosa di



2. Swiss Pavilion, Paris, 1930-32.  
Façade view.

Firenze, which he called Ema (Figs. 3, 4).<sup>10</sup> Among the repeated references, the following from his book *Precisions* may be the most helpful when trying to understand the claim about the Swiss pavilion's roof-top rooms:

The beginning of these studies [of dwelling at a human scale], for me, goes back to my visit to the Carthusian monastery of Ema near Florence, in 1907. In the musical landscape of Tuscany I saw a *modern city* crowning a hill. The noblest silhouette in the landscape, an uninterrupted crown of monks' cells; each cell has a view on the plain, and opens on a lower level on an entirely closed garden. I thought I had never seen such a happy interpretation of a dwelling. The back of each cell opens by a door and a wicket on a circular street. This street is covered by an arcade: the cloister. Through this way the monastery services operate—prayer, visits, food, funerals.<sup>11</sup>

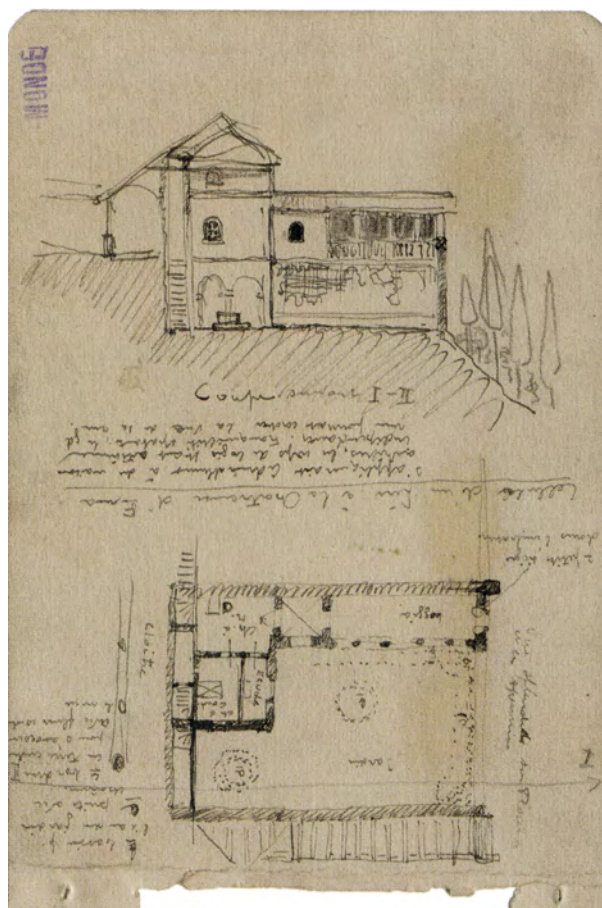
There are a number of useful points in this quotation. The first is that the monk—who would be a student in the Swiss Pavilion—had a view that opened onto an entirely enclosed garden (forgetting for a moment the additional view onto the plain). Although one imagines such a view would have given the monk some pleasure, and perhaps been an aid to the contemplative life, the garden was also a work place. Some Carthusian brothers planted vegetables in these gardens, others transformed them into work yards, where they undertook carpentry and other manufacturing or repair activities. Students in the Swiss Pavilion, however, would have exercised themselves in the little gymnasium on the roof, or the sports fields nearby. The second useful point in Le Corbusier's defense of his garden-facing cells is that he had never seen, and presumably couldn't imagine an interpretation of dwelling that was happier. Solitary contemplation (serenity) was perfectly sheltered in settings of this kind, also some measure of self-sufficiency. In another allusion to the monastery at Ema he wrote:

In early youth I travelled to Italy, the Balkans, Constantinople, Orient. The idea of homes repeated and grouped in units struck me in the monastery of Ema in



3. Charterhouse, Galluzzo, Florence. Plan.





4. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of the Certosa di Firenze.  
Cell plan and section, 1907.

Tuscany. Look, I still have with me a notebook in which I sketched the abode of monks . . . Everyone has what they need, that is to say little, if they are wise. One who is still battered by the instinct of possession can buy an apartment, a house, if you will. But real estate can and should belong to everyone: clean air, the sun, the view of nature, walking in the orchard, games and many other things. What do I need to own? Several books? Probably. But are there not thousands at the National Library?<sup>12</sup>

The third useful point is that this 14th century building expressed the essence of a *modern city*. How this could be so? The presence of the past in modern architecture and urbanism is a topic to which we will return below.

The Swiss Pavilion was not Le Corbusier's only project that included upward oriented cells. A precedent for this solution, which might otherwise be seen as merely expedient (adding five more student rooms without ruining the façade's proportions), can be seen in his *Cité Universitaire* student housing project of 1925 (Figs. 5, 6). I have cited part of the key passage already:

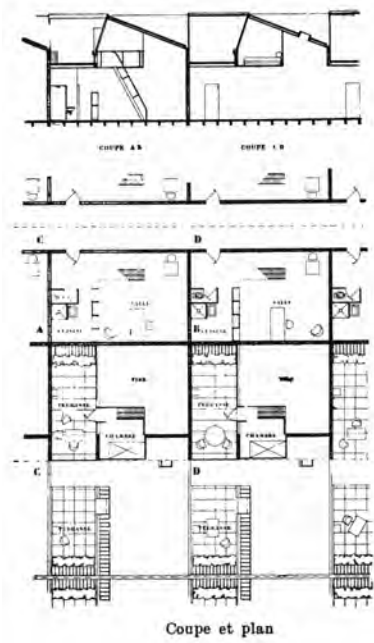
The student belongs to an age of protest against old Oxford; old Oxford is a fantasy . . . *What the student wants is a monk's cell*, well lit and well heated, with a corner to gaze at the stars. He wants to be able to find ready-to-hand whatever he needs to play sports with his fellows. His cell should be as self-contained as possible.<sup>13</sup>

And what was true for one should be true for all, each should enjoy the same standard (ethically speaking), which was for Le Corbusier a measure of common expectation:

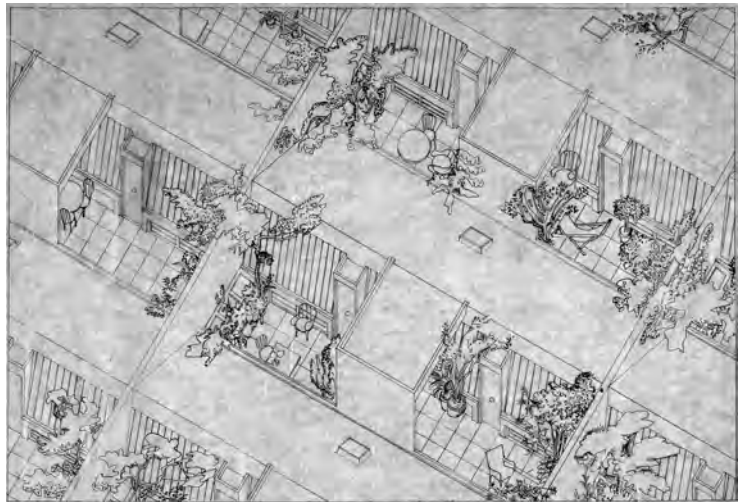
. . . all students are entitled to the same cell; it would be cruel if the cells of poor students were different from the cells of rich ones. So the problem is posed: university housing as *caravanserai*; each cell has its vestibule, its kitchen, its bathroom, its living room, its sleeping loft, and its roof garden. Walls isolate each. Everyone assembles on the adjacent playing fields or in the common rooms of shared service facilities.<sup>14</sup>

Le Corbusier.  
Cité Universitaire, Paris, 1925.

5. Plan and section of cells.  
From *Œuvre Complète, 1910-29*.
6. Axonometric of cells.



Coupe et plan



In this project, as in the villa-apartments of a few years earlier, the aim was to separately acknowledge and then integrate settings for individuals and the group, reconciling the individual with the collective. He often said that this particular reconciliation was the greatest challenge of both modern architecture and modern life.<sup>15</sup> Assuming sports interested many of the student-monks, there were ample courts and playing fields. For the less athletically inclined there were the gardens in between the courts, and the closely cropped tree screens—as in French parks, or the gardens behind the rue de Rivoli—between the houses and the streets, under which students and friends could walk or read, alone or with others. The project was timely, for the University of Paris and the city had agreed in 1921 that the many students who came to the capital for study but could not find suitable or affordable housing needed new premises. The location for the new housing was in the southern part of the city, the land that was to form the site of the *Cité Universitaire*, of which Le Corbusier's Swiss Pavilion would be part.

Great care was also taken with the individual cell in his 1925 project. Each was to be no less complete than a monk's house at Ema, although smaller in size. The student cells were barely two-story. Yet, a raised sleeping loft provided a near equivalent to the Ema cell section and an open terrace substituted the monk's garden. Lastly, "gazing at the stars" oriented the student-monk to the wider horizon, as the passage window had done at Ema. Here, as with many of his projects, the axonometric view demonstrated the importance and role of the garden roof as the destination of movement through the accommodation. In each cell, as in the monastic precedents and his famous *chambre de travail* by the sea, isolation was decisive: "the cell should be as self-contained as possible."<sup>16</sup>

In both the student housing and the Swiss Pavilion the importance of isolation was matched by the significance of self-sufficiency, or the degree of self-reliance that student housing could reasonably allow. A second little controversy that troubled the project for Swiss students can be used to illustrate this point—the matter of individual showers.

Against the cost-saving aims of his client, who thought one set of common showers on every floor would be fine for students, Le Corbusier insisted that each should have a shower in his or her room. For a man who practiced a rather ascetic way of living, providing a sense of luxury was clearly not the aim. Each room was also to have two closets, a sink, and the sitting/study/sleeping room (containing a bed, desk, and shelves) facing a fully-glazed southern wall. Though all glass, the window wall was sub-divided into translucent panes below the level of the desk and transparent panes above. His argument in defense of the individual shower, and by implication of personal hygiene was as follows:

‘Senator Honnorat has asked us urgently, and on several occasions, to remove the showers from each room, replacing them with a common shower room somewhere within the building. But we think it is not extravagant to install one shower per room.’ If this still seemed an overindulgence, they could have the ‘showers with cold water only.’<sup>17</sup>

Here, too, there was a precedent in the traditional model to which he had previously referred. Water was on hand in both the monastic cells and gardens at Ema. In his sketches he took care to draw and label two water basins, one with a bucket and chain for drinking and washing, another for irrigating the plants.

That he personally identified with this need for contemplative privacy, and the well-being of both mind and body, can be inferred from the quotations adduced thus far. But a line from the speech he gave in London, on the occasion of his receipt of the AIA Gold Medal confirms his identification with the life of the student-monk. After the customary allusions to all of the mistreatments he had received in his career, he explained the way he wanted to be seen, or had seen himself:

I feel a bit like a puncher of metro tickets. Thinking what I see and seeing everything in architecture means leading a dog’s life! There are problems before

us. Values change daily. The world explodes. And I, for one, am still living a little in the skin of a student.<sup>18</sup>

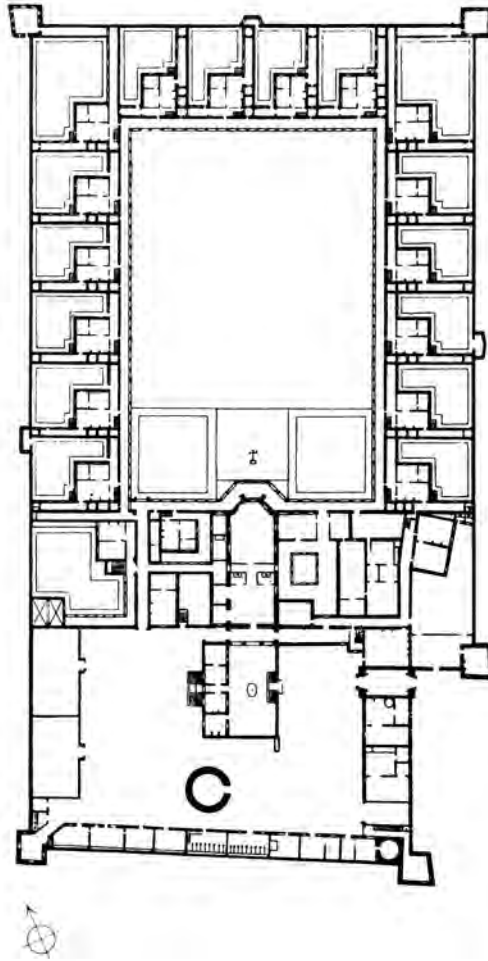
Two interpretations of this self-portrait seem sensible. The first is that even in his advanced years, having accomplished so much—so many buildings, books, and works of art—he felt that there was still more to learn, that more study was necessary, that he hadn't yet graduated. No doubt there is good sense to this, but one must also remember that throughout his life he insisted on the rejection of all things “academic.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the expression he chose is striking: “the skin” of the student, *la peau d'un étudiant*. Why this way of phrasing it? Might it be that even in the evening of his life he had not given up the student's *way of life*, the self-imposed distance from family and home, the making due with less, and the acceptance of a regimen and rule, all for the sake of new beginnings, growing out of critique but leading to new associations, founded on common interests and shared goals? If so, it would be because he saw the life of the student and of a monk to have very similar profiles, each historically grounded.<sup>20</sup>

#### MONASTIC TYPES

Although the Carthusian monastery to which we, following Le Corbusier, have repeatedly referred was built centuries before the modern period, the type's history is much more ancient. Each of the chapters that narrate the story of monasticism follows the pattern set by the Desert Fathers in remote antiquity and was exemplified by the lives of figures such as St. Anthony (251-356), often said to be the founder of the western monastic life style, Pachomios (292-348), whose monastic settlement was among the first in the west, and John Cassian or John the Ascetic (360-435), whose writings provided the basis for many of the subsequent Rules, including the one that is today the most famous, Benedict's. The pattern these and other early figures established was simple: first, repudiation and rejection of contemporary

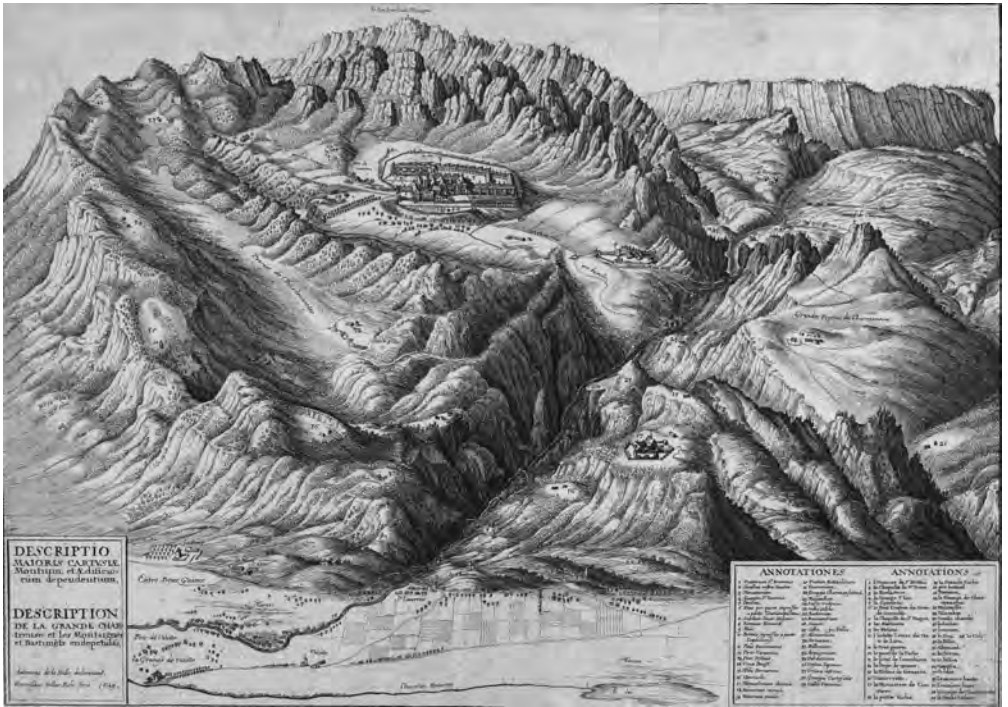
culture, prompted by new awareness of primary realities (which echoes rather exactly Le Corbusier's "modernist" stance); second, retreat in order to recover experiences taken to be fundamental, which with the soul seeks realignment (also a Corbusian procedure and aim); and third, re-articulation of a new way of life (albeit mimetic) in the form of schedules, regimens, and rules that govern (thanks to the abbot's oversight) all manner of spiritual, social and spatial practice. Each time this sequence was reenacted the tension between isolation and fellowship re-emerged, the spatial structure of which determined the distances and connections between the individual cells of a monastery and its shared cloister. Each of leaders of the later orders—Benedict, of the Benedictines; Bruno, of the Carthusians; Bernard, of the Cistercians; Francis, of the Franciscans; Dominic, of the Dominicans; and Clare, of the Poor Clares—tried to restore the complementarity of personal and communal life, according to their own sense of the Rule, governing conditions that were both spiritual and material.

Perhaps the most explicit architectural manifestation of the tension or complementarity between the spaces of solitude and fellowship is the Charterhouse type, Le Corbusier's favourite, as we have seen (Fig. 7). The origins are well documented. St. Bruno (1030-1101) played the role of founder. He was born in Cologne and educated at Reims, where he became head of the city's great episcopal school and friend of Pope Urban 11, whom he had taught there. He also had contact with Robert of Molesme, who helped form the Cistercian Order. The intrigues and disappointments of his administrative life seem to have strengthened his resolve to abandon all these involvements, but instead of following the newly formed Cistercian way with Robert, after a period of wandering in the forests and marshes of eastern France, he won support from the Bishop of Grenoble, who apparently anticipated the request, having had a dream about Bruno and his small group of followers standing in an uninhabited clearing under a crown of seven stars. The Bishop took them to a rather wild spot in the Alps called Chartreuse, a valley surrounded by precipitous slopes of an inhospitable and inaccessible limestone massif, covered most of the year with snow (Fig. 8).



7. Carthusian Monastery, Clermont.  
Plan.  
From Viollet-le-Duc,  
*Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture  
française du XIe du XVIe siècle* (Paris:  
A. Morel, 1875), ill. 27.





8. Carthusian monastery (La Grande Chartreuse), Grenoble, ca. 1084. Aerial view, Wenceslaus Hollar, 1649.

The heat and sands that were so liked by the Desert Fathers couldn't be found there, but the place was similarly desolate. In that spot Bruno and his followers established the first Charterhouse monastery, as well as the Carthusian way of living.

The simplest way of describing this type way of living is to say that Carthusians combined the two fundamental impulses of the entire tradition: *eremical* and *cenobitic* life. They wanted nothing more than solitude, but recognized the need for and benefit of fellowship. Acknowledging this double demand, Bruno gave each of the twelve their own little house, but demanded that they all appear in the shared spaces—the church, chapter house, and refectory—at the appointed hour, according to a schedule that was at once diurnal, seasonal, and liturgical. *Cell* is probably not the right word for such a house. It was twice removed from the shared cloister, first by the cloister walk and second by an internal passage that often contained a stair. Within the unit there were several settings: an anteroom (the only one that was heated), a bedroom large enough for a table or two, an adjoining room used for work, a small larder, and long corridor that led to the latrine. But that was not all. Each house had its own garden or yard for work, as we have seen in Le Corbusier's studies. It was three or four times larger than the house and sheltered behind an enclosing wall. Why the garden or yard? Each monk was to practice a skill that would be of use to the monastery as a whole.

Seen as a whole ensemble, the configuration acknowledged the principle and reciprocity of *ora et labora*. The results of work in the yard or garden would be enjoyed in the refectory of course, but also places like the *scriptorium* or *armarium*. In addition to the individual and key shared spaces (the cloister of houses wrapping around the cemetery, and the church, chapter house, refectory, and prior's house), there was a set of spaces, generally on the west side, for the lay brothers, the *conversi* and *donati*, who not only managed many of the physical needs of the monastery but served as a protective interface between their secluded enclosure and the world beyond. Within the walls of the monastery, however, the equilibrium between spaces for individual and collective life was carefully constructed and controlled.

As we have seen, an exceptionally enthusiastic appreciation of this balance was offered nine centuries after Bruno's work by Le Corbusier. To Charles L'Eplattenier he confessed: "I would like to live all my life in what they call their cells. It is the [perfect] solution to the working man's house, type unique or rather an earthly paradise." "From this moment on I saw the two terms, individual and collectivity, as inseparable."<sup>21</sup> In *Marseilles Block* he wrote similarly: "The Chartreuse d'Enza near Florence made me conscious of the harmony which results from the interplay of individual and collective life when each reacts favourably upon the others. Individual and collectivity comprehended as fundamental dualism."<sup>22</sup> Insofar as the key problem for architecture and urbanism in the modern world was reconciling these two, the historical monastery was an entirely relevant point of reference.

#### A MODERN ANCIENT

For Le Corbusier, then, designs that could be called modern design were hardly free from historical associations, nor of indications of ancient precedents. As we observed at the outset: movement forward was prompted by movement backward, paradoxical though that double movement may seem. Yet, the monastic tradition was not the only context of historical reference for Le Corbusier, there were others. As is well known, he turned his attention toward ancient Greece and Rome, too; particularly when establishing the foundation for the new architecture in his most widely read publication: the Parthenon was famously compared to an automobile. References such as this could be multiplied at great length. He seems to have sustained a steady conversation with Michelangelo. And his discussion with vernacular traditions occupied him at great length.

Nor was Le Corbusier alone in this attention to ancient precedents and beginnings. Figures such as Adolf Loos, Richard Neutra, and Frank Lloyd Wright defined what they meant by modern architecture by referring to native precedents. Loos, for example, once said that he was a modern

architect who built in the manner of the ancients.<sup>23</sup> Richard Neutra's early books, *Wie Baut America* (1927) and *Amerika* (1930) framed their studies of modern construction with allusions to early American building traditions—pueblo settlements of the Southwest in the first book, and these plus a circus tent in the second. This *retreat-in-order-to-advance* also occurred in Latin American countries, where designers believed that a return to their culture's radical foundations would provide the modern movement with a secure foundation. It is not inaccurate to say that modernism (resulting from social and cultural modernization) in this part of America preceded its importation from Europe. Consider the search for a Mexican architecture in the writings and work of figures like Juan O'Gorman, Max Cetto, and Luis Barragán, or, further south, in Brazil, Lúcio Costa's longstanding preoccupation with vernacular forms. Considering Costa's *Missões* project (*Museu em São Miguel*), one cannot say in any decisive way where its historical and modern elements begin and end (Fig. 9).

Advances in modern architecture—particularly Le Corbusier's modern architecture—always depended on “conversations” with predecessors. Rarely were they *viva voce*, of course; they were instead asymmetrical, because the past, having passed, could not answer back. Yet silence did not prevent significance. For architects with non-dogmatic minds history's silence seems to have invited unending inquiry. Who among the moderns that still interest us today did not say both yes and no to work from the past? When one observes unbroken continuity of the modern tradition throughout the twentieth and into the twenty first centuries, one views a history that absorbed other traditions, having been neither initiated nor broken by them. Contemporary modern architecture is only the most recent example of this approach, meaning that it remains, as Habermas observed years ago, “an unfinished project.”<sup>24</sup>

New worlds resulting from projects attuned to modern realities were envisaged, but they were rarely imagined to be *wholly new*, nor thought to be the responsibility of single designers. Adhesions to pre-existing conditions were seen as inevitable when actual sites, programs, materials, and builders

were used as instruments of project realization. Furthermore, just as projects could not free themselves from inherited culture, they were rarely, if ever, realized in full. Non-finality came to be seen as the norm rather than the exception.

The coordination between a project and its historically structured location took a number of different forms in the built work of the modern period. The most obvious sort of connection was visual: the site presented itself through a series of views, around the building and from within it. The project's location was also understood dynamically, which is to say as a play of environmental forces; particularly, light, wind, and temperature. Design and construction entered into this play, into its sequences, transformations, and variations. This, too, is historical; one could say the site's natural history. Patterns could be discerned—days and seasons, for example—but the key principle was alteration, the outcome of which was development or deterioration. Further, simple and fundamental topics of spatial order, orientation for example, were conferred upon new buildings rather than constituted by them. This was especially the case with urban projects—Le Corbusier urban villas for example, or the Salvation Army building. Engagement with these “historical” conditions did not restrict invention but sustained it. Reversals of typical patterns of site development discovered unforeseen possibilities, thanks to attention to the project's location.

What was true for a building's siting was also true for its construction: conditions and techniques that arose in the past remained useful in the present. The more we learn about the *actual* construction of the buildings of the “heroic” period of modern architecture the more we see that later historians have been more dogmatic about materials and methods of construction than the architects themselves. No doubt the architects themselves partially initiated the familiar—if now-discredited—story about “modern” materials (steel, concrete, and glass) and “modern” means of construction (standardization, prefabrication and dry assembly) determining the “evolution” of modernism. Yet, the apologists went much further than the designers, in some cases to the point of obscuring the subject matter of



9. Lúcio Costa.  
Museu das Missões  
(Museum in São Miguel), Brazil, 1940.  
View.
10. Maisons Jaoul, Paris, 1951-56.

their descriptions—the buildings themselves. Less polemical studies of the buildings of these years have shown that the actual construction of these works was often *impure*, that materials used for centuries were still used in the 1920s and 30s in combination with so-called “modern” materials, and that site work was both dry *and* wet, which is to say, factory made *and* made to look that way, or standardized *and* shaped on site for particular application. This was the case for Le Corbusier as early as the Loi Loucheur project. Vivid cases of wet and dry construction include the Villa Mandrot and Maisons Jaoul (Fig. 10). Hybridity was the norm, even when simplicity was claimed. Similarly, craft work was required even when elements that had been mass-produced were installed. In some cases the complexities and compromises of the solutions were concealed, as if the project’s hypothesis had to be saved at all costs. But in more cases the transformations that resulted from the use of available or affordable materials and methods led to new dimensions of significance and suitability. A simple, pure, or self-evidently modern way of building was far less important than careful attunement to ways of living—patterns that were, of course, of their time.

The buildings of the modern period—chief among them Le Corbusier’s—were designed and built to accommodate and express ways of living that were partly modern and partly traditional. What we have argued about monastic modernism is only one instance of this sense of the *modern* work. Possibilities were projected of course, patterns of life that *might be* present and *may have* occurred in the past; but ways of living nonetheless. The fact that these buildings acknowledged the continuity of ways of living, the hybridity of building practices, and the dependence of interior on site conditions suggests that another sense of the architectural project had force in these years: modern because historical.

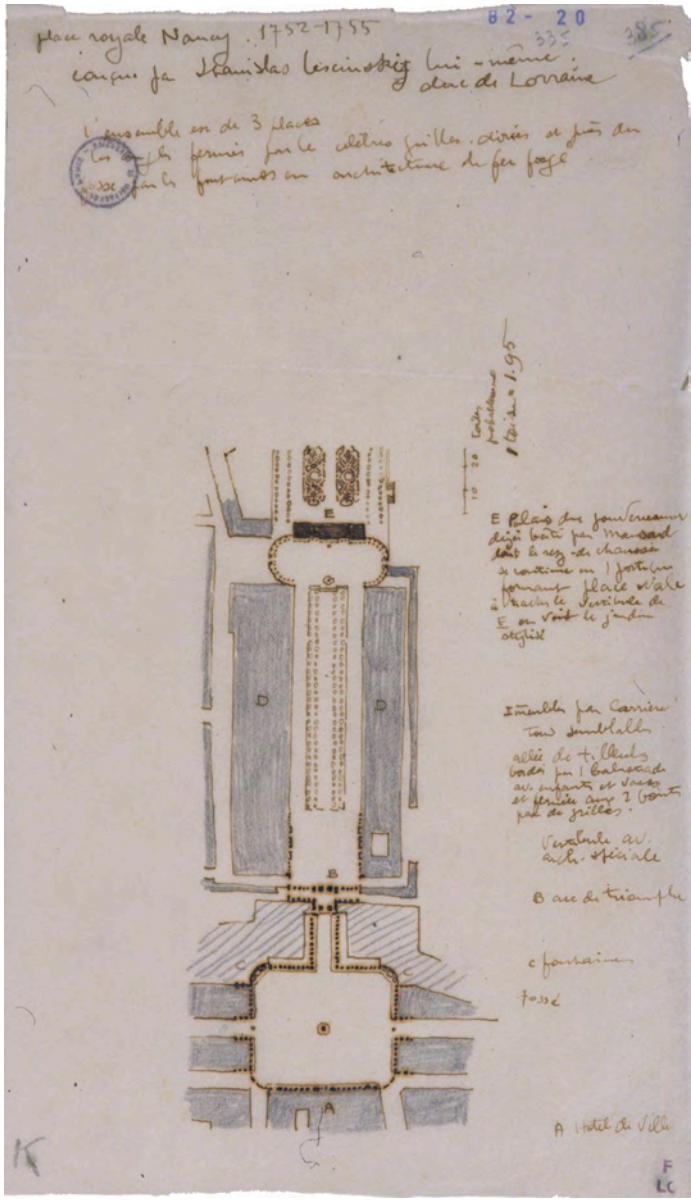


NOTES

- 1 Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier Talks With Students*, [1943] trans. Pierre Chase (New York: Orion Press, 1961), 34.
- 2 Observations and arguments I will set out in this study elaborate points developed in a forthcoming book I have co-authored with Richard Wesley, *Three Cultural Ecologies in the Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- 3 Le Corbusier, *Towards an Architecture*, [1928] trans. John Goodman (Los Angeles: Getty, 2007), 286.
- 4 Le Corbusier, *Unités d'habitation de grandeur conforme* (Paris, April 1, 1957). FLC U3 07 176.
- 5 The history of this little controversy, as well as that of the entire project is beautifully set out in Ivan Zaknic, *Le Corbusier - Pavillon Suisse. The Biography of a Building* (Basel, Boston, Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2004).
- 6 In point of fact, Le Corbusier had known of this larger number, what changed mid-project was the client's insistence that the increase be accommodated with the same amenities, particularly, an outward, not upward view to the open landscape.
- 7 In several drawings there was, however, a façade opening for the director's rooms.
- 8 Le Corbusier to Mr. the Senator Honnorat, President of Cité Universitaire, translated and cited in Zaknic, *Pavillon Suisse*, 193-195; our italics.
- 9 Zaknic, *Pavillon Suisse*, 193.
- 10 Different names can confuse allusions to this monastery. Sometimes it is called the Certosa di Firenzi, due to its proximity to that city. It might also be called the Certosa di Ema, or the Certosa del Galluzzo, as it is known more locally, because it is closer to that village than Florence. Ema is a small tributary to the River Arno. Thus a fourth name in French is Chartreuse du Val d'Éma. Le Corbusier abbreviated this last name, but retained the allusion to the river.
- 11 Le Corbusier. "A Dwelling at Human Scale," *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning*, [1930] trans. Edith Schreiber Aujame (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 91-92.
- 12 Le Corbusier, interview with Jean Gallotti, in "The Shape of Tomorrow's Europe," trans. into Czech by J. Malá, "Tvář zítřejší Evropy." *Āvart: sborník poesie a vědy*. (1945) [*Quart: Proceedings of poetry and science*]: 128-130.
- 13 Le Corbusier, *Towards an Architecture*, 286; my italics.
- 14 *Ibid.*; translation slightly modified.



- 15 The first decades of the 20th century had witnessed a fundamental crisis, he thought, the individual against the collective, a crisis that had to be overcome through whatever means possible, for each was an absurd alternative. The isolated individual, even if genius, would inevitably lead a partial, broken life, and the mass man, even if familiar, would continually suffer anonymity. Throughout his work and life Le Corbusier sought an alternative, a coupling of people and places that would achieve a state of equilibrium, or, as suggested in 1960, *harmony*. See: Le Corbusier, *L'Atelier de la recherche patiente/Mein Werk* (Stuttgart: Hatje, 1960); *Creation is a Patient Search*, trans. James Palmes (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), 65.
- 16 *Ibid.*, *Towards an Architecture*.
- 17 Zaknic, *Pavillon Suisse*, 151.
- 18 Le Corbusier, 1961 AIA Gold Medal acceptance speech; see “Corbu,” *Time Magazine* (May 5, 1961): 60-70. Also: Jean-Jacques Duval, “Le Corbusier parle...et écrit,” *Spazio e Società* 8, no. 29 (March 1985): 56-57.
- 19 See, for example, the rejection of academic thinking in *Precisions*. The first lecture was called: “To Free Oneself Entirely of Academic Thinking.” *Precisions*, 23. A more emphatic denunciation occurs in the middle of the lecture: “The declaration of faith of academism is no more than a mirage; it is a lie; it is the danger of our time.” *Ibid.*, 25.
- 20 Of course college and university life emerged historically from monastic institutions—the buildings, the social organization, and the way of life, albeit secularized. The theme of making due with less in Le Corbusier’s work and modern, secular monasticism, has been studied recently in: Pier Vittorio Aureli, *Less is Enough: On Architecture and Asceticism* (London: Strelka Press, 2103).
- 21 Le Corbusier to Charles L’Eplattenier, 19 September 1907. FLC E2(12)9; Le Corbusier, *Unité d’habitation de Marseilles* (Paris: Édition Le Point, 1950), 35.
- 22 Le Corbusier, *The Marseilles Block*, [1950] trans. Geoffrey Sinsbury (London: Harvill Press, 1953), 45.
- 23 Loos wrote: “I am a modern architect because I build in the manner of the ancient Viennese.” See Adolf Loos, “Eine zuschrift,” [1910] *Trotzdem* (Vienna: George Prachner, 1982), 111. In this instance, as in so many others in the modern period, the new architecture distinguished itself from the recent by returning to even older ideas and elements, those thought to be fundamental.
- 24 Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity—An Incomplete Project,” [1980] in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983), 3-15.



1. Le Corbusier.  
 Sketch of the Place Royale (Stanislas/Carrière), Nancy,  
 for the manuscript "La construction des villes."

URBAN HISTORY AND NEW DIRECTIONS  
THE ROLE OF BRINCKMANN AND LAUGIER  
FOR LE CORBUSIER'S URBAN DESIGN THEORY

INTRODUCTION:

SUDDEN CHANGE OR GROWING INTEREST IN CLASSICAL URBAN DESIGN?

Le Corbusier readily made use of history to develop his own designs. He was, however, not interested in historical accuracy. He brought together historical models from periods distant and close, moulding them into one architecture that often did not even allow to easily discern these influences. The same is valid for his urban planning. Already in his early book *Le Corbusier. Elemente einer Synthese*, Stanislaus von Moos made his readers aware of the synthesis of arts in Le Corbusier's work.<sup>1</sup> And Colin Rowe, noticed an "involvement with a specific rather than ideal Paris . . . an empirical Paris which Le Corbusier so often quoted in his buildings but never in his urbanistic proposals."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Le Corbusier was a master in bringing together material from the most diverse sources—be they persons, places or epochs—into a single, well-designed synthesis. Accepting this as one of the most important traits of Le Corbusier's design and writing, this essay, however, does attempt to distinguish between the historical and the contemporary themes that influenced Le Corbusier in his understanding of the city. Focusing on the period between 1910 and 1915, the period of his manuscript "La Construction des villes," leading towards the development of the *Ville contemporaine* and *Urbanisme*, this essay investigates the influence of

urban history on Le Corbusier's urban design thinking. It wishes to show how Le Corbusier—not necessarily consciously—instrumentalised history, both through his studies and observation of the built reality, to aid in preparing his design thinking to conceive new urban forms.<sup>3</sup>

As Harold Allen Brooks and others have demonstrated, Le Corbusier, then still Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, started his architectural development with a strong Ruskinian bias. During his first visit to Florence in 1907, he almost completely ignored any building from the Renaissance and concentrated on medieval architecture instead. During his year (1908–09) in Paris as apprentice of Auguste Perret, he studied and endlessly drew and redrew the Cathedral of Notre Dame instead of appreciating any classical architecture or urban design. Similarly, an Arts-and-Crafts bias applies to his early houses in La Chaux-de-Fonds.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, historians have for a while now attempted to nominate a point at which Jeanneret's architectural conviction shifted from favouring the medieval and picturesque to the classicist and monumental. Of interest here is the change in his perception of principles of city planning. Antonio Bruculeri and Harold Allen Brooks have set such a point of change in Jeanneret's view of the city at 1915.<sup>5</sup> Brooks says: "This time he conducted research at the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris where he became fascinated with classical principles of town planning."<sup>6</sup> However I have already shown that one crucial challenge to his belief in picturesque urbanism clearly happened as early as January 1911. While working for Peter Behrens in Neubabelsberg, Jeanneret read Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* (in the second edition of 1755) at the *Royal Library Unter den Linden* in Berlin.<sup>7</sup> And even that is not the first instance of a change of mind. Francesco Passanti has suggested such a change may have occurred in June 1910—but without finding a specific event that would have caused this.<sup>8</sup>

The reality may have been a little less black and white. Curiously, an affinity towards the monumental classicism of the French architects and planners of absolutism (Mansart and others) can be observed from the *very moment* at which Jeanneret developed his notions of a picturesque urbanism,

i.e. parallel to his reading of Camillo Sitte's *Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* in early 1910. It seems that the picturesque and classicist monumental direction fought for his attention, i.e. that he struggled to develop arguments for either, although it is indeed noticeable that he was quite drawn to the grandeur of classicism, as Francesco Passanti has observed.<sup>9</sup> So while absorbing, digesting and reformulating Camillo Sitte's theories (Fig. 2), and those of Sitte's followers like Karl Henrici, Paul Schultze-Naumburg, Theodor Fischer and others, he read Albert Erich Brinckmann's *Platz und Monument* of 1908, and it was through Brinckmann's discussions of French urban squares and monuments that Jeanneret began to grasp the grandeur of the powerful unified French designs of the 18th century. Thus Jeanneret was able to develop a fascination for seeing the city of Paris in a way he had hitherto completely ignored.

BRINCKMANN, *PLATZ UND MONUMENT*:  
HISTORY OF URBAN SQUARES AND MONUMENTS

From April 1910 to March 1911, Jeanneret composed a complex manuscript on questions of urban design. While he had received a travel scholarship by the town of La Chaux-de-Fonds for research into schools and practices in Germany related to the Arts-and-Crafts, he was also asked by his teacher, Charles L'Eplattenier, to write a piece on urban design, to be presented at the Assembly of Swiss communities, scheduled for September 1910 in La Chaux-de-Fonds. Following L'Eplattenier's own interest in art and urban design, this piece was to be based on the theories of Camillo Sitte, as outlined in his 1889 volume, *Der Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen*.<sup>10</sup> Directly after having arrived in Munich in April 1910, Jeanneret began his urban design research, mostly in what is today's State Library, the Royal Library (*Bayerische Hof- und Staatsbibliothek*), and also in the smaller library of the National Museum. Only interrupted by a summer break that was spent with further writing and editing, back in La Chaux-de-Fonds,

10

en 1889 par l'architecte Viennois Camillo Sitte<sup>⊕</sup>  
 C'est en un livre plein de foi, de loyauté, de ~~travail~~<sup>sein</sup>  
 artistique qu'il lance le cri de mort contre les villes  
 de laideur. Quelques années suivent, de mo-  
 querie et d'indifférence. Puis en Allemagne,  
 des protagonistes d'un art nouveau de bâtir  
 les villes, écrivains de livres, servent la question,  
 font des conférences, ~~proposent~~ soumettent des  
 projets. Pendant à Sitte l'hommage qu'il méritait,  
 l'un d'eux écrit en tête d'un nouveau livre: Le  
 monument que Sitte s'est élevé avec son livre,  
 fera connaître son nom au monde de l'avenir,  
 comme celui du réformateur de la construction  
 des villes allemandes. Cette consécration des  
 idées de C. Sitte, nous engagea plusieurs fois,  
 au cours de cette étude, à citer l'architecte  
 Viennois, afin de donner à des principes  
 nouveaux chez nous, une ~~consécration~~<sup>sanction</sup> plus  
 solide.  
 Déjà en Angleterre, un beau geste philan-

2. Le Corbusier.  
 Page from the manuscript  
 "La construction des villes."  
 Lcdv34

Jeanneret worked on his *bouquin* almost without interruption. Having begun as a small piece, this work soon turned into a major undertaking, so much so that at times Jeanneret felt lost in the material. As a result he did not finish anything for the September convention—L'Eplattenier ended up writing an article himself.<sup>11</sup>

Jeanneret studied a multitude of texts on questions of Städtebau in 1910, mostly in Munich. The majority of these texts, written by German-language architects (Sitte, Henrici, Schultze-Naumburg, Hubatschek, Fischer), deal with contemporary questions of the relationship between architecture and the city.<sup>12</sup> Even if they use historical forms as examples, as Sitte and Schultze-Naumburg do, this happens in a manner of theoretical discourse, not historically. Of those texts that Jeanneret studied in great detail, the only one which treats the city and its public spaces from a historical perspective, is Albert Erich Brinckmann's *Platz und Monument* of 1908.<sup>13</sup> Brinckmann (1881–1958), German art historian with a specific interest in Baroque architecture in the Latin countries, was to write many books on urban space. In his approach to the *Zeitgebundenheit* (era-based quality) of art he was specifically following his mentor and supervisor, art historian Heinrich Wölfflin. *Platz und Monument*, “Squares and Monuments,” investigates the relationship between public urban space and its monuments from the Renaissance to the turn of the 20th century. As Jochen Meyer reminds us, “A particular achievement of Brinckmann is the reconsideration of urban planning achievements of the Renaissance, Baroque and Classicism.”<sup>14</sup> For Brinckmann, there was no question that the building of a city was art, calling one of his presentations “The City as Work of Art (Die Stadt als Kunstwerk).”<sup>15</sup> This should be appreciated accordingly: here was a book which differed from the contemporary architects’ assessments of urban spaces. Brinckmann was breaking new ground with an art historical investigation of *Städtebau*. When Jeanneret studied Brinckmann’s volume, it had been published just two years earlier. And it is no small thing that Jeanneret found this source useful for him—particularly in guiding him toward the French urban designs of the Baroque and Classicist periods.

