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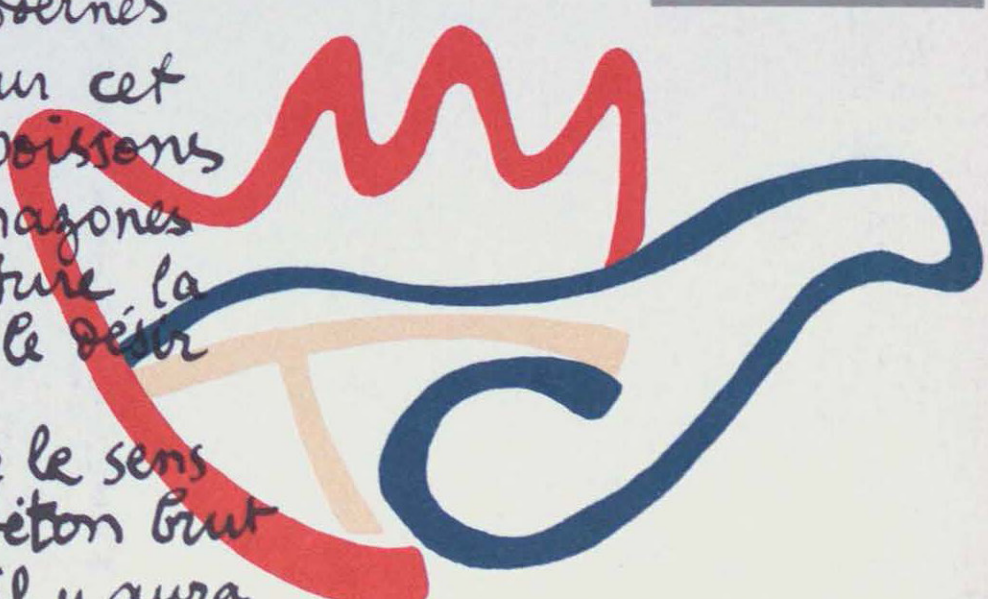
Faire une architecture c'est  
faire une créature. Etre  
rempli se remplir s'être  
rempli éclater epulser  
froid de glace au sein des  
complexités devenir un jeune  
chien content.

Devenir l'ordre.

Les cathédrales modernes  
se construiront sur cet  
alignement des poissons  
des chevaux des amazones  
la constance la droiture la  
patience l'attente le désir  
et la vigilance.

Apparaîtront je le sens  
la splendeur du béton brut  
et la grandeur qu'il y aura  
en à penser le mariage  
des lignes

à peser les formes  
A peser.....



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*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

## The Building of the Canadian Centre for Architecture

The dream is to make and create a centre from which the most present and powerful expression of civilization can be explored and understood.

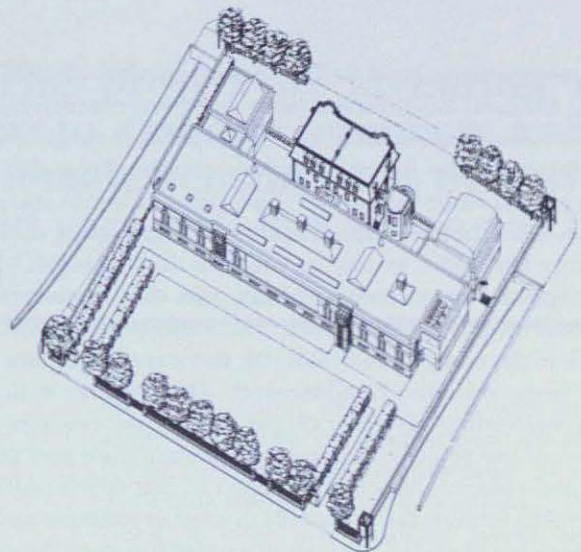
- Phyllis Lambert on May 13, 1985, at the ground-breaking ceremony for the new building of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal.

