

— EDITORIAL —

In every field of industry, new problems have presented themselves and new tools have been created capable of resolving them. If this new fact be set against the past, then you have revolution.

In building and construction, mass-production had already begun; in face of new economic needs, mass-production units have been created both in mass and detail, and definite results have been achieved both in detail and in mass.

If this fact be set against the past, then you have revolution, both in the method employed and in the large scale on which it has been carried out.

The history of architecture unfolds itself slowly across the centuries as a modification of structure and ornament, but in the last fifty years, steel and concrete have brought new conquests which are the index of a greater capacity for construction, and of an architecture in which the old codes have been overturned. If we challenge the past, we shall learn that "styles" no longer exist for us, that a style belonging to our own period has come about; and there has been a revolution.

Our minds have consciously or unconsciously apprehended these events and new needs have arisen, consciously or unconsciously. The machinery of society, profoundly out of gear, oscillates between an amelioration of historical importance, and a catastrophe.

The primordial instinct of every human being is to assure himself of a shelter.

The various classes of workers in society today no longer have dwellings adapted to their needs; neither the artisan nor the intellectual. It is a question of building which is at the root of the social unrest of today; architecture or revolution.

Le Corbusier,
Vers une Architecture, 1923

It is this plea for a revolution in architecture, published in *Vers une Architecture*, that established Le Corbusier as a principle promoter of the *Moderne*. Mainly a collection of articles first printed in the avant-garde magazine "L'Esprit Nouveau" founded 1920 in collaboration with Charles Dermée and the artist Amédée Ozenfant, the volume was the architect's major theoretical contribution to the writing of architecture. A polemic on the tendencies of the architectural expression of the early twentieth century, *Vers une Architecture* was to exercise a critical influence on the development of industrial design and city planning of the modern era. Le Corbusier's revolt against the historical styles, the visionistic and uncompromising attitude of his architectural concepts, prevented the realization of the greater part of the architect's work. The Domino house, prototype of the prefabricated and mechanized dwelling unit, the "Contemporary City of Three Million Inhabitants" town planning scheme, and the Palace for the Soviets in Moscow, never went beyond the design stage. The always controversial and significant authority of these projects on modern architecture has but recently experienced its most condemning criticism.

Le Corbusier bore witness to the technological evolution of the industrial age which emphatically remodeled the means of communication, upsetting traditional socio-cultural perceptions. The advances in knowledge and methods of production, coupled with the invention of new materials were to conceive the telephone, the automobile, the locomotive, and the airplane. With the introduction of the new tools, man's abilities were redefined as were his needs—"mechanization was the symbol of comfort and efficiency in modern life." Accordingly, the arts anticipated these changes and responded; music, art, and literature challenged

popular influence to work with the the spirit of the age. Against this setting, the theories of town planning and residential design remained faithful to earlier truths which were now obsolete. The new means of transportation demanded a radical restructuring of the city, while the adherence to traditional social preconceptions of the dwelling unit and its relation to the inhabitant prevented architecture from serving the needs of industrial man. In this perspective, Le Corbusier proclaimed battle against the contemporary architectural scene and petitioned for a revolution in architecture.

Modern criticism censures the *Moderne* as banal, a *cul-de-sac*, Le Corbusier's work as austere rationalism devoid of the human element venturing as far as functionalism. This misconception is not only due to a grave misunderstanding of the architect but of the historical moment of his time, for in the most simplest to the most complex forms of Le Corbusier's architecture the image of man is prevalent. The supremacy of man over nature expressed in landscape design, and the conception of the Modulor, a proportioning system derived from the human scale—"architecture must be walked through, traversed, it is made to be seen by our human eye at 63 inches from the ground"—exhibit a human influence.

Although the standardization and universality of form rejects the diversity of man on the personal level, the architect injected into his architecture a human nobility which was threatened by mechanization. Justifiably, Françoise Choay states, "...Le Corbusier's greatest contribution to twentieth century architecture is probably that of having rediscovered man, who had become lost in the frenetic development of technique."

—Gina Sarafidis