It seems that Jeanneret began to read Brinckmann in May 1910—this is the date to which the earliest excerpts can be dated. More than twenty pages of Jeanneret’s manuscript directly paraphrase Brinckmann or are related to his historical accounts of Italian and French urban spaces and the respective placement of monuments.<sup>16</sup> But more than that, he would find in Brinckmann’s book judgements on the general appearance of a city. Thus, in a phrase that strongly resembles Laugier’s famous formulation of the order in the detail and the variety, even tumult in the whole, Brinckmann claims that each effect, no matter whether of a building or urban intervention, is relative to the context:

Nothing is achieved by simply setting something down in a city or building something up within it; everything depends on how. The various beautiful elements result in the city’s overall beauty; the *well-formulated harmonious details* will develop into a *great, rich manifoldness in overall impression* [emphasis by author].<sup>17</sup>

This paragraph and others from *Platz und Monument* did not go unnoticed with Jeanneret at all. He developed his own first theory of well-designed public squares almost equally from Brinckmann’s as well as from Sitte’s theories. It is fascinating to see how close Sitte and Brinckmann are in much of their argumentation, and where they differ. Both strongly advocate a sense of spatial enclosure in public urban spaces. However, Brinckmann postulates a sense of spatial unity more strongly than Sitte. While for Sitte, enclosure was possible with varying façade treatment,<sup>18</sup> Brinckmann was closer to what Walter Curd Behrendt would argue for in his dissertation a few years later: *Die einheitliche Blockfront als Raumelement im Stadtbau*—the unified enclosed street front in urban design.<sup>19</sup>

In one of his cahiers (Fig. 3), Jeanneret sketches the end of his chapter *Des moyens possibles*: taking up Brinckmann’s dictum that the city is to be understood as architectural unity, starting from the rooms, to single buildings, to groups of building, seeing them as “material of *Stadtbaukunst*,”<sup>20</sup> Jeanneret



Construction de Villes <sup>59</sup> ~~de~~ ~~de~~ ~~de~~ 17  
av. du matériel de maison  
dresser des volumes.  
(Hütte bauen heißt: mit  
dem Hausmaterial Raum gestalten)  
plus loin:  
l'histoire n'a pas à répondre  
à la question queuse (indiscrète)  
de la réalité (objectivité de la  
nouvelle Forme. La construction  
des Villes est donc avant tout,  
c'est pour la construction d'abstraites  
pensées, av. la quelle comme ça  
de cadence, mais (rien d.'l pensée  
sensé, d.'l pensée de le matériel.  
Seul la force artistique pour  
traverse ce point abstraitif et  
la création possible. Brinkman

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Construction de Villes et Architecture s'apparentent  
étroitement, ils se rapportent l'un à l'autre  
comme à peu près le plan d'une maison se rapporte  
à sa structure architecturale.  
Les ~~chambres~~ ~~comme~~ ~~se~~ ~~font~~ ~~à~~ ~~leur~~ ~~suivant~~  
~~division~~ ~~de~~ ~~la~~ ~~maison~~  
certaines ~~les~~ ~~se~~ ~~font~~ ~~à~~ ~~leur~~ ~~suivant~~  
chambres isolées, et les chambres isolées, et les  
chambres groupées correspondent à la division en

- 3. Le Corbusier.  
Page from the manuscript  
"La construction des villes."  
Lcdv448

calls for a sense of space to guide urban design.

Now a building, a city, a room, these are all merely the applications of a taste for beautiful *volume*. It is this volume which we must teach the crowds to understand, and the architects to create. They will make a room, and then a house; and then a street, then a square, with the right volume, with beautiful volume. Let us conclude with what Mr. Brinckmann summarises perfectly [in] his book. *To construct cities is to shape spaces using buildings as material!* (Städte bauen heißt: mit dem Hausmaterial Raum gestalten!).<sup>21</sup>

For Jeanneret, Sitte and Brinckmann become the starting point of, if one will, two contradicting principles for placing monuments on a public square. Jeanneret chooses to present these principles in such a way that today's reader is able to perceive a struggle within his understanding of public space: firstly, he expands on the notion of the "dead point", as explained by Camillo Sitte. This is the placement of monuments in a corner or other part of the square undisturbed by traffic.

Why do so many old squares, which have remained sheltered from planning devastation, offer strange undulations in their surfaces? These are grooves dug little by little by carriages passing repeatedly along the same track, making slightly raised areas which have, as if by design, become pedestals seemingly designed for siting monuments. It is precisely at these points that one should seek antique fountains, wells, wayside shrines, big trees and their stone benches, the quiet evening meeting places. Sitte claims to have observed that, in winter, children in villages always instinctively build their snowmen at the 'dead point.' Here then is the public square divided into areas propitious for placing monuments.<sup>22</sup>

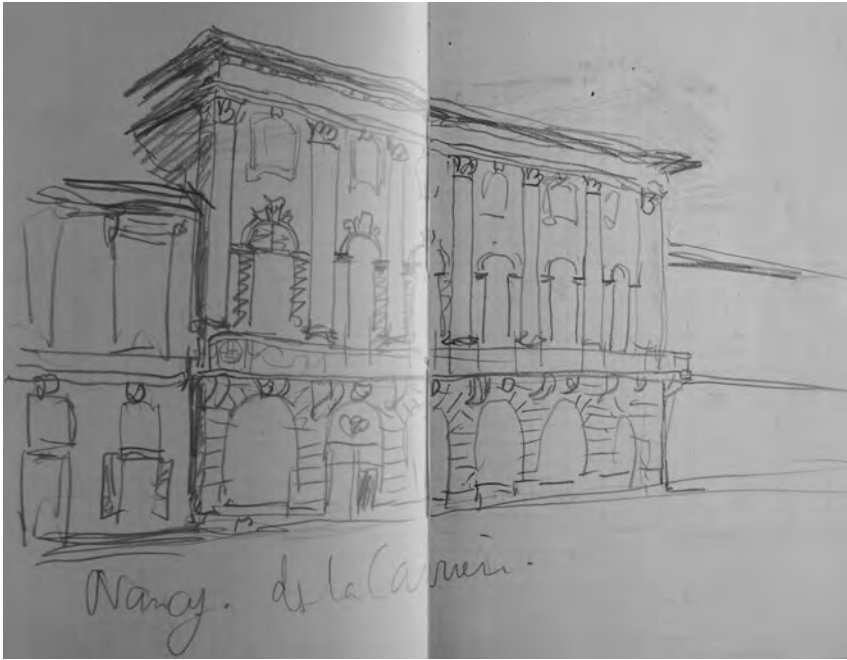
However, Jeanneret also recognizes that there are situations in which this rule might not apply. Turning to the French models of the symmetrically shaped squares, in particular designed for Louis XIV and XV, he follows

Brinckmann's examples. These absolutist kings generally had their sculpture placed in the geometric centre of the square. For his analysis of these urban situations, Jeanneret relies on Brinckmann but does not copy him, rather summarizes and discusses in a more general fashion.<sup>23</sup> Although Jeanneret shows fascination for the centralized square, only very few of the many sketches and hard-line drawings that he crafted for the manuscript in 1910 do represent French centralized squares. At least the Place des Victoires in Paris and the Place Royale (Carrière/Stanislas) in Nancy figure in his body of drawings, both copied meticulously from Brinckmann's *Platz und Monument* (Fig. 1).<sup>24</sup> The latter is important here: Jeanneret would visit Nancy in 1914 and sketch, on site, its various architectural and spatial characteristics.<sup>25</sup>

But whereas Brinckmann's aim is to demonstrate historical differences between epochs and cultures, and thus is historically as precise as possible, Jeanneret seems more interested in the principle than the historical detail. It could be said that he is closer to Camillo Sitte in this. And for our discussion it is crucial to see that history and historical events are being used by Jeanneret at this point to argue for a grander aim, which I believe is the notion of urban space as a contained entity between the mass of buildings.

Towards the end of *Platz und Monument*, Brinckmann attempts to distance himself from the ever-present Sitte, by criticizing his leaning toward the curved and irregular elements of city planning: "A street is not made beautiful by bending the façades of apartment blocks like playing cards."<sup>26</sup> And Brinckmann weighs the curved against the straight street: "A desire to open up the view gave rise to the straight, tidy street. As much as the meandering, irregular street . . . on hilly ground . . . is justified aesthetically as a contrast to the straight, open street, it cannot create a perfectly monumental situation."<sup>27</sup> Spurred by Brinckmann's view, Jeanneret comments on the grandeur and beauty of the long and straight road, pointing out that the "straight line in nature is the noble line par excellence; but of course it is also the rarest,"<sup>28</sup> and highlighting some of the grand roads in Paris and Berlin:

A certain slope or dip will benefit this street, and it will always be enclosed at



4. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of the Place de la Carrière, Nancy.  
Carnet 1914, 12, 13.

its upper end by a monument to glory. Skilful orientation will make the street even more magical. Such is the avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, crowned with the immense Arc de Triomphe, behind which the sun sets gloriously. So too in Berlin, the ‘effect’ of the Siegesallee at the end of which the Siegesäule stands drowning in the crimson of the setting sun, almost mirrored in the tarmacadam polished by automobiles. —Bismarckstrasse in Charlottenburg with its enormous dimensions follows a fixed direction for miles, almost the only straight line through districts which are and will be designed according to the new procedures.<sup>29</sup>

Here, in Brinckmann’s criticism of the curved street, lies the intellectual starting point of Jeanneret’s early criticism of Sitte and of exaggerated picturesque planning. Summarizing parts of his readings, he observes this tension between Sitte and Brinckmann, first saying: “Germany having accomplished, and still accomplishing, reform is already at the stage of reaction!”—only to add that, “[i]n fact, some blundering disciples of C. Sitte, going beyond his theoretical position, would if nobody stopped them, almost have revived that mediaeval era which this eclectic Viennese so brilliantly restored to favour in his book.”<sup>30</sup>

So Jeanneret very clearly sees the danger of overrating the picturesque. He also points out that some writers are aware of this risk, but warns at the same time that such fine-tuned criticism could be too differentiated in a discussion that is usually conducted with the broad brush:

Relishing the reforms accomplished, but already wary of all-too-hasty satisfaction which would invoke a crippling status quo, they identify certain unhealthy tendencies; but by denouncing these—as Mr. Brinckmann does—without additional deliberations, they risk confusing the uninitiated reader, the simple inattentive onlooker who does not know the heart of the matter.<sup>31</sup>

In summary: both Sitte and Brinckmann put their emphasis on the sense of enclosure of public spaces. While Brinckmann disagrees with some of

Sitte's positions (the picturesque vs. the monumental), Jeanneret is fully aware of these subtleties.

However, it seems that many of the remarks on Parisian (and other French) urban situations which Jeanneret received from Brinckmann, did not develop their impact on him in mid-1910. There may have been an incubation period of a few years for these insights to be fully realized, until 1914, when Jeanneret was passing through Nancy, and 1915, when back in Paris, he visited these urban ensembles, thereby newly calibrating their importance for his understanding of the city. Only in 1914/15—with eyes that now do see?—he recorded, in notebooks that had hitherto been thought lost, his impressions of both the Place de la Carrière in Nancy, and of the squares and places of Paris.

#### 1911: LAUGIER THROUGH BRINCKMANN

But to return to Jeanneret's reading in 1910: it is by studying Brinckmann that he takes notice of Marc-Antoine Laugier's writings. In May 1910 he notes Laugier's dictum on regularity and chaos in the city as quoted, in French, in Brinckmann's *Platz und Monument*: "Laugier disait: il faut de la régularité et de la bizarrerie, des rapports et des oppositions, des accidens qui varient le tableau; *un gd ordre dans les détails*, de la confusion, du fracas, du tumulte dans l'ensemble." ("Laugier said: There must be regularity and whimsy, relationships and oppositions, chance elements that lend variety to the tableau, *precise order in the details*, and confusion, chaos and tumult in the whole.")<sup>32</sup> This is the crucial link: Jeanneret is introduced to Laugier by Brinckmann through the latter's investigation of French urban planning of the 18th century. As surprising as it may seem that Jeanneret "needed" a German historian to be made aware of French urban history, this may have been a pattern around 1910, where German architects and historians (re)discovered French urban design from the time of absolutism and introduced this view to the German readers. And it is this quote that, now

calling himself Le Corbusier, he uses in *Urbanisme* to discuss the question of order and variety in the city:

Voici, formulée, une conclusion idéale, précise. Déjà sous Louis XIV, l'abbé Laugier l'avait énoncé:

1. *Du chaos, du tumulte dans l'ensemble.* (C'est-à-dire une composition riche d'éléments contrapuntées, fugue, symphonie.)
2. *De l'uniformité dans le détail.* (C'est-à-dire de la retenue, de la décence, de 'l'alignement' dans le détail.<sup>33</sup>)

However, in 1910/11, Jeanneret left Laugier's *Observations sur l'architecture*, from which this quote stems, largely unnoticed, even if they could have given him a wider insight into Laugier's urban ideas. Instead, he eagerly studied Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* in its second edition of 1755 (1st 1753), excerpting from and commenting on the *Essai* a whole forty-six pages of his last cahier (Fig. 5).<sup>34</sup> But instead of delving into Laugier's architectural theory, Jeanneret devoted most of his attention to Laugier's criticism of Paris and his suggestions for an urban redevelopment of France's capital.

At the turn of the year 1911, Jeanneret lived in Neubabelsberg, on the outskirts of Berlin, of which he said: "I am not convinced by Berlin, and when one leaves the immense avenues, there is only disgust, and horror,"<sup>35</sup> and which he found dreadful in the monotony of its "rues corridors." On the other hand, he adored the grand gesture of the Siegesallee towards the Brandenburg Gate. And while he worked, under Behrens, on neo-classicist buildings, Jeanneret began reading Abbé Laugier's *Essai*; this is between mid-January and the 12th of March, 1911.<sup>36</sup> As much as it is not surprising that Jeanneret would study Laugier at some stage, the specific point in time is somewhat unexpected. One wonders what might have prompted him to study the *Essai*, and just that. This is particularly so because it seems from the dates in the notebook that Jeanneret would have travelled to the *Königliche Bibliothek*, the Royal Library at *Unter den Linden*, on weekdays (e.g. Thu, 26 January). Therefore: was studying the *Essai* something that had

Königliche Bibliothek Berlin  
le P. Laugier. de la compagnie de Jesus.  
Essai sur l'Architecture.  
~~nouvelle édition~~  
ESSAI  
sur  
L'ARCHITECTURE.  
NOUVELLE ÉDITION.  
revue et corrigée et augmentée;  
AVEC  
UN DICTIONNAIRE DES TERMES  
et des planches qui en facilitent  
l'application  
Par le P. LAUGIER de la compagnie de  
Jesus.  
A PARIS.  
chez Duchesne, Libraire sur le Pont-Neuf,  
au-dessous de la Fontaine de la Vierge,  
du Gout. Temple  
M.D.CC.LV  
avec approbation et Privilège  
du Roy.

5. Le Corbusier.  
Page from the manuscript  
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been requested by or simply supported through Behrens's practice? It is quite clear that Behrens's office was one of the best places at the time to be close to the artistic *and* intellectual debate on modern architecture. Hendrik Petrus Berlage's book *Grundlagen und Entwicklung der Architektur*<sup>37</sup> was available in the office, as well as August Thiersch's proportional studies<sup>38</sup> (which led, amongst other sources, to Le Corbusier's *tracés régulateurs*)—and Wright's *Wasmuth Portfolio*.<sup>39</sup> In short: through the distance of a century it looks as if there was hardly a better place for Jeanneret to absorb the current architectural debate, which included theories developed through history.

#### LAUGIER AS STARTING POINT OF A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE CITY

Laugier's *Essai* could have such an impact on Jeanneret because Laugier proposed to abolish the old, winding streets of historical Paris and to design something larger, grander, instead. It might have been as if Laugier had directly criticized Camillo Sitte's theories and everything that had to do with the topic of irregularity. Or was it quite like that?

On over 40 pages of this cahier, Jeanneret copied passages of Laugier's *Essai*, 25 of which are devoted to questions of urban design, covering topics such as entries of a town, the street layout, and gardens, including the park of Versailles. Laugier's core argument on these pages is that Paris needs to be redesigned, and that it requires a sense of monumental grandeur, with wide roads, magnificent entries with triumphal arches. Laugier also presents the idea—with Jeanneret noting this—that the city needs to be conceived as a park, and, in that context, that a good balance of order, symmetry and variety need to be applied: "Il faut regarder une ville comme une forêt."<sup>40</sup> Laugier says: "One must look at a town as a forest. The streets of the one are the roads of the other; both must be cut through in the same way. The essential beauty of a park consists in the great number of roads, their width and their alignment." And he continues to describe how this park should be designed with "at one and the same time order and fantasy, symmetry

and variety,”<sup>41</sup> culminating in: “The more variety, abundance, contrast and even disorder in this composition, the greater will be the piquant and delightful beauty of the park.”<sup>42</sup> In this manner, Laugier’s comments on the park become directly transferable to aid Jeanneret’s understanding of the intended unity of a city’s design. Having excerpted all these ideas, Jeanneret finishes the cahier with a long and very clear rejection of the picturesque:

My impression of this book: . . . His ideas about urban design are perfect for his era, and for art . . . Always striving for the *grand style*, which is superior to the surprises and entertainment of the pictorial . . . In the present day, when a reaction can be detected against the outdated principles of the mediaeval pictorial style developed by Sitte, Laugier speaks with uncommon force because he is of an era which has already tried and tested the *grand style* and which, having reached saturation point, but also strengthened by this extraordinary development, has turned towards charm and grace. We are emerging from our spinelessness, we have allowed ourselves to be exploited by a childish crisis of romanticism, and are yearning for a style which, as an expression of the growing wisdom of our philosophy and science, of the generosity of our social aspirations, will take shape to express this in adequate terms i.e. more as abstract beauty than petty materialism, one which tends towards greatness, which is a sign of the masses marching in unison and overthrowing the pictorial that marks out an individualism which is impoverished by its narrowness.<sup>43</sup>

Those pages by Laugier, describing the monumental entries to a city, the intersections in the form of *patte d’oie*, triumphal arches and similar, practically form the base of Baron Haussmann’s *percement* and redesign of Paris, exactly 100 years after Laugier had written them. And it is difficult not to think of Le Corbusier’s 1920s urban designs while reading these passages since they sound like a direct preparation of the *Ville contemporaine*. With this in mind, one can draw the line from Laugier via Haussmann to Le Corbusier in the perception of the role that monumental order plays or should play for Paris.

What kind of images, however, Jeanneret might have had in front of his inner eye in 1911 when reading these lines is impossible to know, of course. But even if a mostly futile attempt, there may be some value in asking what reference streets and buildings there might have been that could have embodied for Jeanneret in early 1911 what Laugier had written about 150 years earlier. This might be the University in Munich, in fact the whole Ludwigstraße—with the Royal Library where Jeanneret spent many days in 1910 studying literature on *Städtebau*; the long and straight Bismarckstraße in Berlin and possibly even Unter den Linden; plus designs Jeanneret saw at the *Städtebau-Ausstellung* in Berlin, June 1910.

WILLIAM RITTER AND  
THE QUESTION OF A FUNCTIONAL OR AESTHETIC CITY

Jeanneret's Voyage d'Orient in 1911 interrupted further attempts at pursuing his studies of urban questions. Having learnt this much on urban design, walking through Istanbul and Rome however triggered further ideas. The volume *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier* speaks of these experiences.<sup>44</sup> These have a lot to do with the Swiss writer and art critic William Ritter. During the latter part of the year 1910, Ritter became first a friend, later a mentor for the young Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (Fig. 6). Ritter influenced Jeanneret intellectually, even became a fatherly support person with whom Jeanneret could communicate about feelings of essential self-doubt. Elsewhere, I have called him a therapist for Jeanneret; this is valid at least for the early years of their mutual friendship.<sup>45</sup> Ritter's influence, however, also manifested itself in a re-orientation of Jeanneret's architectural interests, at least temporarily, away from "La Construction des villes" and towards the Voyage d'Orient. Having encouraged him to see the vernacular cultures of the Balkan, Ritter strongly advocated that Jeanneret should publish his journals of this voyage. While he was of the opinion that Jeanneret was dealing with unnecessary, maybe even irrelevant questions of an aesthetic of the city, he would have



6. Le Corbusier.  
Portrait of William Ritter, 1916.

steered Jeanneret towards seeing the city through its functional requirements. Ritter wished Jeanneret to set his own priorities: “Make what is beautiful *for yourself*, as it pleases you,” but equally “make beautiful things for your people, *things it needs*; and it will be for the people, not you, to decide what it needs.”<sup>46</sup> In a letter of September 1911, Ritter used pigs as an example to make his point, in his inimitable strong and colourful language:

You may call it a paradox, but just reflect on this for a minute: it is the stomach that digests, and food is made for the stomach. Imagine food revolting against the stomach: food decides one fine day that its main purpose is to be beautiful. From then on, the stomach can no longer tolerate it and says ‘I don’t give a d. about your beauty; beauty to me is something I can digest.’ The problem is not to be theoretically beautiful but to be *digestibly* beautiful.<sup>47</sup>

Ritter concludes his letter with the following observation:

If one casts pearls before swine, it is not the swine who are stupid. I am amazed that nobody appears to have realised this before . . . For a pig, the aim is to be a very pretty piglet. Your job is to help it achieve that and not to transform it into a gazelle or a guinea fowl. Take a look at the Acropolis, it will tell you whether or not I’m talking nonsense, and whether I’m just a doddering old b[ugger].<sup>48</sup>

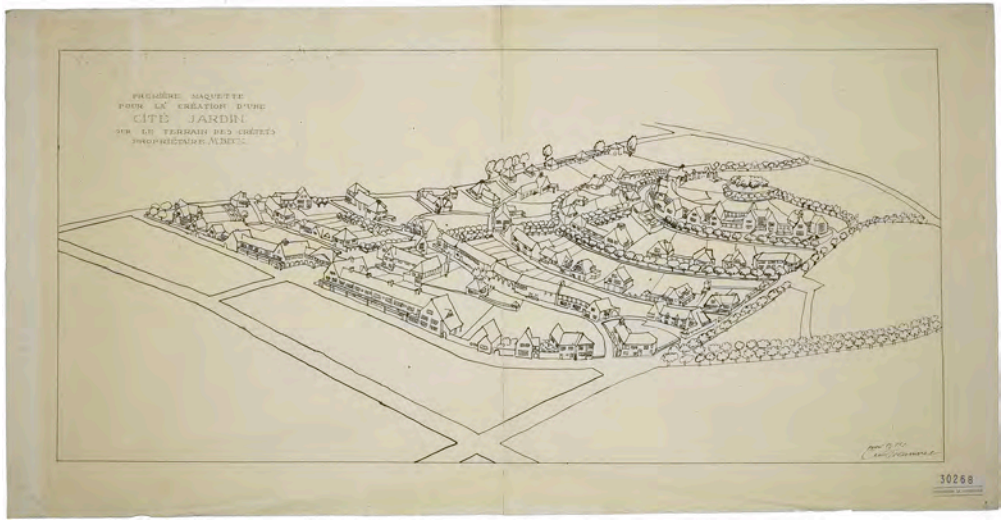
Ritter appears enormously far-sighted in these comments: it is almost as if he anticipated the post-modern debate on modernist architecture. This highly useful criticism allows us to look ahead towards the *Ville contemporaine* which is, indeed, a much stronger aesthetic statement than it is the “tool” that Le Corbusier purported it to be.<sup>49</sup> In 1911, however, Ritter’s judgement is—at least partially—unfair since Jeanneret had indeed incorporated functional questions into his treatise “La Construction des villes,” or rather: not only had he incorporated them but often argued in functional terms, while always in conjunction with questions of beauty, and if in doubt, would have given aesthetic considerations priority.<sup>50</sup> But his early “treatise” is not

just *City planning according to artistic principles*: what Jeanneret assembled is a well-considered argument for a well-functioning, aesthetically considered urban design that takes into account the perception of the city's user—a point that, as modernist architect, he would almost fully neglect, and that needed a Gordon Cullen, or a Kevin Lynch to be brought back into the debate.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, “La Construction des villes” was not pursued further by Jeanneret between 1911 and 1914; it seems that without Ritter's support, and at a time where Jeanneret's bond with L'Eplattenier was waning, the question of aesthetics of the city had little chance. But in 1914 interest was rekindled. Is it the commission by Arnold Beck that instigated this? A trip to the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne via Nancy, and then in 1915 the visit of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris helped Jeanneret to re-direct his interest in urban questions. History—in built and written form—spurred his fascination and helped him to envision the new city.<sup>52</sup>

#### 1914: CITÉ-JARDIN IN LA CHAUX-DE-FONDS AND PLACE DE LA CARRIÈRE, NANCY

In 1914, Jeanneret's intellectual investigation of the urban realm and its architecture was extended in two opposite directions: firstly, he was asked to design a garden-city settlement in La Chaux-de-Fonds, for investor Arnold Beck, a project that was not realised.<sup>53</sup> Jeanneret drew a plan and perspective for the *Cité-jardin aux Crêtets* that directly refers to, even copies Georg Metzendorf's housing estate for workers of the Krupp factories in Essen-Margarethenhöhe of 1909.<sup>54</sup> Jeanneret's design draws on *Heimatschutz* motifs and picturesque layout principles organising rows of houses following the contour lines of the terrain and featuring a gate building which clearly demarcates the entry to the housing estate in a manner close to other architects interested in an Arts-and-Crafts vernacular—one might see Voysey or Tessenow in these houses (Fig. 7). This design demonstrates how two



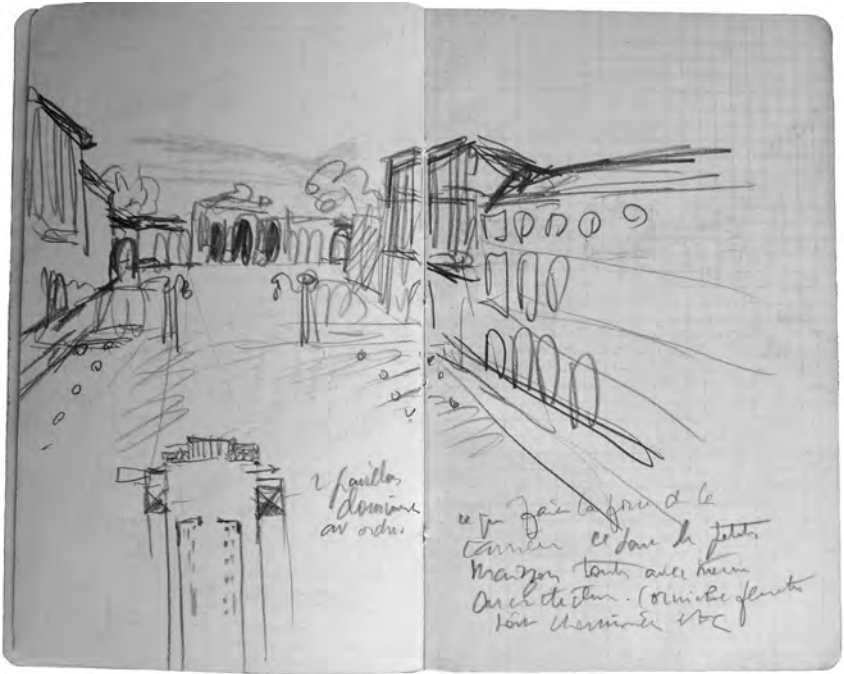
7. Le Corbusier.  
*Cité-jardin aux Crêts*, 1914.

notions of the urban run parallel in Jeanneret's mind: here the picturesque (for garden cities), and there the monumental, even classicist notion of a Laugier or Haussmann.

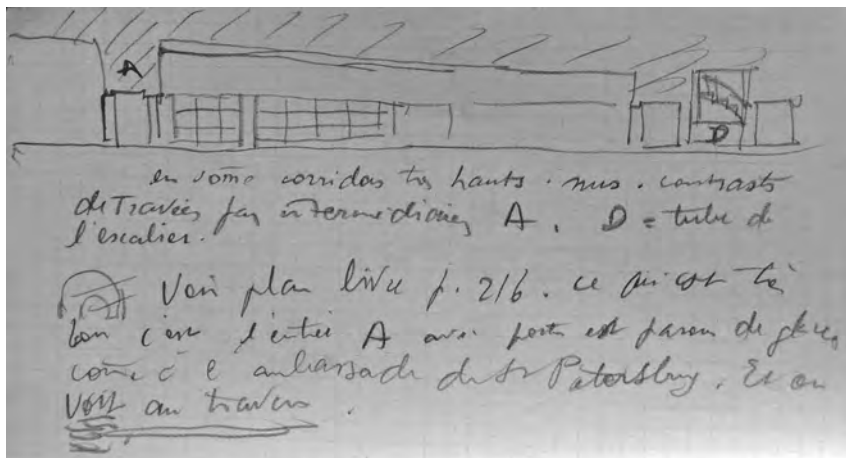
In the same year, Jeanneret travelled to the Werkbund exhibition in Cologne (15 May to 8 August), visiting Nancy on the way. Leaving La Chaux-de-Fonds on the 27th of June, he spent the following day in Nancy. There, he recorded his observations of the architecture in his travel carnet.<sup>55</sup> He sketches—quickly, but with enough precision—the characteristics of the ensemble of the Place Royale, both as seen by the visitor and in plan, and details of the columns, façades etc. over eleven pages, adding notes with comments. Jeanneret very carefully documents his impressions of the architectural qualities of the Place de la Carrière, making notes on the ensemble of small houses that together form the space: “what makes the shape of the Carrière are the small houses,”<sup>56</sup> describing their materiality and detail (Figs. 8, 4). He continues by describing and judging—often in one flow—the sweeping curve of the hemicycle and its ionic order. He further notes how two columns jointly sit on an oval base, etc.—not the slightest sign of a tiredness with classical architecture is noticeable through these notes. And he speaks of the square as an example of “sagesse,” the wisdom that is “imposed” on the citizen.<sup>57</sup>

With his visit of Cologne in early July, Jeanneret would have just caught the exhibition a month before it was closed due to the beginning of the war.<sup>58</sup> Bruno Taut's glass pavilion only receives half a page of sketches and annotations, however Gropius' exhibition hall is studied carefully (Fig. 9), with Jeanneret even noting to ask Gropius how some elements were made and being impressed with the round glass stairs, comparing the section of the hall to Behrens's design for the German embassy in St. Petersburg.<sup>59</sup> Still, one knows little about the importance Jeanneret ascribed to his urban design preoccupations during 1914.





8. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of the Place de la Carrière, Nancy.  
Carnet 1914, 4, 5.



9. Le Corbusier.  
Walter Gropius, Pavilion at the  
Werkbund exhibition in Cologne, 1914.  
Carnet 1914, 52.  
Private archive, Switzerland.

1915: BEFORE THE DEPARTURE TO PARIS  
A RECONSIDERATION OF THE 1910 WRITING

In 1915, Jeanneret developed the idea to pick up his semi-abandoned manuscript “La Construction des villes” and to bring it to publication. In his letter to Auguste Perret of 30 June, 1915, Jeanneret writes:

I will come to Paris soon, for the publication of a book which I have written about urban design and expansion plans etc.. A strong work and very balanced, but with a narrow focus and written tortuously. I will completely rework it. I’m coming to Paris to find a publisher. I thought to myself that this would be the right opportunity to bring back the study from obscurity and that this modest effort could prove very useful at present, as rules on this matter are being discussed.<sup>60</sup>

Before Jeanneret travelled to Paris in late July, he revisited the unfinished manuscript and wrote a whole survey of his work to date, containing 18 pages of an enormously detailed summary of the content. Surprisingly, despite all the contradicting stimulations of the four interjacent years, not much had changed to his 1910 version! If we follow Passanti’s suggestion in his 2002 essay (and many others), Jeanneret’s fundamental attitude towards the question of picturesque vs. classicism would have changed radically, and we would expect the arguments for a picturesque arrangement of elements of the city to have been thrown out. But despite his reading of Laugier’s *Essai* in early 1911, he had not yet touched on the content of his treatise very much to reflect this reading. In his “Avertissement,” the introduction, a few changes are nevertheless looming. Therefore it might be worthwhile quoting it in full here (even if it is in abbreviated language):

FOREWORD

{More editing to do} This book would have remained unpublished as thesis still disappointing. Complexity, and disorder in current taste.

And in the past, if *everything* had been done, so many examples that seem to flout the rules we believed to have discerned.

One thing made me *determined* to create it: the rebuilding of the towns and cities in the north and Flanders. One thing encouraged me: seeing that in France this is being addressed {spaces}; knowing that there are as yet no works popularising this subject.

Efforts such as at the Expo in Lyon (city building department). Complex theme, because difficult to follow a path that is very objective: at every turn, ideas are put forward, overturned, opposed etc. Questions abound: of a practical nature, a business, moral, psycho[logical], philosophical, social {political} nature, etc. My aim is not to propose a solution for whatever question. Instead, by studying a bit of everything, everywhere, from all periods and all places, [I aim] to bring the question back to life. To attract people interested in it, with skills in it, excite interest and discussion.

To bring it to life: in short, to put that question which is believed to be the exclusive preserve of technicians before the public at large—who are the judges of it because they are the intended recipients of the technicians' work, the public who command it and determine the technicians' tasks. To create a body of opinion, from which action [will emerge] on legislators, and on [without?] technicians. To create demand, as in commerce (a city has the architecture it deserves. W.R.<sup>61</sup>)

The type of argument: the past/the present/the future

*The past* studies the causes and results (explain the *multiple* processes, the contradictions due to different tastes, customs, era). I point them out to enable decision making.

*The present*: what is being done in America, Britain, Germany, Switzerland. Advances above all where ugliness was unbearable. Therefore less pressing [powerful?] in France.

Future what one could do.

Study of different factors: Materials: cost/sculptural/practical/hygienic.<sup>62</sup>

So Jeanneret explains why he has not published the treatise yet: the hypothesis was disappointing, underwhelming—but does he refer to his own research or to what he got out of it? But now as he sees an opportunity, even a need for the rebuilding of the cities in Flanders and since France officially deals with this problem, he feels that his treatise might remedy the lack of a popularizing work on this topic. He sees the past as a field of study of the causes and results of developments. And Jeanneret takes into account that conditions change—this is Brinckmann’s historical approach: “The downfall of XIX-century architecture is that architects were unable to feel space and spatial effect . . . Even if they succeeded in copying from history in detail, they fail to realise that the changing architectural form merely expresses a changing sense of space.”<sup>63</sup> Jeanneret had noted this to himself back in 1910: “noter que le Raumgefühl change avec les époques (note that the sense of space changes with the eras).”<sup>64</sup>

#### 1915 IN PARIS: ESTABLISHING A NEW VIEW ON THE CITY

Jeanneret left for Paris on the last days of July 1915 where he delved into library studies in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*. The intended stay of three weeks was prolonged to seven.<sup>65</sup> He devoted part of his work to two major tomes: *Topographie de France* by Gabrielle Pérelle, dated 1753/66 and *Monuments érigés en France à la gloire de Louis XV* by Pierre Patte, dated 1765, which may have served as inspiration for his radical treatment of central Paris in his 1925 *Plan Voisin*.<sup>66</sup> Antonio Bruculeri traces Jeanneret’s criticism of the historically disorderly state of Paris back to Pérelle; however, as shown above, Jeanneret had already absorbed such a critique through Laugier’s *Essai* in 1911. Jeanneret’s bibliography from his stay in Paris covers 80 works on architecture and urban design throughout the centuries, he drew new sketches as illustrations and copied extracts in tiny handwriting, to produce a full hundred pages of raw text on urban design.<sup>67</sup> Jeanneret’s excerpts from the *Bibliothèque Nationale* have yet to be fully transcribed.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless,

it can be established that in 1915 Jeanneret built on his 1910 research: a considerable proportion of the 1910 bibliography is listed again, naturally including in particular those books he had not yet tackled, or not in any detail. This category includes Brinckmann's *Spätmittelalterliche Stadtanlagen in Südfrankreich*, Charles Buls' *Esthétique des villes*, Joseph Stübgen's *Der Städtebau*, and Raymond Unwin's *Town planning in practice*, then Roland Fréart's *Parallèle de l'architecture antique av.[ec] la moderne* and Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture*, from which Jeanneret had already quoted, Laugier's *Observations sur l'architecture* and Pierre Patte's *Mémoire sur les objets les plus importants de l'architecture*.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, works of classical architectural theory from antiquity through Renaissance to Classicism show up in Jeanneret's bibliography: Vitruvius, Alberti and Palladio, alongside French theoreticians such as Blondel, Briseux, de l'Orme and Perrault, plus contemporary essays and works on social and technical questions in urban design. Such a comprehensive bibliography suggests that Jeanneret felt a need to compensate for some intellectual shortcoming—perhaps piqued by his discussions with Ritter?<sup>2</sup> Like the excerpts, the sketches Jeanneret made in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* still await in-depth analysis. These sketches cover French urban design of the 17th and 18th centuries as well as European and Far Eastern urban design subjects spanning all eras.

Marie-Jeanne Dumont notes that “Evidently, Le Corbusier knew German architecture and journals better than French.”<sup>70</sup> And indeed, this shows where Jeanneret, in a letter to Perret, lists several German publications (on works by Peter Behrens, Theodor Fischer, the Werkbund, etc.) which he suggests to supply Perret with, demonstrating how well-versed he was in the Werkbund debate and general architectural progress in Germany at the time.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, Jeanneret would have felt a lack of knowledge concerning French architectural culture, a gap of which his reading of Brinckmann and Laugier would have only made him more aware. The journey to Paris 1915 and into the thicket of the *Bibliothèque Nationale* meant a slowly growing understanding of French culture for Jeanneret, the culture he would claim more and more as his own, despite having been raised in between three cultures, that of French-speaking Switzerland, France and Germany.

## PARIS ATMOSPHERICALLY

At the same time, Jeanneret wandered through the streets of Paris and recorded historical urban settings in drawings and commentary, including the bridges (Pont Marie, Pont Neuf and others), the Tour St. Jacques, the Place des Victoires, the Louvre, St. Sulpice, the Boulevard Henri IV, the Rue Royale, the Place de la Concorde, and many other spots, including the Hôtel Lambert (Fig. 10).<sup>72</sup> In his carnet of this trip, Jeanneret quasi draws impressionistically with words, staying away from theorising and instead “bathing” emotionally in the atmosphere of Paris. He also draws atmospheric sketches and often describes the mood of a space rather than simply measuring it or asking for its functional value (Fig. 11). Repeatedly, he refers to either missing greenery or green spaces or to the either architectural or atmospheric value of trees, in particular of their canopies—this very personal experience of Paris sits in contrast to his theoretical investigations of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*.

In this carnet, Jeanneret often creates links to chapters of “La Construction des villes;” refers to the chapters he has already written, complains about the *dégagement* of Notre Dame, as had been Camillo Sitte’s argument, wishes to add to the chapter about enclosing walls (*Murs de clôture*),<sup>73</sup> and draws sections through streets as he had done in 1910.

But at the same time as he studies Paris from a historical point of view, Jeanneret judges the city in terms of its modernity. He makes a note to himself, “to devote a chapter in my book to modern Paris, to what has already been achieved.”<sup>74</sup> And the verdict is not very flattering. Viewing the city from Sacré-Cœur, he finds it lacks structure and order, asking:

Is Paris beautiful? This has not been proven. What is clear: the Pantheon admirably made (sphere); and Notre-Dame, cubes; Invalides, gracious volumes. In such a vast expanse, spires count for—and are worth—nothing. But from Sacré-Cœur one cannot see a single tree . . . The great lines are missing, the great volumes, and order. It is fundamentally random.<sup>75</sup>



10. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of the Hôtel Lambert, Paris.  
Carnet 1915, 72.
  
11. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of the Quai d'Anjou, Paris.  
Carnet 1915, 70.



## IDEAS, INVENTIONS POINTING TOWARDS MODERNISM

Additionally, it appears that Jeanneret uses the built history of Paris to produce images of the future. He exclaims: “It is a fact that the Tour St. Jacques is the most futuristic, the most cubist architecture one could imagine.”<sup>76</sup> While Jeanneret transforms historical architecture in his mind into the future city, he is aided in this process by Auguste Perret. Together with Charles L’Eplattenier and William Ritter, Perret played a vital role for Jeanneret’s intellectual development. Jeanneret’s notes of early August 1915 in Paris are filled with suggestions Perret seems to have made—apparently he found San Marco in Venice “une infecte camelote, le comble du mauvais goût.”<sup>77</sup> He also advised Jeanneret about roads and buildings—and it appears as if Perret was pointing Jeanneret into his future, towards what would become the *Ville contemporaine*:

Auguste Perret sees towers. Instead of 4,000 square metres of 5-storey buildings, have 1,000 m<sup>2</sup> of 20-storey buildings. And make the 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> into parkland with big trees. Align your towers in this sea of greenery. You will have one of the most majestic avenues that a mind can dream up. 9 August 1915.<sup>78</sup>

Further, Perret advised on roads of which he saw two kinds:

Aug. Perret sees two types of street. Preserved = rue de Rivoli. Free, with recesses in height and depth (system developed from 25bis [Rue] Franklin) with at the time 2 or 4 rows of trees at the bottom, in the setbacks, and vegetation in both depth and height. Irrigation and drainage would have to be combined so the concierge could water it all automatically. 10 August 1915.<sup>79</sup>

Through these notes, both from his library studies as well as from walking through Paris and his conversations with Perret, the reader slowly sees elements emerge that point towards the *Ville contemporaine* and the *Plan Voisin*: freestanding “cubistic, futuristic” towers, big lines and order brought into

the city. But we are not there yet. And it is necessary to bear in mind that in all these forward-looking explorations, the picturesque and emotional, atmospheric city is not thrown out. Jeanneret notes:

Do a chapter on the picturesque in which I dot around according to my sketches, photos etc.. Thus I am asking the reader: Do you not have near your home some hill, some watercourse, etc. from which the view is exquisite and where a road will pass? Will this road be well made or ugly? Will it be like Istanbul: the vertiginous drops and the sea, the mosque terraces and the sea, etc.? Like Tirnovo<sup>80</sup> and each room in each house? Like Le Landeron, and each space [?] on our route, etc., etc., like La Chaux-de-Fonds, from our garden: landscape served up on a plate. No, in fact it is all rubbish, nobody thought of it.<sup>81</sup>

And through these notes and his carnet, together with other evidence from these days such as letters, it becomes visible to what extent Jeanneret was beginning to rethink his attitude towards urban planning.

#### A SHIFT IN ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CITY

It is nearly impossible to know what Jeanneret thought of his own work on “La Construction des villes” after his 1915 visit to Paris, because he did not add to or amend it any more. Already before this journey he had known his manuscript would need substantial work in order to be published. But it seems that after his visit, he realized that his 1910 writing could not easily be adapted for a French market—and that, were he to re-write it, he would need to write a completely new piece instead. “La Construction des villes” had become out-dated, through the war and the animosities between Germans and French in general, and particularly so with Jeanneret’s own growing nationalism. But also, the field had changed for him. From favouring picturesque solutions, he had grown more attached to the sense of unity

and grandeur which classicism provided. Both Brinckmann and Laugier had been pivotal in opening up new visions of the urban form. All this was added to by Jeanneret's experience of the Voyage d'Orient and by Perret's suggestions for a future city.

Jeanneret's understanding of what was needed for a city to function as an organic whole had shifted. Would this have had to do with the changing face of the new discipline of urban design, as well? Hinting at the difference between the German notion of *Städtebau* and the French *urbanisme*, Dumont has suggested that this was more than a linguistic difference:

A change of attitude and cultural refocusing which were to be translated splendidly by a neologism that appeared in precisely the same period: the word *urbanisme*. For the invention of a term to denote this new discipline, or rather this bundle of disciplines, did not happen overnight. Depending whether you were an architect or an engineer, looking to Britain or Germany, you would speak of the science of town plans (*town planning*), or of city building (*Städtebau*), of urban hygiene or designs . . .<sup>82</sup>

This rings true to a certain extent, however one will need to acknowledge that Sitte's conscious turn towards a *Künstlerischer Städtebau* had only happened because the German experts on town-planning of the 1880s, such as Josef Stübben, had been perfectly scientific in their approach, and had simply left any artistic considerations behind.

All in all, it is visible that "La Construction des villes" of the years 1910/11 marked a certain attitude and approach towards the city, a well-tempered combination of aesthetic and functional considerations together with a conservative approach to urban spaces. Nothing was wrong with this. But Jeanneret would have begun to sense that there was a bigger, brighter future in urban design to be explored. What this essay then has attempted to show is how Jeanneret extended his view by making use of the combination of historical research (both in reading and writing as in observations of the built reality) with investigations into contemporary developments.