The Canadian Centre for Architecture is a museum and study centre founded in 1979 by Phyllis Lambert to study and make known the significance of architecture in the unfolding history of our society.

Through its collections and activities it has come to be recognized as an institution of importance by both the local and international architectural communities. Its collections, which include drawings and prints, books, photographs and other important architectural archives, number approximately 100 000 items, thus providing a most important resource for study, research and exhibition. Since its founding in 1979, the CCA has sponsored a number of significant activities, including exhibitions of its collections, publications, seminars and lectures.

In its present location at 1440 St. Catherine Street West, the CCA's accessibility to all of the architectural community and the interested general public has been limited to the existing facilities available. It is therefore exciting news to learn that the centre is to be moved to a new building where its resources can be more fully exploited.

On May 13, 1985, the ground-breaking ceremony for this new building took place in the presence of a number of important government officials and representatives of the international architectural community. The project, which is located on the grounds of the Shaughnessy House in downtown Montreal, and is centred around renovations to this historic nineteenth century property, will increase the size of the facilities to 120,000 square feet. It will include exhibition galleries, a library, a 250-seat auditorium, studios and offices for architects and scholars in residence, a bookstore and a restaurant. In addition it will house the large areas required for the storage of the collections and the offices of the fifty permanent staff members re-



quired to administer and operate the centre. The construction is expected to take three years with the official opening planned for the spring of 1988. Funding for the project has come from both the federal and the provincial governments (each announced grants of four million dollars at the ground-breaking ceremony), while the CCA itself is investing 10.6 million dollars, and is campaigning to raise an additional five million from the private sector.

The noted Montreal architect Peter Rose is the architect for the renovations and extensions of the Shaughnessy properties. Erol Argun, another Montreal architect of considerable repute and involvement in many major projects in downtown Montreal, is the associate architect. Phyllis Lambert, who is founder of the CCA and internationally renowned for her involvement and interest in many aspects of contemporary architecture, urban renewal and cultural heritage, is the consulting architect.

# BUILDING WOMEN'S CULTURE: *on architecture and politics*

by Pauline Fowler

The competition held in Toronto in the fall of 1983 for a Women's Cultural Building has been discussed extensively in recent publications; description of its inception through criticism of the entries can be found in various sources. Now that some time has passed since the competition event, it seems that the issues most consistently touched upon by the prospect of making architecture for such a group are twofold: the making of a building appropriate for women's culture and the relationship between architecture and feminism. While these issues have been dealt with in the competition material, there is a larger one which has not been sufficiently addressed. The Women's Cultural Building, more than any other recent project, necessitates a confrontation of the relationship between architecture and politics, or form and content: hence, the subject of this article. Although these remarks employ the competition itself as example and illustration, they are intended to apply in a wider forum to the circumstances of groups who, like the Women's Cultural Building, stand outside or at the periphery of mainstream society, culture, and politics.

Clearly evident in all the material surrounding the competition—the brief, the jury's comments, the entries themselves, and subsequent critiques—is an association of architectural forms with mainstream patriarchal values, problematic for a dissenting institution and its architects. The resulting outright rejection of architecture takes several forms which include various non-architectural and anti-architectural expressions, and in some instances, the implicit expectation of a new, other architecture.

The competition brief, for instance, articulates a profound distrust of architecture as representing "patriarchal ideas of monumentality, dominance, and power"; another Collective member expresses a preference for "something between circus tent, beehive, and octopus."<sup>1</sup> Both these quotations have found prominent places in publications on the competition, attesting to their general acceptance. An earlier source contains a reference to

anthropomorphically-based architectural designs with their resultant oppressiveness arising from their obsession with the human form.<sup>2</sup>

