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Le Corbusier
History and Tradition

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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: Brassaï

Arthur Rüegg

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[1]

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."[2] 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,"[3] and he himself would have lived in one of those cells "destined for the proletarians if you like, with the greatest of pleasure."[4] 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.[5] 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."[6]

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.[7] 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[8]: 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.

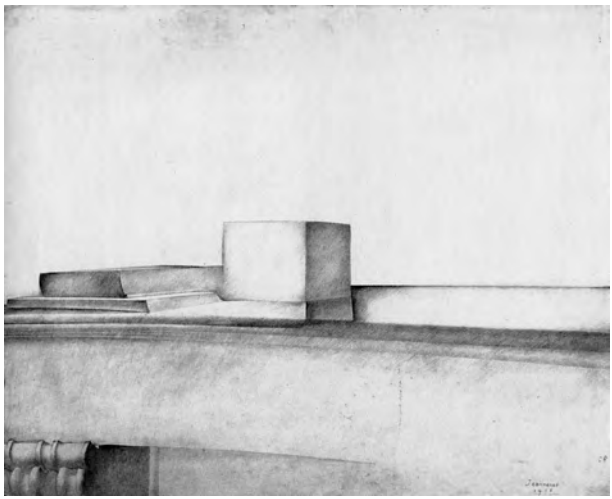
Jeanneret had spent most of the first thirty years of his life in Switzerland, where he had achieved some measure of success with the construction of six private homes (several quite luxurious), a movie theatre, and numerous

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.[9] 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.[10]

The telling iconic photograph published in *La Ville Radieuse* had been taken by the illustrious Hungarian photographer Brassaï (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.[11] 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, Brassaï 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.[12] This iconic photograph is doubtlessly posed, which is common in the work of Brassaï, 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. Brassaï 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 mantlepiece 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 mantlepiece 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: Brassaï

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, Brassaï 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."[13]

Brassaï'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[14] and a pair of anonymous straw armchairs like the ones the young architect had purchased for his parents in around 1915.[15] If this Bohemian condition at least corresponded to the Purist ideal of emptiness, the photograph taken by Brassaï 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.[16] 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 asssemblages of meaningful objects.
Mantlepiece in Le Corbusier's apartment at 20, rue Jacob, ca. 1931.
Photo: Brassaï

8. Jealously protected asssemblages of meaningful objects.
Mantlepiece in Pablo Picasso's studio at 23, rue La Boétie, 1932.
Photo: Brassaï

"the number of different styles with which we are confronted by the visible objects of daily life."[17] 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 Brassaï 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 Brassaï remarked of the painter's "studio."[18] 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.[19] In the process he acquired essential pieces for his own collection, such as the two major Cubist paintings[20]—probably purchases from the Kahnweiler sales (followed by Le Corbusier on behalf of Swiss banker Raoul La Roche)[21]—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. Brassaï's photograph shows predominantly recent discoveries on the mantelpiece which substantiate Le Corbusier's newly awakened interest in things "rustic, biological and archaic."[22] A *botijo bolo* from somewhere near Valencia,[23] 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,[24] a large piece of flint from the region of Normandy[25]—such are the motifs found in art after 1930, like the visual references in Jeanne Léger's wedding gift, "Nature Morte/1er Etat," painted by Fernand Léger in 1928 (on the right, partial view).[26] Next to Léger's late-Purist "Composition avec Profil" from the year 1926[27]—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),[28] the other by André Bauchant, a painter he had been promoting since the late 1920s.[29] 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 Brassaï'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.[30] Instead of developing "true-to-style machine-made products," to use Muthesius's term,[31] 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.[32] 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*).[33] 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."[34]

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[35] (not present in Brassaï'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."[36] 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."[37] 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.[38]

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."[39] 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."[40] 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.[41] In this sense, the

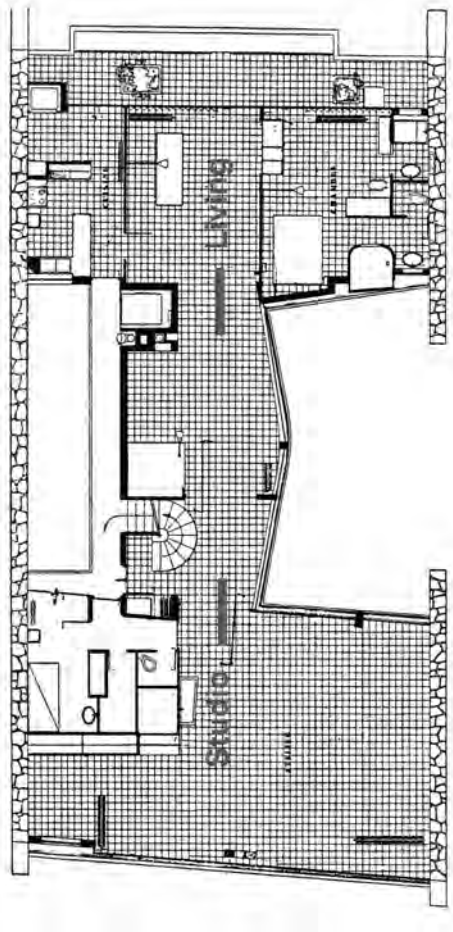
objects on the mantelpiece testify to Le Corbusier's ability to cross boundaries and oppose the prevailing conventions at will. Colquhoun even sees the *à redents* composition of the Ville Radieuse as being "derived from the Baroque Palace, of which we take the Château Richelieu as a suitable example, by way, probably, of Fournier's Phalanstères"[42] (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"[43]). 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.[44] Years later, the work of the Team X generation of artists and architects would closely echo the "As Found" principle,[45] 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 Brassaï'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.[46] 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."[47] 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*.[48] 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"[49]—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).[50] 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.[51]

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*,[52] 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*[53]—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.[54] 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."[55] 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.[56] 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,[57] 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[58]—but also the antiques and vases of Serbian and West Anatolian provenance brought back from the *Voyage d'Orient* in 1911.[59] 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)[60] or in a tape-recorded conversation with the headmaster Robert Mallet (1951),[61] the architect assumes the manner of a museum tour guide. Once again, Brassaï'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."[62] 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.[63]

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.[64] A plaster study of *La Négresse* 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 Dizy-Iso brick and a large pebble granite from Le Corbusier's *collection particulière.*

The show opened on July 3rd 1935,[65] 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."[66] 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."[67] 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 Vegesack, 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 Franceso 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^2 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'immatricualation" (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 Brassaï (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 Brassaï, *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 reaction 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 Schregenberger, 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 compète 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.