Passanti quotes a letter of 16 January 1911 to L'Eplattenier in which Jeanneret declares himself freed from the "medievalizing morass . . ." and exclaims: "So, all my enthusiasm goes now to Greece and Italy . . ."<sup>83</sup> For Passanti, the shift happened in June 1910. While it is undeniable that Jeanneret began to strongly appreciate the classicist monumental language of urban design as a design tool, it is important to me to underline that throughout "La Construction des villes"—and throughout Le Corbusier's work, in fact—ambivalences remain, one might even say, are being used as an artistic device. Le Corbusier nourishes an affection for ideas or architectural elements that contradict one another, and are strongest when this contradiction is unresolved. Taken in this sense, it seems futile to attempt to locate a precise moment of a switch of mind: the tension between the picturesque and the monumental is introduced at the very moment when Jeanneret delves into the study of Sitte's writings: in April 1910. The point I have made before and will maintain here is that it is quite obvious (when reading his publications, personal notes and letters over a longer period of time) that he is able, like hardly anybody else, to maintain contradictory opinions and beliefs and offer them at the same time. This is also what happens with the question of picturesque vs. monumental which does not get decided in the years of 1910/11, in fact which seems to never fully get decided.

## NOTES

- 1 Stanislaus von Moos, *Elemente einer Synthese* (Frauenfeld und Stuttgart: Huber, 1968), 337–341.
- 2 Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter, *Collage City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), 34.
- 3 This essay, combining existing and new material, is able to provide additional interpretation. I am grateful for access to private archival material from Switzerland. I thank Kim Sanderson for her translations.

- 4 For a full account of Le Corbusier's architectural formation, see Harold Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1997).
- 5 See Antonio Bruculeri, "The Challenge of the 'Grand Siècle,'" in von Moos and Arthur Rüegg, eds., *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 99–108.
- 6 Brooks, *Formative Years*, 207.
- 7 Christoph Schnoor, ed., *La Construction des villes: Le Corbusiers erstes städtebauliches Traktat von 1910/11* (Zurich: gta, 2008).
- 8 Francesco Passanti, "Architecture: Classicism, Proportion and Other Issues," in *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, 82.
- 9 See *Ibid.*, 81–83.
- 10 Camillo Sitte, *Der Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (Vienna: Teubner, 1889).
- 11 Charles L'Eplattenier, "L'esthétique des villes", in [Résumé de l'intervention de Charles L'Eplattenier à l'] *Assemblée générale des délégués de l'Union des villes suisses réunis à la Chaux-de-Fonds à l'Hôtel de Ville, les 24 et 25 septembre 1910, Compte-rendu des délibérations de l'assemblée générale des délégués de l'union des villes suisses, 1910; Beilage zum schweizerischen Zentralblatt für Staats- und Gemeinde-Verwaltung* 11 (1910), 24–31.
- 12 Camillo Sitte's *Der Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* has been translated into English as: Camillo Sitte, *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*, trans. George R. Collins and Christiane Crasemann Collins (London: Phaidon Press, 1965). In addition to Sitte, these are: Karl Henrici, *Beiträge zur praktischen Ästhetik im Städtebau* (Munich: Callwey, 1904); Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Der Städtebau. Kulturarbeiten, Vol. 4* (Munich: Callwey, 1906); Johann Hubatschek, *Die bautechnischen Aufgaben einer modernen Stadt* (Linz: Mareis, 1905); Theodor Fischer, *Stadterweiterungsfragen* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1903).
- 13 Albert Erich Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1908).
- 14 "Eine besondere Leistung Brinckmanns ist die Neubewertung der städtebaulichen Leistungen von Renaissance, Barock und Klassizismus." Jochen Meyer, Afterword to *Platz und Monument* (Reprint of 1st ed. 1908, Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2000), 187.
- 15 Meyer, Afterword to *Platz und Monument*, 178.
- 16 Manuscript Lcdv 182–188, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 369–373.
- 17 "Es wird nichts damit erreicht, daß man in eine Stadt etwas hineinstellt oder irgend etwas in ihr aufbaut, alles kommt auf das Wie an. Aus den verschiedenen Teilschönheiten resultiert dann die

- Gesamtschönheit der Stadt, aus den wohldurchgebildeten harmonischen Einzelheiten soll eine große und reiche Mannigfaltigkeit der Gesamterscheinung entwickelt werden.” Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*, 140.
- 18 See Sitte’s project for the transformation of the Votive Church plaza in Vienna, in the chapter: “Example of an Urban Arrangement”, 141–159 of Sitte, *City Planning According to Artistic Principles*.
- 19 Walter C. Behrendt, *Die einheitliche Blockfront als Raumelement im Stadtbau* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1911).
- 20 “Das Haus bestimmt die Physiognomie der Straße, der Stadt, es ist das Material der Stadtbaukunst.” Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*, 170.
- 21 “Or 1 maison 1 ville, une chambre, tout ça c’est que l’application du goût du beau *volume*. C’est ce volume qu’il faut apprendre à comprendre aux foules, à savoir créer, aux architectes. Ils feront la chambre, alors et puis la maison; et puis la rue, et puis la place, en juste volume, en beau volume. Et concluons par ce que M. Brinckmann résume parfaitement son livre. *Construire des villes veut dire: av. du matériel de maison dresser des volumes!* (Städte bauen heißt: mit dem Hausmaterial Raum gestalten!)” Manuscript Lcdv 448–449, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 558.
- 22 “Pourquoi tant des places anciennes, restées à l’abri des dévastations cadastriques, offrent-elles dans leur surface de bizarres ondulations? Ce sont des rigoles qu’ont creusées petit à petit les voitures en repassant dans la même piste, déterminant des aires légèrement exhaussées qui devinrent les socles tout désignés pour l’emplacement des monuments. C’est en ces points précis qu’il faut chercher les antiques fontaines, les puits, les oratoires, le grand arbre et son banc de pierre, rendez-vous tranquille du soir. Sitte dit avoir observé, que d’instinct, en hiver, les gamins dans les villages plantent leurs hommes de neige toujours au ‘point mort.’” Manuscript Lcdv 176–178, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 366–367.
- 23 Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 129.
- 24 These are illustrations 34, page 103, and 40, page 119 (Figs. B2-20-329 and -335, FLC).
- 25 Brooks believed this drawing by Jeanneret to date from 1915, not, as it does, from 1910.
- 26 “Eine Straße wird nicht dadurch schön, daß man Miethausfassaden wie ein Kartenblatt biegt.” Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*, 168.
- 27 “Das Verlangen nach Befreiung des Blickes ließ die gerade reinliche Straße entstehen. Hat die gewundene, unregelmäßige Straße . . . auf hügeligem Gelände . . . als Kontrast zur geraden freien Straße durchaus ihre ästhetische Berechtigung, eine vollendet monumentale Situation kann sie nicht schaffen.” Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*, 168.

- 28 “La ligne noble par excellence, dans la nature. Mais le plus rare aussi c’est la droite.” Manuscript Lcdv 123, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 327.
- 29 “Telle est l’avenue des Champs-Élysées à Paris couronnée par l’immense arc de triomphe derrière lequel se couche en gloire le soleil. Tel à Berlin, le soir, ‘l’effet’ de la Siegesallee à l’extrémité de laquelle se dresse la Siegesäule toute noyée dans le pourpre du couchant et se mirant presque dans le macadam poli par les automobiles. – La Bismarckstrasse à Charlottenburg aux dimensions énormes qui suit une direction inflexible pendant d’interminables kilomètres, seule droite, à peu près, au travers de quartiers qui sont et seront tous tracés suivant les procédés nouveaux.” Manuscript Lcdv 123–24, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 327–328.
- 30 “En effet, des disciples maladroits de C. Sitte, outrepassant ses théories en seraient arrivés presque, si on n’y mettait le holà, à revivre l’époque médiévale si brillamment réhabilitée par le livre de l’éclectique Viennois. Ces réactionnaires, – Monsieur Brinckmann entre autres dans sa très belle étude ‘Platz und Monument’ – sont placés quelque peu dans une situation analogue à celle de Sitte, voici 30 ans.” Manuscript Lcdv 37, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 255.
- 31 “Jouissant des réformes accomplies, mais redoutant déjà une trop prompte satisfaction, et, parce, l’engendrement d’un statu quo fatal, ils devinent certaines tendances morbides; mais en les dénonçant, – comme le fait M. Brin[c]kmann, – sans considérations accessoires, ils risquent de troubler le lecteur non averti, simple spectateur distrait n’ayant pas connaissance du fond de la question.” Manuscript Lcdv 37, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 255.
- 32 Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*, 140. Manuscript Lcdv 436, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 549.
- 33 Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994, originally Paris: Crès, 1925), 65. “We have now formulated an ideal and precise aim. Already, in the time of Louis XIV, the Abbé Laugier had propounded the following axioms: 1. *Chaos, disorder and a wild variety in the general lay-out* (i.e. a composition rich in contrapuntal elements like a fugue or symphony). 2. *Uniformity in detail* (i.e. reticence, decency, ‘alignment’ in detail).” Le Corbusier, *The City of To-Morrow*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Payson and Clarke, 1929), 72.
- 34 This is the last of the thirteen cahiers that make up the 1910/11 version of “La Construction des villes.” Manuscript Lcdv 475–520, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 566–594.
- 35 “Berlin ne me conquiert pas et dès que l’on sort des immenses avenues, c’est de l’écœurement, de l’horreur.” Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, letter to his parents, 21 October 1910, R1-5-68 FLC.
- 36 Manuscript Lcdv 495, 520, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 579, 594.
- 37 Hendrik Petrus Berlage, *Grundlagen und Entwicklung der Architektur. Vier Vorträge* (Berlin: Bard, 1908).

- 38 August Thiersch, *Die Proportionen in der Architektur* (Darmstadt: Bergsträsser, 1893); also in *Die architektonische Composition. Handbuch der Architektur, Part 4, Vol. 1* (Darmstadt: Diehl, 1883).
- 39 See Passanti, "Architecture: Proportion, Classicism and Other Issues," 78–79.
- 40 Manuscript Lcdv 489, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 576.
- 41 ". . . This, however, is not sufficient: it needs a Le Nôtre to design the plan for it, someone who applies taste and intelligence so that there is at one and the same time order and fantasy, symmetry and variety, with roads here in the pattern of a star, there in that of a *patte d'oie*, with a featherlike arrangement in one place, featherlike in another, with parallel roads further away and everywhere *carrefours* of different designs and shape." Laugier, *An Essay on Architecture*, trans. Anni and Wolfgang Herrmann (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1977), 128.
- 42 Laugier, *Essay on Architecture*, 128.
- 43 Manuscript LCdv 516–19, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 593–594.
- 44 Von Moos and Rüegg, *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, Catalogue entries 8–14, 170–195.
- 45 Schnoor, "'Soyez de votre temps' - William Ritter et Le Corbusier," in *Le Corbusier. La Suisse, Les Suisses*, XIII Rencontre de la Fondation Le Corbusier (Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, Éditions de la Villette, 2006), 104–127.
- 46 "Faites *pour vous* les belles choses qu'il vous plaira, faites pour votre peuple les belles choses *qu'il lui faut*, et ce n'est pas vous, mais lui le juge de ce qu'il lui faut." Ritter to Jeanneret, 26 September 1911 (SLA Bern, 1911.291).
- 47 "Criez au paradoxe, mais réfléchissez deux minutes. C'est l'estomac qui digère et la nourriture qui est faite pour l'estomac: représentez vous la révolte de la nourriture contre l'estomac: les aliments ont décidé un beau matin qu'avant tout il faut être beau. La dessus l'estomac ne les supporte plus et réponds je me f. de votre beauté, la beauté pour moi c'est que je vais digérer. Le problème n'est pas d'être beau théoriquement mais *digestiblement*." Ibid.
- 48 "Si l'on jette des perles aux cochons, c'est pas le cochon qui est bête, et je m'étonne que personne ne semble s'en être avisé. Au revoir. L'idéal des porcs est d'être un très joli goret: c'est votre devoir de l'y aider et non de les changer en gazelles ou en pintades. Regardez l'acropole elle vous dira si je divague ou non et si je suis un vieux c.[on]." Ibid.
- 49 Francesco Passanti has written extensively about this question.
- 50 See Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 220–223.
- 51 Gordon Cullen, *Townscape* (London: Architectural Press, 1961); Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960).



- 52 These visits are still not fully researched, despite Philippe Duboy's study of the library visit in Paris. With hundreds of fiches/tiny filled pages with notes still not fully transcribed, there is further research to be done.
- 53 Brooks, *Formative Years*, 368.
- 54 Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 165–169.
- 55 Jeanneret, Carnet 1914. Private Archive, Switzerland.
- 56 “ce que fait la forme de la carrière ce sont les petites maisons.” Jeanneret, Carnet 1914, n.p. [4-5]. Private Archive, Switzerland.
- 57 Jeanneret, Carnet 1914, n.p. [9]. Private Archive, Switzerland.
- 58 For the itinerary see Brooks, *Formative Years*, 369–372.
- 59 Jeanneret, Carnet 1914, n.p. [52]. Private Archive, Switzerland.
- 60 “Je pense venir bientôt à Paris, pour la publication d'un bouquin que j'avais écrit sur la Construction des villes, plans d'extension, etc. Un gros travail très avancé, mais écrit dans [un] esprit étroit et tortueux. Je le remanierai complètement. Je viendrai à Paris pour trouver un éditeur, me disant que l'heure est peut-être favorable de sortir cette étude de son tiroir; et que ce modeste effort pourrait être utile, en ce moment où l'on discute de lois relatives à ce thème.” Jeanneret to Auguste Perret, 30 June, 1915. Marie-Jeanne Dumont, *Le Corbusier. Lettres à Auguste Perret* (Paris: Éditions du Linteau, 2002), 145ff.
- 61 Here, Jeanneret refers to a letter exchanged with William Ritter in 1911; see above.
- 62 Jeanneret, unpublished pages of the manuscript “La Construction des villes.”
- 63 “Es ist das Verhängnis der Architektur des XIX. Jahrhunderts, daß den Architekten das Gefühl für Raum und Raumwirkung versagte . . . Gelingt es auch, im Detail historisch genau zu kopieren, so fehlt die Erkenntnis, daß die wechselnde architektonische Form nur Ausdruck eines sich wandelnden Raumgefühles ist.” Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*, 153.
- 64 Manuscript Lcdv 434, in Schnoor, *La Construction des villes*, 547.
- 65 Brooks, *Formative Years*, 403.
- 66 Pierre Patte, *Monumens érigés en France à la gloire de Louis XV* (Paris, 1765); Gabrielle Pérelle, *Topographie de France*, Paris: Jombert 1753. See Brucculeri, “The Challenge of the ‘Grand Siècle,’” and the catalogue entry ‘Parisian Urbanism,’ in von Moos and Rüegg, *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, 200.
- 67 The bibliography, sketches and excerpts are filed under B2-20 at the Fondation Le Corbusier.
- 68 Philippe Duboy transcribed and published some of Jeanneret's notes in “Charles-Edouard

- Jeanneret à la Bibliothèque Nationale,” *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 49 (1979), 9–12, and *Casabella* 531/532 (1987), under the heading ‘L.C.B.N. 1915.’
- 69 Where listed in the 1910 bibliography, these appear as: Albert Erich Brinckmann, *Spätmittelalterliche Stadtanlagen in Südfrankreich* (Berlin: Schenck 1910); Charles Buls, *L’Esthétique des villes* (Bruxelles: Bruyland-Christophe, 1893); Roland Fréart, Sieur de Chambray, *Parallèle de l’architecture antique av. la moderne* (Paris: Martin 1650); Laugier’s *Essay* (1753) and *Observations* (1765); Pierre Patte, *Mémoire sur les objets les plus importants de l’architecture* (Paris: Rozet, 1769); Joseph Stübgen, *Der Städtebau. Handbuch der Architektur, Part 4*, Vol. 9 (Darmstadt: Bergstrasser, 1890); and Raymond Unwin, *Grundlagen des Städtebaues* (Berlin: Baumgärtel, 1910), originally published as *Town-Planning in Practice* (London: Fisher and Unwin, 1909). This bibliography follows Jeanneret’s notes in B2-20 FLC.
- 70 “Le Corbusier, à l’évidence, connaissait mieux l’architecture et les revues allemandes que ce qui touchait à la France.” Marie-Jeanne Dumont, ed., *Le Corbusier, Lettres à ses maîtres*, vol. 1, *Lettres à Auguste Perret* (Paris: Éditions du Linteau, 2002), 143n2.
- 71 See Francesco Passanti, “The Vernacular, Modernism and Le Corbusier,” *JSAH* 56 (1997), 438–451.
- 72 These experiences are recorded in a separate carnet (filled with comments and drawings on architecture and the city on almost 150 pages), kept in a private archive in Switzerland.
- 73 Jeanneret, *Carnet* 1915, 75.
- 74 “Consacrer ds mon livre un chapitre au Paris moderne, aux choses déjà réalisés.” Jeanneret, *Carnet* 1915, 21.
- 75 “Est-ce beau Paris ? C’est pas prouvé. D’évident, ceci : le Panthéon fait admirablement, (boule) et N-Dame, cubes, Invalides, volumes gracieux. Dans une si grande étendue, les flèches ne comptent et ne valent rien . . . Mais du Sacré-Cœur, on ne voit aucune arbre . . . Il manque des grandes lignes, des grands volumes, une ordonnance. C’est un hasard, au fond.” Jeanneret, *Carnet* 1915, 22.
- 76 “Il est un fait que la tour St Jacques es la plus futuristique la plus cubistique architecture qu’on puisse imaginer.” Jeanneret, *Carnet* 1915, 23.
- 77 B2-20-108 FLC.
- 78 “Auguste Perret voit des tours. Au lieu de 4000 mètres carrés de maisons à 5 étages, prenez 1000 m<sup>2</sup> de maisons à 20 étages. Et les 3000 m<sup>2</sup> faites en du parc à grds arbres. Aligned vos tours dans cette mer de verdure. Vous aurez l’une de plus majestueuses allées que cerveau puisse rêver.

- 9 août 1915.” B2-20-106 FLC.
- 79 “Aug. Perret voit 2 types de rues. Préservé = rue de Rivoli. Libre, avec redans en hauteur v. profondeur (système développé de 25bis [Rue] Franklin) avec alors 2 ou 4 allées d’arbre en bas, dans les redans, et végétation en profondeur et en hauteur. Il faut alors combiner des irrigations et drainages pour arrosage automatique du tout par le concierge. 10 août 1915.” B2-20-107 FLC.
- 80 i.e. Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria.
- 81 “Faire un chapitre sur le pittoresque ou je saute du coq à l’âne d’après mes croquis, photos etc. Ainsi je pose la question au lecteur : N’avez vous pas proche de par vous n’importe quelle colline, n’importe quel cours d’eau etc. d’où la vue est exquise et où une rue va passer ? Passera-t-elle bien ou laide ? Aussi Stamboul : les dégringolades et la mer, les terrasses des mosquées et la mer, etc. Ainsi Tirnovo et chaque sale [?] de chaque maison. Ainsi Landeron, et chaque chambre sur le cours, etc. etc. Ainsi la Chaux-de-Fonds, depuis notre jardin : assiette au paysage. Mais non, tout est foutu, personne n’y a pensé.” B2-20-116 FLC.
- 82 Dumont, *Lettres à Auguste Perret*, 147–148.
- 83 Passanti, “Architecture: Classicism, Proportion and Other Issues”, 82–83.



1. Maison Cook, Paris, 1926.  
Living room.

HADRIAN'S VILLA AND SPATIAL DIALOGUE  
IN LE CORBUSIER'S HOUSES

INTRODUCTION

A good place to introduce the topic of this essay is the living-dining-library space in the Maison Cook, which Le Corbusier designed in 1926 (Fig. 1). The living room proper, an elongated rectangular space two floors high, takes the full depth of the house, from front to back. Along one of its long walls open the other two rooms—the dining room downstairs near the front of the house, the library upstairs near the back. And several other elements add further complexity (freestanding fireplace, staircase, curved projection). How should we look at this puzzling space? I propose that it was conceptualized by Le Corbusier as an ambiguous dialogue of three rooms, each with its own separate identity. The dialogue is ambiguous because, on the one hand, the living room dominates, providing a spatial and social centre; but on the other hand, there is a real negotiation and play between all three rooms, with a literal hierarchical reading undermined by the complexity of the composition and by the equalizing presence of a continuous ribbon window, linking the living and dining rooms along the façade. On the one hand *centrality*, on the other hand *play*.

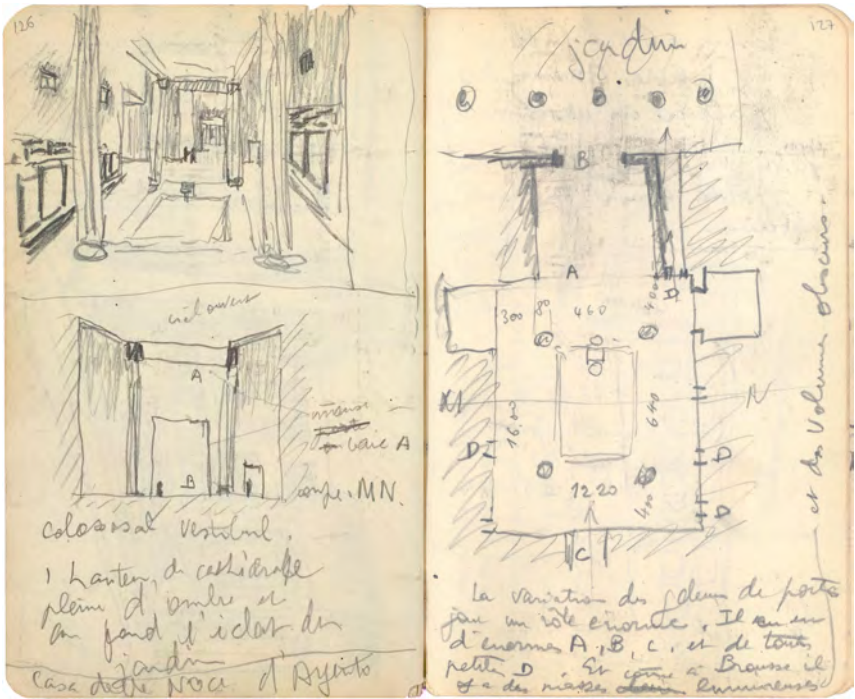
This description of interior space as a “dialogue of rooms” fits many of Le Corbusier’s houses, but would not come to mind at Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona Pavilion, which can more readily be described as continuous space,

inside and outside, organized by floating planes.<sup>1</sup> And both Le Corbusier's and Mies's interiors differ from traditional interiors where several rooms are arranged *en enfilade*: there, the rooms are independent boxes, and the relationship between them is really the dialogue between aligned doors.

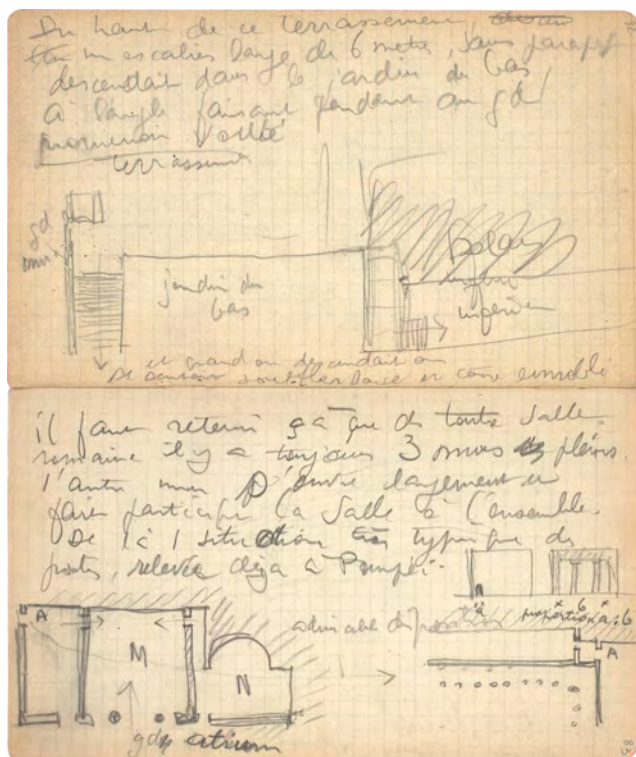
By the time he designed the Maison Cook in 1926, Le Corbusier had been evolving the concept of "dialogue of rooms" for fifteen years. The broad framework for his thinking about internal space had been a notion of space as "enclosure," acquired from reading Camillo Sitte and other authors in 1910-11, while preparing a manuscript about urban design that remained unpublished.<sup>2</sup> And an important early experience of sophisticated internal spaces had occurred during his Voyage d'Orient in 1911, when he had visited many great mosques in Turkey—in particular the Green Mosque in Bursa, where he had commented about the "admirable concordance between the volumes."<sup>3</sup> But the specific moment when the concept of "dialogue of rooms" began to acquire specificity came at the end of his Voyage d'Orient, when he visited Pompeii and Hadrian's Villa. In this essay, I will speculate on that visit and its effect, with particular attention to two sketches from Hadrian's Villa (Figs. 2, 3, 4).

In Pompeii, Le Corbusier was exposed to the characteristic typology of ancient Roman houses, with rooms arranged around two large spaces open to the sky, the Atrium and the Peristyle. The drawings in his sketchbook show a keen appreciation of the spatial richness of Pompeian interiors, though his written comments do not explicitly address the spatial aspect, focusing more generically on contrasts of light and shade, volumes and surfaces, large and small. Typical are his comments at the House of the Silver Wedding (Fig. 2): "The range of door sizes plays a huge role. There are huge ones like ABC, and tiny ones like D. And, like in Bursa, there are bright masses and dark spaces" (he is referring to the Green Mosque in Bursa, Turkey).<sup>4</sup>

A couple of weeks later, while visiting Hadrian's villa near Rome, Le Corbusier suddenly understood the spatial quality of Pompeian houses in a more structural way. Next to a plan made at the Water Court adjoining the Piazza d'Oro he wrote: "Keep in mind that, in any Roman room, there

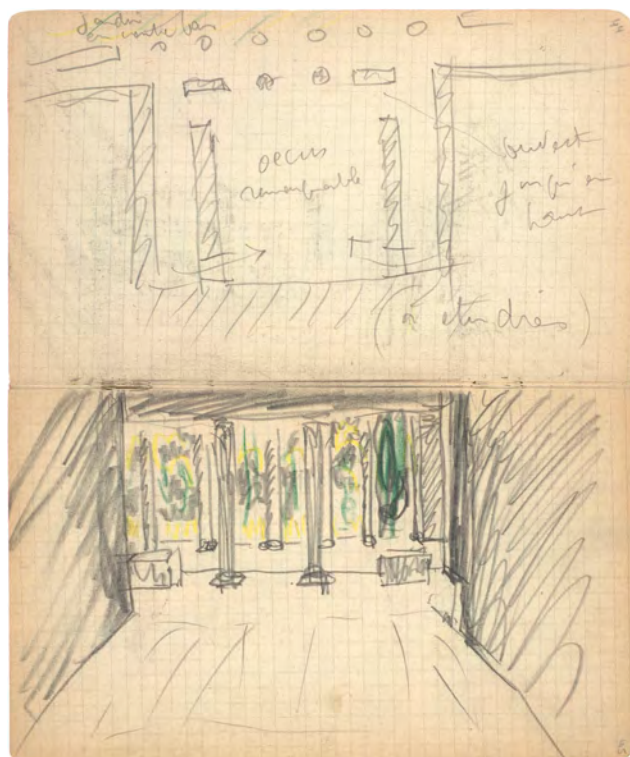


2. Le Corbusier.  
 Sketches made at the House of the Silver Wedding  
 in Pompeii, 1911.  
*Voyage d'Orient, Carnets, Carnet 4, 126-27.*



3. Le Corbusier.  
 Sketch made at the Water Court adjoining  
 the Piazza d'Oro, Hadrian's Villa, 1911.  
 See bottom half of the figure.  
*Voyage d'Orient, Carnets, Carnet 5, 82-83.*





4. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch made at the Library Court,  
Hadrian's Villa, 1911.  
*Voyage d'Orient, Carnets, Carnet 5, 44-45.*

are always three full walls. The other wall opens widely and lets the room participate in the ensemble. Hence a very typical context for the doors, already noted in Pompeii" (Fig. 3).<sup>5</sup> In other words, Roman Rooms are U-shaped spaces, closed on three sides and open on the fourth one. The tone is as if Le Corbusier has just understood something important, as if he has just had a flash of intuition.

In a narrow sense, his new understanding of Roman Rooms solves the puzzle of those huge variations in door sizes: it does so by recasting categories. What he had called "enormous doors" in Pompeii are now the "fourth walls," the open ends of the *Alae* and *Tablinum* abutting the *Atrium*; and what he had called "very small doors" are now just functional passages, so small that they don't interrupt the "full walls." There are only walls, not doors.

But the implications of Le Corbusier's new understanding go well beyond door sizes. He has acquired a new framework to conceptualize synthetically the spatial qualities of Roman interiors: because of their fourth open wall, the peripheral rooms in the Pompeian house are like extensions (niches) of the *Atrium* or *Peristyle*, and thus help to shape the "ensemble." And beyond that, Le Corbusier has acquired a new framework to conceptualize interior spaces in his own architecture: it is this new framework that interests us here.

Le Corbusier's intuition will affect his architecture in two stages, one immediate, the other ten years later.

#### CENTRALITY

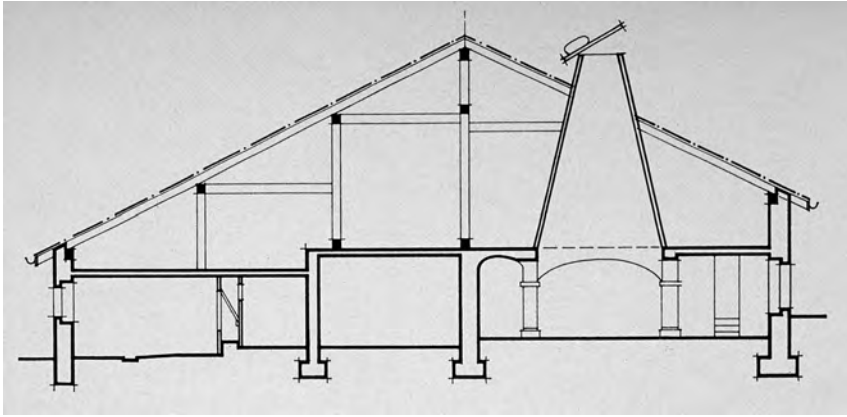
The first immediate effect was to qualify a preexisting interest in *centrality*—like in the earlier discussion of the *Maison Cook*, I use this term to indicate that the internal space has a centre or focus, it has physical and symbolic hierarchy.

Le Corbusier's interest for *centrality* predated his encounter with ancient Roman architecture. Le Corbusier's first important experience in this respect

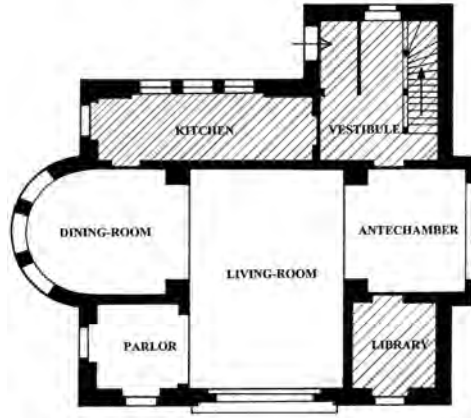
had been that of the local farms in his native Jura region of Switzerland: he even lived in such farms on two occasions, in 1910 and in 1912 (Fig. 5).<sup>6</sup> In these farms, some dating back to the 1500s, the living quarters are gathered around a tall central space serving as kitchen with an open fire and as the gathering place for the family. This space, which may be a room all by itself or form the central portion of a larger room, is two or three times taller than the surrounding spaces, because its ceiling—the chimney—is one giant pyramid rising through the spacious attic of the farm: like the attic, the chimney is built in wood, hence it must be kept away from the flames, and this is why it is so ample. These farms had had an enormous impact on Le Corbusier, so deep that forty years later he went back to them to conceptualize the Assembly Building at Chandigarh and the church at Firminy. There, he quite specifically used the sloped “chimney” form. But at a more general level, what matters is the notion of a central spatial focus, both physical and symbolic—the place that gives meaning to the rest, the place where the family gathers around the fire, where a country’s representatives gather to decide its collective course, where the faithful gather to pray. Indeed, throughout his career, from the Maison Citrohan, the Villa Cook, and the Villa Savoye in the 1920s, to the apartments of his Unité d’Habitation and to Chandigarh in the 1940s-1950s, Le Corbusier repeatedly structured his interior spaces around a powerful communal focus.

So, here we have a persistent interest of Le Corbusier for spatial hierarchy or *centrality*, an interest which predates his encounter with ancient Roman architecture and which will continue throughout his life. Together with other influences that I will not discuss here, Roman interiors gave Le Corbusier a way to articulate formally that kind of hierarchy, as a central spatial core surrounded by “Roman Rooms” that open onto it.<sup>7</sup>

The effect can already be seen in 1912, a few months after his return home, when Le Corbusier designed a house for his parents (Figs. 6, 7).<sup>8</sup> Here, he is starting from current typologies that were routine in bourgeois houses: on the one hand, combining the main rooms through French doors; and on the other hand, connecting the whole plan through an axis, which here

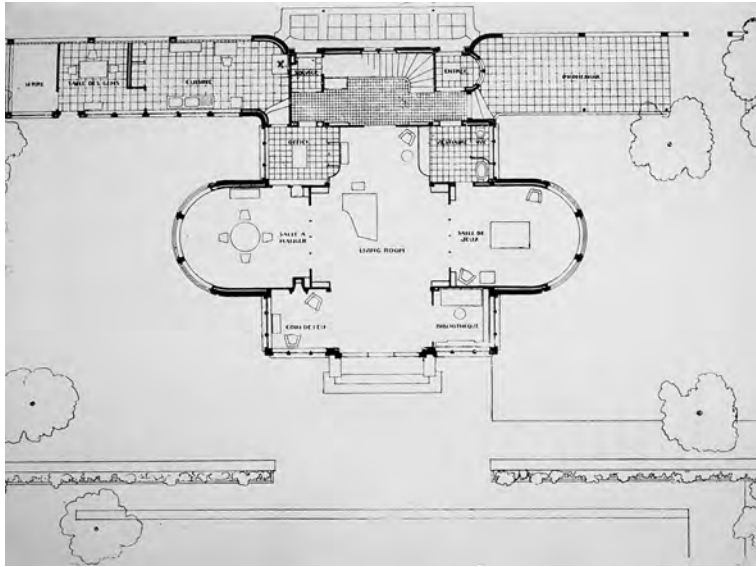


5. Farmhouse "Les Crosettes"  
near La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1614.  
Drawing by H. Mischler.  
From Max Gschwend, "Bauernhäuser  
im Hochjura," *Schweizer Baudokumentation*  
(August 1968).  
Courtesy Schweizerische  
Bauernhausforschung, Archiv Zug.



House for Le Corbusier's parents,  
La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1912.

6. Schematic plan of the main floor.  
Drawn by author.  
In order to highlight the main living spaces,  
internal walls have been thickened and some  
areas have been shaded.
7. Living room seen from the antechamber.  
Dining-room in front with parlor to the left  
separated by a curtain.



Villa Schwob, La Chaux-de-Fonds, 1916.

8. Plan of the ground floor.  
From *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 6 (1921).
9. Façade towards the garden.  
Photograph at the Bibliothèque de la Ville  
in La Chaux-de-Fonds.

goes from the antechamber, through living and dining room, to the garden. But those current typologies are now overlaid with an ancient Roman interpretation, because the living room with its large window acts like an Atrium, a spatial centre onto which open three clearly subordinate spaces (antechamber, dining room, library): the hierarchical relationship is clearly visible in photographs of the room, and it is also implied in a contemporary remark by Le Corbusier's father, who likened the living room to the nave of a cathedral, with the antechamber and dining room acting as transept.<sup>9</sup>

The Pompeian influence continues in the Villa Schwob, designed four years later (Figs. 8, 9).<sup>10</sup> This house combines two typologies, artist's studio and Pompeian house. Like in studios, the main space is an inward looking hub, with the big window, screened by curtains in its lower part, providing ample light. Like in Pompeii, the façade on the street is blind; and the main space, lit from the upper part of the big window, can be likened to an Atrium onto which open subordinate spaces, modulated from large to small.

And after Le Corbusier moved to Paris in 1917, echoes of the Villa Schwob interior will be felt in many of the interiors already mentioned, for example the Maison Cook.

## PLAY

I will now turn to the second effect that Le Corbusier's intuition about Roman Rooms had upon his architecture—an effect that will only materialize ten years after the visit to Hadrian's Villa. This second effect has to do with what I called *play*: the dialogue or negotiation between the various parts that, together, compose the main internal space of Le Corbusier's houses.

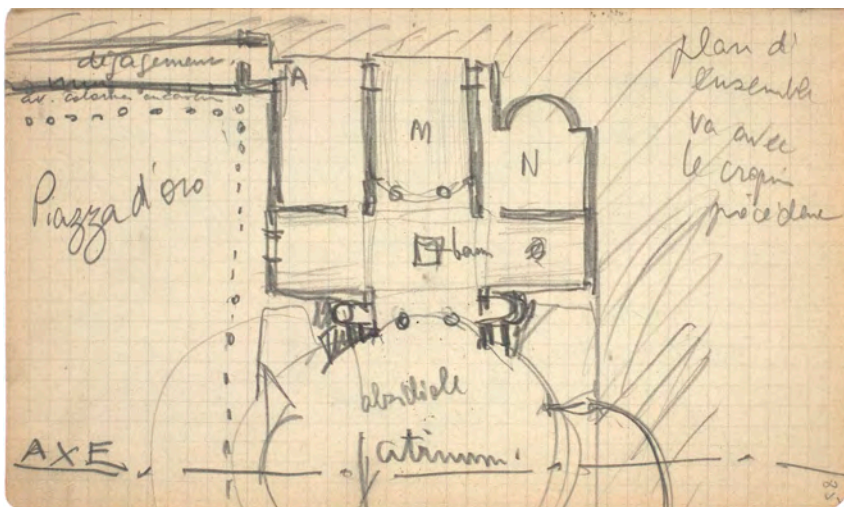
Let's look again, more closely, at the sketch made at the Water Court (Fig. 3), with its insight that “in any Roman room there are always three full walls. The other wall opens widely and lets the room participate in the ensemble.” If we think of the typical Pompeian Atrium as the spatial hub of the house, and the Alae and Tablinum as the spokes, Le Corbusier's

insight does two things: it broadens the scope of the hub (from Atrium to “ensemble”), and it shifts the focus from the hub to the spokes. Le Corbusier is aware of the hub (the ensemble), but his focus is now on the spokes (the Roman Rooms that open onto the hub): his focus is on how each Roman Room participates in the ensemble, how the dialogue happens in formal terms (the fourth open wall allows one to see from one space into the other, hence to appreciate the hollow form of both the room and the ensemble).

Note also the relationship between the three rooms in that sketch: three parallel adjoining rooms of comparable size, sharing their front alignment. The sketch is notable for being decisive in tone and yet inaccurate or incomplete, in short for revealing much about Le Corbusier's first instinctive reaction. An archaeological plan that Le Corbusier copied on the following page of his sketchbook (Fig. 10), probably taking it from his Baedeker guidebook, shows that the three rooms were part of a larger complex arrangement (the Water Court); that they did not form an autonomous coherent sub-unit of that arrangement; and that only the central room was fully open in front, while the other two were closed boxes with doors—more closets than rooms. But the initial sketch, drawn before consulting the archaeological plan, reflects his first reaction and expectations: it treats the rooms as a suite of three giant niches, one of which is open while the other two have been walled-in, all facing in the same direction and sharing a common frontal alignment.<sup>11</sup>

The lateral relationship between rooms is also evoked in a second sketch from Hadrian's Villa, which I have already mentioned but not discussed (Fig. 4). This sketch had been made on the previous day in the area known as the Library Court (Cortile della Biblioteca). It shows a typical Roman Room, closed on three sides and open on the fourth towards a lower garden, and flanked by two narrow rooms or passages. Two features struck Le Corbusier: a double row of columns in front of the opening between room and garden, and the fact that the two lateral walls of the room stop short of the front end, leaving two full-height passages to the flanking spaces. The dual layering thus generated in front of the room (by the columns and by the arrested





10. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch reproducing an archaeological plan of  
the Water Court adjoining the Piazza d'Oro,  
Hadrian's Villa, 1911.  
*Voyage d'Orient, Carnets, Carnet 5, 85.*

walls) suggests lateral movement to the right and left, while distancing the main reference from which the room draws its meaning, the garden.

We can summarize this discussion of the two sketches as follows. On the one hand, the written note on the Water Court sketch focuses on the openness and directionality of each Roman Room (three full walls, the fourth wall open to connect with the ensemble). On the other hand, the actual sketches, both of them, also explore the relationship between adjacent rooms, which can entail both their *lateral* physical connection and their *centripetal* common reference to a third party (the larger “ensemble”).

For the next ten years, as we have seen, the concept of “Roman Room” embedded in the two sketches will help Le Corbusier to articulate his pre-existing concept of *centrality*, of a hierarchical arrangement of spaces. But, soon after the end of the first World War, Le Corbusier discovered another larger potential in those two sketches—the potential for *play*. Le Corbusier had had his Roman insight during the Voyage d’Orient; but it took another epiphany, a trigger, a “booster” so to speak, to allow him to use it. That booster was his encounter with modern art—Cubist painting and Symbolist poetry.

At the end of WWI Le Corbusier became seriously involved with Cubism. Starting in 1918 he was associated with the painter Ozenfant in launching a post-cubist movement that they called Purism; and in 1921 the two acted as buyers of paintings by Picasso and Braque during the Kahnweiler auction, on behalf of the Swiss banker Raoul La Roche, for whom Le Corbusier would soon design a house.<sup>12</sup>

A central aspect of Cubism and its derivatives is the linguistic notion of the ambiguity of the sign: the meaning of a sign depends on its context. In Le Corbusier’s painting “Nature Morte à la Pile d’Assiettes,” for example, the circle can be interpreted as “hollow of the dishes” or “hole in the guitar,” depending on the context that we associate it with (Fig. 11).<sup>13</sup>

For Le Corbusier the architect, designing an interior space, a Roman Room now becomes a “room with one side wide open” that can operate in many different ways depending on the situation in which it is inserted.



11. Le Corbusier.  
Nature morte à la pile d'assiettes, 1920.

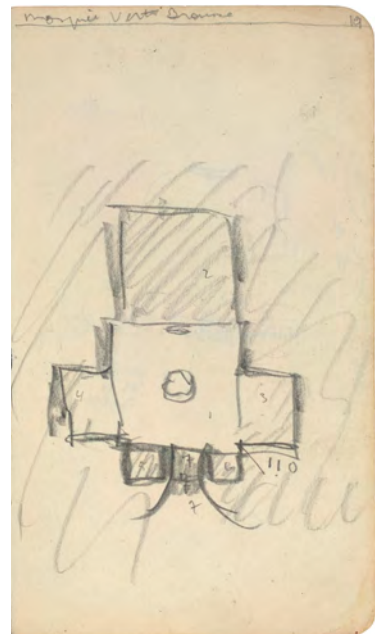
When Le Corbusier had designed the Villa Schwob, instead, a “room with one side open” had to open onto a larger and taller space, an Atrium: he could only think of a Roman room within a hierarchical diagram. I will come back to this in my discussion of the house La Roche-Jeanneret.