*L'auteur, en analysant les projets soumis à la compétition pour un Centre Culturel des Femmes, en vient à la conclusion que la plupart sont anti-architecturaux à cause de leurs affiliations à l'idéologie patriarcale: plusieurs projets sont étudiés dans ce cadre de référence. Pour illustrer le lien entre la politique et l'architecture, l'auteur analyse ensuite le club masculin et sa typologie du palazzo. Elle en conclut que les hommes et les femmes doivent maintenant participer pleinement à la théorie et pratique de l'architecture pour détruire le monopole masculin existant et établir le status quo.*

Many of the entries are simply not architectural proposals. The Gas Stations project,<sup>3</sup> for instance, is the unaltered re-use of abandoned vernacular filling stations; another proposed quarters underground in a concrete bunker, with no visual, representative aspect. In the Door project, it is only the doorways which are considered, and even then, each door is left to the individual artist to design. One such scheme proposes the transformation of a classical patriarchal structure, the Triumphal Arch. This is an admirable beginning, but the form itself is not recognizable without verbal identification, and there is no new narrative which disrupts anything but its "uselessness." The Snakes and Ladders entry, in a brilliant graphic, foregrounds women's place in history, but again there is no proposal for architecture.

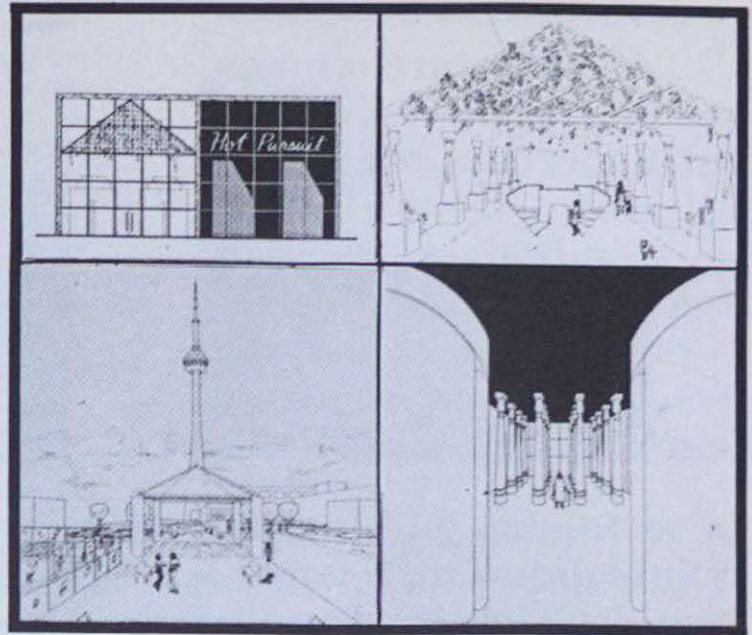
Other entries exhibit *anti-architectural* biases. Several schemes which share the premise of radical decentralization have critical consequences for architecture, and for the City: one wonders if this approach is born of the belief that architecture, as a large, centralized institution, necessarily means the existence of a servant class to effect maintenance and cleaning tasks. The Lighthouse proposal makes a conscious effort to deal with the institution's public/vertical representation, but the notion of a *moving* lighthouse gives rise to disturbing connotations of impermanence, even treachery; similarly, the Arbour scheme proposes the transformation of the City's permanent artifacts into ruins and ephemeral garden growth. The Omphalos project uses "disjuncture and uncertainty" to create a new spatial order: is this what we want our architecture to be?

Furthermore, there is evidence throughout the competition of the expectation of a new, fun-

damentally different architecture, expressive of women's culture and experience. Given that architectural history is almost devoid of contributions by women, it may not be unreasonable to postulate that their work could be perceptibly different from existing architectural stock, and that such expression by women could reveal a coherent aesthetic. However, it's been a long time since anyone invented anything new in architecture.<sup>4</sup> The project of inventing new forms to embody feminism and/or the female sensibility is one which could very well last as long as time itself. It can be seen, therefore, as a convenient diversion which diffuses opposition to the dominant group by channelling it into unproductive pursuits, which at the same time, are infinitely amusing to those in power: participants in this futile search thus become accomplices to their own bondage. Old parts can be made into an original whole, yes—a New Architecture, which is not very likely. One competition entry rejected any trace of recognizable imagery whatsoever in favour of the *tabula rasa*: the proposed "Wedge", "Amoeba", etc., are more a denial of architecture than a New Architecture. The forms are mute, and illegible in any context.