The other “booster,” besides Cubism, was Symbolist poetry, whose central concept had been given a classic formulation by the poet Stéphane Mallarmé in 1893 and then had been put in these terms by the poet Reverdy at the end of the first World War: the poetic image is born from the bringing together of two realities.<sup>14</sup> Le Corbusier, who had read Mallarmé and knew Reverdy, soon echoed Reverdy in the caption to the photograph of an airplane cockpit that he published in 1921 (Fig. 12). What you see in the photograph is the padded edge of a powerful machine; the dials by which you know its performance; the stick by which you dominate it; the map on which you choose where you will go; the compass by which you know where you are going. In short, the poetic experience of flying an airplane. Below the picture, Le Corbusier's caption reads, in part: “Objects that mean something and that are arranged with tact and talent create a poetic fact.”<sup>15</sup>

Applied to architecture, for example to a complex interior space with different degrees of light and shadow, this means a focus on how its different parts interact with each other, because it is that interaction, rather than the parts taken individually, that creates something new, the poetic fact. Take the Green Mosque of Bursa, near Istanbul, which Le Corbusier had visited in 1911 before Pompeii (Fig. 13). Le Corbusier had been deeply affected by this visit, noting in his sketchbook that “it's night that comes down from the second dome, and that rises filling the whole with mystery” and “an admirable concordance between the volumes.”<sup>16</sup> But in 1922, when he published his sketch of the plan, just a few months after publishing the cockpit photograph, his comment shows a new layer of understanding: “You are in a large space of marble white, flooded with light. Beyond, a second space opens, similar and of equal dimensions, full of shade and raised up by some steps (repetition in minor); on each side, two spaces in shade, still smaller; you turn around, two dark spaces, very small. From full light to dark,



12. Cockpit of a Caproni airplane,  
from Le Corbusier-Saugnier,  
“Des yeux qui ne voient pas... III: les autos,”  
*L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 10 (1921), detail.  
Later included in *Vers une architecture*.
13. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of the plan of the Green Mosque in  
Bursa, Turkey, 1911.  
*Voyage d'Orient, Carnets*, Carnet 3, 19.



a rhythm. Minuscule doors and very large bays. You are taken, you have lost the sense of normal scale. You have been subjugated by a sensory rhythm (light and volume) and by clever dimensions, to a world in itself which tells you whatever it has chosen to tell you.”<sup>17</sup> The one overriding issue is how the play between spaces and between light and shadow creates a new “world in itself,” a new poetic reality.

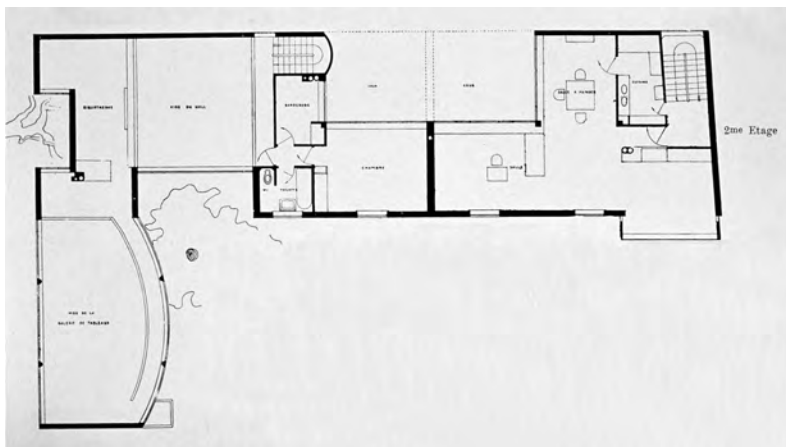
In different ways, then, both influences (Cubist painting and Symbolist poetry) liberated Le Corbusier from literalness, and opened the door to a notion of internal space as *play*. The effect was felt almost immediately in Le Corbusier's architecture. Here, we will discuss two designs, both from 1923-24: the house La Roche-Jeanneret in Paris, and the house for his parents in Vevey.

#### HOUSE LA ROCHE-JEANNERET

In 1923, soon after absorbing the lessons of Cubism and Symbolism and after writing the emotional lines about the Green Mosque, Le Corbusier designed his first important modernist house in Paris, the double house La Roche-Jeanneret, for the banker La Roche and for his own brother Albert Jeanneret and his wife Lotti Raaf (Fig. 14).

Here, we will focus on the Jeanneret living space, at the end of the long wing, on the top floor (Fig. 15). It comprises three parts: the living room proper, projecting forward from the façade with a big studio window; a dining corner in the middle towards the rear; and a study. In traditional bourgeois houses, these would have been three separate rooms. Here they have been merged together, but they still maintain separate identities. Note that the dining corner can be shielded from the rest by a curtain (visible in the photograph).

It is interesting to see how this solution emerged during the design process. In that process, I propose, we see Le Corbusier starting from a still hierarchical scheme (subsidiary spaces opening onto a larger central one)



House La Roche-Jeanneret, Paris, 1923.

14. Plan of the top floor.  
The La Roche unit is on the left, the Jeanneret unit is on the right.  
From *Ceuvre Complète 1910-1929*.
15. Living space of the Jeanneret unit, looking diagonally from the dining room towards the living room. The study (not visible) would be on the right.

and then learning to let the “ensemble” arise from the mutual interaction of open rooms, without the presence of an a-priori hierarchy.

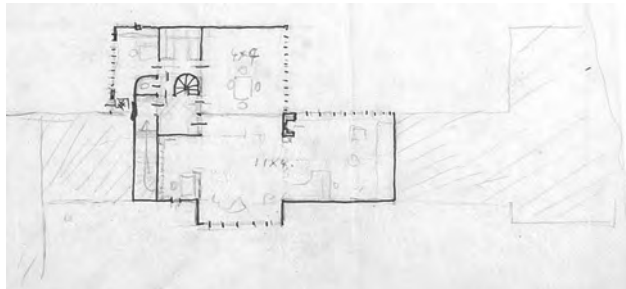
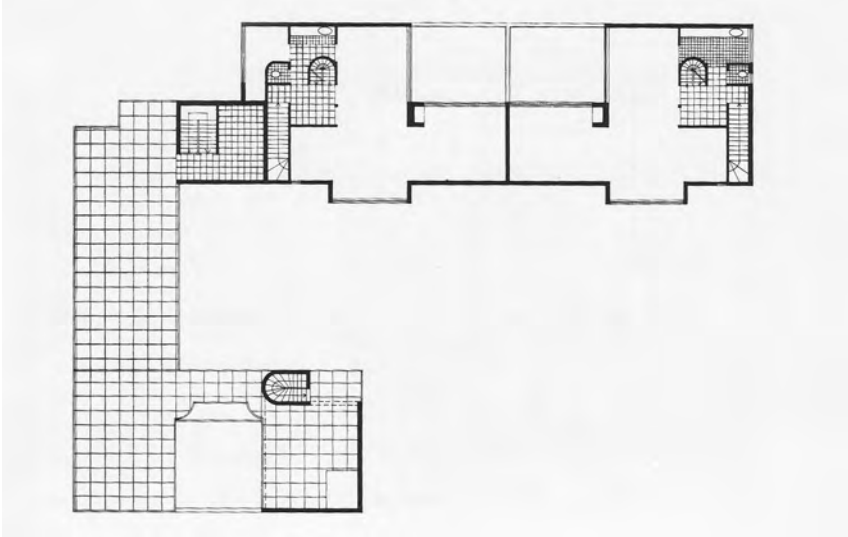
Early and final designs for the Jeanneret house were not very different.<sup>18</sup> Once the location of the composite house, at the end of the short street, had been settled, its initial design was for three and then four units (Fig. 16); the final design was, of course, for two units (La Roche, Jeanneret). But several key features of the Jeanneret unit were already present at the beginning: the unit is located within the long wing, as one of two symmetrical units; the outline of the unit is a rectangle, expanded in front by a projecting bay and diminished to the rear by a small garden court; the living spaces are on the top floor; kitchen and circulation are in the far corner against the two blind party walls; the rest forms one undivided space with multiple wings and continuous ceiling, open to the street through an ample studio window in the projecting bay, and open to the rear through two narrow horizontal ribbon windows across both court walls; and the dining area, between court and kitchen, can be temporarily set off by a curtain or folding partition. We are interested in how that undivided space is conceptualized in the early and final design.

For the early four-unit design we have a telling plan of the living spaces on the top floor (Fig. 17). The plan is actually for the left one of the two symmetrical units, in the middle of the long wing, whereas it is its mirror image, at the end of the wing, that eventually became the Jeanneret house. So, in comparing the early plan with the final one (Fig. 18), we need to mentally flip the early plan in our mind.

In the early plan, within that undivided space with multiple wings, one can identify a long rectangular space taking the full depth of the house, from the projecting façade bay with studio window to the rear party wall. Because of its depth and its big window, this long rectangle seems to provide the principal reference for the plan, as if it were the nave of a church, from which emanate two “transepts” or “chapels” of different sizes.

Thus described, the early plan brings to mind the house for Le Corbusier's parents in La Chaux-de-Fonds, ten years earlier (Figs. 6, 7), that we already





House La Roche-Jeanneret, 1923.

16. Early scheme for four units, May 1923, top floor.  
From Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier, 1920-1930* (1987).
17. Early scheme for four units, May 1923, top floor.  
Plan for one of the two symmetrical units in the long wing.  
Detail.
18. Final plan of the Jeanneret unit, top floor.  
Detail from Fig. 14 earlier in this essay.

discussed: indeed it is both likely and touching that Le Corbusier's early idea for his brother's house would be based on the one they had both called home as young men. And we saw that the house for the parents, in turn, was partly inspired by Pompeii. But in La Chaux-de-Fonds the central hall had clearly legible longitudinal walls and a clear rectangular ceiling, separate from that of the other rooms; and the other rooms abutted the central hall through subordinate openings. There was a clear hierarchy and narrative. In Paris, instead, the ceiling is continuous, with nothing to separate central rectangular space from side rooms.

Note also that, in the early plan for Paris (Fig. 17), the central "nave" can be read in two different ways, because the dining corner at its rear end can be set off by drawing a curtain, indicated in the plan: because of this potential separateness, the dining corner could be seen as a niche room by itself. Diminished of the dining corner at its far end, the central rectangular space would now be reduced to a square in front of the big studio window, flanked on three sides by three "Roman Rooms" for library, dining, and living.

In reinterpreting his parent's house in La Chaux-de-Fonds, then, Le Corbusier is, on the one hand, continuing his original reliance on the Pompeian hierarchical precedent. But on the other hand, Le Corbusier is undermining the primacy of its central space through continuous ceiling and comparable dimensions, thus generating a near-egalitarian assembly of "Roman Rooms": the only faint echo of the original hierarchical ordering principle is provided by the placement of the projecting bay with big studio window at the pivotal centre of the composition.

In the final design, even this echo is removed. The pivotal centre, with its projecting bay and big window, has been shifted to the corner, completely clear of the place where the other wings cross. There is no Atrium in the final scheme any more, only rooms with different characteristics communicating with each other through open walls.

If we now think again of the undivided quality of the living area in this house (Fig. 15), it becomes evident that its spatial continuity has a particular

character. This area is not conceptualized as “flowing space,” as a continuum that has been partitioned by floating vertical and horizontal planes, like Mies’s Barcelona Pavilion. Whereas Mies is thinking *Space*, Le Corbusier is thinking *Volumes* or *Rooms*—Roman rooms, open and directional.

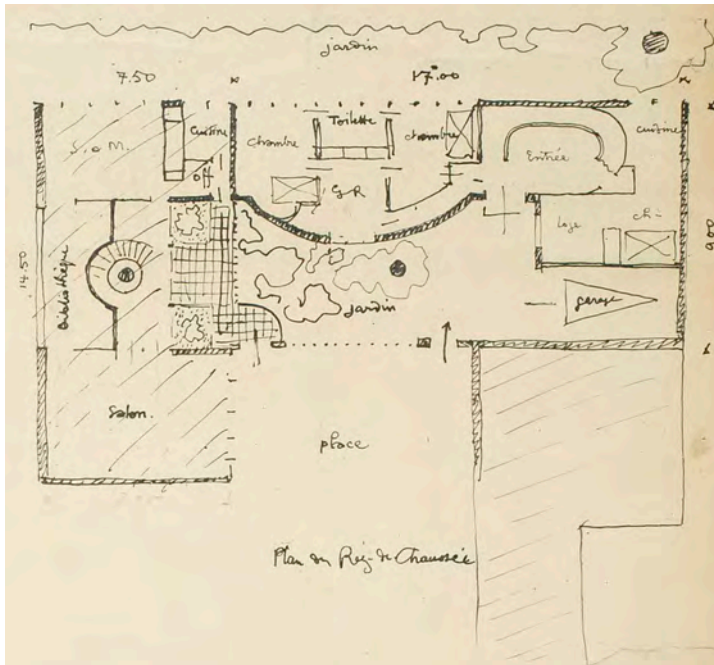
Of course, much of the architectural power of both Miesian and Corbusian space comes from the tension between continuity and discrete parts. But the direction of that tension is different. In Mies the tension goes from continuity to discrete parts, and in the Pavilion’s enclosed pool with statue we almost see “a room in the process of becoming” but not quite there yet. In Le Corbusier, the tension goes from discrete parts to continuity, and in the Jeanneret living room we see “several rooms in the process of becoming an ensemble.”

#### VEVEY

While designing the house La Roche-Jeanneret in Paris, in the winter of 1923-24, Le Corbusier also started work on a house for his parents near Vevey on the Lake of Geneva—the house that is also known as “Le Lac,” or “Petite Maison.”<sup>19</sup> While very different in location and budget, the two designs are not unrelated, and our discussion of the house in Vevey will begin by analyzing a drawing for the house in Paris, specifically for the La Roche portion of the house.

This drawing (Fig. 19) is for an intermediate stage of the design, when the curved La Roche gallery at the end of the street was already in place, but when La Roche’s sleeping quarters were still on the ground floor *under* the curved gallery, instead of their final location upstairs in the long wing. The drawing is a plan of those sleeping quarters.

This plan, I propose, was inspired by those two sketches that Le Corbusier had made at Hadrian’s Villa. Two bedrooms and a bathroom between them face the garden along the rear wall—thus, three rooms in a row, much like in the sketch from the Water Court (Fig. 3). Each of the bedrooms is closed



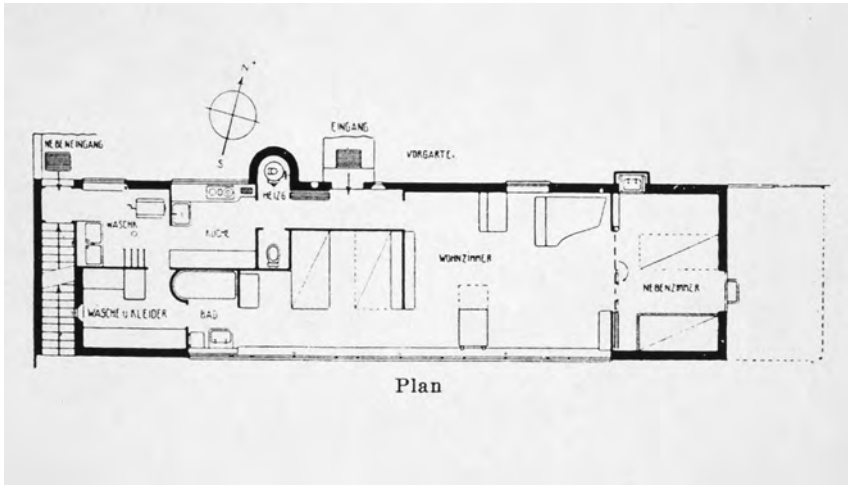
19. House La Roche-Jeanneret, Paris, 1923.  
Intermediate plan, July-August 1923.  
Detail.

In this scheme, the La Roche unit was at the end of the street (with a curved façade) and to the right, with bedrooms and services downstairs, living and dining upstairs. The unit to the left was intended for somebody else at this stage.

on three sides and ending with an apse of sorts, recalling the sketch. On the fourth side, the two bedrooms and the bathroom about a continuous window towards the garden, which gives these three very different spaces a common view and datum, like in both sketches from Hadrian's Villa, especially the one from the Library Court (Fig. 4), if we equate the regular mullions of the La Roche window with the regular columns at Hadrian's Villa. The doors connecting the shared bathroom to the two bedrooms come up against the continuous window and thus define a layer along the window, like the two openings at the ends of the lateral walls in the Library Court sketch.

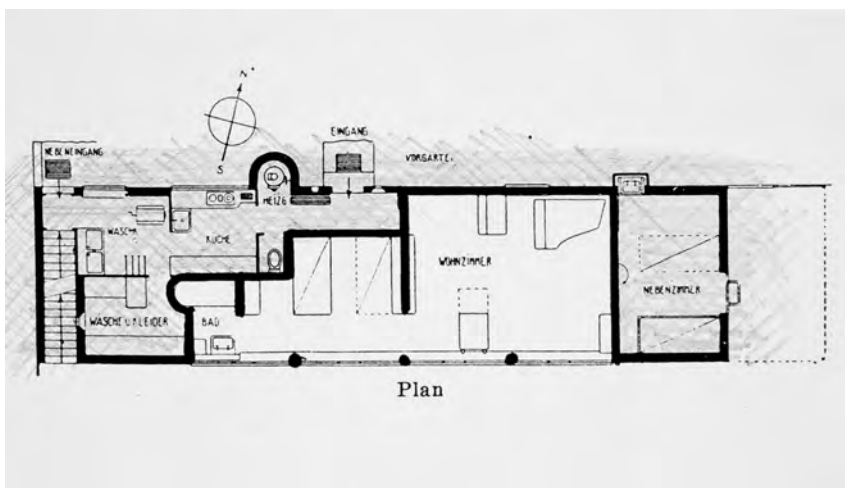
A couple of months later, I propose, the same concept governed the internal layout of a little house for his parents (Figs. 20, 21, 22). In contrast with the House La Roche-Jeanneret, of course, this house is extremely modest, a plain rectangular box set parallel to the shore: indeed, Le Corbusier's father referred to it as a "maison forme wagon," a train-car house—in modern American English one would say a "trailer."<sup>20</sup> The house has only a ground floor, with a single ribbon window taking up 2/3 of the long side towards the lake. The bulk of the interior consists of one large undivided space corresponding to the length of the ribbon window: going from right to left in the plan, it includes living, sleeping, and bath, with curtains for privacy. Kitchen, laundry, toilet, and closets are separate, tucked at the far end in the back.

In this discussion we are interested in the articulation of the main space (Figs. 22, 23). While open from end to end, this space is richly differentiated into parts by two wall panels perpendicular to the length of the house, by curtains that can extend those panels for privacy, and by the variable depth of the three parts (the depth from ribbon window to back wall of each section). As a result, the main space can be seen as a suite of three "Roman Rooms," much like the early La Roche bedroom scheme and like the sketches from Hadrian's Villa: three rooms of differing size and shape (living, sleeping, bath), set in front of the ribbon window and all directed towards the common domain of the lake. Like in the sketch from the Library Court at Hadrian's Villa (Fig. 4), the two wall panels stop short of the ribbon



House for Le Corbusier's parents near Vevey on the Lake of Geneva, 1923.

20. Plan.  
From *Œuvre Complète 1910-1929*.
21. View from the lake (the house is on the left, the garden wall is on the right).



House for Le Corbusier's parents near Vevey on the Lake of Geneva, 1923.

22. Internal view.  
Living-dining room
23. Plan (already seen in Fig. 20) with the main space along the big window highlighted.

window, thus leaving a floor-to-ceiling passage and defining a layer parallel to the window; and outside the window, the parapet of the sea-wall defines a second parallel layer (like the two layers of columns in the sketch).

Yes, this is a “maison forme wagon,” to use Le Corbusier’s father’s language: but it took Hadrian’s Villa to conceptualize it. Helped by his experience there, Le Corbusier could exploit the emotional potential of a play between two orthogonal directions—two directions that also have symbolic meaning: on the one hand the lateral direction from room to room suggested by the layer of space along the ribbon window, implying movement and the functional requirements of daily life; on the other hand the “centripetal” direction from each of the rooms to the lake, implying contemplative gaze and the light and view from which the rooms draw their shared meaning.

## Notes

- 1 Alan Colquhoun hinted at similar points in his pioneering article “Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier” (1972), where he wrote that “However ‘free’ a plan of Le Corbusier’s may be, not only does it consist, in large part, of quite traditional ‘rooms,’ but a certain axial magnetism persists which has the effect of emphasizing the process of explosion and distortion to which the plan has been subjected. Such a spatial ‘discourse’ does not exist in De Stijl plans, where the blowing apart of the ‘box’ and the assertion of crystalline structure are never met with any resistance.” Reprinted in Alan Colquhoun, *Essays in Architectural Criticism. Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 62. On Miesian space see Barry Bergdoll, “The Nature of Mies’s Space,” in Terence Riley and Barry Bergdoll, eds., *Mies in Berlin* (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Abrams, 2001), 66-105.
- 2 Christoph Schnoor, “Le Corbusier’s early urban studies as source of experiential architectural knowledge,” Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, International Congress on *Le Corbusier, 50 years later* (DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/LC2015.2015.1547>) which builds upon his earlier book *La Construction des villes, Le Corbusiers erstes städtebauliches Traktat von 1910/11* (Zurich: GTA Verlag,

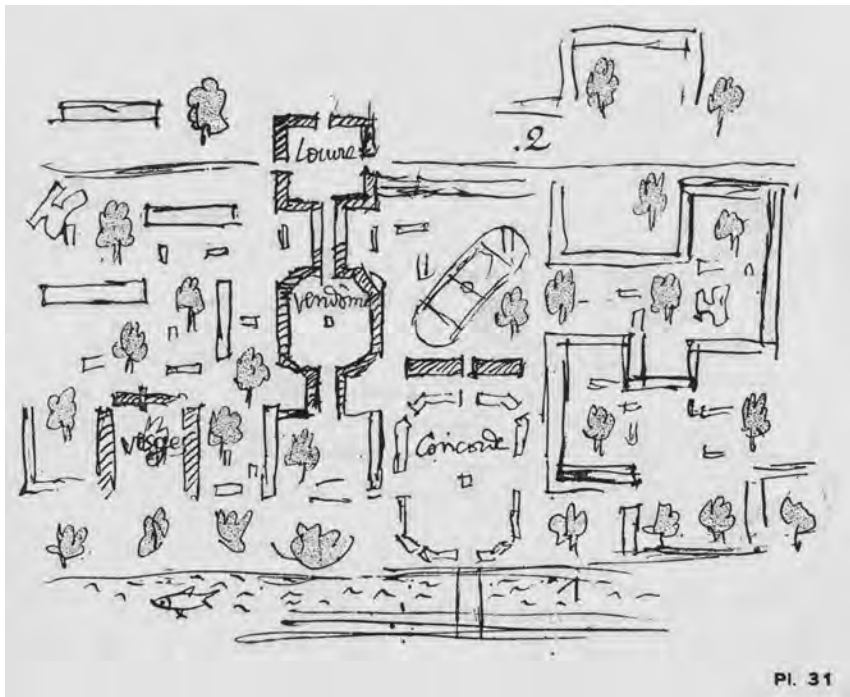


- 2008). Schnoor's shows that Le Corbusier's interest for "space as enclosure," seen in the chapter "L'Illusion des plans" of his *Vers une architecture* and in interiors like the entry hall of the house La Roche in Paris, can be traced back more than ten years, to concepts that he had acquired while preparing his unpublished manuscript *La construction des villes* in 1910-11.
- 3 On Le Corbusier's reaction to mosque interiors in Turkey see Armando Rabaça, "Ordering code and Mediating Machine. Le Corbusier and the Roots of the Architectural Promenade" (Doctoral thesis, Coimbra University, 2013), 262-292.
  - 4 "La variation des gdeurs de porte joue un rôle énorme. Il en est d'énormes A,B,C, et de toutes petites D. Et comme à Brousse il y a des masses lumineuses et des volumes obscurs," Le Corbusier, *Voyage d'Orient, Carnets* (Paris: Fondation Le Corbusier, 1987), Carnet 4, 127.
  - 5 "il faut retenir ça que ds toute Salle romaine il y a toujours 3 murs pleins l'autre mur s'ouvre largement et fait participer la Salle à l'ensemble. De là 1 situation très typique des portes, relevée déjà à Pompei." *Voyage d'Orient, Carnets*, Carnet 5, 83.
  - 6 H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 185-191.
  - 7 For the sake of brevity I will omit discussion of two other precedents that helped Le Corbusier to articulate his interest in *centrality*. The first precedent is the Cabaret Fledermaus by Josef Hoffman in Vienna, completed in 1908 and visited by Corbusier in that year. It was a large and relatively low rectangular room converging towards the stage at one end; but in the area close to the stage it rose to double height, so that the proscenium could be tall; and the higher section of the room was surrounded by balconies. The second precedent is the Maison Bouteille, a concept-house designed by Le Corbusier in 1909, in dialogue with Auguste Perret, in whose office he was then working. Here, a double-height space with studio window expands on the sides into two low lateral rooms, but without a clear hierarchy between the parts. See Brooks, *Formative Years*, 148-149, 165-167.
  - 8 On the house for his parents, often referred to as "La maison blanche," see Brooks, *Formative Years*, 310-27; Leo Schubert, *La villa Jeanneret-Perret di Le Corbusier, 1912: la prima opera autonoma* (Venice: Marsilio, 2006).
  - 9 Letter by Le Corbusier to William Ritter, 10 February 1913. Bern, Schweizerische Landesbibliothek.
  - 10 On the Villa Schwob see Brooks, *Formative Years*, 424-463; Francesco Passanti, "Architecture: Proportion, Classicism and Other Issues," in Stanislaus von Moos and Arthur Rüegg, eds., *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier* (New Haven and London, Yale Univ. Press, 2002), 69-97, esp. 90-95.

- 11 The proof that this is how Le Corbusier internalized those three Roman Rooms will come later in this essay, when I will discuss an intermediate project for the Villa La Roche-Jeanerret in 1923 (Fig. 19), twelve years after visiting Hadrian's Villa. In that intermediate project, Le Corbusier used the sketch from Hadrian's Villa as a point of departure for an arrangement of three side-by-side rooms all facing in the same direction.
- 12 Pierre Daix, "Die Sammlung Kahnweiler - als 'Feindesgut' versteigert (1921-1923)," in Katharina Schmidt and Hartwig Fischer, eds., *Ein Haus für den Kubismus. Die Sammlung Raoul La Roche* (catalog of an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum in Basel, 1998), 24-31.
- 13 The literature on this subject is too vast to be listed here. See in particular Yve-Alain Bois, "Kahnweiler's Lesson" (1987) in Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 65-97.
- 14 Mallarmé, "Divagation première, relativement au vers" in *Vers et prose, morceaux choisis* (Paris: Perrin, 1893), 172-194; Pierre Reverdy, "L'image," *Nord-Sud* 13 (March 1918), 73-75. The exact wording by Reverdy is this: "L'Image est une création pure de l'esprit. Elle ne peut naître d'une comparaison mais du rapprochement de deux réalités plus ou moins éloignées."
- 15 The full caption is this: "Caproni-Exploration. La poésie n'est pas que dans le verbe. Plus forte est la poésie des faits. Des objets qui signifient quelque chose et qui sont disposés avec tact et talent créent un fait poétique." Le Corbusier-Saugnier, "Des yeux qui ne voient pas... III: Les autos," *L'Esprit Nouveau* 10 (1921): 1139-1151. The photograph of the airplane cockpit is on page 1147. In 1923 the essay was used again as one of the chapters in *Vers une architecture*.
- 16 "C'est de la nuit qui tombe de la II coupole et qui y monte emplissant de mystère." *Voyage d'Orient, Carnets*, Carnet 3, 21.
- 17 "Vous êtes dans un grand espace blanc de marbre, inondé de lumière. Au delà se présente un second espace semblable et de mêmes dimensions, plein de pénombre et surélevé de quelques marches (répétition en mineur); de chaque côté, deux espaces de pénombre encore plus petits; vous vous retournez, deux espaces d'ombre tout petits. De la pleine lumière à l'ombre, un rythme. Des portes minuscules et des baies très vastes. Vous êtes pris, vous avez perdu le sens de l'échelle commune. Vous êtes assujéti par un rythme sensoriel (la lumière et le volume) et par des mesures habiles, à un monde en soi qui vous dit ce qu'il a tenu à vous dire." Le Corbusier-Saugnier, "Architecture...l'illusion des plans," *L'Esprit Nouveau* 15 (February 1922), 1769-70, later included in *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Crès, 1923), 146-147.
- 18 On the evolution of the design for this house, see Tim Benton, *The Villas of Le Corbusier, 1920-1930* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 45-75. The story is extremely

complicated: the number of clients shifted between one and four; their identity changed several times; the location shifted from the left side, near the start of the short dead-end street, to the end and right side.

- 19 On the house in Vevey see especially Bruno Reichlin, “L’intérieur traditionnelle insidiato dalla finestra a nastro. La Petite Maison a Corseaux, 1923-1924,” in Reichlin, *Dalla “soluzione elegante” all’“edificio aperto.” Scritti attorno ad alcune opere di Le Corbusier*, ed. by Annalisa Viati Navone (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2013), 86-131; earlier versions of this essay, starting in 1975, are listed on page 417. As the title makes clear, the focus of this essay is on the ribbon window of this house.
- 20 “Ed a fait des plans très simples, d’une maison puriste, forme wagon.” Entry in father’s diary, on 27 December 1923. Cited in Reichlin, *ibid.*, 125, n16.



1. Le Corbusier.  
Illustration demonstrating how Le Corbusier relates dimensions of Ville radieuse to the dimensions of historical urban spaces in Paris.  
From *Propos d'urbanisme* (1946).

## THE MUTUAL CULTURE

### LE CORBUSIER AND THE FRENCH TRADITION

In Le Corbusier's correspondence with Auguste Perret one can single out a paragraph which refers to his intense appreciation of France and French culture.<sup>1</sup> Le Corbusier tells of how he took Perret's recent letter up into the mountains to a point where the Alps open out and he has a view of Franche-Comté, the region he crosses on his trips to and from Paris. From here the setting sun envelops a part of France's soil in "radiant clarity"<sup>2</sup>:

The vast panorama undulating from left to right; I knew the direction of Paris and could see the sun go down almost along the ideal line which has carried me forward time and again, as you know, to your city where I never experienced anything other than joy and enthusiasm.<sup>3</sup>

Le Corbusier's work is characterized by its strong, but also contradictory, relationship to France and the French tradition. In this letter written in May 1915 he talks about his "never abandoned dream" to live in Paris but also expresses his pride in belonging to the rugged mountains of Switzerland.<sup>4</sup> Over the years he began to see himself as more of a Frenchman with Mediterranean origins, while his years in the Swiss Alps seemed to belong to a time of forced exile.<sup>5</sup>

Some features of his rich and complex relationship with France are outlined here. The originally Swiss architect integrated French culture

profoundly into his own life and gave it a place of special importance. At the same time, he was one of the first modern architects to work across borders and appear internationally with projects in many continents. He was influenced by and interested in many aspects of the world and its cultures, which interacted with and enriched his interest in French culture. Moreover, his relationship with French culture was neither systematic nor critically nuanced. He referred to historical figures such as Louis XIV and Claude Perrault to illustrate his own reasoning rather than to reach a scientifically correct understanding of the significance of their actions.

Le Corbusier's attraction to France appears relatively late in his training and is tied to a direct encounter with German culture. After completing work on his first building, Villa Fallet, in his hometown of La Chaux-de-Fonds, he set off on his first field trip. Following instructions from his teacher, the artist Charles L'Eplattenier, he travelled to Italy in September 1907 to study Italian Medieval art and architecture. After travelling south, as far as Sienna, he returned north, reaching Budapest and Vienna by mid-November to pursue a teaching program focused on modern art and architecture. This should have included regular studies as well as working with an architect or engineer, but Le Corbusier did neither. He chose instead to design two new villas in La Chaux-de-Fonds from his distant position in Vienna. The projects, Villa Jacquemet (1908) and Villa Stotzer (1908), were conveyed by L'Eplattenier and followed in the same traditional style of Villa Fallet.

Le Corbusier's sojourn in Vienna came to an end when he travelled to Paris in mid-March 1908, against the wishes of L'Eplattenier. The reason for the breakup with his teacher has never been totally clear, but it is possible to highlight some underlying factors. From the annual reports of l'École d'art in La Chaux-de-Fonds, one can see how the school differentiated between Paris and the German-speaking countries. Paris was associated with pure art, while Germany and Austria were connected to the art industry which had a decidedly stronger connection to the economics of his hometown and the future of watch production. It seems that L'Eplattenier

saw Le Corbusier's education as part of the new industrial art movement represented by the Deutscher Werkbund and the Wiener Werkstätte.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly before the young architecture student left Vienna for Paris, he states in a letter to L'Eplattenier that he felt indifferently about the question of Germany and France with regard to modern art. It seems as if Le Corbusier mainly wanted to learn the applied and technical aspects of the architectural profession. "What I need is to improve my technical ability," he writes to his teacher in a letter in early March 1908.<sup>7</sup> He then refers to the fact that employers in Paris used an hourly system whereby practice placements could be combined with personal study. He also sees Paris as a better alternative for artistic studies. In fact, the two cities he considers relevant for his continuing studies are Paris and Zurich, but he adds that Zurich attracts him little. The letter gives the impression that Le Corbusier had already decided to go to Paris and was merely attempting to quell the disappointment his decision would arouse in L'Eplattenier.

Although Le Corbusier abandoned L'Eplattenier's study plans in 1908, he returned, at his teacher's request, to the German-speaking environment in 1910, to work on two specific book projects. One of these was specifically concerned with the art industry and became Le Corbusier's first published book, *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne*.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps, one should not underestimate the hints that his Parisian sojourn give of Le Corbusier's artistic ambitions. Even late in life, he would refer to the time when his teacher claimed that he was not sufficiently talented to become a painter.<sup>9</sup> A readiness to return to L'Eplattenier's guidance and studies within the German cultural sphere was maybe only possible after he had forged a link with the French art world. Another aspect of the question regarding Germany and France was that Le Corbusier never seems to have felt at home with the German language.<sup>10</sup>

Literature also provides us with an anecdote that gives authenticity to the impulse behind Le Corbusier's decision to leave Austria for France. The first true biography of Le Corbusier, Maximilien Gauthier's theoretically focused book *Le Corbusier ou l'architecture au service de l'homme* from 1944, tells the story

of the breakup in Vienna.<sup>11</sup> According to Gauthier, the young architect saw Giacomo Puccini's opera *La Bohème* staged in a set with turn-of-the-century Parisian decor. The biography tells how "the set and costumes expressed a strong desire to create something new" and that it was this experience which gave Le Corbusier the sudden feeling that the world's most important art centre was not Vienna, as he had first thought, but Paris.<sup>12</sup> This story must in some way have been told by Le Corbusier himself.

Le Corbusier left Vienna in March and travelled to Paris via Nuremberg with his sculpture student friend, Leon Perrin. He arrived in the French capital at the end of March and was obviously ill prepared. He seems to have had little prior knowledge of the Parisian environment and was slow to take up initiatives to fulfill the purpose of his journey. It took three months for him to begin any architectural practice.

During this initial period one can nevertheless note a tangible interest in French architectural literature in several of his undertakings. Firstly, he worked at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, where he made his first known reading of an architectural book, which was accompanied by careful notes about the book's contents. It was Édouard Corroyer's (a student of Viollet-le-Duc) book *L'Architecture romane* (1888).<sup>13</sup> Secondly, he contacted a writer whose work he had been acquainted with during the studies at the École d'art. It was this writer, Eugène Grasset, who eventually introduced him to the architect Auguste Perret, whom Le Corbusier had not been familiar with before his arrival in Paris.<sup>14</sup> He contacted Perret in mid-April and by the end of June he had begun to work in his office on the ground floor of the famous house at 25 bis rue Franklin. Perret was primarily known for his experimentation with reinforced concrete and the use of this material in residential constructions. The knowledge he gained from Perret would come to be of fundamental importance to the young Swiss architect. It seems reasonable to assume that Le Corbusier was also influenced by Perret's views on architecture in general.

While working for Perret Le Corbusier began to direct his interest towards the work of the theoretician and restoration architect Eugène



Viollet-le-Duc. In August 1908 he bought *Dictionnaire raisonné* (1854-68) and wrote in one of the volumes that he had paid for it with his first salary from Perret. “I bought this to learn,” wrote Le Corbusier “because if I learn I will be able to create.”<sup>15</sup> Shortly before this, Le Corbusier had written to L’Eplattenier about his readings of Viollet-le-Duc, claiming that the writer was “a man so clear-thinking and astute, so logical, so clear and precise in his observations.”<sup>16</sup> It is likely that Perret, also influenced by Viollet-le-Duc, directed Le Corbusier in his new theoretical interest. Likewise, one can imagine that it was through Perret that Le Corbusier came to study the work of Auguste Choisy, which he gave more serious attention to at a later date. His interest in Viollet-le-Duc lasted for a limited period but his appreciation of Choisy was permanent. He bought Choisy’s *Histoire de l’Architecture* (1899) in 1913 and would later describe it as one of the foremost books on architecture ever written.<sup>17</sup> He also used illustrations from this in his books, such as *Vers une Architecture* (1923).<sup>18</sup>

During his time as an intern in Perret’s office, Le Corbusier deepened his understanding of French thoughts and traditions in many other ways. He worked in the mornings and devoted his afternoons to study. On Perret’s advice, he read about mathematics and took private lessons in statics with an engineer.<sup>19</sup> In addition, he studied at the Sorbonne, where he attended courses in musical history run by Romain Rolland.<sup>20</sup> It was also at this time in Paris that he began to visit museums on a regular basis.

Le Corbusier’s appreciation of the museum as an institution was twofold, but at one point he argued that knowledge gained from studies in a museum was “more reliable” than that gained from books.<sup>21</sup> In the Paris museums he studied and made notes on exotic and primitive art, together with objects from French design history. Initially he was primarily interested in the French Gothic style and referred to Notre-Dame as his “laboratory.”<sup>22</sup> It is also likely that it was during this early period in Paris that Le Corbusier first encountered the work of Tony Garnier. He states, in fact, on several occasions that he met Garnier in Lyon on his way to Paris, but according to what we know from research, this is unlikely.<sup>23</sup>

One of the earliest documented meetings with Garnier was when Le Corbusier sent him his article “Le Renouveau dans l’architecture” (1914).<sup>24</sup> This was a few years before Garnier published *Une cité industrielle* (1917), one of the few books by contemporary French architects that Le Corbusier used in his own publications. It is probable that Le Corbusier became familiar with Garnier’s work during his stay in France in 1908-09 and met him in person later.

Le Corbusier remained in Paris until December 1909, when he returned to La Chaux-de-Fonds. He devoted the following years to study and study trips to Germany and the Orient, and worked as an independently practising architect in his hometown in Switzerland. During this time his desire to return to Paris and establish himself there grew until he finally succeeded in the autumn of 1917.

Le Corbusier’s first two important writing projects were directed toward the culture of German-speaking nations. Both works had been initiated by L’Eplattenier and were implemented in accordance with the teacher’s plans for an extended stay in Germany. The first book project, “La Construction des villes” (begun in 1910 and published posthumously), grew out of Camillo Sitte’s influential work, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (1889), which Le Corbusier had first read in French.<sup>25</sup> The second, *Étude sur le mouvement d’art décoratif en Allemagne* (1912), was a study of the German industrial art movement. Although these projects were about German culture, they provided Le Corbusier with the possibility to further his pursuit of French culture.

The work on the first book began with library studies in Munich and grew partly out of his readings of French architectural literature. Among other writings, he studied the French Jesuit Marc Antoine Laugier’s classic works *Essai sur l’Architecture* (1753) and *Observations sur l’Architecture* (1765).<sup>26</sup> These readings influenced the young architect’s future view of the city in a way that should not be underestimated and Laugier became one of the few French theorists who Le Corbusier referred to in his own writing. In addition there are discussions on French architectural history in the book’s

manuscript. His movement towards French architectural culture became even clearer when Le Corbusier, in the summer of 1915, returned to his book project through studies at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Even though the studies primarily regarded illustrations and his ambition to complete the book failed, he acquired knowledge of the French architectural tradition that became an important influence for his future writing.<sup>27</sup>

In his book about the German industrial art movement, which was actually a kind of report, he focuses his attention on German-speaking culture. Nevertheless, the introduction shows that Le Corbusier's analysis of German culture was, in many ways, made in relation to French culture.<sup>28</sup> It is also clear that he had begun to see the book as a study to serve French purposes. His insights into German progress did not bring him closer to Germany, but were used to strengthen his position in relation to France.<sup>29</sup>

In both written works one discerns signs of a double stance in relation to the French tradition that came to be characteristic of Le Corbusier during his entire career. In "La Construction des villes," he discusses the creation of urban space in Paris during the classical period and points out how this tradition had been managed in recent times. One can already find a hint of the scepticism about French architecture in 1800, which he would develop further. He criticized what he perceived as a preoccupation with the plan drawing in itself, without regard for what it represented in reality.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, in the introduction to *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne* (1912) we notice an ambivalence to the French heritage; it is described as a constant, currently available resource, which also leads to a loosening of architectural morality.

Following this, Le Corbusier theorizes explicitly about the French tradition for the first time in the short but significant article "Le Renouveau dans l'architecture" (1914).<sup>31</sup> A starting point for this article is a comparison between the Invalides (1680) by Jules Hardouin-Mansart and Auguste Perret's recently inaugurated Théâtre des Champs Élysées (1913). Le Corbusier describes Perret's building as a renewal (renouveau) of architecture, while the older church building with its thick stone walls and historicized decorations

represents part of a tradition that is no longer justified and which fails to match modern needs and ways of life. At the same time the French tradition of 1600 was, in effect, a role model. Louis XIV, a rational and dynamic ruler, ignored and went beyond the “paralyzing” respect for history. Le Corbusier emphasizes in the text how the French autocrat renewed Paris without any consideration for its “Gothic towers” and how he allowed Claude Perrault to create the East façade of the Louvre, even if it shows no pity for its relationship to the palace’s original architecture.<sup>32</sup>

References to the French tradition are found again after Le Corbusier established himself in Paris and appear, for example, in *Après le cubisme*, the art theory book, which he wrote together with the painter Amédée Ozenfant in 1918 and which can be regarded as a breakthrough in Le Corbusier’s writing. The exchange with Ozenfant constituted a further step in Le Corbusier’s relationship with the French cultural tradition. The Frenchman had previously created *L’Élan*, one of the most important art magazines to be published in France during the First World War. The magazine was geared towards the artistic avant-garde and ten issues were published in Paris between April 1915 and December 1916. Ozenfant was supported by many others including Auguste Perret, who had brought the publication to Le Corbusier’s attention.<sup>33</sup> While the latter was working in La Chaux-de-Fonds and longing for the artistic cultural world of Paris, Ozenfant had already carved out a place for himself in the innermost French avant-garde circles through his work with the magazine and was acquainted with people such as Guillaume Apollinaire, Max Jacob, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Jacques Lipchitz.

The references to French history in *Après le cubisme* are applied primarily to paintings. Artists as Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorraine are highlighted, together with the architect and first leader of the French Academy of Architecture, François Blondel.<sup>34</sup> The period after Classicism is indirectly described as a decline associated with Romanticism, after which painters such as Paul Cézanne, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres and Henri Matisse emerged as innovators renewing French traditional ideals.

Similar references are also found in the next publication project by Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, the magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau*, which was published in Paris between 1920 and 1925. Together with contributions about the French and international avant-garde are individual articles about artists such as Jean Fouquet, the brothers Le Nain, and Nicolas Poussin.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in Le Corbusier's texts on architecture and urbanism, we find positive references to French historical architects such as François Blondel, Claude Perrault (both mentioned previously) and Jacques-Ange Gabriel and to Gothic buildings such as Notre-Dame Cathedral. These are set against what Le Corbusier considers a decline in the beaux-arts tradition and contemporary interior design.

From an observation of Le Corbusier's references to history in *L'Esprit Nouveau* and other written works, it becomes clear that he had a special relationship with French classicism and the Louis XIV epoch. The connection is derived not only from aspects of design but also from the link between architects or artists and power. As we have seen, he was impressed by the way in which the French King and his influential finance minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, commissioned Claude Perrault to design the East façade of the Louvre which appeared detached from the original building's stylistic scheme. Colbert contributed to the founding of the Académie Royale d'Architecture (1671) and commissioned Perrault—who was a physician and member of the French Academy of Sciences—to do a French translation of Vitruvius's architectural theory. A decade later when Perrault published his own writings on architectural theory, *Ordonnance des cinq espèces de colonnes* (1683), he referred to Colbert. In the preface, explicitly dedicated to the French Minister, he emphasizes that he would like his book to enlighten the public and expresses his gratitude to the support and requirements of Colbert.<sup>36</sup> Such direct appeals to political power and its representatives, which had previously been the prevailing model for architectural literature, had become rarer in modern times.

When the second edition of Le Corbusier's ground breaking book, *Vers une architecture* (1923), was published at the end of 1924, he claims in the

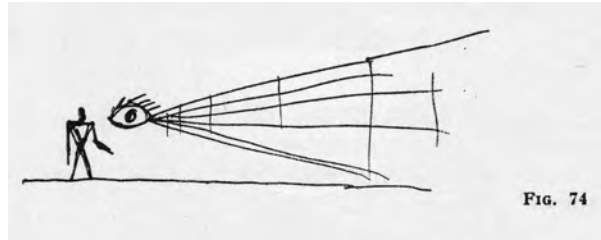
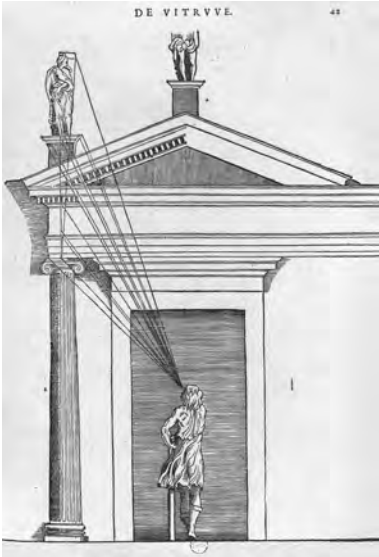


FIG. 74

2. Page from Jean Martin's translation of Vitruvius published in 1547, with illustrations by Jean Goujon.

Le Corbusier explicitly refers to this work in his book *Une maison un palais* (1928) and writes “these lines hold freedom” and “the French Renaissance vibrates with joy”, qualities he believes come from a rediscovery of “l’Orthogonal” —the perpendicular.

3. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch published in *Le Modulor* (1950).

new preface that the book interacts with a newly awakened interest for architecture in society, something which reflects key changes in modern times. In the first paragraph he compares this new celebration of the relevance of architecture to a period of French history which left important traces in the history of buildings. He mentions François Blondel with the Porte Saint-Denis and Claude Perrault with the Louvre's East façade. He points out that such persons and their work had been a reflection of a widely shared passion about architecture that was present amongst the citizens and higher political functionaries at that time.<sup>37</sup>

While Le Corbusier theorized about such historical references, in practice he prepared for the construction of the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1925. A full-scale model of an apartment to be inserted into apartment buildings with stacked "villas" (immeuble-villas) was one of his earliest concrete proposals for a solution to the housing problems in big cities. Adjacent to the full-scale model he produced a panoramic model of the architect's plans for the renewal of Paris, the well-known Plan Voisin. Although Le Corbusier in some ways criticized how his pavilion was treated at the exhibition, it was nevertheless, inaugurated by the French Minister of Education, Anatole de Monzie.<sup>38</sup> Monzie was interested in the radical urban planning proposals for the French capital and the architect later spoke of his own experience at this important occasion: "At one moment the minister's words reached a level where I forgot the baseness of egoism. I came to think of one person in particular: Colbert."<sup>39</sup> This reference to Colbert was not temporary. In his book on urban theory, *Urbanisme*, published in the same year, Le Corbusier exalted Louis XIV's finance minister as the initiator and figurehead of "all the great works in Paris."<sup>40</sup>

In the development of Le Corbusier's theoretical work it is, in fact, possible to identify Colbert as a kind of role model for persons in positions of authority. In the book of lectures *Précisions* (1930) Le Corbusier suggests that all countries should immediately create a ministry for building and infrastructure. He emphasizes that this should be led by a minister that could remain independent of political turbulence and that it should be:

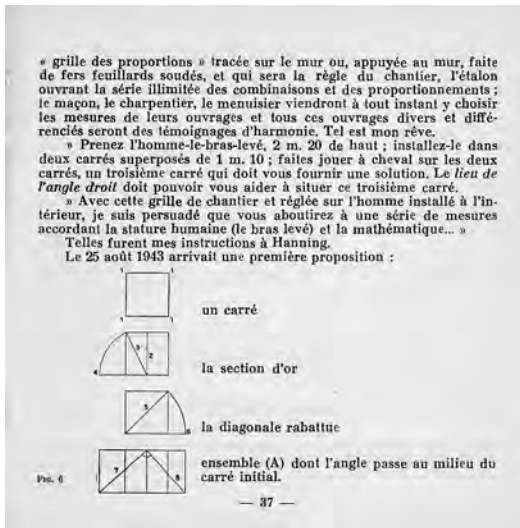
“*The best ministry of all ministries.*” The model for the minister is more than evident: “I have been haunted for one year by the shadow of Colbert. If the nation would only give us a Colbert!”<sup>41</sup> This haunting can be traced back to Le Corbusier’s earlier writing such as his first published article, “Art et utilité publique” from 1910, which was written to provide a useful example to those who “use their powers to combat the overwhelming ugliness.”<sup>42</sup> In the previously discussed book on urban planning, which he began at the same time as the article, there is a similar dedication: “This study, written with no other purpose than as a reminder of the measures which can make life in cities more pleasant, is directed especially towards the authorities.”<sup>43</sup> The same stance is preserved in what was to become his most extensive theoretical work and book about cities and the built environment, *La Ville radieuse*, printed in 1935. It begins with the words: “This work is dedicated to the authorities, Paris, May 1933.”<sup>44</sup>

It is equally clear that the classical epoch constituted an even more direct inspiration for Le Corbusier’s practical work. The striking similarity between the ideal plan for a modern city for three million inhabitants from 1922 and Louis XIV’s Versailles has been pointed out before.<sup>45</sup> This was clearly not a coincidence but an indication that Le Corbusier used the work of Louis XIV as a model for his own theories. In a text published in January 1921, just before he began to develop his well-known ideal city, he writes:

A hundred years ago the sense of the plan was lost. Tomorrow’s most important tasks are dictated by collective necessities, which take their starting point in statistics and can be understood with the help of calculations. They raise once again the question of the plan. When the undoubtable greatness of the city plan is understood, a time will come to pass that no era has previously experienced. The entire expanse of the city should be considered and planned in the same way as Oriental temples or Les Invalides and Versailles were envisaged by Louis XIV.<sup>46</sup>



Le Corbusier also refers to the Porte Saint-Denis, another work from the French seventeenth century which was designed by François Blondel, Perrault's opponent and first director of the French Academy of Architecture. At about the same time as the above article was printed, the Swiss-French architect published a text about proportions, "The regulatory lines" (*Les tracés régulateurs*), in 1921. The article begins with a geometric analysis of Blondel's famous city gate and includes a quote in which he describes the use of "tracés régulateurs" for the work in question.<sup>47</sup> Le Corbusier states that such "regulatory lines" had also been used by the Greeks, Egyptians and by Michelangelo. A similar idea, which had appeared in *Après le cubisme* three years earlier, referred to design principles used throughout history and which, according to the authors' discoveries, had left traces up to the time of Louis XIV and Blondel.<sup>48</sup> In his article Le Corbusier demonstrates how he used regulatory lines in his building the Villa Schwob in La Chaux-de-Fonds. He apologizes for referring to his own work, but claims he had no choice, because he was unable to find modern architects who showed an interest in such matters. Leaving aside the fact that the article contains a reference to the eighteenth century and Jacques-Ange Gabriel's Petit Trianon, we get the impression that Le Corbusier intended to resume an approach to architectural design that had been ignored in all French architectural work from that time and onwards. That Le Corbusier used Blondel and his proportional thinking as a reference was clear and even led to a contribution in a later issue of *L'Esprit Nouveau*. This short text, which occupies a single page, presents "François Blondel's life."<sup>49</sup> The article is signed "Fayet" and everything suggests that Le Corbusier was involved.<sup>50</sup> It contains a geometric schedule of the Porte Saint-Denis, along with a reference to the article "Les tracés régulateurs" which begins with a version of the same geometric construction. No further references to the schedule are provided. However, if one turns to a work on architectural history that Le Corbusier repeatedly referred to, Choisy's double volume from 1899, the schedule can be found in an interpretation of Blondel's *Cours d'architecture*.<sup>51</sup> It is likewise clear that Choisy also had a high opinion of Blondel and his work.



4. Page from François Blondel, *Cours d'architecture enseigné dans l'Académie royale d'architecture* (1675).
5. Page from Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor* (1950).

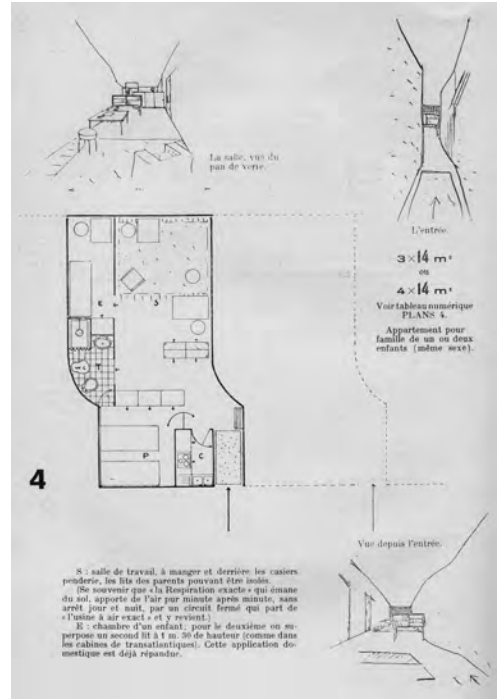
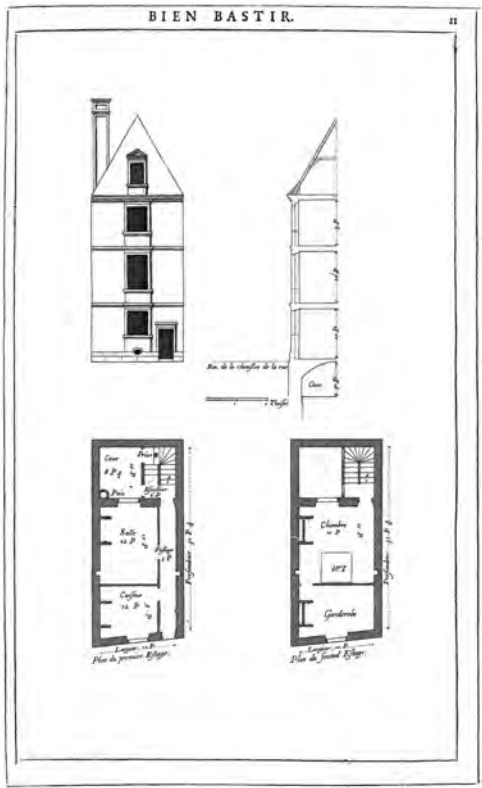
Another theorist who, like Le Corbusier, made reference to Blondel was Marc Antoine Laugier. Here we find an even greater respect and admiration for the Blondel City gate. In *Essai sur l'architecture*, which Le Corbusier read in 1910 while working on "La Construction des villes," Porte Saint-Denis is highlighted as the foremost of its kind, superior even to the antique triumphal arches.<sup>52</sup>

One noticeable aspect of French architectural theory, when compared to the Italian tradition, is the presence of polemics. Disagreements over the importance of the ancient heritage as expressed in Claude Perrault's translation of Vitruvius (1673) and François Blondel's *Cours d'architecture* (1675-1683), are set against more general and protracted controversies which centre around hostilities between the old and the modern (*La Querelle des anciens et des modernes*).<sup>53</sup> The somewhat later exchange of opinions on Gothic relevance was an issue discussed by, among others, Jean Louis de Cordemoy and Amédée-François Frézier. Yet another dispute was about the hierarchy between Greek architecture and that of the Romans. This can be noted in Roland Fréart de Chambray's *Parallèle de l'architecture antique et de la moderne* (1650). As mentioned earlier, this polemical stance is tangibly present in Le Corbusier's writings from very early on. The article "Le Renouveau" from 1914 can be seen, for example, as a kind of controversy with some of the period's architects. In addition, the manifesto written together with Ozenfant, *Après le cubisme* (1918), is significantly polemic. The new art direction, purism, which the book launches, is derived from a criticism of other art movements. Two years later, when Le Corbusier began to write for *L'Esprit Nouveau*, under the pseudonym Le Corbusier, he began with a series of articles under the common title: "Three petitions to gentlemen architects."<sup>54</sup> As the title suggests, he directs his articles to the Beaux-Arts architects in order to criticize them and inform them about the essential components of architecture, which they do not understand. The same applies to the three articles entitled "Eyes that do not see."<sup>55</sup> His criticism is not gracious. The established architectural profession in France is bigoted, lazy and behaves as if it wanted to "poison" France's citizens.<sup>56</sup> This provocative side of Le

Corbusier's oeuvre returns throughout his career.

The emergence of the French theoretical tradition from the Renaissance onwards was coupled to the need for practical guidance in construction. This requirement could be likened, at least partly, to industrialization and the extensive needs this created in terms of urban and architectural design solutions for large numbers of people. It is not impossible at this point to see a relationship between older French architectural literature and Le Corbusier's theoretical project. In fact, he repeats again and again his goal to create a "doctrine" for contemporary architecture from the overall urban structures of society down to the detailed design of the modern home. For a possible comparison among many, one could refer to Pierre Le Muet's *Manière de bien bastir pour toutes sortes de personnes* (1623). Le Muet's concrete and pragmatic proposals for residential plans and residential buildings, from simple to more exclusive examples, can be compared to Le Corbusier's similarly pragmatic studies of the dwelling. One interesting example is the article on a 14-square meter standard that he wrote before the CIAM meeting in Brussels in 1930. Both Le Muet and Le Corbusier specify carefully calculated surface areas, ceiling heights and other practical details, such as the need for wardrobes.<sup>57</sup>

Even without detailed studies, one can notice how Le Corbusier dealt with several questions and themes which had held an important place in the French tradition. These include the question of the relationship between buildings and nature, the discussion of "truth" in architecture and the question of architecture's aesthetic effect on man; or more precisely, how buildings affect the senses and if there are constant aspects of the experience common for all people.<sup>58</sup> The latter issues are taken up by, among others, Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières in *Le Génie de l'architecture; ou, l'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (1780). It is worth observing how similar aspects came to be treated by Le Corbusier in texts from the period around 1920, when his modernist theories were formulated in collaboration with Ozenfant. To highlight this point one can look at how Le Camus de Mézières describes the proportional role of architecture:



6. Example from Pierre Le Muet, *Manière de bien bastir pour toutes sortes de personnes* (1623).

7. Work by Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret for the CIAM meeting in Brussels in 1930—standard housing designed from the living space of 14 square meters per person—published in the journal *Plans* no. 9 (November 1931).

Study incessantly and take the mutual relationship (rapport) between harmony and proportion as the primary objective; it is harmony alone which generates the enthusiasm that grips our soul.<sup>59</sup>

Such a formulation can be compared to Le Corbusier's interest in the same inner experience of the proportions of construction:

ARCHITECTURE, that is art par excellence, reaches platonic grandeur, mathematical order, abstract meditation and the experience of harmony through proportioned relationships (rapports). That is the GOAL of architecture.<sup>60</sup>

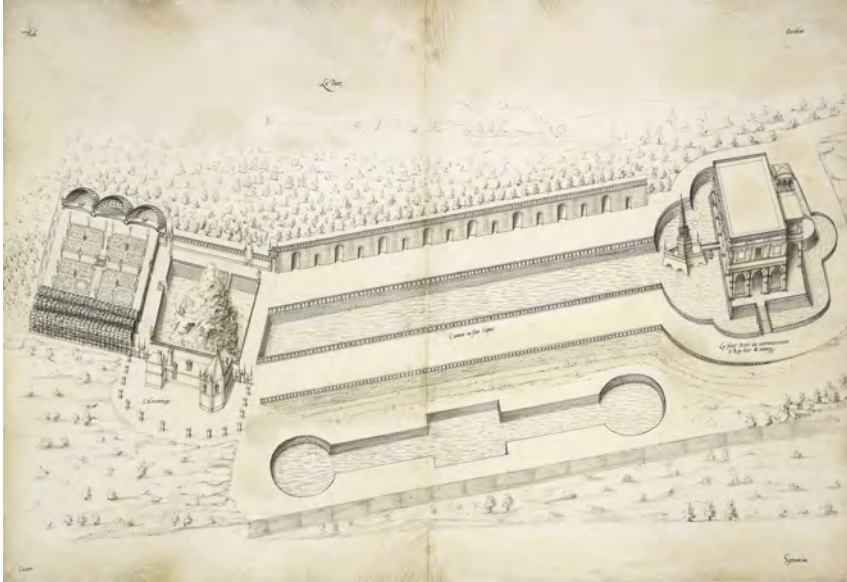
These same reflections can also be applied to theoretical concepts of French architecture. Le Corbusier discusses several concepts of mathematics and proportional doctrine, referred to as the aforementioned "rapport," but also uses terms such as "caractère", "certitude" and "utilité." Indeed, the last concept appears in the title of his first published text "L'art et l'utilité publique." In comparison, the concept is highlighted by Jacques-François Blondel in the introduction to his extensive lectures, the *Cours d'architecture*, when he discusses "benefits of Architecture" (de l'utilité de l'Architecture) immediately after the initial historical overview.<sup>61</sup> In the same way Le Corbusier used the related concept of "usage," a term found in French architectural theory since the sixteenth century and which Claude Perrault associated with aesthetics.<sup>62</sup>

Even around more formal aspects of theory one can find links to tradition. Both François Blondel, the Academy's first director and professor, and Jacques-François Blondel, leader of the first actual architecture school, published their theoretical reflections in the form of lectures, *Cours d'architecture*. Le Corbusier added to the tradition by posting lectures from his visit to South America in 1929—*Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*—a book that turned, however, decisively against the instruction of the Academy. Parallels with the theoretical tradition might also be

drawn from the titles of Le Corbusier's books. For example the title *Manière de penser l'urbanisme* leads one to think, not only of the already mentioned *Manière de bien bastir* (1623) by Pierre Le Muet, but also of works such as Jean Bullant's *Reigle générale d'architecture des cinq manières de colonnes* (1564), the first French book about the five orders, or the engraver Abraham Bosse's *Traité des manières de dessiner les ordres* (1664). When Le Corbusier, in his polemical writing about the contest for the headquarters of the League of Nations, chooses the designations of "house" and "palace" in the title, *Une maison - un palais, à la recherche d'une unité architecturale* (1928), we find the terminology of historical French architectural literature once again. In some cases we discover the same references even in the titles, Charles-Étienne Briseux's *Architecture moderne ou l'art de bien bâtir pour toutes sortes de personnes tant pour les maisons des particuliers que pour les palais* (1728) and in Pierre François Léonard Fontaine and Charles Percier's *Palais, maisons, et autres édifices modernes dessinés à Rome* (1798). Le Corbusier was in any case aware of such links between his own theoretical works and tradition, which he expressed openly himself in 1929 when he responded to Karel Teige's criticism of the Mundaneum. In another example of polemical writing, he commented upon the title of his article "Defence of architecture" (*Défense de l'Architecture*): "It is a title with a taste of the 'Grand siècle,' that I admit."<sup>63</sup>

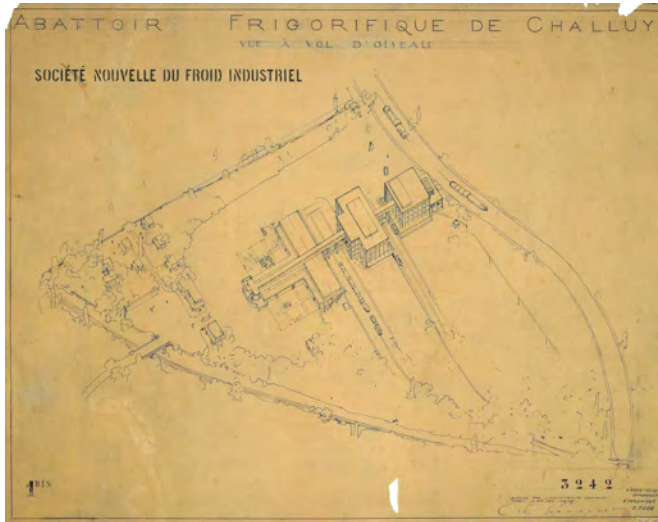
It is of course also possible to relate Le Corbusier's work to individual French architects. One of them it is difficult to avoid comparison with is, as indicated, Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc. The latter was influential as both a theorist and a practitioner and left behind extensive written works, which placed him among the great architectural theoreticians in history. Like Le Corbusier, he stood outside the French academic system and challenged it with a radical interpretation of architecture based on technological advancements and a "modern spirit."

Other French theorists who made contributions that provide a background to Le Corbusier's vision of modern life and habitat, include Charles Fourier, and his idea of "the Phalansteries"; Eugène Hénard and Tony Garnier, with their town planning visions, and Auguste Choisy, and



8. Jacques I Androuet du Cerceaus.  
Representation of the Jardin du Lydieu  
at the Château de Gaillon, one of  
France's oldest Renaissance castles.

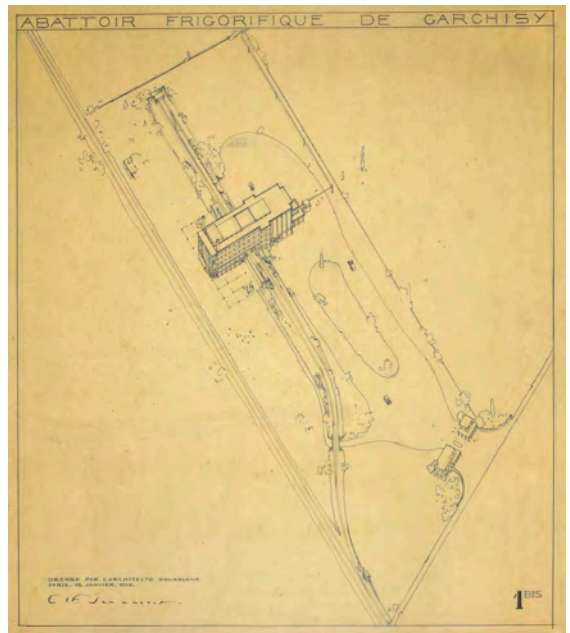




9. Le Corbusier.  
Slaughterhouse project, Challuy,  
1917.

10. Le Corbusier.  
Slaughterhouse project, Garchizy,  
1918.

In 1917/1918 Le Corbusier made two designs for slaughterhouses. In a letter from the time he writes about the projects and states that they have given him the ability to create "Loire Castles."



his ideas about the importance of modular construction. The last two were contemporary colleagues who Le Corbusier expressed his admiration for. One more role model from the modern French era was, hardly surprisingly, Georges Eugène Haussmann. Le Corbusier in his own book, *La Ville radieuse*, cut out passages from a biography of the famous city planner and introduced the citations with the words “My respect and admiration for Haussmann.”<sup>64</sup>

French architectural theory, even prior to the Academy’s foundation, has been described as an attempt to establish an independence from the Italian tradition.<sup>65</sup> The establishment of the Académie royale d’architecture in the second half of the seventeenth century represented an institutional step towards the maintenance of the French tradition, a project launched by theorists such as Jacques Androuet du Cerceau the Elder, Jean Bullant and Philibert Delorme. Even in this respect, Le Corbusier joins his important French predecessors and highlights France as the main reference for architectural and urban development from the Middle Ages onwards. In *Urbanisme* (1925), for instance, he puts Louis XIV alongside the Romans as the only great city builder in the Western world.<sup>66</sup> In *Précisions* (1930), he writes that “France is, through its art and philosophy, a lighthouse for every place.”<sup>67</sup> In the introduction to *Sur les quatre routes* (1940), he points out how France, in terms of architecture and urban planning, “represents a thousand years of conquered power, an unbroken chain of harmony.”<sup>68</sup> Similar examples recur frequently.

According to Le Corbusier, the most important built expression of French greatness is Paris itself. In *La Ville radieuse* (1935), the chapter where his urban plans for the French capital are explained, he writes: “Paris is not just a community, Paris is the incarnation of France. Throughout the world, Paris is a beloved city, everybody reserves a space for Paris in his heart . . . Why? Because Paris has been thinking for century after century, for a thousand years about creativity, entrepreneurship, and audacity.”<sup>69</sup>

Le Corbusier’s praise of the greatness of France and Paris is however paralleled by criticism of the present situation. Paris had become a “freak,” a “puddle,” a “protoplasm,” which “stretches out across an entire region.”

If there is still a city with radiance (Ville lumière), it is thanks to the stars which, just like in heaven, reach us with a light which has really gone out.<sup>70</sup>

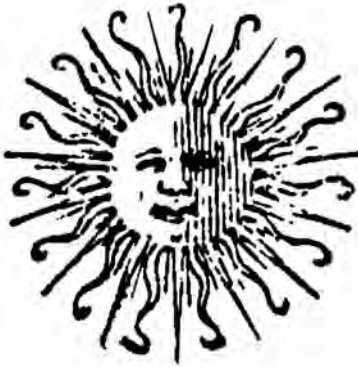
In this way Le Corbusier managed not only to align himself with the French tradition of promoting the superiority of French achievements in architecture and urbanism, but also made proposals for how French greatness in these fields could be achieved, or re-established at that time. One example is the Plan Voisin. In the manifesto which accompanies the panoramic model of the project at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1925 he writes: “Paris has expectations of our time (époque): that this endangered life be rescued. That our beautiful past be saved. To conquer the grandeur and power of the twentieth century.”<sup>71</sup> The words of the Manifesto express a connection with Le Corbusier’s personal ambition to become the one that will realize the vision of a new grand era (époque) in the history of the French capital. The words are reminiscent of the famous phrase which we find in the introduction to the first issue of *L’Esprit Nouveau*—put in italics—“A great era has just begun” (Une grande époque vient de commencer).<sup>72</sup>

However, when Le Corbusier expressed such thoughts he was not yet a Frenchman. He established himself in Paris at the age of thirty in 1917. In conjunction with the launch of *L’Esprit Nouveau* in 1920, he started to abandon his Swiss name, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris for the pseudonym Le Corbusier, taken from his ancestor, Le Corbézier.<sup>73</sup> It is possible that the name also drew its origins from the raven shooters who prevented medieval cathedral façades being soiled by birds.<sup>74</sup> Just over a decade later, it became clear that Le Corbusier’s relationship with France would develop. In association with his plan to marry a French woman,<sup>75</sup> he writes to his mother about “a new big question”: his idea and desire to apply for French citizenship.<sup>76</sup> To his mother Le Corbusier presents the idea that he would get more work as an architect if he were a French citizen. Pretty soon it became clear that the citizenship represented a rebirth into French culture. In the book *Croisade*, published only three years after his adoption of French citizenship, he speaks of religious persecution in southern France during the 1300s and of how some of the persecuted managed to save themselves,

with the help of “French princes,” by travelling to inaccessible areas of the Swiss Jura mountains.<sup>77</sup> In letters, texts and notes he would then come to insist about the idea that his family had been displaced from the South of France during the Middle Ages because of religious persecution and that, consequently, his natural nationality had always been French.<sup>78</sup>

It is not surprising therefore, that at the same time he starts to present himself as a cultured person who represents and contributes to France’s prestige. In a letter written in 1936 to the Director of Fine Arts, Georges Huisman, concerning the possibility of designing the French Embassy in Moscow, he points out how he had been the first architect to realize a building (Centrosoyus) of great publicity value for France in the USSR. He supports this claim with attached (Soviet) documents. The letter also tells the story of Le Corbusier’s origins in southern France and emphasizes that he does not wish to put on airs, but to prevent his opponents from treating him like “a long-distance Papuan,” completely devoid of “the spirit of the French genius” (*L’Esprit du Génie français*).<sup>79</sup>

Le Corbusier’s relationship to France and French culture can be described as a life-long project to create, present and integrate his own personal contribution, which could then compete with the principal stages of French architectural history. Long before the Swiss architect became a French citizen in 1930, he chose a pseudonym that linked him to important representatives of the great national architectural tradition. He presented himself as a modern heir to luminous figures such as Le Brun, Le Camus, Le Clerc, Le Duc, Le Muet, Le Nôtre, Le Roy, Le Vau and certainly Viollet-le-Duc.<sup>80</sup> The case of Le Corbusier was never that of an ordinary foreign student, who in his youth had been lured to Paris by Puccini’s famous opera and dreams of bohemian life in the Quartier Latin. He was the son of a glorious France returning from exile after half a millennium with a mission to lead the country forth into a new and important century—“une grande époque,” a modern “grand siècle”—through the art form superior to all: Architecture.



11. Vignette used by François Blondel in the *Cours d'architecture enseigné dans l'Académie royale d'architecture* (1675).
12. Vignette used by Le Corbusier in *La maison des hommes* (1942).
13. Sun symbol used by Philibert Delorme in *Le Premier tome de l'architecture* (1567).

## NOTES

Warm thanks to Peter and Birgitta Celsing's Foundation and to Estrid Ericson's Foundation that made it possible to write and publish this article. Warm thanks also to Sarah North for assisting with the English translation.

- 1 The extensive historical studies of Le Corbusier, his education, his practical and theoretical experiences, give an image of how he encountered and integrated parts of the French cultural heritage. The great importance of this influence is also evident in more general studies. However, as far as the author is aware, until now, no thorough study has been done that focuses on Le Corbusier's relationship with the French architectural tradition as a whole. Separate in-depth studies of certain aspects have been conducted. One of the earliest and most ambitious of these is Richard Allen Moore's dissertation on the concept of "dessin" in the French Beaux-Arts-tradition. Other examples are Philippe Duboy's work on Le Corbusier's studies at the Bibliothèque nationale in 1915, Michael Dennis's original study on the vision of space in French tradition, with a chapter on Le Corbusier, and articles like that of Jean-Louis Cohen, who places Le Corbusier in relation to Eugène Hénard, that of Antonio Bruculeri, discussing aspects of the studies at Bibliothèque nationale in 1915, or Christoph Schnoor's thorough studies of Le Corbusier's first book project that also deal with the relationship to French theory.

Richard Allen Moore, "Le Corbusier and the 'mécanique spirituelle': an investigation into Le Corbusier's architectural symbolism and its background in Beaux-Arts 'dessin.'" (Ph D diss., University of Maryland, 1979); Philippe Duboy, *Charles-Édouard Jeanneret à la Bibliothèque Nationale Paris, 1915*, [1985] new rev. print (Paris: École d'architecture de Paris-Belleville, undated); Idem., "Ch. E. Jeanneret à la Bibliothèque National, Paris 1915," *A.M.C.* 49 (September 1979): 9-12; Idem., "L.C.B.N. 1.9.15.," *Casabella* 531-532 (1987): 94-103; Michael Dennis, *Court & Garden: From the French Hôtel to the City of Modern Architecture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986); Jean-Louis Cohen, "Sulle tracce di Hénard," *Casabella* 531-532 (1987): 34-41; Antonio Bruculeri, "The challenge of the 'Grand Siècle,'" in Stanislaus von Moos and Arthur Rüegg, eds., *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier, Applied arts, Architecture, Painting, Photography, 1907-1922* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002); Christoph Schnoor, *La construction des villes: [Charles-Édouard Jeannerets erstes städtebauliches Traktat von 1910/11]* (Zürich: gta, 2008).

This text aims at throwing light upon Le Corbusier's relationship to French architectural culture

- and outline its extent. For the description of Le Corbusier's early education and for the history of French architectural theory, the rich studies of H. Allen Brooks and Hanno-Walter Kruft have been fundamental. H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997); Hanno-Walter Kruft, *A History of Architectural Theory from Vitruvius to the Present*, [1985] trans. by Ronald Taylor, Elsie Callander and Antony Wood (New York: Princeton architectural press, 1994).
- 2 “[C]larté étincelante.” Le Corbusier to Auguste Perret, 3 May 1915, Archives Fondation Le Corbusier [henceforth FLC] E1 (11), 164. The letter is transcribed in Marie-Jeanne Dumont, ed., *Le Corbusier, Lettres à ses maîtres*, vol. 1, *Lettres à Auguste Perret* (Paris: Éditions du Linteau, 2002), 134-137.
  - 3 “Et le long panorama mamelonnant de droite à gauche, je savais la direction de Paris, à voir le soleil se coucher presque sur la ligne idéale, qui tant de fois, vous le savez, m’a porté et reporté vers votre ville où je n’ai eu que joies et enthousiasmes.” Le Corbusier to Auguste Perret, 3 May 1915, FLC, E1 (11) 164; Le Corbusier, *Lettres à Auguste Perret*, 134-137.
  - 4 “[M]on rêve jamais trahi.” Ibid.
  - 5 See for example Johan Linton, “Arkitekturens hemvist, Le Corbusier och horisonten,” *Psykoanalytisk Tid/Skrift* 10 (2004): 78-87.
  - 6 École d’art, Rapport de la Commission 1903-1904 (La Chaux-de-Fonds, undated), 6-9; École d’art, Rapport de la Commission 1904-1905 (La Chaux-de-Fonds, undated), 7.
  - 7 “Ce qu’il me faut actuellement, c’est ma technique.” Le Corbusier to L’Eplattenier, dated Wien, 2 March 1908; FLC, E2 (12), 28. The letter is transcribed in Jean Jenger, ed., *Le Corbusier: Choix de lettres* (Basel, Boston, Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2002), 51-53.
  - 8 Le Corbusier [sign Ch-E. Jeanneret], *Étude sur le mouvement d’art décoratif en Allemagne* (La Chaux-de-Fonds: Haefeli et Cie, 1912).
  - 9 See for example Le Corbusier, “[J]’étais né pour regarder,” in *Le Corbusier: Œuvres plastiques*, exh. cat. (Paris: Éditions des musées nationaux, 1953), 7-12.
  - 10 The critical attitude towards Germany and the difficulty with the German language can be seen both in Le Corbusier’s correspondance and in his texts. See for example the letter to L’Eplattenier mentioned above or the text “Le monument à la bataille des peuples” (1913). Le Corbusier to L’Eplattenier, dated Wien, 2 March 1908; FLC, E2 (12), 28; Le Corbusier [sign Ch.-E. Jeanneret, architecte], “Le monument à la bataille des peuples (Lettre de voyage),” *Feuille d’Avis de La Chaux-de-Fonds*, 1 July 1913.

- 11 Maximilien Gauthier, *Le Corbusier ou l'architecture au service de l'homme* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1944). Various researchers are of the opinion that the book essentially expresses verbal information by Le Corbusier himself. See for instance Paul Turner, "The beginnings of Le Corbusier's education, 1902-07," *The Art Bulletin* 53, no. 2 (June 1971): 214n6, or Giuliano Gresleri in his introduction to the Italian edition of the book, Giuliano Gresleri, "Introduzione," in Maximilien Gauthier, *Le Corbusier, biografia di un architetto. 1944*, trans. M. A. Coppola (Bologna: Zanichelli Editore, 1987).
- 12 "[L]a mise en scène et les costumes portaient également la marque d'une puissante volonté de faire du neuf." Gauthier, *Le Corbusier*, 23.
- 13 In the beginning of the notebook Le Corbusier has written: "Study of Corroyer at Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris at my arrival Spring 1908". ([E]tude faite à Paris à mon arrivée printemps 1908 à la Bibliothèque Ste Geneviève d'après Corroyer.) FLC, A2 (19), 108.
- 14 Le Corbusier would refer to the meeting with Grasset in many of his own books. Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1925), 204; Oskar Stonorov & Willy Boesiger, eds., *Le Corbusier & Pierre Jeanneret, Ihr gesamtes Werk von 1910-1929* (Zurich: Girsberger, 1930), 5.
- 15 "J'ai acheté cet ouvrage le 1 août 1908 avec l'argent de ma première paye de [monsieur] Perret. Je l'ai acheté pour apprendre car sachant je pourrais alors créer." FLC Z 018, note in vol. 1 of Eugène Viollet-le-duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XIe au XVIe siècle*, 10 vols. (Paris, 1854-1868).
- 16 "[J]e lis Viollet-le-Duc, cet homme si sage, si logique, si clair et si précis dans ses observations." Le Corbusier to L'Eplattenier, dated Paris Friday morning, 3 July 1908; FLC, E2 (12), 34. It's one of the few long letters reproduced in *Le Corbusier, lui-même* (1970) (together with the letter to L'Eplattenier of 22 November 1908) and therefore probably a letter that meant something special to Le Corbusier. Jean Petit, ed., *Le Corbusier, lui-même* (Genève: Rousseau, 1970), 31-36.
- 17 Auguste Choisy, *Histoire de l'architecture*, 2 vols. (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1899). It is described in that way in Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne* (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1926), 116.
- 18 Illustrations by Choisy appears repeatedly in Le Corbusier's books. The most famous example is certainly Le Corbusier [sign Le Corbusier-Saugnier], *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1923), 31, 35-39.
- 19 Le Corbusier mentions himself that Perret gave him the impulse to study mathematics. Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, 206. See also Giovanni Fanelli & Roberto Gargiani, *Perret e Le Corbusier. Confronti* (Roma: Laterza, 1990), 6.



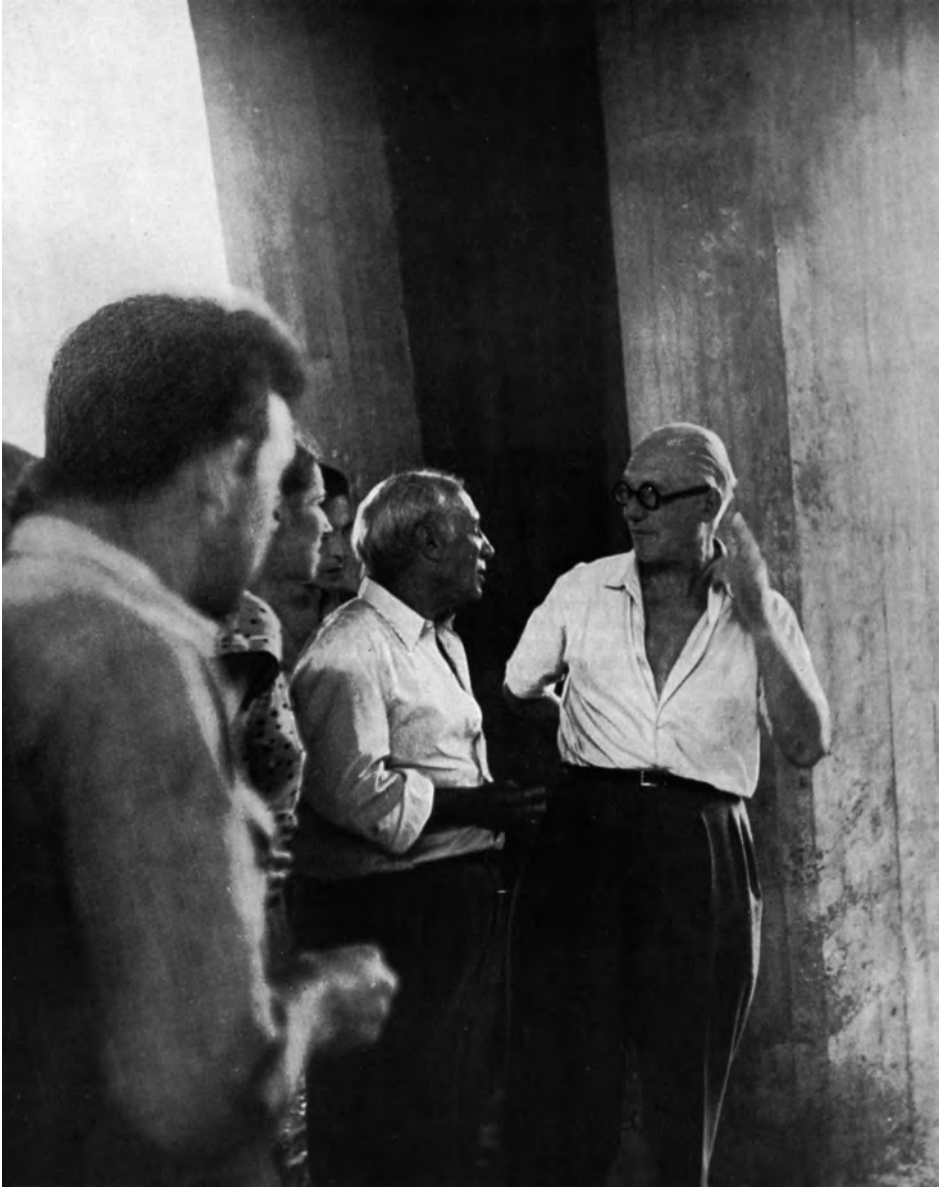
- 20 Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier, lui-même*, 31; See also Le Corbusier, *Viaggio in Oriente, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret fotografo e scrittore*, ed. by Giuliano Gresleri [1984], 3rd rev. and ext. ed. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1995), 141n2.
- 21 Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, 201-202.
- 22 Le Corbusier to L'Éplattenier, dated Paris Friday morning, 3 July 1908; FLC, E2 (12), 34.
- 23 Le Corbusier writes in the (already mentioned) autobiographical introduction to the first volume of his complete works that "I met Tony Garnier in Lyon about 1907." (J'ai rencontré Tony Garnier à Lyon vers 1907). A similar statement is to be found in Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier, lui-même*. Brooks on the contrary writes. "One thing is however clear: Jeanneret did not go to Paris by way of Lyon and met Tony Garnier, as has been asserted by Jean Petit (p. 28) and others." *Le Corbusier & Pierre Jeanneret, Œuvre complète de 1910-1929*. 1930, French ed. (Zurich: Girsberger, 1937), 9; Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier, lui-même*, 28; Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years*, 149n33.
- 24 When the research for this text was made, the whereabouts of the original letter wasn't known by FLC, however there is a reference to it in a later letter by Garnier. Tony Garnier to Le Corbusier, dated 13 December 1915; FLC B1 (20), 87.
- 25 Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years*, 200.
- 26 Christoph Schnoor, in his extensive dissertation on "La construction des villes," has presented a "fictitious" bibliography of Le Corbusier's readings in relation to the writing project. Christoph Schnoor, "La construction des villes, Charles-Édouard Jeannerets erstes städtebauliches Traktat von 1910/11" (PhD Diss., Technischen Universität Berlin, 2003), 477-482.
- 27 See Philippe Duboy, "Ch. E. Jeanneret à la Bibliothèque Nationale." It is known that Le Corbusier used this study in later writings, for example in Le Corbusier, *Propos d'urbanisme* (Paris: Éditions Bourrelly, 1946).
- 28 "Considérations générales," in Le Corbusier [sign Ch.-E. Jeanneret], *Étude sur le mouvement d'art décoratif en Allemagne*, 16.
- 29 When Le Corbusier some years later presents a report to the French ministry of education, the book is emphasized as one of the most important studies of the German industry of applied arts. Le Corbusier himself is presented as Swiss, but "French at heart" (français de coeur). Le Corbusier [Sign CH.-E. Jeanneret], "Rapport de la souscommission de l'enseignement [de l'Œuvre], présenté au conseil de direction," *Les Arts français*, 24 (1918).
- 30 Marc E. Albert Emery, ed., *Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, Le Corbusier. La construction des villes* (Lausanne: L'âge d'homme, 1992), 126-132; Schnoor, *La construction des villes*, 375-384.