One recent critic articulates the fundamental question as "was it really an architectural problem in the first place?" This preposterous question contains within itself the germ of its own answer, "the unavailability of architecture appropriate to the specified purpose." The key word in the foregoing quotation is "appropriate": as in other instances, it invokes the expectation that there exists a precise correlation between form and content, and that out there, somewhere, is the perfect architectural counterform for women's culture, just waiting for someone diligent enough to discover it. In fact, such is simply not the case. As will be illustrated shortly, architecture comes *by association* to represent a certain ideology, and not, as this critic seems to feel, by building types embodying certain values inherent at their inception and which survive any subsequent transformation. If we are to agree with his conclusion, that "Architecture is extraneous to the specified purpose of expressing women's culture,"<sup>5</sup> we are left with the unfortunate situation of such dissenting groups being without architecture, without symbolic presence, without a place in the City, and thus culturally invisible. Such a state of affairs is all too convenient for the *status quo*.

The call for a Women's Cultural Building occurs within the implicit context of a "modern" society in which women participate as full equals and which necessitates, it seems, a rejection of architecture as given.<sup>6</sup> Implicit in the act of rejection, obviously, is a profound critique of architecture as inextricably bound up with the *status quo* in which women are marginalized or excluded, although the critique remains unconscious and unarticulated. This rejection, we have seen, takes the form of non-architectural and



**"The project of inventing new forms to embody feminism and/or the female sensibility is one which could very well last as long as time itself."**

anti-architectural proposals, as well as those manifesting the expectation of wholly new forms: the competition entries thus, can be seen as critical anti-projects.<sup>7</sup> In addition, published criticism contains a similar latent and undeveloped critique of architecture as "extraneous" to the task at hand by pointing out the lack of architecture in the competition entries, but makes no counterproposal. In both instances, the critique without a project—a viable alternative—is not just impotent; if simply an enthusiasm for criticism, it is also nihilistic, an invitation to ever-deepening despair. Leon Krier's observations seem appropriate here:

A Resistance without a project is... a useless effort; because a critic without a project gazes as impotently into the future, as an archaeologist without a vision into the past.<sup>8</sup>

It now seems clear that there exists within society and the architectural discipline the implicit understanding that the forms of architecture embody the collective values of the society which these forms represent. In the words of Paul Philippe Cret:

... the designers of the past have always been able to give to wide different civilizations their most complete expression—their architecture.<sup>9</sup>

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**“...Architecture comes by association to represent a certain ideology, and not,...by building types embodying certain values inherent at their inception and which survive any subsequent transformation.”**

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An architectural form's first appeal, obviously, is at the level of the purely visual—the play of light and shadow, solid to void, proportion, etc. But for as long as there has been a discipline of architecture, its forms have been co-opted for the political use of various regimes by means of the rhetoric accompanying the act of appropriation. The visual forms themselves do not have any inherent ideological content; they always require a component of language in order to become a system of signification:

It is true that objects, images and patterns of behaviour can signify, and do so on a large scale, but never autonomously; every semiological system has its linguistic admixture. Where there is a visual substance, for example, the meaning is confirmed by being duplicated in a linguistic message so that at least a part of the iconic message is, in terms of structural relationships, either redundant or taken up by the linguistic system.<sup>10</sup>

Thus by rhetoric and by convention, certain architectural forms can come to be associated with a certain value system. Since it is conventional, the relationship between form and content is far from predictable, or precise. Nonetheless, the strong associations which exist between architectural forms and the dominant value system make architecture a main instrument of the society's ideological superstructure.