- 31 Le Corbusier [sign Ch. E. Jeanneret, architecte], "Le renouveau dans l'architecture," *L'Œuvre, revue suisse d'architecture, d'art et d'art appliqué*, 2 (1914).
- 32 Le Corbusier attributes the east façade of the Louvre to Claude Perrault. Today's historians refer also to other names, for instance Louis Le Vau and François d'Orbay. See Antoine Picon, *Claude Perrault, 1613-1688, ou la curiosité d'un classique* (Paris: Picard, 1988), esp. 157-196.
- 33 In March 1916 Le Corbusier asks Perret to send him a copy of *L'Élan*. See Le Corbusier to Perret, 29 March 1916, FLC, E1 (11), 201. See also Françoise Ducros, "Ozenfant," in Jacques Lucan, ed., *Le Corbusier, une encyclopédie* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1987); Françoise Ducros, ed., *Amédée Ozenfant* (Saint-Quentin: Musée Antoine Lécuyer, 1985), 16, 18, 23, 133-134; Susan L. Ball, "Ozenfant and Purism. The evolution of a style. 1915-1930" (Diss., Yale University, 1978), rev. ed. (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 9.
- 34 See Le Corbusier & Amédée Ozenfant [sign. Ozenfant et Jeanneret], *Après le cubisme* (Paris: Édition des commentaires, 1918), for example 13, 14, 48.
- 35 Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant [sign de Fayet], "Nicolas Poussin," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no.7 (1921): 751-754; Idem. [sign Vauvrecy], "Les frères le Nain," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 10 (1921): 1125-1130; Idem. [sign B], "Jean Fouquet," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 5 (1921): 515-519.
- 36 "Epistre," unnumbered, in Claude Perrault, *Ordonnance des cinq espèces de colonnes selon la méthode des anciens* (Paris, 1683).
- 37 "Introduction à la seconde édition," dated November 1924, in Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, new enl. ed. (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1928).
- 38 Ministre de l'Instruction publique et des Beaux-Arts. de Monzie held this position between April 17 and October 11, 1925.
- 39 "Élevé doucement pour un instant par la parole du ministre, à un degré d'oubli des voracités individuelles, je songe à un homme: Colbert." Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, 136.
- 40 "Colbert est l'initiateur et le réalisateur de tous les grands travaux de Paris." Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme* (Paris: Crès, 1925), 250.
- 41 "En passant, ceci encore : ne croyez-vous pas qu'en chaque pays, la prudence commande d'instituer d'urgence un ministère de l'équipement national, avec un ministre à l'abri des sursauts des parlements? Le plus beau ministère de tous les ministères. Je suis, depuis des années, poursuivi par l'ombre de Colbert ! Que le pays nous donne un Colbert !" Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (Paris: Crès, 1930), 187.

- 42 Le Corbusier [sign Ch.-E. Jt.], "Art et utilité publique," *L'Abeille, Supplément du National Suisse*, 15 May 1910.
- 43 "Cette étude, écrite sans autre prétention que de rappeler les procédés qui agrémentent l'existence dans les villes, s'adresse plus particulièrement aux autorités." Emery, *La Construction des villes*, 69-70.
- 44 "Cet ouvrage est dédié à l'autorité, Paris, mai 1933." Le Corbusier, *La Ville radiieuse. Éléments d'une doctrine d'urbanisme pour l'équipement de la civilisation machiniste* (Paris: Éditions de l'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui, 1935), 3.
- 45 In his book from 1986, Michael Dennis presents a collage comparing the plan for Versailles with the plan for a city with 3 million inhabitants. Dennis, *Court & Garden*, 209.
- 46 "Mais on a perdu le sens du plan depuis cent ans. Les grands problèmes de demain dictés par des nécessités collectives, basés sur des statistiques et réalisés par le calcul, posent à nouveau la question du plan. Lorsqu'on aura compris l'indispensable grandeur de vue qu'il faudrait apporter au tracé des villes, on entrera dans une période que nulle époque n'a encore connue. Les villes devront être conçues et tracées dans leur étendue comme furent tracées les temples de l'Orient et comme furent ordonnés les Invalides ou le Versailles de Louis XIV." Le Corbusier [sign Le Corbusier-Saugnier], "Trois rappels à MM. les architectes [troisième rappel: le plan]," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 4 (1921): 462-463.
- 47 Le Corbusier [sign Le Corbusier-Saugnier], "Les tracés régulateurs," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 5 (1921): 563-572. For further discussion on Le Corbusier and proportions, see Linton, *Om arkitekturens matematik - en studie av Le Corbusiers Modulor* (M. thesis. Göteborg: Chalmers, 1996).
- 48 Le Corbusier & Ozenfant, *Après le cubisme*, 48.
- 49 Le Corbusier [sign. Fayet], "Vie de François Blondel," *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 21 (1924): n.p.
- 50 The pseudonym—or signature—"de Fayet" was used by Le Corbusier and Ozenfant both in individually and jointly written articles.
- 51 Choisy, *Histoire de l'architecture*, 2 vols. (1899), 2:746.
- 52 Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur l'architecture* (Paris, 1753), 253.
- 53 One can mention that Le Corbusier participated in a discussion on art organized in Paris in May 1936. The discussion regarded reality in painting and used the famous title from the 17th century. Contributions, by Le Corbusier and others, were published in Jean Lurçat & Marcel Gromaire & Édouard Goerg et al, *La Querelle du réalisme, Deux débats organisés par l'Association des peintres et sculpteurs de la Maison de la culture* (Paris: Éditions sociales internationales, 1936).

- 54 Le Corbusier [sign. Le Corbusier-Saugnier], “Trois rappels à MM. les architectes [premier rappel: le volume],” *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 1 (1920): 90-95; Idem., “Trois rappels à MM. les architectes [second rappel: la surface],” *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 2 (1920): 195-199; Idem., “Trois rappels à MM. les architectes [troisième rappel: le plan].”
- 55 Le Corbusier [sign. Le Corbusier-Saugnier], “Des yeux qui ne voient pas..., I, les paquebots,” *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 8 (1921): 845-855; Idem., “Des yeux qui ne voient pas..., II, les avions,” *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 9 (1921): 973-988; Idem., “Des yeux qui ne voient pas..., III, les autos,” *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 10 (1921): 1139-1151.
- 56 Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, 7, 71, 85.
- 57 Le Corbusier, “La ‘Ville Radieuse’. 8. L’élément biologique : la cellule de 14m2 par habitant,” *Plans*, 9 (novembre 1931): 49-64; Pierre Le Muet, *Manière de bien bâtir pour toutes sortes de personnes* (Paris, 1623).
- 58 Aspects of Le Corbusier’s interest in nature and his views on the relationship between physical form and aesthetic experience are covered in Linton, *Om arkitekturens matematik*; Idem., *Le Corbusiers maskin – industriella spår i ett arkitekturtänkande* (Lic thesis [1999] 2nd rev print, Göteborg: Chalmers, 1999). As for the concept of truth one can refer to a book that Le Corbusier had in his library and that he read in Munich in 1910: Victor Cousin’s *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* from 1836.
- 59 “Consultez sans cesse, & ayez pour objet principal l’harmonie des proportions & des rapports mutuels de chaque partie; elle seule forme l’enchantement dont notre âme est éprise.” Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, *Le Génie de l’architecture, ou, l’analogie de cet art avec nos sensations* (Paris, 1780), 7.
- 60 “L’ARCHITECTURE c’est l’art par excellence, qui atteint à l’état de grandeur platonicienne, ordre mathématique, spéculation, perception de l’harmonie par les rapports proportionnés. Voilà la FIN de l’architecture.” Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, 86-87.
- 61 Jacques-François Blondel, *Cours d’architecture*. 9 vols. (Paris, 1771–1777), 1:118-143.
- 62 Krufft, *A History of Architectural Theory*, 134.
- 63 “‘DÉFENCE DE L’ARCHITECTURE’, titre très ‘grand siècle’ j’en conviens.” Le Corbusier, “Défense de l’architecture,” *L’Architecture d’aujourd’hui*, 10 (1933): 29.
- 64 Le Corbusier, *La Ville radieuse*, 209-211.
- 65 It is described in this way by Krufft. See *A History of Architectural Theory*, 118-123.
- 66 Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 8-9.

- 67 “[L]a France, parce qu’elle fut artiste et cartésienne est partout le phare qui dirige ...”  
Le Corbusier, *Précisions*, 18.
- 68 “[E]n ces choses où la France représente une force acquise millénaire, une suite ininterrompue  
d’harmonies successives.” Le Corbusier, *Sur les quatre routes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), 7.
- 69 “Paris n’est pas qu’une municipalité, Paris incarne la France, et Paris dans le monde, c’est un lieu  
chéri de tous; une part du coeur de chacun s’en va vers Paris... Pourquoi? Parce que, siècle après  
siècle, depuis mille années, Paris fut le haut lieu de la pensée, de la création, de l’entreprise, de  
la hardiesse.” Le Corbusier, *La Ville radiieuse*, 202.
- 70 “[M]onstre”, “flaque”, “protoplasme”, “aplatis sur une région entière.” Ibid., 202.
- 71 “Paris attend de l’époque: Le sauvetage de sa vie menacée. La sauvegarde de son beau passé. La  
manifestation magnifique et puissante de l’esprit du XXe siècle.” Le Corbusier, *Urbanisme*, 277.
- 72 Amédée Ozenfant, Paul Dermée, Le Corbusier [sign “L’Esprit Nouveau”], “Domaine de  
l’Esprit Nouveau,” *L’Esprit Nouveau*, no. 1 (1920): n.p.
- 73 The name Le Corbézier appears with different spellings in the literature. Compare e.g. Brooks,  
*Le Corbusier’s formative years*, 8-9 and von Moos and Rüegg, *Le Corbusier before Le Corbusier*, 305.
- 74 The story about the raven shooter is told by Ozenfant, who presents it as his own idea. Amédée  
Ozenfant, *Mémoires 1886-1962* (Paris: Seghers, 1968), 113.
- 75 Yvonne Jeanne Victorine Gallis was born in Monaco January 4, 1892. She married Le Corbusier  
December 18, 1930.
- 76 Le Corbusier to his mother Marie Jeanneret, 28 November 1928. FLC R2 (01), 25. Transcription  
published in Le Corbusier, *Choix de lettres*, 199-200.
- 77 Le Corbusier, *Croisade ou le crépuscule des académies* (Paris: Éditions Crès, 1933), 32-35.
- 78 For further discussion, see Linton, “Arkitekturens hemvist, Le Corbusier och horisonten,”  
*Psykoanalytisk Tid / Skrift*, 10 (2004): 78-87.
- 79 Le Corbusier to Georges Huisman, 6 April 1936, FLC E2 (11), 322. Transcription published in  
Le Corbusier, *Choix de lettres*, 238-240.
- 80 Charles Le Brun (1619-1690); Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1721- 1789); Sébastien Leclerc  
(1637-1714); Gabriel Le Duc (1635-1696); Pierre Le Muet (1591–1669); André Le Nôtre  
(1613-1700); Julien-David Le Roy (1724–1803); Louis Le Vau (1612-1670); Eugène Emmanuel  
Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879).



1. Picasso visits the construction site of the Unité d'habitation in Marseille (October 1949).  
Frontispiece of *Le Corbusier, Œuvre Complète, 1946-1952*.

## CIAM'S GHOSTS

### LE CORBUSIER, ART, AND WORLD WAR II

#### 1. MEETING PICASSO

The *Unité d'habitation* in Marseilles is Le Corbusier's most ideologically charged, socially ambitious and politically controversial project of the postwar years (1947-1952).<sup>1</sup> As to its aimed for rank in the history of art, we need only to look at the snapshot that shows the architect together with Picasso visiting the construction site. The picture was taken in October, 1949: it shows Picasso, occupying the middle of the picture; his regal profile stands out in the sunshine against the murky background of a piloti. Around him is a gathering of architects, all ready to accept the blessing—and the stigmata—of modern art. Le Corbusier, behind the mask of his horn-rimmed glasses, stands clumsily to the side, sharply observed by his collaborators (among them Bernhard Hoesli clearly recognizable on the far left), all eager to see if, and with what arguments, their boss will pass the test in the eyes of the artist regarded as the unequalled master of modern art.

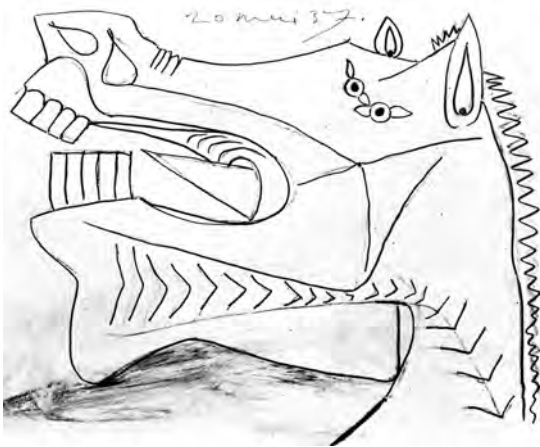
Picasso had been Le Corbusier's supreme point of reference in matters of art since the days of *L'Esprit Nouveau*. In 1939, ten years before the Marseilles encounter, the painter had entrusted *Guernica*, the mural shown in the Pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the 1937 Paris World's Fair, to the Museum of Modern Art in New York for safekeeping. Meanwhile, with the monumental outcry against the savagery of Nazi air raids still resonating in New York,

his aura had reached a peak in the world of art and politics. After all, MOMA was universally seen as Modern Art's unquestioned hub, not to mention the fact that Picasso was a membership of the French Communist party, which added a further element to the magic of his name in a way that clearly outshone the ambivalences of Le Corbusier's own chequered political past.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore understandable that Le Corbusier reproduced the picture as the frontispiece of the fifth volume of his *Œuvre complète*. Picasso's visit to the Unité appeared like the art world's accreditation of his own efforts as an artist-architect (Fig. 1).<sup>3</sup>

However, if Picasso does not always appear in person, as in Marseilles, his presence is ubiquitous in Le Corbusier's work after 1937, the year of *Guernica*. There is a photograph of the model of the Ronchamp chapel, for example, in front of a large painting whose date and subject matter bears no direct connection with it, except for the Art Nouveau rhythm of sweeping outlines that reverberate with the model's curves (Fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> The painting in question, *La Menace*, dates from 1938 and the scene depicted is martial. A tall nude woman is standing to one side, only just identified by her hip, leg, and navel. A much shorter man on the right (a *maréchal ferrant* or "farrier"<sup>5</sup>) is holding a horse, which clearly dominates the scene, its head and mane intersecting with the woman's face. The distressed expression of the "Amazon" and her brown face, turned to the right, are nearly eclipsed by the grimace of the horse's head above her. With its eyes wide open and nostrils flared, its ears pricked and tense, and teeth bared, the horse dramatizes the pain and panic that is in the air; it is an allegory of despair. A glance at *Guernica* (and at Picasso's studies for the painting) is enough to contextualize *La Menace* within contemporary art (Fig. 3).<sup>6</sup>

A letter dated March 6, 1938 and addressed to Le Corbusier's mother, casts further light on the painting and suggests a direct connection with *Guernica*. In it, the architect refers to the "disquietudes of the times," which forced him to work on *La Menace* from early in the morning and deprived him of the "beautiful tranquillity of the postwar years" (he is referring, of course, to the Platonic dreams of Purism after 1918). The "terrifying risks





2. Model of the Ronchamp chapel (built between 1951 and 55) in front of *La menace*, a painting of 1938.  
Unidentified photographer.
3. Pablo Picasso.  
Head of wounded horse.  
Sketch study for the painting shown at the pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the 1937 Paris World's Fair (*Guernica*).  
From *Cahiers d'Art*, 1937.

of a nameless war” are in the air, he says, although he does not rule out that “this terrible fever, this agony” may well prove to be “the end of the malady,” bringing about “the delivery of a new civilization.”<sup>7</sup> The Spanish Civil War appears to have played a key role in this “disquietude.” In the year following the painting of *La Menace*, Franco’s brutal conquest of Barcelona, an event that forced many of Le Corbusier’s republican friends to leave the country (José Luis Sert, among others), would be at the core of yet another series of allegorical paintings.<sup>8</sup>

Le Corbusier’s interwar tribulations as a “fellow traveller” of French fascist groups and, more generally, of France’s “droite autoritaire,” has recently become a subject of intense interest.<sup>9</sup> While privately (and not so privately) committed to ideas about democracy, capitalism, war, and “la question juive,” which puzzled friend and foe alike,<sup>10</sup> the artist Le Corbusier liked to cast his political instincts in mysterious allegories, not totally unlike his *alter ego* Picasso in that respect. As an incarnation of archaic man, nestling under the wings of ancient mythology and musing about the law of eternal return, he liked to picture war as a cosmic fatality, or even as a universal, inevitable purgatory rite at the service of man’s (and architecture’s) rebirth.<sup>11</sup> It is tempting to consider the mysterious combination of the Ronchamp model with *La menace* as an illustration of such a mythic practice. Note that, at one point, the architect compares the whitewashed walls of the church to “the Virgin carrying in her womb the martyrdom of her child.”<sup>12</sup> Is the chapel thus presented next to the painting the baby that has been delivered from its mother’s womb, or does its form itself incorporate the suffering? Whatever the case, the harmony of the building’s outline seems like the counterimage of the agony and bloodshed that preceded its birth. Could it be that Ronchamp, apart from its role as a pilgrimage chapel, needs to be seen as a war memorial?<sup>13</sup>

Whereas the message of *La menace* is mythological and apocalyptic, the often reproduced *Graffiti à Cap Martin*, also of 1938, appears to represent a pastoral scene and to carry a pacifying message. In formal terms, as a monochrome mural, this work, too, recalls *Guernica*, though not in respect of



4. Le Corbusier.  
*La menace.*  
Oil on canvas, 162x130cm.

style and emotional content. The mythology of “Algérie française,” which sparked Le Corbusier’s interest in Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger* to begin with (for that painting doubtlessly served as the basis for the mural), to say nothing of the troubling presence of what looks like a swastika inscribed on one of the figures, rather suggests that what the painter had in mind was a tribute to the pacific and constructive forces of some kind of Mediterranean fascism.<sup>14</sup> Whether Picasso’s own fifteen variations on Delacroix’s *Femmes d’Alger*, executed between 1954 and 55, had anything to do with the architect’s work is a matter of speculation. It is interesting that Le Corbusier later claimed to have at one point shown the mural to Picasso. He even recalled that, while examining the mural, Picasso instantly recognized the connection with Delacroix.<sup>15</sup>

Be that as it may, Picasso’s symbolic patronage of Le Corbusier’s postwar *Œuvre complète* was all the more adroitly staged as it implied both cultural nobilitation and political exorcism. Picasso’s public engagement with the cause of the left was a matter of public record in the years after 1945 (he had joined the French Communist party in 1944). Furthermore, his many variations on the theme of the peace dove, multiplied by the thousands on posters, book covers, handouts, ceramic plates, scarves, etc. (Fig. 5), were about to become synonymous with the international peace movement, which had started in Europe as a response to the American-led arms race, and which notoriously had Stalin’s blessings (in fact, centre-right Europe suspected the Kominform of being its ideological headquarters).<sup>16</sup> Picasso had participated in the *Congrès Mondial des partisans de la paix* (World Congress of Partisans for Peace) only a few months before his visit to the Unité, a meeting that ended in a mass rally attended by half a million peace activists waving home-made versions of Picasso’s Dove of Peace at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris. As if touched by the wings of glory, the artist stood on the gallery and remarked to his friend and neighbour, Louis Aragon: “Alors quoi? Dis-moi? C’est la gloire?”<sup>17</sup> Le Corbusier did not participate in the event, although he may have witnessed some of it from his apartment situated directly across the street from the stadium. We do not know whether



5. Pablo Picasso.  
Peace Scarf showing the Peace Dove  
surrounded by representants of the  
four human races (1951).  
From Utley, *Picasso, the Communist Years*.

5a. Wrocław.  
Entrance to the Wrocław Polytechnic  
School, where the "Congress of the  
Intellectuals for Peace" was held in  
1948.  
From Bibrowskiego, *Picasso w Polsce*  
(1979).

he was around at the time. If he was, he may not have felt unalloyed pleasure at seeing Picasso so enthusiastically embraced by the peace-loving masses—a joy he could only dream of one day experiencing himself. In fact, two years later, when visiting Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at his state office in New Delhi, he handed him a copy of the letter he had sent to the Congress in 1949 and in which he had declared his refusal to participate in the event: “They want to place us on the horns of a USA-USSR dilemma. This is the result of a lack of information which can only be obtained by an enquiry on the spot regarding the differences and similarities which condition the fast-developing machinist phenomenon . . . (etc).”<sup>18</sup> He had even added a handwritten note saying that in 1948 he had already refused to participate in a similar Congress in Wroclaw.<sup>19</sup> Le Corbusier must have hoped that the presentation of such an immaculate pedigree as a political “neutralist” would convince Nehru to go ahead with the building of the monument of the “Open Hand,” the Non-Alignment Movement’s answer to Picasso’s Peace Dove (see Fig. 17).

In a letter to CIAM Secretary General Giedion, Helena Syrkus, the Polish architect who had just been made vice president of that organization, and who was one of the organizers of the Wroclaw Peace conference, complains bitterly about Le Corbusier’s unwillingness to accept the invitation to Wroclaw (“ . . . which for me, as a member of the CIAM Council, was a bitter pill to swallow and has given me much food for thought,” she added), although she is proud to report that she managed to attract Picasso to the conference instead (Fig. 5a).<sup>20</sup> Bringing Picasso to Wroclaw hadn’t been that easy either, however. What appears to have lured him into accepting was the prospect of travelling to Warsaw by airplane (he had never flown before). Syrkus had asked the pilot to circle Paris a few extra times, and Picasso raved about the “cubist” birds-eye views thus obtained.<sup>21</sup> In Wroclaw, Picasso proved to be the spearhead among the Western artists, scientists and intellectuals that had accepted the invitation to the conference—people such as Fernand Léger, Paul Eluard, Bertolt Brecht, Eve Curie, Aldous Huxley, and many more. Cordial relationships in “brotherly understanding” were cemented,



not least with Soviet delegates, Syrkus adds in her note to Giedion. She does not mention Alexander Fadeyev, the president of the Soviet Writers Union, whose keynote speech outraged Picasso. Fadeyev had denounced Picasso's friend Sartre as a "hyena and a jackal," thus encouraging other participants to take the painter aside and "criticize him for the decadent and bourgeois manner of his art."<sup>22</sup>

## 2. CIAM AND "COMMON MAN"

The Wroclaw congress was in fact symptomatic of the increasing political tension within the world of modernist art in general, even though the divide between "left" and "right" far from followed clear-cut party lines. That the tension was also real within CIAM is highlighted by Helena Syrkus's failure to recruit Le Corbusier to the peace movement. The avant-garde's "problem" with the multifaceted spectrum of left wing "realisms," and in particular with Socialist Realism as the official aesthetic doctrine in the Soviet Union, had been at the core of artistic debates in Europe ever since the mid 1930s.<sup>23</sup> By 1947, when CIAM planned its first meeting after World War II, which was to be held in Bridgwater, England, it became clear that even as seemingly "a-political" a question as that of the collaboration between artists and architects was enough to reveal a potential mountain of political and cultural discord within the organization.<sup>24</sup> The autonomy of art with regards to politics could no longer be taken for granted even within CIAM. "Socialist Realism" was no longer taboo.

Weeks before the Bridgwater meeting began, the questionnaire that had been prepared in Zurich as a base for the discussions was picked to pieces by the English MARS Group, which was in charge of the organization: "The aspect of aesthetics that we suggest for discussion at the sixth congress is not the purist approach, but the sociological aspect: the relation of modern architecture with what ordinary people require."<sup>25</sup> An alternative questionnaire prepared by the MARS Group raised the issue as to whether architectural design should

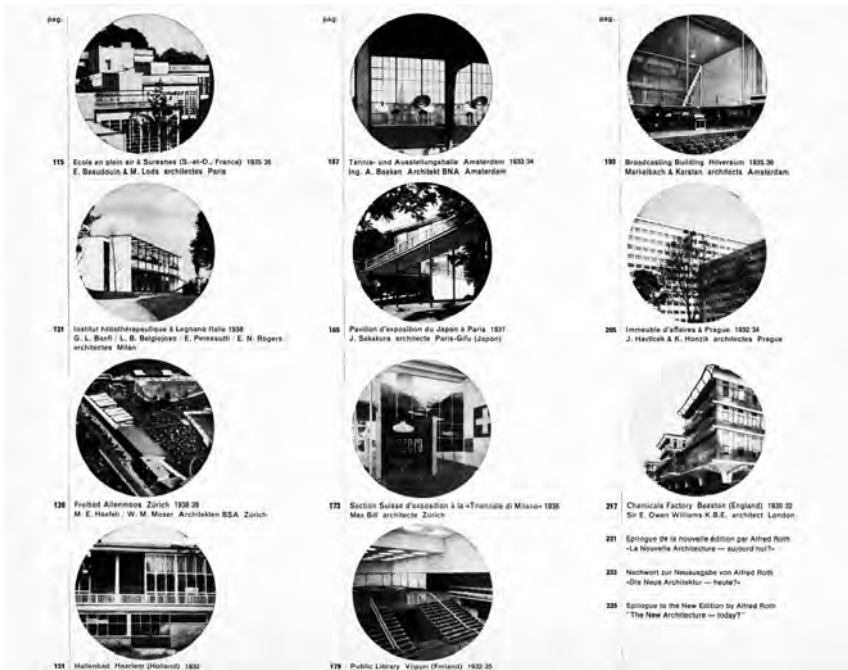
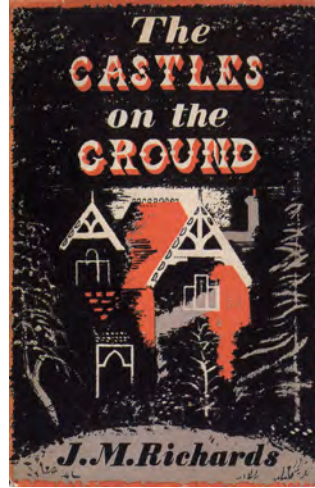
not be based on systematic opinion-polls. Furthermore, the time had come for architects, so it was argued, to pay special attention “to the symbolic or allusive aspect in architecture as opposed to its abstract aesthetic qualities.”<sup>26</sup> Finally, some British participants of the congress voted openly in favour of a serious study of the experiences made under “Socialist Realism.” James M. Richards himself, one of the organizers of the Bridgwater meeting, complained that in most countries represented at the congress, CIAM ideals were couched in a visual language that “the man in the street” was incapable of accepting or even understanding.<sup>27</sup>

As a “neutral” Swiss and through able diplomacy, Giedion, the CIAM secretary general, finally managed to prevent a fatal paralysis, if not complete breakdown of the organization. In 1947, he had reviewed James M. Richards’s small book *Castles on the Ground*, a reminder for architects to take seriously ordinary people’s expectations with regards to beauty in the built environment (Fig. 6). Perhaps surprisingly, Giedion praised the book as extremely useful. “Richards needs to be praised,” so he argues, for not boasting about the robustness of a Swiss architect “who takes it for granted that he is the predestined soul surgeon of the general public.”<sup>28</sup> Was he thinking of younger compatriots like Max Bill or Alfred Roth, for whom European reconstruction primarily represented an opportunity to finally bring about the victory of pre-war functionalism (Fig. 7)?<sup>29</sup> Also, Richards does not waste his time “by once again making fun of the English suburbs,” Giedion continues. Though incapable of taking seriously these suburban homes as architecture, Richards insists on the seriousness of the “needs that are alive in their inhabitants.”<sup>30</sup>

A friendly salute to Richards, one of the organizers of the Bridgwater meeting, the review was clearly part of an effort on Giedion’s part to open a dialogue with the “Marxist” positions on architecture and art that were about to set the tone in Eastern Europe. That Helena Syrkus, the head of the Polish CIAM group, was made Vice President of CIAM at Bridgwater, points into the same direction. “Following the 2nd World War, new hopes have arisen among the large urban and rural masses,” she and her husband, Szymon



6. J. M. Richards, *Castles on the Ground* (1946).  
Cover.
7. A page from Alfred Roth, *The New Architecture* (1939), showing samples of the buildings documented in the book.



Syrkus, as well as Hans Schmidt and Mart Stam, had written in a declaration previously submitted to the congress: "Their participation in social events took [sic] a greater impetus because the war taught them that through cooperation and social solidarity the material and spiritual progress of the individual is better achieved."<sup>31</sup> The declaration went on to urge CIAM to fundamentally revise the role of the architect in the design of man's physical environment, and to drop the term "Modern" from the organization's name: "In concluding the above principles, and while retaining the abbreviated name, the CIAM will amend their title," they insisted. "CIAM will from now on be called 'INTERNATIONAL CONGRESSES FOR SOCIAL ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING.'"<sup>32</sup>

In her subsequent correspondence with Giedion, Syrkus invites the secretary general to open up the organization towards Eastern Europe by choosing Prague or Brno rather than Bergamo as host for the following congress. At one point, she even urges her friend to read Stalin's essay *Historical and Dialectical Materialism* in order to better understand what architects in Eastern Europe were working on. "What is missing in your extremely interesting book," she writes to her friend, the author of *Space, Time and Architecture*, "is the the purely Marxist point of view, which you are content to employ emotionally, if one may say so." Why not simply "read in an unbiased way the definition of historical and dialectical materialism given by Stalin?" she writes in the famous essay of 1938. "If you know this work, read it once again carefully, with urbanism on your mind, and you will understand our point of view."<sup>33</sup>

With CIAM 7 held in Brno or Prague, Syrkus might have succeeded in bringing about the desired shift in CIAM politics. Yet the CIAM governing body had decided in favour of Bergamo (Fig. 8). The topical role played by Italian architects in early CIAM history was one of the reasons. That the Democrazia Cristiana, massively aided by the US, had won a landslide victory in Italy's national elections of April 1948, thus preventing the communists from entering the government, made the choice look even more plausible: Italy was now solidly anchored in the Western Block.<sup>34</sup> Considering the aesthetic



8. Bergamo.  
Brolleto (communal palace), where CIAM 7 was held.  
From *Metron*.
  
9. Helena Syrkus together with Le Corbusier (left),  
J. L. Sert and S. Giedion (right) at the 1949 CIAM  
Congress in Bergamo.

demands of “common man,” Giedion now returned to his older theory of the “ruling taste,” which had already helped him to rationalize the crisis of modern architecture in the Soviet Union under Stalin.<sup>35</sup> According to the secretary general, the situation at the time was characterized by an increasing gap between highly advanced methods of thinking on the one hand and fatal stagnation on the level of emotions on the other. The results were to be seen “in the judgments of politicians of all countries as far as questions of literature, art, and architecture are concerned.” Even though their judgment was lagging generations behind, “they nevertheless decide what will be built and what will not be built.”<sup>36</sup> Politics and business continued to press the new into the visual habits of tradition, Giedion lamented. As a result, the paralyzing heritage of 19th century historicism and its culture of historical borrowings had kept official culture under its sway up to that very moment. Was he thinking of Stalin’s alleged role in choosing the final project for the Soviet Palace in Moscow between 1933 and 35, which had put an end to the Modern Movement’s confidence in Soviet politics? In one of the Bergamo sessions, Giedion evokes a fictive dinner conversation between Truman (the then president of the United States), Stalin, and “a typical fascist”: “I believe if one could seat round a table Mr. Truman and a man, who shall be nameless, for Russia, together with a typical fascist, one would find their taste was identical when it comes to passing judgment on this problem of art.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, a few moments before, the art historian James J. Sweeney had quoted from a letter Truman had addressed to the American press only two years previously (June 1947):

I do not pretend to be an artist or a judge of art, but I am of the opinion that so-called ‘modern art’ is merely the vapping of half-baked lazy people . . . There is no art at all in connection with modernism in my opinion.<sup>38</sup>

With the “problem” thus identified as a question of emotional readiness to accept (instead of simply rejecting) the leading role of modern art in organizing visual culture at large, the premises for a discussion on the

possible roles of tradition and popular taste in art and architecture appeared no longer to exist. As a result, the dialogue with the Modern Movement's Eastern European diaspora appears to have come to a sudden halt when Syrkus (after all, CIAM's Vice President) openly challenged what had become the organization's shared notion of cultural politics (see Fig. 9). "We lack a fair attitude towards the people. Art belongs to the people and must be understood by the people," she insisted in her address to the congress. And she added, referring to the splendid 17th century Palazzo Nuovo in which some of the meetings were held: "We of CIAM must revise our attitude. The Bauhaus is as far behind us as Scamozzi."<sup>39</sup>

Max Bill was first to speak up after Syrkus's presentation. Interestingly, he countered her populist plea with a panegyric of the Unité d'habitation in Marseilles (which, at that moment, was barely two thirds built). Unlike some buildings that are so big they make people feel like "dust," Le Corbusier here reached an exemplary "unité esthétique," Bill argued. Then he went on to use a project by his friend Hans Schmidt as a counter-example. This "house" may be seen as typical for Syrkus's program, according to Bill. It was to contain a mural painting, 20m long, in "popular" style, though clumsily wedged into a small corridor so as to be hardly visible. "The subject has become revolutionary, but the work as such uses an outdated language, it is academic and sterile."<sup>40</sup>

Schmidt did not respond. Giedion, in turn, tried to re-focus the conversation towards the "moral" issue of artistic authenticity. CIAM's task, so he insisted, was to defy the "ruling taste"—whether represented by Truman, Stalin, or by any fascist dictator.<sup>41</sup> It took him time to return to the opposing party's cause, albeit referring to the Bridgwater meeting that had preceded Bergamo. After recalling the question that had been raised by the MARS Group, pondering "how far the ruling taste needs to be taken into account in order to satisfy the needs of the man in the street," he writes: "At the following congress at Bergamo in Italy (1949), the question led immediately to the hottest discussion between East and West, and we felt once more that aesthetic problems are not just personal matters . . . but that they are

a part of our attitude towards the world, and that they merge—sometimes tragically—into politics.”<sup>42</sup> Indeed, consensus within CIAM appears to have been close to its breaking point. One year later, Hans Schmidt, after all, one of the founders of CIAM, wrote to his friend Mart Stam in Dresden: “We can no longer afford to sit in CIAM and see it being run in such a biased way as is done by Le Corbusier, Giedion, Roth, etc.. We have no choice but to either leave CIAM or to inaugurate a discussion that is long overdue.”<sup>43</sup> No wonder the minutes of those tormented debates were never published in extenso.

In retrospect, and generally speaking, the “Marxism” voiced within CIAM was certainly more of the Stalinist type than of Trotskyist (or anarchist) origin. Trotsky’s theories about art and revolution had profoundly influenced Surrealism, yet they found little echo within the congress. They smouldered in related artists’ groups such as COBRA, however, not to mention the fact that Trotskyism would indeed soon help to ignite the “revolution” envisioned by the *Internationale Situationniste*. Already in 1947, the year of the Bridgewater congress, the Danish painter Asger Jorn, a founding member of the COBRA Group, and subsequently an active *Situationniste*, began to voice a solid metaphysical disgust for all that Le Corbusier (and, by implication, the CIAM) stood for: “The ‘fundamental joys’ in people’s lives are not ‘sun, air, and green trees,’” he proclaimed,

*but rather the chance to develop, exploit and enjoy their creative powers and abilities to the benefit of themselves and those around them.* This presupposes that each man is able to draw the maximum benefit from his work, food, clothing, housing, light and air; and instead of an aesthetic enjoyment of green tree tops seen from a pigeon’s perspective 50 floors up in a tower block, *an active relationship with nature* is required where he, as a free man, can be involved in shaping his surroundings without hindrance—to fashion them according to his needs and experience, and that includes the architecture around him—should he so desire.

Jorn then goes on to invoke “spontaneity” as the secret of this revolution: “For this is only the beginning of a new dawn which not only heralds a new form of living and building but also a new artistic development of enormous scope and potential.”<sup>44</sup> Note that a succession of poignant essays on the interaction of architecture and the arts in Le Corbusier’s work had preceded these critical remarks (indeed, Jorn knew Le Corbusier well: while studying with Léger in Paris, he had been one of those to give the architect a helping hand in making the “Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux”).<sup>45</sup> “Instead of cultivating life itself, Corbusier cultivates common sense logic,” Jorn then states.<sup>46</sup> He continues,

. . . the winds of change will blow down this carefully constructed house of cards. In the new age that is dawning, mankind will turn their backs on autocratic designers who claim to design on their behalf; be that in housing, town planning, regional development etc.. People will grow and encourage others to grow, people will live and let live.<sup>47</sup>

The man who, within CIAM, probably came closest to such views was Aldo van Eyck. He was a friend of Karel Appel, Constant Nieuwenhuys and other Dutch members of the COBRA Group. When van Eyck famously sprang up shouting: “To hell with common sense!” (in his response to the “Stalinist” ideologues at Bridgwater), Jorn would probably have agreed. At the same time, van Eyck’s fervid exclamation also struck a decisive chord with the CIAM consensus as it had been defined and nurtured by Giedion for decades. Nor is the twin reference to “existentialism” and “humanism” in his subsequent statement a mere coincidence. Architecture follows the same logic as any other creative activity, van Eyck insisted; here, too, the question that needs to be asked is “how to make explicit the natural course of existence, by man and for man.”<sup>48</sup>

By placing Le Corbusier’s “Grille CIAM” and the Unité d’habitation, then still under construction, at the center of the debate, the subsequent meeting at Bergamo managed to re-focus the debate on values and procedures





10. Ivan Zholtoviski.  
Housing complex on Leninski Prospekt,  
Moscow, 1949.  
Page from *Casabella*, no. 262, April 1962.

11. Mario Ridolfi.  
Quartiere INA A Casa Tiburtino, Rome.  
Plot F, building 3. (1951).  
Elevation and plan, November 28, 1951.  
Courtesy Accademia Nazionale di San  
Luca, Roma. Fondo Ridolfi-Frankl-  
Malagrifici, [www.fondoridolfi.org](http://www.fondoridolfi.org).



that had matured within CIAM over the two decades of its existence. The highly official construction site in Marseilles met with the vivid curiosity it deserved, not to mention acclaim for the unquestioned master of CIAM. As to the prejudices still held by some against the avant-garde's aesthetic elitism, the *Unité* after all rather confirmed them. What is more, being the work of but one single artist-architect, this building did not offer a real answer to CIAM's earlier plea for an "Integration of the Arts" that would result from a collective effort. Consequently, enthusiasm was far from ubiquitous at Bergamo. And while Giedion later praised the completed building as the model for a visionary combination of "social" and "spatial imagination," Italian architecture set out to develop its own answers to the pressing challenges of reconstruction, developing its own vision of urbanism's symbolic and communicative potentialities.<sup>49</sup> The *Quartiere Tiburtino*, in Rome, partly made possible by Marshall Plan funds, is just one example of the way those "realist" design strategies CIAM had attempted to put under quarantine subsequently became the basis for a new approach to social housing. Within a few years, Italian "Neo-realismo" thus managed to eclipse the ghost of Soviet Monumentalism (Figs. 10, 11).<sup>50</sup>

As to the ghost of "the man in the street," it was not eradicated for good. Doubts regarding the providential nature of the aesthetic avant-garde and its self-declared leadership in matters of architecture and city planning had been rumbling throughout the history of Team X, although the *esprit de corps* was effective at keeping them under control.<sup>51</sup> However, a growing resistance against accepting the language of Modernism as the sole interpreter of people's needs would soon find new advocates outside the world of CIAM, and in particular among sociologists and urban theorists such as Henri Lefèbvre (in France), or Herbert Gans and Denise Scott Brown (in the USA).



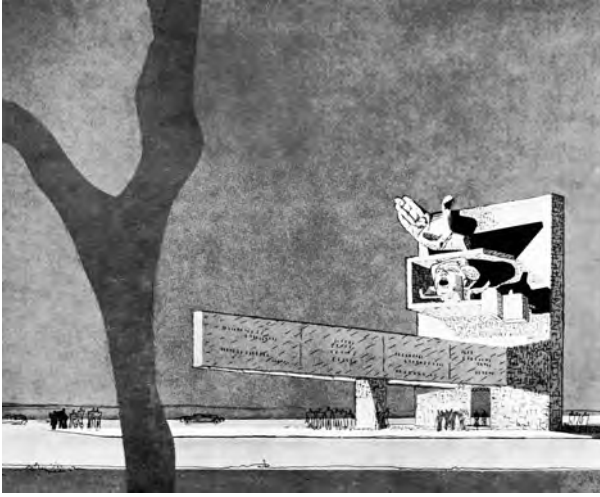


13. Werner Bischof.  
An Indian beggar.  
Photograph (1951).  
From *du*.

## 3. THE OPEN HAND AND "ETERNAL MAN"

Chandigarh was founded in 1950. As is well known, the "Open Hand" had been imagined by Le Corbusier as a kind of logo to be planted at the edge of the city's Capitol area (Figs. 12, 17). Its outlines recall those of a trophy in the shape of a cup. At closer inspection, one could almost mistake it for a giant baseball glove.<sup>52</sup> Although the form speaks the language of popular symbolism, the message is lofty: as a gesture, it can be seen as a pledge declaring the government's determination to distribute the riches of progress among the people, as is the role of the modern welfare state. This, at least, is how the architect may have wanted the monument to be understood by its client, even though statements such as "pleine main j'ai reçu, pleine main je donne" ("with full hands I have received, with full hands I give") suggest that the "Open Hand," as we now find it on letterheads, book covers, exhibition catalogs, even medals, is nothing less than a substitute for the architect himself: it stands for his signature. Due to the mystery of its mytho-poetic aura, this signature evokes Rudolf Steiner no less than Joseph Beuys, yet its origin is obviously Nietzschean: "I would like to give away and to distribute, until the wise among men will again rejoice in their foolishness and the poor in their richness." Furthermore: "This, in fact, is the hardest task of all: to close, out of love, the open hand and maintain, in the act of giving, one's shame."<sup>53</sup>

Chandigarh would not exist had not India's central government agreed to cover one third of the city's estimated building costs. The decision was eminently political.<sup>54</sup> An important purpose of the city was to serve as a memorial to the 500,000 people who had fallen in the savage war with Pakistan—a war that had cut the Punjab into two halves—and to offer work to, and hopefully a roof over the heads of, at least some of the 12 million who had lost their homes in the war. Moreover, for Prime Minister Nehru the project offered a unique occasion to efficiently stage the newborn nation's will to find its own way towards modernization, regardless of the macro-political situation and the hegemonic claims of both Washington and Moscow that



14. Le Corbusier.  
Monument for Paul Vaillant-Couturier,  
Paris (1938).  
From *Œuvre complète, 1938-1946*.

15. François Rude.  
*Le Départ des volontaires (La Marseillaise)*,  
1833-1836.  
North-east pillar of the Arc de  
Triomphe, Paris.



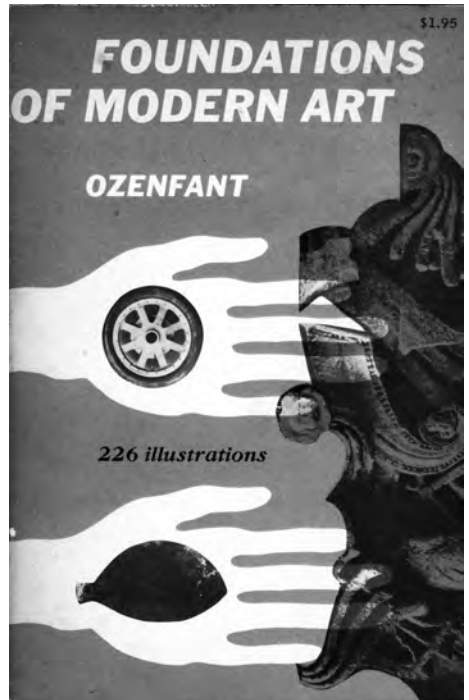
went along with it. It is important to remember how much the former enemy, Pakistan, was (and still is) enmeshed with the US, reason enough for India to invest even more energy in the demonstration of its autonomy. One can therefore understand why Nehru, who a few years later, in 1955 would join forces with other Third World leaders towards forming the Non-Aligned Movement (at the Asia-Africa conference in Bandung), responded with a smile when Le Corbusier entertained him with his maverick ideas about political neutralism. It was but one of the many attempts by the architect to lure his patron into building the “Monument of the Open Hand.”<sup>55</sup>

At one point he claims to have borrowed the idea from some sketch done in 1948.<sup>56</sup> Yet there is a much closer precedent: his unrealized project for a monument to Paul Vaillant-Couturier, of 1938, a huge construction to be erected at the bifurcation of a national highway outside Paris. Forming a kind of city gate, and made of mounted vertical and horizontal planes supporting and framing a face and an open hand in the act of addressing a mass rally, the project is rather *pompier* (Fig. 14). In its inflammatory pathos, it almost equals the work that transpires to be its model: *Le Départ des volontaires*, also called *La Marseillaise*, the sculpted relief on the south-east pillar of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, facing the Champs Elysées (1833-1836). This is a singularly pathetic glorification of French military triumphalism, and certainly one of the most widely shown pieces of public statuary in France (Fig. 15). Both the head and the huge hand in Le Corbusier's project are inspired by (although not actually copied from) the famous work by François Rude, and then grossly enlarged and “pasted” into the abstract “pastiche.”<sup>57</sup>

Le Corbusier's monument to Vaillant-Couturier was to honour one of the great figures of the French Popular Front. But why this “baroque” emphasis on the hand? The monument appears to have offered an occasion to literally lift out a theme Le Corbusier had been obsessed with in his paintings for years. To the degree that painting is about human emotions, or more precisely, passion—and Le Corbusier's painting certainly was—hands, either ecstatically gesticulating or convulsively entangled, seem to be topical for this painter (as with Caravaggio or Delacroix; see also Fig. 2). On the



16. Le Corbusier.  
*Les lignes de la main.*  
Oil on canvas (1930).



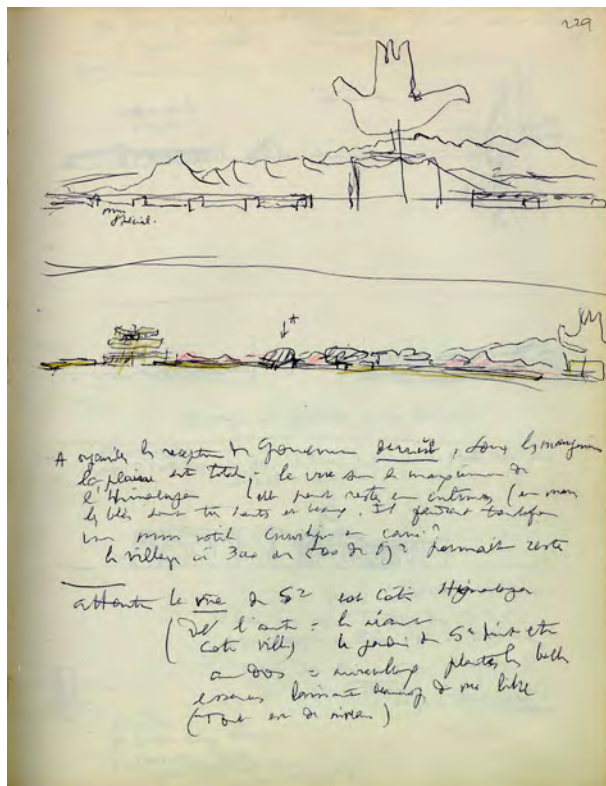
17. Amédée Ozenfant.  
*Foundations of Modern Art* (1931;  
originally published as *Art*).  
Cover design based on prehistoric palm  
prints from cavern of Les Eyzies, France.

other hand, the project's reference to 19th century public statuary makes it singular within the architect's oeuvre, nor should one forget that holding out one's hand is a formula with its own history in political rhetoric. Can Le Corbusier not have been aware of the clarion call of Maurice Thorez, the secretary of the PFC (*Parti Communiste Français*), to the French workers in favour of a cross-party "Reconciliation of the people of France" ("réconciliation du peuple de France") in 1936? "We are holding out our hand to you," Thorez declares in this speech: "Catholic, worker, employee, craftsman, farmer, we who are secular. For you are our brothers . . . (etc)."<sup>58</sup> Though Thorez's conciliatory initiative did not outlast the political coalitions that constituted the Popular Front, it can be seen as the first step towards what later became known as the Christian-Marxist dialogue.<sup>59</sup> That the philosophical credo invested in the monument turned out to outlive party politics would have been wholly in Le Corbusier's spirit.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, for a celebration of India as the harbour of world peace, political imagery would need to be anchored in a more primeval and also a more universal idiom than the one chosen in 1938. As it happened, Le Corbusier's visual memory held a stock of images that promised to fit the occasion in an almost providential way. The hand as a primeval symbol had been on Le Corbusier's mind since the days of *L'Esprit Nouveau*. He knew about Abbé Breuil and the prehistoric hand prints Breuil had discovered in the caves of Pech-Merle and El Castillo in around 1910. *Les lignes de la main*, a painting of 1930, is a late tribute to the primeval symbolism of the palm prints inscribed on these walls—at the same time, one cannot help being reminded of Ozenfant, Le Corbusier's former brother-in-arms, who in 1928 returned from a visit to the caverns of Les Eyzies exclaiming:

Ah, those HANDS! Those silhouettes of hands, spread out and stencilled on an ochre ground! Go and see them. I promise you the most intense emotion you have ever experienced. Eternal Man awaits you (Figs. 16, 17).<sup>61</sup>





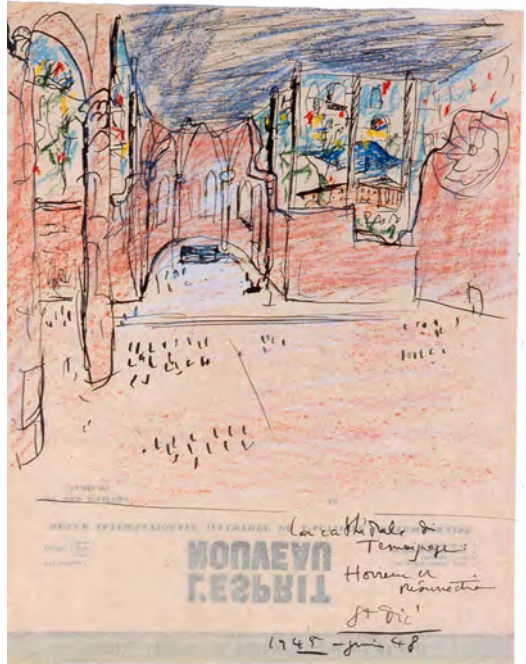
18. Le Corbusier.  
 Sketch of the proposed Monument  
 of the Open Hand (1951 or after).  
 Cahier Nivola, 229.

Indeed, while Le Corbusier was entertaining Nehru with his ideas about the “Open Hand,” Georges Bataille and somewhat later Sigfried Giedion were initiating a new round of discussions and reflection on the meaning of these signs.<sup>62</sup>

Yet the blind passenger carried along with Le Corbusier’s “Open Hand,” enviously implied, silently refuted, is Picasso’s peace dove. As to the Prime Minister, he mustered but limited interest in his visitor’s attempts to provide evidence for his dedication to the philosophy of “neutralism.” He made it clear that the execution of the proposed monument was unlikely in the near future for financial reasons. Obviously, as a savvy politician, he knew only too well how easily the public effect of political gestures and symbols could subvert the very contents those gestures and symbols intended to convey. What, for instance, if the world at large would interpret the “*Open Hand*” as yet another rendering of the “*Empty Hand*”? Indeed, this was a worrying thought given the deadly famine that plagued India at the very moment of the Prime Minister’s dialogue with Le Corbusier. In a long series of haunting photographs, taken in 1951, Werner Bischof documented the reality of “the smashed, the crooked, the beggar’s hand, India’s second face” (Adolf Muschg; Fig. 13).<sup>63</sup> No wonder the realization of a monument whose symbolism would make it so vulnerable to misunderstanding did not make it to the top of the political agenda.

#### 4. RUIN EXORCISM, AND THE NUCLEAR SUBLIME<sup>64</sup>

One way of finding out what makes people look at ruins may be to explore the reasons why, in certain circumstances, they categorically refuse to do so.<sup>65</sup> For many years, the mental block regarding the experience of ruin appears to have been more widespread even among architects than among ordinary people. If Anthony Vidler is correct, architectural discourse in England was characterized for decades by “a culture of suppression and conscious self-deceit with respect to the psychological damages of war.”<sup>66</sup>



19. *Survival . . . and the Need for Revival*  
 Advertisement from  
*The Architectural Review* (1947)  
 showing the bombed nave of  
 Coventry cathedral.
  
20. Le Corbusier.  
*The Cathedral of Testimony, Horror and resurrection.*  
 Ink and colour pencil drawing on the reverse  
 of a sheet of *L'Esprit Nouveau* stationary.  
 Dated "June 48,"

Yet the clean-up was certainly not total in England. Before the bombings had come to an end, Kenneth Clark rationalized the effects of war by simply stating that “war damage in itself is picturesque.”<sup>67</sup> A lost drawing by Louis Kahn basically makes the same point when it suggests that Europeans should use their bombed churches as war memorials (also in 1944).<sup>68</sup> Many among London’s bombed churches eventually survived as war memorials in the form of picturesque urban amenities, thanks to this strategy. Coventry cathedral has thus become a symbol of Britain’s rebirth after the war (Fig. 19), as has, *mutatis mutandis*, the badly damaged Kaiser Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche in Berlin, although, not by coincidence, the Gedächtniskirche is also the latecomer in this series (completed 1958-62).

Le Corbusier’s plan for the rebuilding of Saint-Dié is a key example of “ruin exorcism.” Except for some pre-19th century artefacts considered to be worthy of preservation, the plan virtually ignores the city’s historic street pattern. The “New” is defined by its radical opposition to the “Old.” Granted that in comparison to the 1930s visions of the “Ville Radieuse,” the nervous gesture of the late Saint-Dié renderings now evokes a rather broken version of the “New”: in an encrypted way, these drawings seem to speak of violence, of dark materiality, as if involuntarily reflecting the sombre experience the country had just gone through.<sup>69</sup> In the background of one of those drawings, one notices the 17th century towers of the cathedral and the ruined gothic nave covered by some sort of emergency roof (Figs. 21, 22). By 1948, while it had become clear that the famous master plan for Saint-Dié would be shelved, the idea of the ruin as war memorial had resurfaced on the agenda (see Fig. 20). Charged with ideas of martyrdom and resurrection, the proposal for the “cathédrale du témoignage” in Saint-Dié resonates with the architect’s upbringing. At the same time, memories of World War I appear to have had a share in this reawakened interest in ruin symbolism: in 1915, in the early months of the war, German artillery had attacked Reims cathedral, a trauma that caused an uproar far beyond France and that had ultimately been decisive for the architect to choose France (instead of Germany) as his field of action.<sup>70</sup>

21. Saint-Dié, France.  
View of ruined city centre after  
the cleaning up of the ruins,  
ca. 1947.
  
22. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch illustrating Le Corbusier's  
plan for the reconstruction of  
Saint-Dié, showing the city  
administration tower (right)  
and the cathedral (background;  
1945).



Should the project's rough materiality and tragic aura be seen as a first step towards Brutalism (Fig. 20)?<sup>71</sup> At the very least, that quality appears to be a belated acknowledgment of the brutality of ruination that had triggered the abstract program of the master plan to begin with. The architecture thus incorporates both the horror of war *and* the triumph of resurrection ("horreur et résurrection," as is noted on the drawing). The idea never reached the project stage. The cathedral's nave as well as the adjacent cloisters now survive in the form of a *reconstruction à l'identique*.<sup>72</sup>

Speaking of exorcisms, one wonders if Reyner Banham's exploration and canonization of "New Brutalism" should not, after all, primarily be understood as an effort to exorcize the preceding fashion launched by the *Architectural Review*: "New Empiricism."<sup>73</sup> Banham is quite explicit about this aspect of his campaign when he pours sarcasm over that movement's "cottage-sized aspirations" and its "sentimental regard for nineteenth century vernacular usages." For him, its tendency to "elaborate woodwork detailing," its "pitched roofs . . . pretty paintwork and freely picturesque grouping on the ground," etc., deserve ridicule. He knows that, granted an input of British socialist ethos, the origins of the style are Swedish (he reports James Stirling stating "Let's face it, William Morris was a Swede!"<sup>74</sup>), but he cannot resist the temptation to add political spice to the argument by associating those petty aspirations with "conscious attempts by architects committed to the Communist line, to create an English equivalent of the Socialist-Realist architecture proposed in Russia by Zhdanov's architectural supporters." With a "grotesque mixture of Stalinist conspiratorial techniques (and) the traditional methods of British snobbery," these architects attempt to "enforce an Anglo-Zhdanov line," he writes, thus defining the "picturesque" as yet another layer of exorcism, this time at the expense of Soviet neo-classicism (see Fig. 10).<sup>75</sup>

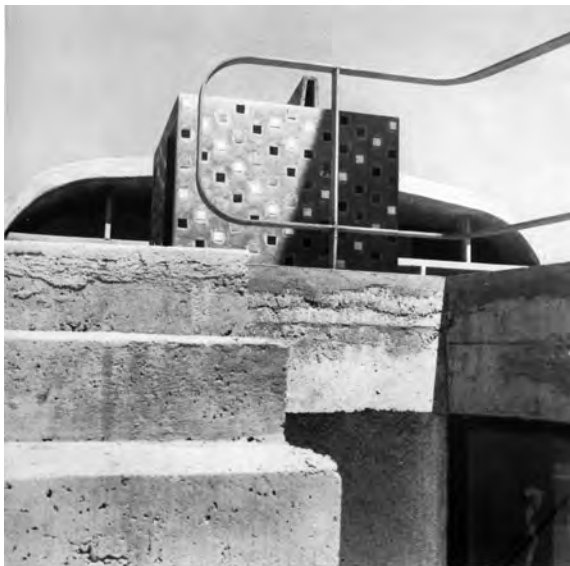
The animosity is surprising. Though England had its own, steadfast tradition of state classicism, and one that survived well into the postwar years, no one would associate it with Stalinist politics. Certainly, the Communist cause in Britain was considerably weakened by 1951, when the Conservative

Party returned to power, and by 1954, when Krushchov's verdict gave "Socialist Realism" its *coup de grâce*, Communist state art no longer served as a model, even in the most orthodox Communist circles in the West (see Fig. 10).<sup>76</sup>

Yet Banham has a point when he suggests that the short conjuncture and rapid demise of "Socialist Realism" in Britain, the homeland of Socialism, created a vacuum that invited an extravagant flourishing of less politically motivated discourses on "reality" and, by implication, "real-ism." What mattered, in the end, was hardly the alleged politics of the *Townscape* movement, or the politics of such books as *Castles on the Ground* by J. M. Richards (1946; see Fig. 6);<sup>77</sup> rather, what was at stake was the notion of "reality": according to this critic, the "reality" of a bucolic landscape or a picturesque village, or of the "genius loci," which "seemed of absolutely trivial value to a younger generation." In the eyes of that generation, the reality that needs to be dealt with is the reality of "social chaos, a world in ruins, the prospect of nuclear annihilation."<sup>78</sup> With their two "exhibition pieces" of 1956, Alison and Peter Smithson had demonstrated what Banham had on his mind when he defined architecture as a way of digging into the substance of war memory and war anxiety. The first piece, "Patio and Pavilion," shown at the "This Is Tomorrow" exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery in 1956, was a simple wooden structure, resembling an East End garden shed furnished with "bits of homely junk," the whole thing looking as if it had been "excavated after the nuclear holocaust."<sup>79</sup> The second piece, the "House of the Future," shown a few months later at the "Ideal Home" exhibition again in London, was an integrated model home, made of streamlined elements, assembled like a car, and thus, albeit not made of metal but of plastic, could be classified as "Pop." It was totally self-contained and oriented towards the interior: perfectly safe, the ultimate bomb shelter.<sup>80</sup>

What, then, would be the appropriate model for architecture to adopt in a world of social chaos, ruins, and the prospect of nuclear annihilation? For Banham's generation, for the generation of the Brutalists, the answer was Le Corbusier, Mies, or—perhaps surprisingly—Philip Johnson (the Glass House





Un exemple frappant de malfaçon de béton armé considéré comme l'un des éléments constitutifs d'une symphonie plastique



23. Le Corbusier.  
*A striking example of badly executed reinforced concrete considered as one of the constituent elements of a plastic symphony.*  
Photo from the roof terrace of the Unité d'habitation, Marseille, with caption from *(Œuvre complète, 1946-1952)*.

24. Peter Smithson.  
View of the Golden Lane neighbourhood after bombing, ca. 1945.  
The photograph was later integrated by Alison and Peter Smithson into their Golden Lane housing project (1952).  
Courtesy Smithson Family Collection



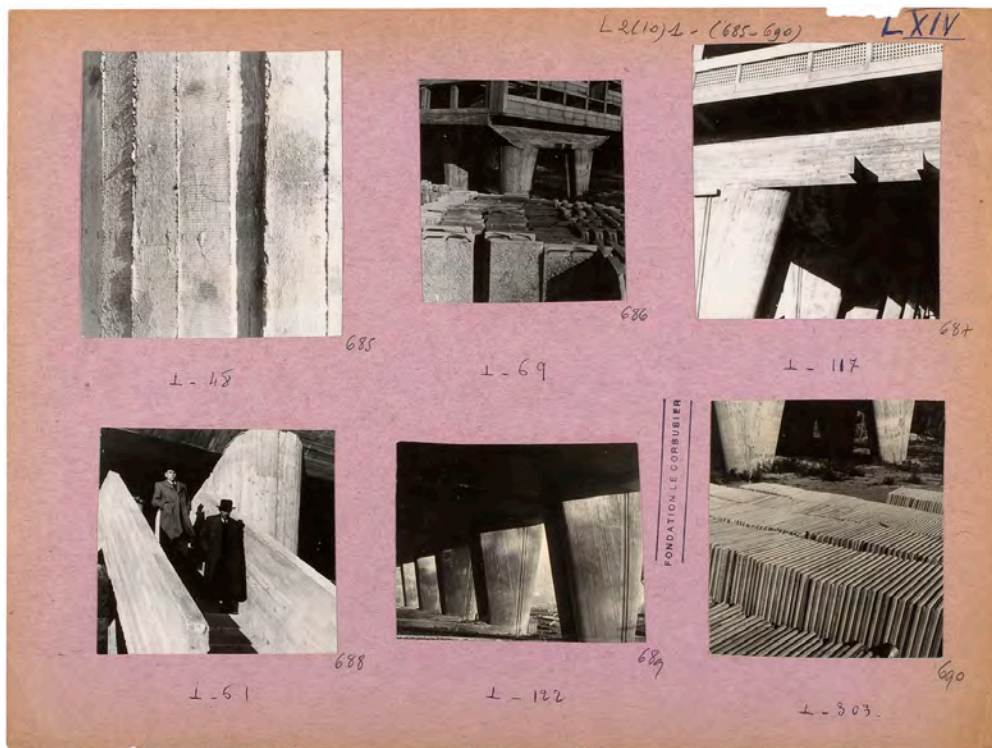
in Greenwich, CT). This may have been why the “Angry Young Men” of British architecture invaded the 1951 CIAM congress in Hoddesdon “in order to sit at the feet of the ‘grands maîtres’ whose views they could respect,”<sup>81</sup> while the “English seniors,” whom they despised more and more, continued indulging in discussions on the relevance or not of the “Picturesque tradition” for architecture.<sup>82</sup>

## 5. MARSEILLES, RUINS, AND THE MYTH OF ETERNAL RETURN

No Modernist building has been associated as persistently with ruin as the Unité d’Habitation, in Marseilles (1947-52). According to Banham, the traces of wooden coffering on the surfaces of the stairs, walls, chimneys, exhaust shafts, and elevator towers on the roof terrace make these look “like ruins.” “The concrete work of Marseilles started as a magnificent ruin even before the building was completed,” Banham writes.<sup>83</sup>

The *malfaçons* that resulted from the construction workers’ lack of experience with on-site cast concrete, swiftly reclaimed by Le Corbusier as “noble rudeness” (since repairs would have been virtually impossible, Fig. 23), are only part of the problem, although it is these technical defects that “produce an architectural surface of a rugged grandeur that seems to echo that of the well-weathered Doric temples in Magna Graecia.”<sup>84</sup> In fact, according to Vincent Scully, it is by virtue of their plastic power that the “sculptural drama” of Le Corbusier’s late works (Unité, Ronchamp, and the High Court Chandigarh) is linked to the Greek experience: for Scully they are all “primitive Greek temples, sculptural bodies in whose gestures we feel a modern violence.” As to the “muscular giant” of the Unité, he explicitly turned to maritime and military metaphors: “The Unité is a giant, a temple, an aircraft carrier,” he writes. “Its pilotis are the legs of a colossus, a bomber’s tires; the shapes of its roof are maritime, a medieval city, a dirigible’s hangar. The roof is a mountaintop itself” (Fig. 25).<sup>85</sup>

These implications of primitive violence do not make the Unité a



25. Lucien Hervé.  
The construction site of the Unité d'Habitation  
in Marseille.  
Contact sheet; undated, ca. 1950.  
Courtesy The Getty Research Institute,  
Los Angeles

war memorial, however, even though “Marseilles was built on top of a battlefield,” as the architect once wrote. In 1952, when the Unité was about to be completed, the Smithsons used photographs of London’s bombed Golden Lane neighbourhood to personalize their project site. The ruins were to become part of the reconstructed neighbourhood, a testament to the events London and its inhabitants had gone through during the war (Fig. 24).<sup>86</sup> Although their project owes a lot to the Unité, the Smithsons knew very well that Le Corbusier had not envisioned anything of the sort.<sup>87</sup> However, without the battlefield of World War II, there would have been no Unité d’Habitation to begin with. Nor did Marseilles lack its share of bombing, ruin, and cleaning up. Remember that French cities paid a heavy price in the course of France’s liberation by Allied Forces and reconquest of the territory that had been under German control. Though less dramatically hit than Orléans, Caen, Royan, or Saint-Malo, Marseilles suffered 1,250 casualties during the Allied bombing in June 1944 alone.<sup>88</sup> In 1947, in the American edition of *When the Cathedrals Were White* (a book dealing with New York, first published in 1937), Le Corbusier writes: “The American Army arrived in Europe, found its lands, its peoples, its cities, and its fields ravaged by four years of war, emptied and robbed, in ruins, covered with dirt and eaten with rust; found broken windows and nerves on edge, exhausted bodies, and tenacious morale.”<sup>89</sup>

That the Unité, “perhaps the most influential and controversial architectural image to emerge during the reconstruction period,”<sup>90</sup> was also, eminently so, an “art project,” is highlighted by the Picasso episode referred to at the beginning of this essay. As art, architecture cannot illustrate history and biography, except in the language of allegory and metaphor. Architecture, one would assume, is no medium for autobiographical reflection: the shape of a ventilation shaft, an elevator engine casing, a gymnasium, or a child-care centre thus are primarily determined by their functions. Within the Beaux-Arts tradition, it was possible to nobilitate such installations by way of incorporating columns, friezes, pediments and capitals (see Fig. 10). However, at the Unité, the ventilation towers emerge



26. Giorgio de Chirico.  
*Two Sisters, Jewish Angel.*  
Oil on canvas.



27. Unité d'Habitation in Marseilles.  
Roof terrace during inauguration  
ceremony on October 14th, 1952.  
Unknown photographer.

from box-shaped podiums like sculptures; the conical ventilator shafts look like tree trunks turned upside down, ending with a small slit from where one might ultimately get the panorama that the high parapet of the roof terrace forbids. It is Morandi and de Chirico turned into a grotesque Walpurgis night (Figs. 26, 27).

Many have written about the process through which concrete architecture in the twentieth century began to cannibalize the traditional arts, in particular sculpture (Sigfried Giedion, James Hall, Alan Colquhoun, Rosalind Krauss, and Detlef Mertins).<sup>91</sup> In the second edition of her seminal *Contemporary Sculpture* (1960; first edition, 1937), Carola Giedion-Welcker included a series of images of both sculptures by Le Corbusier for the Unité and its roof terrace.<sup>92</sup> It is intriguing that while the building was under construction, in 1950, Giedion-Welcker wrote a penetrating essay on De Chirico, who had already entered the pantheon of great artists (see Fig. 26). Albeit indirectly, her comments reveal some of the more obscure reminiscences (or implied prophesies) invested in the building. "The entire world appears to survive as an abandoned theatre whose stage set is made of historic and personal reminiscences," she writes. "We see bizarre concretions of human form emerging, born from a critical stance towards the present. Figurations evoking both Greek mythology and the mechanical present in Chirico's 'manichinos' are looming over technical measuring instruments and architect's stencils like grotesque idols on fragile wooden podiums."<sup>93</sup>

All this throws considerable light (or shadow?) on the Unité. Concerning the gymnasium with its structurally unnecessary keel (Fig. 27), can it be read as anything other than an archaizing reference to the high-tech romanticism of the ocean liner, which is in many ways the conceptual key to the Unité? At the same time, it resonates with the fishermen's barges at Arcachon, while also being an allusion to the ship that carried Ulysses, Le Corbusier's alter ego, across the Aegean Sea, cut in half and capsized. "Born in furor,"<sup>94</sup> the project seems similarly imbued with archaic myths, restored through the force of desire and destiny: a storm is in the air, as is the smell of blood

and vengeance, not unlike many of Böcklin's paintings. Böcklin was a topical reference for the *pittura metafisica* and for Surrealism, as well as an occasionally cited name in Le Corbusier's early travel reports, but by 1950 he had obviously been forgotten. The same applies to most of the formal tropes behind the biomorphic geometries of the roof terrace. Although they powerfully reverberate with ancient memories, there is obviously no simple key for deciphering them. Barge, column, stage, the organic form of a tree trunk that embodies a memory of human form: as in Le Corbusier's painting, it is the layering of the fragments, their "automatic" interaction in time and space, "devoid of any visible link,"<sup>95</sup> that creates the crude and irritating mystery of the situation.

## NOTES

- 1 The key text on the Unité d'habitation is by Atelier de bâtisseurs, Le Corbusier, *L'Unité d'habitation de Marseille* (special issue of *Le Point*, Nov. 1950), but the most complete critical examination of the building in its socio-political context, including also its ambiguous impact on social housing in France, is by Gérard Monnier, *Le Corbusier. Les Unités d'habitation en France* (Paris: Belin/Herscher, 2002). See also François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier* (Paris: Fiction & Cie., 2015), 283-381 and passim for a fascinating close-up view of the project's genesis.

A preliminary version of the present essay appeared as "Brutalism's Ghosts: Le Corbusier, Art, and War," in Ruth Baumeister, ed., *What Moves Us? Le Corbusier and Asger Jorn in Art and Architecture* (Silkeborg; Zurich: Museum Jorn; Verlag Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015), 17-25. For background to Le Corbusier's concept of the "synthesis of the arts" see my *Le Corbusier. Elements of a Synthesis*, rev. ed. (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009), 264-317 as well as, more recently, Joan Ockman, "A Plastic Epic: The Synthesis of the Arts Discourse in France in the Mid-Twentieth Century," in Eeva Liisa Pelkonen and Esa Laaksonen, eds., *Architecture + Art* (Helsinki: Alvar Aalto Academy, 2007), 30-61.

- 2 See Gertie R. Utey, *Picasso. The Communist Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), esp. 39-51; on Le Corbusier's politics, see below.

- 3 *Le Corbusier, Œuvre complète 1946-1952* (Zurich: Les Éditions d'Architecture, 1953), 9.
- 4 *La Menace* ("The Menace," 1938, oil on canvas, 162 x 130cm, private collection, Switzerland). A photomural made from the photograph was included in the 1952 Le Corbusier retrospective at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris. For an installation shot see *Le Corbusier ou la Synthèse des Arts* (Geneva: Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Skira, 2006), 50. The picture was but rarely reproduced in subsequent years. On *La Menace* and its stylistic and iconographic antecedents, see Naima Jornod and Jean-Pierre Jornod, *Le Corbusier (Charles Edouard Jeanneret): Catalogue raisonné de l'œuvre peint* (Milan: Skira, 2005), 628-630. For a more general discussion of Le Corbusier and World War II see my "Ruin Count. On Le Corbusier and European Reconstruction," *Perspecta*, no. 48 (2015): 144-161.
- 5 See Jornod and Jornod, *Le Corbusier*, 596ff. Although it is with respect to another version of the painting that Le Corbusier gives these details, the analogies are sufficiently clear for the description to be transferred to *La Menace*.
- 6 From World War I onwards, Le Corbusier's painting unfolded in an almost uninterrupted dialogue with Picasso, although the subject was hardly discussed. After 1937, *Guernica* became a major reference. We can take it for granted that Le Corbusier not only knew the mural as such but also Picasso's preparatory studies since many of them were published in 1937 in *Cahiers d'Art* 12, no. 4-5.
- 7 "Je viens de peindre comme un forensé depuis tôt ce matin. Les inquiétudes du temps agissent et me privent de la belle tranquillité d'après-guerre" (meaning, of course, the years after WWI). Then: "Risques effroyables de guerre sans nom. Derrière tout ça: rien! Des mots, des fantômes," in a letter to his mother dated March 6, 1938; quoted in Jornod and Jornod, *Le Corbusier*, 628.
- 8 In particular *La chute de Barcelone* (1939, oil on canvas 70 x 103cm, private collection); see Jornod and Jornod, *Le Corbusier*, 664-665 as well as, for a detailed analysis of these works, Juan José Lahuerta, *Le Corbusier e la Spagna: Con la riproduzione dei carneti Barcelone e C10 di Le Corbusier* (Paris: Electa/Mondadori, 2006), esp. 63-65.
- 9 See in particular Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*. On fascism's "fellow travellers," who far outnumbered those actually enrolled in any fascist groups (Le Corbusier never was), see Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left. Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 272, passim.
- 10 Von Moos, *Le Corbusier*, 200, 212, passim.



- 11 On the myth of eternal return in archaic culture see Mircea Eliade, *Kósmos und Geschichte. Der Mythos der ewigen Wiederkehr*, trans. Günter Spaltmann (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1984), esp. 44-51, 153-159, passim.
- 12 Quoted after Emmanuel Rubio, *Vers une architecture cathartique (1945-2001)* (Paris: Éditions donner lieu, 2011), 43. Rubio mentions *Le Corbusier: Textes et dessins pour Ronchamp* (Ronchamp: Association Œuvres de N.D. du Haut de Ronchamp, 1997) as source. Rubio has a point when he argues that, “By ways of incorporating war destruction (the chapel) helps ruin become one of the foundations of new life,” in *Vers une architecture cathartique*, 37. In his more optimistic reading of Ronchamp, Josep Quetglas sees the chapel as a demonstration that “ruin can be avoided”; see “Ronchamp: A Landscape of Visual Acoustics,” in Jean-Louis Cohen, ed., *Le Corbusier. An Atlas of Modern Landscapes* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2013), 212-216, here 215.
- 13 See my “Ruin Count. Le Corbusier and European Reconstruction.”
- 14 The “Graffiti à Cap Martin” is reproduced in *Le Corbusier, Œuvre complète 1938-1946*, 159. See my, “Le Corbusier as Painter,” *Oppositions*, no. 19-20 (1980): 88-107. (“Author’s postscript, December 1980”); for an alternative interpretation see Beatriz Colomina, “Battle Lines: E1027,” in Francesca Hughes, ed., *The Architect Reconstructing Her Practice* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 2-25.
- 15 At least according to Samir Rafi, “Le Corbusier et ‘Les Femmes d’Alger,’” *Revue d’Histoire et de Civilisation du Maghreb* (1968): 50-66 (my own previously mentioned essay, “Le Corbusier as Painter,” is heavily indebted to Rafi).
- 16 Tony Judt, *PostWar. A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 221-225; Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 1999), 45ff., 68, passim; Utley, *Picasso*, 106-116.
- 17 Utley, *Picasso*, 110.
- 18 “On veut nous renfermer dans un dilemme: USA-URSS. Tel est le fruit d’une absence d’information qui ne se peut acquérir que par l’examen sur place des diversités et des similitudes qui conditionnent le présent phénomène machiniste en pleine évolution . . . (etc).” Letter to Prime Minister Nehru, printed in Jean Petit, *Le Corbusier lui-même* (Geneva: Éditions Rousseau, 1970), 116-117. On the encounter with Nehru see also Nicholas Fox Weber, *Le Corbusier. A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 561-563 (although the chronology as reported in the footnotes is far from reliable).

- 19 The note is on the respective document owned by the Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris. On the “Congress of Intellectuals for Peace” held in Wrocław, 1948, the founding moment of the international Peace Movement, see Utley, *Picasso*, 106, *passim*.
- 20 “. . . was für mich als CIAM Council Mitglied eine bittere Pille war und mir viel zu denken gegeben hat.” Letter to Sigfried Giedion, 17 November 1948 (Giedion-Archive at gta Institute, ETH-Z). For a more contextual discussion of post-World War II CIAM, see my “‘L’Europe après le pluie’ ou le brutalisme face à l’Histoire,” in Jacques Sbriglio, ed., *Le Corbusier et la question du brutalisme* (Marseille: Parenthèses, 2013), 66-87.
- 21 “Il s’amusait comme un gosse en regardant Paris du haut. Comme nous voyagions en avion spécial polonais, j’ai demandé au pilote de descendre plus bas et de faire quelques tours au-dessus de Paris et puis au-dessus de toutes les villes qui se trouvaient sur notre trajet.” Helena Syrkus, “Tel que je l’ai gardé dans la mémoire” (French translation of a text published in *KULTURA* 515, no. 16 (22 April 1973), typewritten manuscript, GSD Archive, Harvard University (Sert Collection).
- 22 Utley, *Picasso*, 107. Despite such “blows,” Picasso decided to extend his stay in Warsaw so as to be present for the ceremony scheduled in his and Paul Eluard’s honour as the 1948 recipients of the “Croix de Commandeur avec l’Etoile de l’ordre Polonia Restituta.” Syrkus, “Tel que je l’ai gardé dans la mémoire.”
- 23 Two of the reference texts should at least be mentioned here: Louis Aragon, “Le réalisme a l’ordre du jour,” *Commune* (1936): 20-32, repr. in *idem.*, *Ecrits sur l’art moderne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1981); and Fernand Léger, Jean Gromaire, Le Corbusier, Jean Lurçat, Louis Aragon et al., *La querelle du réalisme* (Paris: Éditions Cercle d’Art, 1987).
- 24 Some of the statements delivered at the 6th CIAM conference were summarized by Giedion in *A Decade of New Architecture* (Zurich: Girsberger, 1951), 30-40, as well as in his *Architektur und Gemeinschaft. Tagebuch einer Entwicklung* (Reinbek b. Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1956), 62-67, but there is no official documentation on the Bridgwater conference. For a more recent summary see Joan Ockman, *Architecture Culture 1943-1968* (New York: Columbia Books of Architecture, Rizzoli, 1993), esp. 100-122. Regarding the East-West conflict within CIAM see also Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), 182-195.
- 25 M. Hartland Thomas, letter to S. Giedion dated 24 June, 1946 (Giedion-Archive at gta Institute, ETH-Z).

- 26 Questionnaire prepared by the MARS Group (1947; Giedion archive at the gta Institute, ETH-z). No evidence of these concerns is to be found either in the questionnaire prepared by the commission headed by Giedion himself or in the two final reports on the Bridgewater meeting prepared with Bergamo in mind ('Rapport A' and 'Rapport B'); see 7 *CIAM Bergamo 1949. Documents* (Nendeln: Kraus Reprint, 1979), n.p.. (For an incomplete summary of the minutes of the Bergamo meeting see also "VII CIAM. Il Settimo Congresso Internazionale di Architettura Moderna - Bergamo 22-31 luglio 1949", *Metron*, no. 33-34 (1949): 48-72.
- 27 J. M. Richards, "Architectural Expression," lecture notes in preparation for CIAM 6 in Bridgewater, 1947 (Giedion-Archive, gta Institute at ETH-z). Interestingly, Richards's statements at CIAM 7 in Bergamo were considerably less provocative. See "Contemporary Architecture and the Common Man," in Giedion, ed., *A Decade of New Architecture* (Zurich: Girsberger, 1951), 33-34.
- 28 Author's translation from the German. Giedion, "J. M. Richards: 'The Castles on the Ground' (London: The Architectural Press, 1946)," *Werk-Chronik*, no. 4 (1947), 47-48.
- 29 Alfred Roth's ideas about postwar reconstruction are documented in a series of essays in the magazine *Werk*, published between 1943 and 1948; for Max Bill see primarily his *Wiederaufbau. Dokumente über Zerstörungen, Planungen, Wiederaufbau* (Erlenbach; Zurich: Verlag für Architektur AG, 1945). Roth and Bill are at the core of my forthcoming book entitled *Erste Hilfe. Schweizer Architekten und die Welt seit 1940 (First Aid. Swiss Architects and the World since 1940)*.
- 30 Giedion, "The Castles on the Ground."
- 31 Statement for CIAM, dated 16 October, 1946 by Helena and Szymon Syrkus (preliminary translation into English by Stamo Papadaki; Giedion-Archive, gta Institute, ETH-z)
- 32 Ibid.. In a letter to Giedion dated 17 November 1947 Syrkus adds the following *Ceterum Censeo*: ". . . deshalb muss CIAM das Wort MODERN fallen lassen – CONGRÈS INTERNATIONAUX D'ARCHITECTURE SOCIALE . . ." (Therefore CIAM must drop the word MODERN - CONGRÈS INTERNATIONAUX D'ARCHITECTURE SOCIALE . . .).
- 33 "Was Deinem höchst interessanten Buch fehlt, ist gerade der rein marxistische Standpunkt, den Du nur gefühlsmässig anwendest, wenn man so sagen darf," Syrkus writes. Then she goes on urging Giedion "mal ganz vorurteilslos die Formulierung des historischen und dialektischen Materialismus" zu lesen, "die Stalin in wirklich vorbildlicher Weise in seiner kurzen Arbeit *Historischer und dialektischer Materialismus*, 1938, gibt. Wenn Du sie kennst, lies sie mal aufmerksam noch einmal, an den Städtebau denkend, und da wirst Du unseren Standpunkt richtig verstehen." Ibid.

- 34 Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 182-183. See also Judd, *Cold War*, 206-209.
- 35 On Giedion and cultural politics under Stalin (and for Giedion's letter to Stalin regarding the jury decision in the Soviet Palace competition) see Martin Steinmann, *CIAM: Internationale Kongresse für Neues Bauen: Dokumente 1928-1939* (Basel, Stuttgart: Birkhäuser, 1979), 124-129 as well as Daniel Weiss, "Eine Reise in die Sowjetunion, 1932," in Werner Oechslin and Gregor Harbusch, eds., *Sigfried Giedion und die Fotografie. Bildinszenierungen der Moderne* (Zurich: gta Verlag, 2010), 222-223.
- 36 Giedion, in Preface to the Polish edition of *Space, Time and Architecture*, quoted after "Vorwort für die polnische Ausgabe von Space, Time and Architecture," Ms., Giedion-Archive, gta Institute, ETH-Z. Giedion's concept of the "ruling taste" is key to his vision of cultural politics as developed in *Architecture, You and Me* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), esp. 10-11, 28-36, 68, 86-87 and passim, but it was first developed in *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 329-343.
- 37 CIAM 7, Bergamo 1949. Documents, 12-13 (French version).
- 38 Ibid., 11. For more on Truman and on Senator George Dondero's tirades against modern art see Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*, 252-253. Sweeney, who had reported the Truman quote, was later to be the curator of the important travelling exhibition "Masterpieces of 20th Century Art," the biggest cultural enterprise ever sponsored by the CIA. For him, the propaganda character of modern art was a matter of fact, since that kind of art "could not have been created or allowed to be exhibited by such totalitarian regimes as Nazi Germany or present day Soviet Russia and her satellites." Ibid., 268.
- 39 Quoted after "VII CIAM. Il Settimo Congresso Internazionale di Architettura Moderna - Bergamo 22-31 luglio 1949," *Metron* (1949), 59. Ironically, the façade of the "Palazzo Nuovo," allegedly designed by Scamozzi, was completed only in 1927; see Maria Luisa Scalvini, Gian Piero Calza, and Paola Finardi, *Bergamo* (Bari: Laterza, 1987), ills. 142, 143.
- In the words of an Italian participant of the Bergamo meeting, Syrkus pleaded in favour of a "human urbanism" that, instead of imposing a predetermined life-form upon people "demands the creation of dwellings whose concept . . . derives from the will of those who have to inhabit them." See Nestorio Sacchi, *I Congressi Internazionali di Architettura Moderna* (Milan, 1998), 71. For a summary of the debates see Ockman, *Architecture Culture*. (Syrkus's talk "Art Belongs to the People" is on pages 120-122). Note that the Syrkus's patently modernist Kolo housing complex in Warsaw, then under construction, "slipped through the ideological net she was

- herself now casting.” David Crowley, “Europe Reconstructed, Europe Divided,” in David Crowley and Jane Pavitt, eds., *Cold War Modern: Design 1945-1970* (London: V& A Publishing, 2008), 45.
- 40 7 *CIAM Bergamo. Documents*, 9. The project in question may have been shown by Schmidt in an earlier session of the congress, though there are no corresponding minutes. The “house” referred to by Bill recalls a competition project Schmidt was to propose for a school in Niederholz, Switzerland, which also contains the sketch of a figurative mural to be placed in the recreation hall (1950). In his somewhat later competition project for a municipal hall in Potsdam, 1960, Schmidt would indeed envision a large mural to fill almost the entire surface of the main façade’s base. See Ursula Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893-1972. Architekt in Basel, Moskau, Berlin-Ost* (Zurich: gta, 1993), 283, 330; see also page 52.
- 41 7 *CIAM Bergamo. Documents*, 12.
- 42 “Architect, Painter and Sculptor,” in Giedion, ed., *A Decade of New Architecture*, 30-40. See also his “Architects and Politics: An East-West Discussion,” in *Architecture, You and Me*, 79-90.
- 43 “Wir können es nicht weiter verantworten, im CIAM zu sitzen und zu sehen, wie man sich derart einseitig festlegt, wie dies durch Le Corbusier, Giedion und Roth etc. geschieht. Wir haben die Pflicht, entweder die CIAM zu verlassen oder eine Diskussion zu eröffnen, die mehr als fällig ist.” Letter by Hans Schmidt to Mart Stam, 10 July 1949, quoted after Suter, *Hans Schmidt 1893-1972*, 50.
- 44 Asger Jorn, “Homes for the People or Concrete Castles in the Air?” (1947), in Ruth Baumeister, ed., *Fraternité Avant Tout. Asger Jorn’s Writings on Art and Architecture, 1938-1958* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2011), 136-152; here 141. A few years later, the concept of “Spontaneity” would be invoked by Giedion, too, as key to what he called “Plastic Imagination” in building.
- 45 See in particular Asger Jorn, “New Painting New Architecture: Fernand Léger and Le Corbusier” (1938) or “Face to Face” (1944), in *Fraternité Avant Tout*, 35-38, 54-78.
- 46 “Homes for the People or Concrete Castles in the Air?,” 137.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 140.
- 48 Aldo van Eyck, undated Ms., (Giedion-Archive at gta Institute, ETH-Z); see also the re-worked version of this statement in Vincent Ligtelijn and Francis Strauven, eds., *Aldo van Eyck, Collected Articles and Other Writings 1947-1998* (Amsterdam: SUN, 2008), 52. On van Eyck’ and his statements made in Bridgwater see Strauven, *Aldo van Eyck, The Shape of Relativity* (Amsterdam: Architectura & Natura, 1998), 117ff.