In spite of this common understanding of architecture's ideological role, there is a reluctance or refusal on the part of most designers to deal deliberately and consciously with this dimension.

Just as architecture itself is autonomous from political positions, neither can it be sexist or feminist. We would be well-advised to let architecture be architecture, not propaganda.<sup>11</sup>

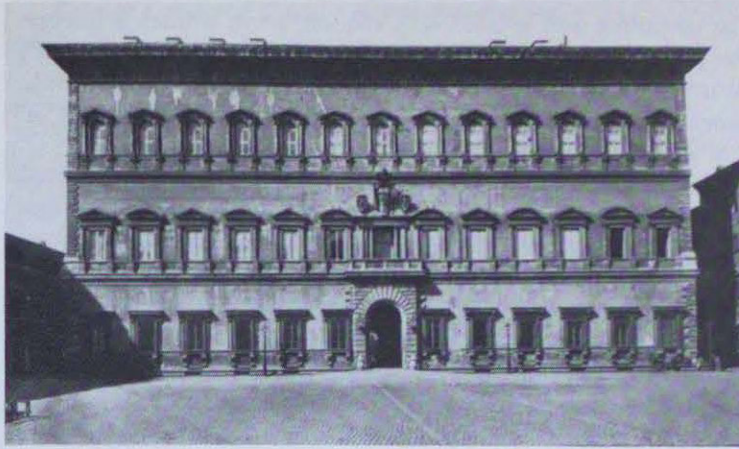
Citing it as neutral, as valid on its own terms, architects go on producing architecture which goes on being subconsciously understood as reinforcing the prevailing value system. The refusal to acknowledge this role is not, in fact, an ideologically neutral act: it is instead an implicit acceptance of the prevailing values. To discuss the conventional meaning of a visual form is to open it to question, and to destroy the myth of its neutrality, its “naturalness;” to call architecture “neutral” is to render unassailable the ideological system it currently represents. Concomitantly, to consider architecture as a system of signification which is socially constructed, is to allow the possibility of its transformation for other meanings.

A discussion of a particular institution and its conventional architectural container will serve to illustrate the preceding theoretical remarks on form and ideology. In this context, the private Men's Club and its palazzo building type seem especially appropriate as *undeniably* embodying the quintessence of Western capitalist and patriarchal values, quite opposed to those of the Women's Cultural Building. Such an ideological reading can be applied to both the building itself and its complementary texts.

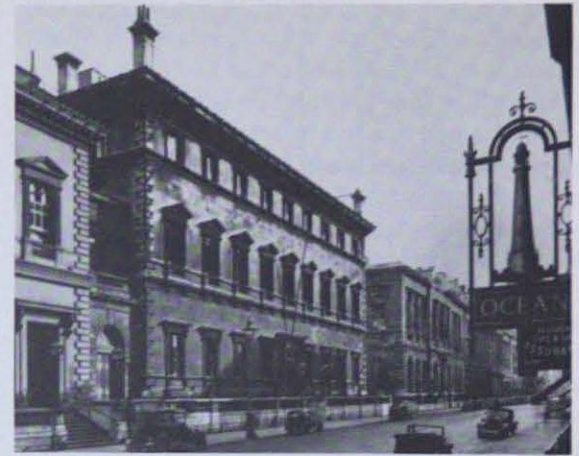
Men have congregated in clubs for at least as long as “Western civilizations” has existed, their commonalities being political, literary, religious, military, or social. The British clubs, since late in the 18th Century, have represented the crystallization of that elite which conquered half the world, built the British Empire, and ruled it for more than two hundred years—the aristocracy and landed gentry, ministers' and officers' sons, industrialists, and the civil service. Women were most definitely not allowed as members and were admitted, if at all, only on special occasions and very infrequently. It has been said of the London clubs that they are still “a refuge from the vulgarity of the outside world, a reassuringly fixed point, the echo of a more civilized way of living.” Clubs in the New World freely adopted most of the customs of their British ancestors, membership being drawn almost entirely from the wealthy upper classes of Anglo-Saxon descent. Some clubs came to be associated with particular political parties, such as one stronghold of the Republican party, whose unwritten rule was “no women, no dogs, no reporters, and no Democrats.” Whatever its political persuasion, these clubs' memberships included, and still do today, the wealthiest and most influential men in the Western world.