- 49 Italian members appear to have been particularly annoyed by Giedion's unwillingness to open up the discussion for new approaches to history in design; see Oechslin, ". . . auch ein Reisebericht - in die 'Geschichte,'" in Bruno Maurer and Werner Oechslin, eds., *Der unendliche Raum der Architektur. Ulrich Stucky (1925-2009), Architekt, Planer, Forscher, Vermittler* (Zurich: gta Verlag), 2009, 106-125. For Giedion's comments on the Unité d'habitation see his *Architektur und Gemeinschaft*, 100-105.
- 50 Manfredo Tafuri claimed that "Il Neorealismo italiano" is "the most noteworthy movement in our century" corresponding with an authentically "realist" sensibility. Tafuri, "Architettura e Realismo," in Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, ed., *L'avventura delle idee nell'architettura 1750-1980* (Berlin; Milan: Internationale Bauausstellung Berlin; Triennale di Milano, 1985), 123-136; here 123. For a more recent appreciation of Italian Neo-realism see Jane Pavitt, "Design and the Democratic Ideal," in Crowley and Pavitt, *Cold War Modern*, 72-93.
- 51 The best documentation on Team X is by Dirk van den Heuvel and Max Risselada, eds., *Team X 1953-81. In Search of a Utopia of the Present* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2006).
- 52 William Curtis, *Le Corbusier. Ideas and Forms* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1986), 198. I have tried to explore the political and ideological context of Chandigarh's foundation in "The Politics of the Open Hand: Notes on Le Corbusier and Nehru at Chandigarh," in Russell Walden, ed., *The Open Hand. Essays on Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), 412-457, but the present chapter is primarily on the symbolism of the monument that goes by that name.
- 53 "Ich möchte verschenken und austeilen, bis die Weisen unter den Menschen wieder einmal ihrer Torheit und die Armen wieder einmal ihres Reichtums froh geworden sind." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (1975 edition), 87 (author's translation). On the title page of his copy of *Ainsi parla Zarathustra* Le Corbusier indicated the time and place of his first reading of the book (Paris, 1909) and the passages most directly relevant for the symbolism of the open hand.
- For a brief genealogy of the motif's form and symbolism see my *Le Corbusier. Elements of a Synthesis*, 286-290, but the most acute interpretation is by Marie-Jeanne Dumont, "Die offene Hand. Vom politischen Symbol zur Signatur des Künstlers," in Olivier Quincalbre and Frédéric Migayrou, ed., *Le Corbusier. Die menschlichen Masse* (Paris; Zurich: Centre Pompidou; Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015), 135-141.
- 54 On the political circumstances and ideological implications of Chandigarh's foundation see primarily Vikramaditya Prakash, *Chandigarh's Le Corbusier. The Struggle for Modernity in Postcolonial*

*India* (Seattle, WA: The University of Washington, 2002) and Ravi Kalia, *Chandigarh: The Making of an Indian City* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a new assessment considering also the role of international organizations see now Tom Avermate and Maristella Casciato, eds., *Chandigarh Casablanca. A Report on Modernization* (Montreal; Zurich: CCA; Park Books, 2014), 54-87.

- 55 See Avermate and Casciato, *Chandigarh Casablanca*, 54-57 for the basic information. Already in 1946, thus before India even existed as an independent nation, Mahatma Gandhi and his designated successor, Pandit Nehru, had instructed the Indian delegates at the first General Assembly of the United Nations scheduled to be held in London, “to stay clear of rival power blocs and try to ease the tensions that such blocs generated.” Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Place. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 177.

The drawing by Le Corbusier mentioned before is from the *Carnet Nivola*, 211; FLC, Paris). In the 1980s, an international financing campaign ultimately allowed a version of the “Open Hand” to be erected posthumously in the intended location.

- 56 Le Corbusier, *Le Modulor 2*, (Boulogne-sur-Seine: Éditions de l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, 1959), 269-274.
- 57 A photograph of the “Marseillaise,” including also a view of the Arc de Triomphe and the Eiffel Tower, had already appeared on the cover of *Logis et loisirs. 5ième Congrès CIAM Paris 1937* (Boulogne-sur-Seine: Éditions de l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, 1937); and a drawing representing the same “pastiche” appears on the cover of Le Corbusier, *Destin de Paris* (Paris: Collection Préludes, 1941).
- 58 Maurice Thorez, “Discours de Maurice Thorez, 17 avril 1936.” The relevance of this speech in connection with the monument as well as the respective bibliography was indicated to me by Jean-Louis Cohen.
- 59 Francis J. Murphy, “‘La Main Tendue’: Prélude to Christian-Marxist Dialogue in France, 1936-1939.” In *Catholic Historical Review*, vol. 60, no. 2 (July 1974): 255-270.
- 60 Following the “caprice of events” (Le Corbusier), after World War II “Rockefeller” (via the Museum of Modern Art in New York) inquired about the possibility of building the monument as a memorial to the GI’s fallen in France during the war. See *Le Corbusier textes et planches* (Paris: Vincent Fréal & Cie., 1960), 135.
- 61 Amédée Ozenfant, *Foundations of Modern Art* (New York: John Rodker, 1931), xi-xii. Originally

- published in idem., *Art* (Paris: Jean Baudry, 1929). See also the earlier essay by Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, “De la peinture des cavernes à la peinture d’aujourd’hui,” *L’Esprit Nouveau*, no. 15 (1922): 1795-802.
- 62 Georges Bataille, *La Peinture préhistorique. Lascaux et la naissance de l’art* (Geneva: Skira, 1955). See also idem., *The Cradle of Humanity. Prehistoric Art and Culture* (New York: Zone Books, 2009); Giedion, *The Eternal Present I: The Beginnings of Art* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1962), 93-124.
- 63 Adolf Muschg, “Ueber die Unzulänglichkeit bedeutender Architektur,” in idem., *Fremdkörper. Erzählungen* (Zurich: Die Arche, 1968), 71-108; here 103. Werner Bischof’s famous “Report on India” had been commissioned by and published in *LIFE Magazine* in 1951, the year of Le Corbusier’s conversation referred-to above; see Peter Edwin Erismann, “Indien sehen - Looking at India. Schweizer Fotografinnen und Fotografen,” in idem., ed., *Indien Sehen. Kunst, Fotografie, Literatur* (Baden; Bern: Verlag Lars Müller; Schweizerische Landesbibliothek, 1997), 91-112.
- 64 “Nuclear Sublime,” a variation on Peter B. Hales, “The Atomic Sublime,” *American Studies* (1991): 4-31.
- 65 If Winfried Georg Sebald is correct, conditions of crime, catastrophe and mourning appear to be particularly conducive to this type of blindness. See Sebald, “Air War and Literature,” in his *The Natural History of Destruction*, 1999. For a discussion of “ruin” as a condition of architecture in general, and of “ruins” as a reality architects could not ignore in the aftermath of World War II, see my “Ruin Count. Le Corbusier and European Reconstruction.” An inspiring alternative view is offered by Kurt W. Forster, “Die Ruine als Nachklang, Vorbild oder Zukunftsboten,” in Claudia Blümle and Jan Lazardzig, eds., *Ruinierte Öffentlichkeit. Zur Politik von Theater, Architektur und Kunst in den 1950iger Jahren* (Zurich, Berlin: Diaphanes, 2012), 182-206.
- 66 Anthony Vidler, “Air War and Architecture,” in Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle, eds., *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 29-40.
- 67 *Bombed Churches as War Memorials* (Cheam, Surrey; London: The Architectural Press, 1945). T.S. Eliot as well as John M. Keynes were among the signers of the petition. See Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins* (London: Vintage, 2002), 212, and Marc Treib, “Remembering Ruins, Ruins Remembering,” in idem., ed., *Spatial Recall. Memory in Architecture and Landscape* (New York, London: Routledge, 2009), 194-217, 216.
- 68 The drawing must have been prepared as an illustration to Kahn’s essay on “Monumentality,”



- in Paul Zucker, ed., *New Architecture and City Planning* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944), 577-588, but was not used on that occasion. A photograph of the drawing survives in the Kahn collection at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 69 The literature on Saint-Dié does not need to be reported here. The most recent discussion is by Mary McLeod, "Saint-Dié: 'A Modern Space Conception' for Postwar Reconstruction," in Cohen, *Le Corbusier. An Atlas of Modern Landscapes*, 193-199.
- 70 See Cohen, *France ou Allemagne? Un livre inédit de Le Corbusier* (Paris: Édition de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2009). Le Corbusier owned many picture postcards commemorating the bombardment.
- 71 Giuliano Gresleri and Glauco Gresleri, *Le Corbusier, Il programma liturgico* (Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2001), 70.
- 72 In a text fragment dated April 4, 1946, Le Corbusier formulates his radical objection against reconstruction as a way of preserving monuments. Gresleri and Gresleri, *Le Corbusier. Il progetto liturgico*, 221-222.
- 73 Reyner Banham, "The New Brutalism," *Architectural Review* (December 1955): 354-361. The echo of "The New Empiricism. Sweden's Latest Style," *The Architectural Review*, no. 6 (1947): 109-204, can hardly be overstated. See also Eric de Maré, "The Antecedents and Origins of Sweden's Latest Style," *The Architectural Review* (1948): 9-12. The following discussion, however, is based on Banham's *The New Brutalism. Ethic or Aesthetic?* (London: The Architectural Press, 1970).
- 74 Banham, *The New Brutalism in Architecture*, 11.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 13.
- 76 See Anders Aman, *Architecture and Ideology in Eastern Europe during the Stalin Era. An Aspect of Cold War History* (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: The Architectural History Foundation; MIT Press, 1992), 211-219 for a good summary of De-Stalinization in the USSR.
- 77 J. M. Richards, *The Castles on the Ground* (London: The Architectural Press, 1946).
- 78 Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 12. Measured up against that reality, the "fashionably morbid school of landscape/townscape painting" à la Graham Sutherland and its "mood of elegant despair" was nothing less than "A blank betrayal of everything that Modern Architecture was supposed to stand for;" if not, indeed, an "act of treachery"; *ibid.*, 13.
- 79 Alex Potts, "New Brutalism and Pop," in Mark Crinson and Claire Zimmerman, ed., *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern. Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 29-52, esp. 37.

- 80 Van den Heuvel and Risselada, eds., *Alison and Peter Smithson: From the House of the Future to a House of Today* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2004), 79-95, 79-95; see also Colomina, "Unbreathed Air 1956," in *ibid.*, 31-49.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 82 For Banham's own retrospective view on the British quarrels on the "Picturesque" see his "Revenge of the Picturesque: English Architectural Polemics, 1945-1965," in John Summerson, ed., *Concerning Architecture: Essays on Architectural Writing Presented to Nikolaus Pevsner* (London: Penguin, 1968), 265-730.
- 83 Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 16, but see also Banham's "The New Brutalism."
- 84 Banham, *The New Brutalism*, 16. For the architect's own comments on the "malfaçons," see *Le Corbusier, Œuvre complète 1946-1942*, 189-191 and the captions on pages 214 and 218. Some implications of Le Corbusier's cult of "Non Finito" are discussed in my "'Ruins in Reverse.' Notes on Photography and the Architectural 'Non Finito,'" in von Moos, ed., *Ernst Scheidegger: Chandigarh 1956* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2009), 45-66.
- 85 Vincent Scully, "Le Corbusier 1922-1965," quoted after Neil Levine, ed., *Vincent Scully: Modern Architecture and Other Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 246.
- 86 See Alison and Peter Smithson, "Human Associations," in *Ordinariness and Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 44-61; and van den Heuvel and Risselada, eds., *Alison and Peter Smithson*, 61-78.
- 87 What Le Corbusier had in mind when he referred to Marseilles as a "battlefield" was the battle against the unionized architects in France and their organizations, which were determined to stop the project (see von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis*, 156; Monnier, *Le Corbusier: Les Unités d'habitation*, 46-47, 60-62, *passim*). The Smithsons had visited the Unité's construction site before; see Alison and Peter Smithson, *Without Rhetoric: An Architectural Aesthetic* (London: Latimer New Dimensions, 1973), 4, *passim*. For a recent discussion of the project see Martino Stierli, "Taking on Mies: Mimicry and Parody of Modernism in the Architecture of Alison and Peter Smithson and Venturi/Scott Brown," in Mark Crimson and Claire Zimmerman, eds., *Neo-avant-garde and Postmodern: Postwar Architecture in Britain and Beyond* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2010), 151-174.
- 88 See Wikipedia, *Bombardements de Marseille*, accessed March 1, 2015. In 1940 the German Luftwaffe had already bombed the city; furthermore, under the German occupation its core, the Vieux port, was razed and rebuilt entirely.

- 89 Le Corbusier, *When the Cathedrals Were White* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947; rev. ed. McGraw Hill, 1964), xl. The book was originally published as *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches* (Paris: Éditions Plon, 1937).
- 90 Crowley, “Europe Reconstructed, Europe Divided,” 43-71, here 55.
- 91 Detlef Mertins, *Modernity Unbound* (London: Architectural Association, 2011), 180ff. Some of the ideas underlying the following lines have been developed in greater detail elsewhere; see “Die Welt als Skulptur: Zur Aktualität der ‘Synthese der Künste,’” in Regula Krähenbühl, ed., *Avantgarden im Fokus der Kunstkritik: Eine Hommage an Carola Giedion-Welcker (1893-1979)* (Zurich: SIK/ISEA, 2011), 17-32.
- 92 Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Contemporary Sculpture: An Evolution in Volume and Space* (New York: Wittenborn, 1960), 231-233.
- 93 Idem., “Die magische Dingwelt der Pittura metafisica,” in Regula Krähenbühl, ed., *Carola Giedion-Welcker, Schriften 1926-1971: Stationen zu einem Weltbild* (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1973), 131-136. The essay was first presented as a lecture in 1950.
- 94 “Nées dans la fureur, elles sentent encore la poudre,” Monnier writes on Le Corbusier’s Unités in *Le Corbusier: Les Unités d’habitation*, 186.
- 95 “Mariant souvent sans lien apparent comme dans la vie / Les sons les gestes les couleurs les bruits / La musique la danse l’acrobatie la poésie la peinture / Les chœurs les actions les décors multiples” (Guillaume Apollinaire).



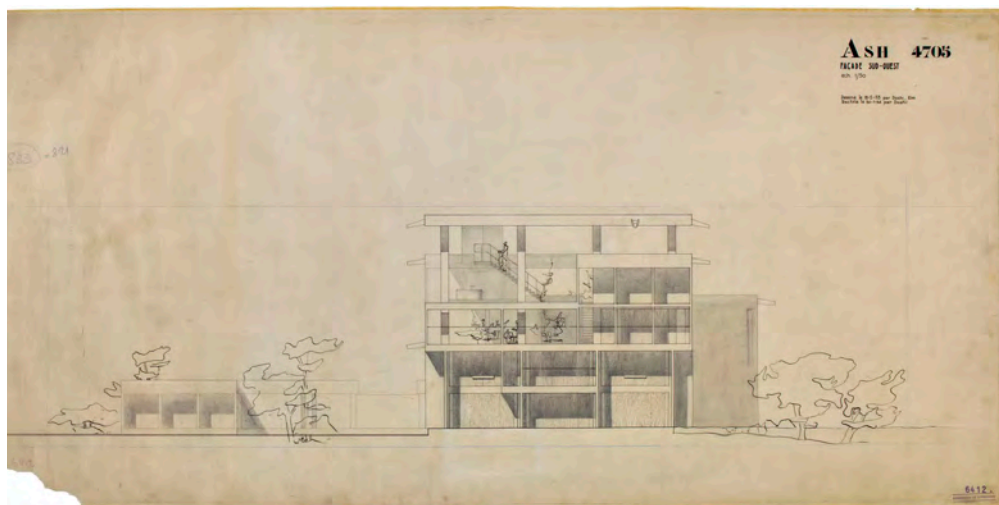
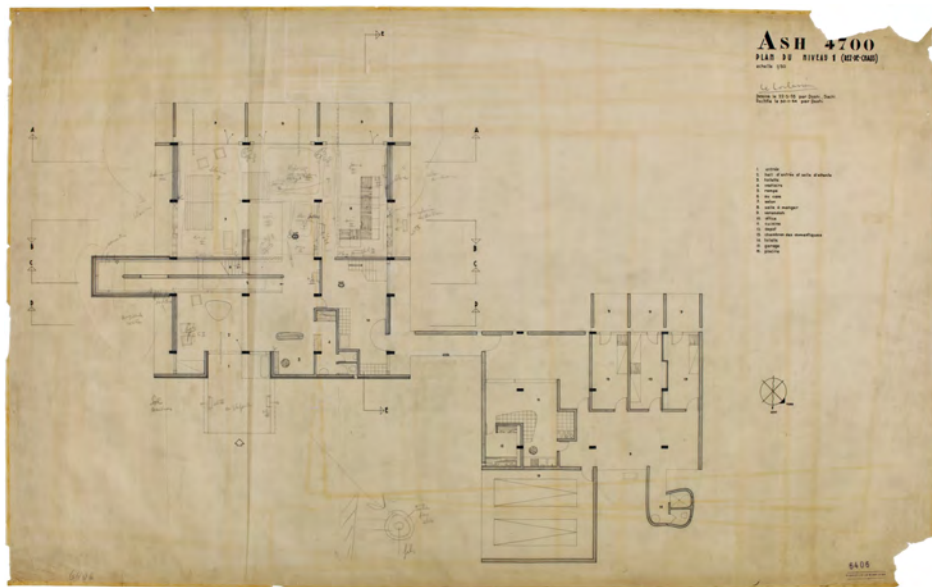
1. Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan, 1951-56.  
South-west elevation.

BETWEEN INDIAN TRADITION AND  
CORBUSIAN MODERNITY:  
THE CASE OF THE VILLA HUTHEESING-SHODHAN

In early 1951 Le Corbusier was commissioned by the Government of the State of Punjab to plan a new Capital. When he was in Chandigarh, a group of Jainist clients from Ahmedabad invited him to develop five projects, the museum of Ahmedabad, the Mill Owners' Association and three family houses.<sup>1</sup> Four among the five were built, one of which was the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan (Figs. 1-3). The villa is the last referent of Corbusian family-housing architecture. Developed between 1951 and 1956, it was conceived on the basis of a conscious combination of modern architecture and the climate and culture of India.

Le Corbusier's design for the Villa Shodhan—from here on referred to as Villa Hutheesing or Hutheesing-Shodhan<sup>2</sup>—has three versions, which synthesize the vast investigation he developed over three years.<sup>3</sup> The program for the villa is described on a sheet dated 23rd March 1951, titled “Bungalow de Surottam P. Hutheesing, Shahibag, Ahmedabad.”<sup>4</sup> It reveals the importance of building *verándahs* and terraces, on every floor, which would serve each bedroom so that one could sleep outside during summer nights. Among the handwritten notes, possibly expressing Hutheesing's request, Le Corbusier wrote: “very best modern (très bon modern).” This suggests the client's receptiveness to Corbusian architecture. Referring to the villa, Le Corbusier wrote in *Œuvre Complète*:

BETWEEN INDIAN TRADITION AND CORBUSIAN MODERNITY



Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan, 1951.  
Third version.

2. Ground floor plan.
3. South-west elevation.

The villa has a story: the commission was given to Le Corbusier in 1951 for the residence of a Mr. Hutheesing, Secretary of the Mill Owners', with a set of requirements, primarily personal, complicated and subtle. Just when the construction plans were completed, Mr. Hutheesing there upon sold them to Mr. Shodhan, who owned another plot and desired to start construction immediately. As luck would have it, Le Corbusier's Indian projects are always dictated a priori by the Indians. The transfer of this house to a new plot was therefore a perfectly natural event.<sup>5</sup>

For Le Corbusier, the Indian climate explains why Shodhan had bought the project without asking for any changes. Peter Serenyi provides more clues:

The old town house of the Shodhan family located at the heart of the city provides an interesting clue to an understanding of the client's willingness to accept Le Corbusier's design exactly as it was intended for Surottam Hutheesing. Having been raised in a house which had pilotis, terraces, roof gardens, and open façades, Shiamubhai Shodhan must not have found the designs for the house he was to buy too unusual. Coming from such an architectural environment, he was in fact better prepared to accept Le Corbusier's ideas, than a Parisian client.<sup>6</sup>

According to Serenyi, some features of the project would have been familiar to Shodhan given the affinities with the traditional architecture of the city. This is the case of the double-height living room: "When Shiamubhai Shodhan first saw the designs for the double-storied interiors of his future house, he must have recognized in them a modern reinterpretation of a familiar symbol of status and wealth."<sup>7</sup> The same applies to the double-height *salle d'attente*:

The large houses of old Ahmedabad were usually built around a double-storied entry hall, or chowk, which signifies their symbolic and ceremonial centre. As

seen in the eighteenth-century Chunilal house, this space was given the greatest artistic attention in terms of spatial organization and decorative treatment.<sup>8</sup>

While double-height rooms were commonly used in Le Corbusier's work, Serenyi's observations seem to suggest that the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan entails a dialogue between Le Corbusier's modern architecture and Indian architectural tradition. My aim is to explore this dialogue. By focusing of the *verándahs* and terraces, I will suggest that Le Corbusier reinterpreted modern architecture through Indian architectural tradition, and that these reinterpretations became key elements of his domestic architecture in Ahmedabad.

#### LE CORBUSIER AND THE INDIAN IDEA OF *VÉRANDAH*

For Le Corbusier, India's climate was a main concern from the beginning. When he presented the architectural solutions for the new capital of India, he cautioned in "Chandigarh. La naissance de la nouvelle capitale du Punjab (Indes) 1950":

The problem is accentuated by the ruling factor of the sun, under which this new Indian way of life must be created. The sun is so violent that until now the habits of siesta and laziness were inevitable, in native architectural conditions which allowed no work whatsoever at certain hours and seasons. The rainy season also has its problems.<sup>9</sup>

Le Corbusier paid special attention to local architecture, having found in the *verándah* one of its most fundamental elements. This is shown in his notes and drafts: "The *verándah* (Indian word) is the dwelling condition itself . . . One sleeps at night on the roof from April to October, except during July and August = rain / one sleeps in the *verándahs*."<sup>10</sup>

Several months after his first visit to India—and after having finished

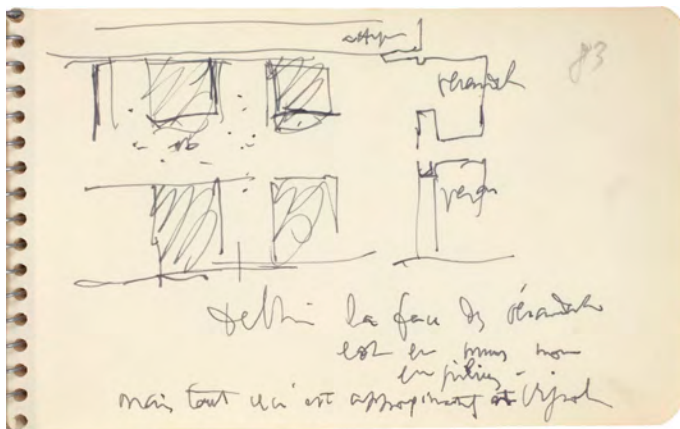


the first version of the Villa Hutheesing, which provided each floor with *vérandahs*—he was still reflecting on this element of Indian architecture. Next to a sketch of the façade and section of a building (Fig. 4), he explains: “The face of the verándahs results in a wall, not in pillars. But everything is approximated and Vignola.”<sup>11</sup> In another note, he observes:

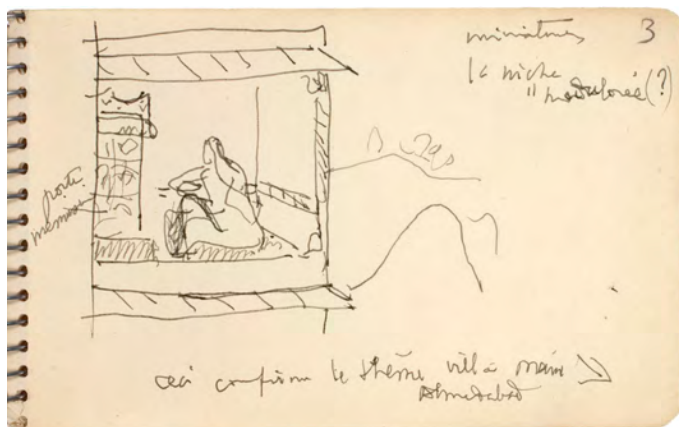
The villas and aligned houses of Delhi are a charming coquetry (Bd were the Hotel Ambassador is). But the sun does what it wants. It is necessary to start from the 4 orientations off Thapar and create what is needed: what is indispensable: subjects of the sun with the available techniques.<sup>12</sup>

From the first moment, Le Corbusier understood the value of the *vérandah* for Indian climate and culture. Yet, he also recognized the architectural possibilities it created: a transitional space, a void generating light and dark, an element capable of being reworked and integrated into the message he intended to pass on to the Indians, translated into modern architectural language. Thus he explored it in Hutheesing’s house. In this villa, the *vérandah* is a key element of architectural form that invigorates its volume. The way it is adapted to all versions of the villa during the design process is clear evidence of how Le Corbusier regarded the *vérandah* from the beginning as an ally and not an obstacle, repeatedly taking advantage of it. Le Corbusier’s notes on Indian miniatures (Figs. 5, 6) confirm—as noted by several authors—his admiration for the way in which they generate depth, light and shadow.<sup>13</sup> One of two drawings reads: “miniatures / the modulating niche [?] This confirms the theme of the villa for Mayor Ahmedabad.”<sup>14</sup>

The attributes of Indian miniatures seem to be reinterpreted at different levels in the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan. A first level lies, as suggested in the note mentioned above, in the “alveolus” of the *brise-soleil* of the southwest façade (2.26 x 2.26 m), providing the interior spaces and the suspended garden with a new veiling texture. A second level is suggested by Balkrishna Doshi: the connection between Indian miniatures and the concrete texture of the *brise-soleils*, enhancing depth through the use of a diagonal, textured



4. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of a house,  
Façade and cross-section, 1951.  
Carnet E23, 83.



5. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of Indian miniature, 1951.  
Carnet E23, 3.

6. Le Corbusier.  
Sketch of Indian miniature, 1951.  
Carnet E23, 5.

formwork.<sup>15</sup> A third level concerns the association between the spatial quality of Indian miniatures and the spatial complexity of the suspended garden, with its various platforms and stairs.

#### FIRST LEVEL: THE ALVEOLAR *BRISE-SOLEIL*

The *brise-soleil* in the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan (Figs. 1, 3) shows a direct relationship with the alveolar façade of the Unité d'habitation in Marseilles (Fig. 7)<sup>16</sup> and, before that, with the façade of the Law Court in Algiers. Le Corbusier had used the *brise-soleil* in some of his previous projects, but it was with these two cases that it gained a new dimension.

In cases such as the Maison Curutchet (Fig. 8) or the Manufacture in Saint-Dié, the depth of the *brise-soleil* was reduced to the required needs of protection from the sun. The Unité d'habitation develops a new kind of *brise-soleil*, in which depth becomes a dominant dimension, acquiring greater formal protagonism than in the earlier cases. This was turned into a new design tool to be applied in other projects simply by adjusting its height and width to the spaces that it would protect. In the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan, the “inhabitable alveolus” of the *brise-soleil* generates a textural structure in front of the interior spaces and suspended garden, veiling the inner and outer spaces. In contrast with the Unité d'habitation, the *brise-soleils* of the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan are separated from the building itself, manifesting their independence. They have 2.26 x 2.26m, a measure of the *Modulor* that Le Corbusier had recognized in the alveolus of the Indian miniature that he drew in his sketchbook E23 (Fig. 5). The Indian version of the alveolar *brise-soleil* can thus be seen as a three-dimensional repetition of the alveolus represented in Indian miniatures.



7. Unité d'habitation, Marseilles, 1947-49.  
"Brise-soleil en alvéoles."  
Photo: Paul Kozlowski, detail.

8. Maison Curutchet, La Plata, 1949.  
Conventional *brise-soleil*.  
Photo: Olivier Martin-Gambier, detail.



SECOND LEVEL: THE TEXTURE OF THE *BRISE-SOLEIL*

When questioned about the impact of India on Le Corbusier's work, Doshi answered:

Well, mainly that he was looking at things in a different way than he had in the West. What do you do in a country where there's no technology but lots of skilled people, people with ideas; a country far behind in time but also very vital—full of energy! He began to think of using natural materials in a different way. When he came to Ahmedabad in 1951 and he saw the concrete column at Kanvinde's *ATIRA* building, I know that he took pictures, back to Paris and said: 'why not use concrete like this?'<sup>17</sup>

Doshi knows that Le Corbusier did not discover rough concrete in India. He had already used it before. In India, however, he learned how to take further advantage of its texture and plasticity.

No, not really discovered—Marseilles had already been in rough concrete. But we had to do the form-work in small plates, because pouring and casting is difficult. And he said, 'why not take planks and do what we call shuttering?'. He also used steel form-work and said 'why don't we show the rivets also so we can feel how the concrete is poured.' In India he looked at concrete as texture. What he did here was to add plasticity. Le Corbusier was a man of great plasticity.<sup>18</sup>

So, he explains how, feeding upon the Indian miniatures he had drawn, Le Corbusier attempted to intensify the visual depth of concrete:

He spent a lot of time looking at Indian miniatures and he once showed me a painting of Krishna and Radha dancing and he said, 'You see, how front and back are shown, how you can twist the plane to get a complete image.' The problem that was intriguing him was how to get another dimension within the

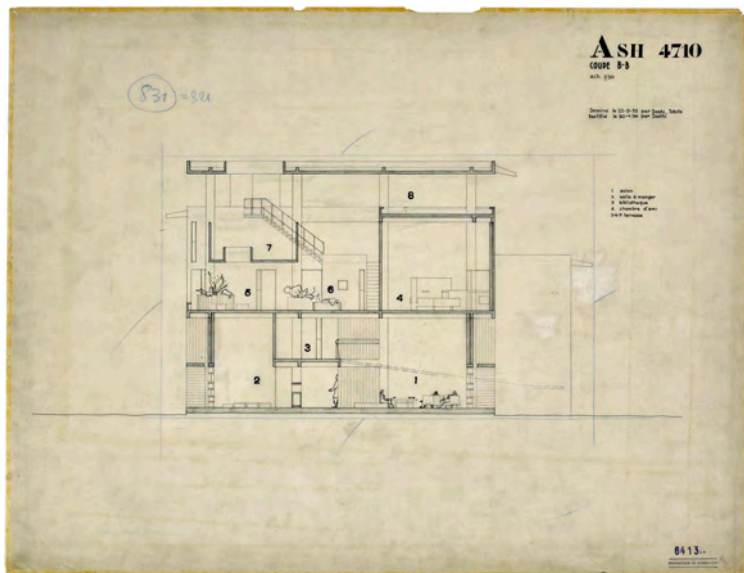
same plane. And this is what he did in Ahmedabad, he made the form-work go against the nature of concrete, i.e., normally the form-work is designed vertically, but here he placed the shuttering planks diagonally, so that the shadows cast are diagonal, while the basic level remained horizontal. This was done with the idea that the plane must get another dimension through shadow. So he discovered that you can use planes in a different way. No one really invents, you know, only re-discovers.<sup>19</sup>

In the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan (as in the Mill Owners' Association, the two projects of Ahmedabad where rough concrete acquires greater expression) the concrete texture is vertical and horizontal, never diagonal. Concrete texture does not lack purpose, however. When the form-work footprint is horizontal, it accentuates the depth of the brise-soleil and extends the length of the façades. In contrast, when the footprint is vertical, it emphasizes the strength of the load-bearing elements.

### THIRD LEVEL: THE SPATIALITY OF THE SUSPENDED GARDEN AND TRADITIONAL INDIAN TERRACES

The Indian miniatures seem to have awakened in Le Corbusier another architectural aspect: the new spatiality that his concept of suspended garden could acquire, a spatiality now multiplied in platforms of different levels, connected by stairs just as in traditional Indian architecture (Figs. 9-12). This new conception of the suspended garden can be found from the beginning of the design process to the built version.

Various authors, including Le Corbusier himself, compared the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan with Villa Savoye. Some of them, as Prasad and others, have argued that a shortfall of the Indian villa resides in the interruption of the ascending path along the ramp, ending on the first floor. It is further argued that the specific problem of the ramp is that the end occurs at a small and secondary point: the first floor hall. One must however ask how the Villa



Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan.

9. Section across the suspended garden with the ramp leading to the first floor.
10. Suspended garden from level 2bis.  
From *Œuvre complète, 1952-1957*.
11. Suspended garden and sunshade.  
From *Œuvre complète, 1952-1957*.
12. Traditional Indian architecture.  
Courtyard with ladder to the roof terrace.  
From *Œuvre complète, 1965-1969*.



Hutheesing-Shodhan should be looked at in light of Villa Savoye, with the end of its journey at the *toit-jardin*, facing a window framing the landscape.

This questionable comparison seems to rest on the premise that both villas take into consideration the surrounding natural environment in the same way. This, I think, is not the case. Whereas the Villa Savoye struggles against nature, considers it antagonist to architecture, is overwhelmed by it, and only manages to counterpoise its strength and order at the end of the path through the window on the *toit-jardin*, the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan dialogues with its natural environment as an equal. This is because Le Corbusier did not feel here the harassment that Western nature imposed in the 1920s. Unravelling the issue is necessary to understand Le Corbusier's position with regard to nature when he designed these two projects, distant from each other by over thirty years.

In *Vers une architecture*, Le Corbusier had written: "A house that will be this human boundary that encloses us from antagonistic natural phenomena, giving us, giving man, our human milieu."<sup>20</sup> In *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, he added:

What do you see developing before your eyes, if not an immense setting in order? Fighting against nature to dominate it, to classify it, to profit from it, in a word, to settle oneself in a human world that is not the milieu of antagonistic nature, a world of our own, of geometric order?<sup>21</sup>

For Le Corbusier, in the 1920s, nature meant chaos, and only architectural order could neutralize its negative effects, tame it with its geometrical laws to reverse the relationship of domination. It is the window at the end of the path that organizes the initial chaos in every suspended garden of the 1920s:

Because it is in the window that nature becomes landscape, where the ultimate focus of the path is to be found, the episode that puts an end to representation, where the initial antagonism between nature and man is overcome, fusing both characters.<sup>22</sup>

The impact of what he saw after reaching India, however, led Le Corbusier to recognize the need for reconciliation with nature which he once considered antagonist, the need to make a pact with it:

He saw many things for the first time, the bright blue sky, the relentless sun, the hot winds, the cool moon, the beauty of tropical nights, the fury of the monsoon, and he said to me once that while his work so far had been a counterpoint to nature, he now realized that he had to make a pact with nature.<sup>23</sup>

In comparing the Villa Savoye and Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan, it is possible to argue that in the latter, the ramp reaches the point it should reach. There is no path end. Neither is there a window framing nature. There is no such window because nature is no longer a chaotic entity for Le Corbusier to tame. Instead, there is: a suspended garden deployed across multiple platforms topping the villa, multiple path endings, and various windows (Figs. 9, 10). There is a ramp that has expanded into multiple steps through which the continuity of the climb to the *toit-parasol* is assured. In reality, the ascent provided by the villa is achieved through the conjunction of the ramp, the roofs of the inner spaces, and stairs. It is this conjunction that guarantees the path, which is not linear, as in the 1920s, but zigzagging, with intermittent openings and closures, full of events. Only through the platforms that cover the inner spaces, in the suspended garden, is it possible to reach the stairs, which, reinterpreting the ladder of traditional Indian architecture, serve to reach the *toit-parasol*, even if the main spaces remain underneath, protected from the Indian sun.

CONCLUSION

A cross-reading of the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan, combining the principles of modern Corbusian architecture with Indian tradition, allows us to understand the relevant experience that building in India meant to Le Corbusier. Knowing what Greece and the Middle East had also meant to him in his youth, Doshi wrote:

. . . he admired most profoundly the quality of activities around the huge water tank enclosed by the spaces and forms of the Sarkhej mosque and tomb complex. His only comment to me was ‘Doshi, you do not need to go to the Acropolis, you have all that we seek from architecture.’<sup>24</sup>

For Le Corbusier, India meant looking backwards into his youth and, at the same time, the confirmation of the timelessness and universality of some of the architectural tools that he had explored throughout his work. Indian tradition led him to reinterpret and re-elaborate his modern design, just as Mediterranean culture had participated in the basis of his architecture. The design of the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan illustrates how, until the end of his life, Le Corbusier’s architecture results from a continuous dialogue between tradition and modernity, allowing him to further develop the architectural elements of his researches, from the depth of the *brise-soleil* to the relevance of its texture, and from the spatiality of the suspended garden to the paths it generates, ultimately expressing a dialogue between architecture and nature that he had discovered forty years earlier in the Mediterranean.

NOTES

- 1 The museum was commissioned by the Mayor of Ahmedabad, Chinubai Chimanbhai, who also asked Le Corbusier for the design of his house. The building for the Mill Owners' Association was commissioned by Surottam Hutheesing, president of the association and Chimanbhai's cousin, who also asked Le Corbusier for the design of a house. The third house was commissioned by Manorama Sarabhai, Chimanbhai's sister. These commissions date from March 1951, during Le Corbusier's first trip to Ahmedabad, except for that of Sarabhai House, dating from November 1951, during Le Corbusier's second trip.  
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- 2 The house was designed for Surottam Hutheesing. The final plans were then sold to Shiamubhai Shodhan, Hutheesing's friend, for whom the villa was eventually built.
- 3 Versions are dated October 1951, November 1952 and May 1953. The first and third versions were published in volumes 5 and 6 of *Œuvre Complète*. Nevertheless, the Registration book from the atelier reveals the existence of a fourth "avant-projet" dated June 1952 which would have been sent to Hutheesing (FLC 6445).
- 4 FLC P3-5-2.
- 5 Le Corbusier, *Œuvre complète 1952-57* (Zurich: Artemis, 1957), 134. The French version of this text adds more information: "Par bonheur, les projets indiens de Le Corbusier sont toujours dictés a priori par le soleil et les vents dominants qui sont constants, par régions de l'Inde. Le transfert de cette habitation sur un nouveau terrain se fit donc assez naturel."
- 6 Peter Serenyi, "Timeless but of its Time: Le Corbusier's Architecture in India," in Allen H. Brooks, ed., *The Le Corbusier Archive: Ahmedabad, 1953-1960*, Vol. 26 (New York; Paris: Garland Publishing Inc.; Fondation Le Corbusier, 1984), xvi.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 *Le Corbusier, Œuvre complète 1946-52* (Zurich: Girsberger, 1953), 114.
- 10 "La véranda (mot indien) est la condition même du logis . . . La nuit on dort sur le toit d'avril à octobre sauf juillet et août = pluie / on dort dans le véranda." Le Corbusier, Album *Punjab*

*Simla. Chandigarh, Mars 1951*, 17 (FLC Archives).

- 11 “La face des vérandahs est en murs non en piliers. Mais tout ceci est approximatif et Vignole.” Le Corbusier, *Carnet E23 Indes*, 1951, 27 Octobre-28 Novembre, repr. in Françoise de Francieux, ed., *Le Corbusier Carnets 2, 1950-1954* (Paris: Hercher, Dessain et Tolra, 1981), ill. 652.
- 12 “Les villas et maisons alignées de Delhi sont une coquetterie charmante (Bd où est l’Hôtel Ambassador). Mais le soleil fait ce qu’il veut. Il faut partir des 4 orientations off Thapar et créer ce qu’il faut: ce qui est indispensable: des sujets du soleil avec les techniques disponibles.” *Ibid.*, ill. 653.
- 13 During my research it was not possible to find information about the miniatures drawn by Le Corbusier. The figures and scenes represented lead us to suggest their relationship with the Basholi School (and even with the Mewâr School). Commissions for Ahmedabad would have led Le Corbusier to the study of this school’s miniatures in the 1950s. Note that he had already shown interest in other Oriental miniatures in 1911, having bought some Persian exemplars during his journey to the East. Images of Indian miniatures can also be found in books on Indian painting belonging to Le Corbusier’s personal library, although not being the ones depicted in the sketches of *Carnet E23*.
- 14 “Miniatures / la niche modulorée [?].” *Ibid.*, ills. 611-612.
- 15 Balkrishna Doshi was an Indian architect who collaborated with Le Corbusier on the projects for Ahmedabad, including the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan. Later, Doshi moved to Ahmedabad to replace Jean-Louis Vêret in the building supervision. He had met Le Corbusier in London, while studying there, during the CIAM congress in Hoddesdon in 1951. He was the only Indian architect to attend the congress.
- 16 Le Corbusier named this façade “les brise-soleil en alvéoles.”
- 17 Balkrishna Doshi, “Le Corbusier: The Acrobat of Architecture,” interview with Carmen Kagal, in *Le Corbusier and Louis Kahn. The Acrobat and the Yogi of Architecture* (Ahmedabad: Vastu-Shilpa Foundation for Studies and Research in Environmental Design, 1986), 5.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- 20 “Une maison qui soit cette limite humaine, nous entourant, nous séparant du phénomène naturel antagoniste, nous donnant notre milieu humain, à nous hommes.” Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Crès, 1923), i. Translation from the English edition *Toward and Architecture*, transl. by John Goodman (London: Frances Lincoln, 2008), 83.

- 21 “Que voyez-vous se dérouler sous vos yeux, sinon une immense mise en ordre? Lutte contre la nature pour la dominer, pour classer, pour se donner ses aises, en un mot, pour s’installer dans un monde humain qui ne soit le milieu de la nature antagoniste, un monde à nous, d’ordre géométrique?” Le Corbusier, *Almanach d’Architecture Moderne* (Paris: Crès, 1926), 26.
- 22 Josep Quetglas, *Les Heures Claires. Projecto y arquitectura en la villa Savoye de Le Corbusier y Pierre Jeanneret*, sec. ed. (Barcelona: Associació d’idées. Centre d’Investigacions estètiques, 2009), 593.
- 23 Doshi, “Le Corbusier: The Acrobat of Architecture,” 5.
- 24 Doshi, “Legacies of Le Corbusier and Louis I. Kahn in Ahmedabad,” *A+U*, no. 368 (2001), 22.

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