From formal beginnings in late Georgian London through the Greek Revival and eclectic Regency periods, the Men's Club pursued a deliberate search for a normative type. The ultimate choice of the Italian palazzo coincided with maturation of the institution itself, at a moment when architectural culture was engaged in a re-encounter with the Renaissance. If this moment had occurred during the Greek Revival, the Men's Club could have been housed in a temple; similarly, maturation in the heyday of the Gothic Revival could have resulted in a castle as container. Once established as a palazzo at this critical moment, however, and even though architectural fashion moves on, the type endures because of now-established conventional associations. There is no question that the choice of the palazzo may be ascribed in some measure to a wish to partake of already-prevailing associations with the prestige of a powerful nobility, thus documenting the institution's own social pretensions. The essential architectural characteristics of the type in plan, section, and elevation “predisposes” it toward such an appropriation and such a reading, exemplified in the Reform Club of London, 1837, by Sir Charles Barry.





Palazzo Farnese



Reform Club

**“...architecture for a Women’s Cultural Building cannot be a search for the perfect counterform. It is instead an opportunity for the subversion of traditional associations between architecture and the dominant value system, allowing the appropriation of these same forms for the new institution and its dissenting values...”**

The building’s principal entrance is symmetrically placed to its main bulk and to the major rooms inside. The areaway, the surrounding fence, and the raising of the threshold to just about eye level all act as distancing devices, setting the club at a slightly remote level from the vulgar and ordinary life of the sidewalk. Inside the door is a porter’s station, a point of control to maintain the club as an elite precinct. A further flight of steps sets the club’s preferred floor, the *piano nobile*, almost a storey above the street.

Passing through the colonnade from the entry, one enters the large courtyard which is open for two storeys to a glazed roof; this room is the Saloon, where members gather informally on a daily basis for business and for pleasure. The dominance of this great central hall gives the club a self-sufficient, inward-looking quality, as though the outside world did not exist: the building is thus well-suited to its members. Two other major rooms are located on the building’s principal axis, one on the *piano nobile* and one on the first floor, both with views out to a small park. Other spaces on these two floors are used as obvious adjuncts to the principal rooms. The great staircase which leads to the first floor is off to one side within the building’s main bulk, true to the original palazzo type.

The secondary entrance, at the east side of the building, leads into a staircase which serves the dormitories on the second floor; a distinctly secondary emphasis is thus given to the residential or “private” component. Servants’ quarters on the top floor are of an even lower priority in their lower ceiling height and lack of windows to the street. The two floors which are below grade consist of the kitchen and various other service spaces, essentially all *poché* with no real legibility in plan. The entrance to these quarters is by the steps into the north areaway, which would also be used for delivering coal to the adjacent storage bins. The only connections with the principal floors are a number of narrow stairways, through which food is transported and various other serving tasks performed.

Other club buildings exhibit some interesting variations on this basic palazzo organization. One New York club has its entrance from a side forecourt, which further elaborates the main

sequence of spaces. Another provides a special restaurant for the ladies, a discreet distance away and virtually unconnected with the club proper. In yet another case, the great central hall is given over to a grandiose staircase, which functions as a place of presentation and representation—here the marriagable daughters of club members are presented as “debs” each year. In many instances, the residential rooms of the upper floors are used by members when they wish, for their own reasons, not to spend the night in their homes.

Returning now to the Reform Club, the exterior of the building is as a clear appeal to the associations of palatial architecture, cribbed directly by Sir Charles Barry from the Palazzo Farnese. The *piano nobile* and the building’s interior hierarchy can be read on the facade, with the main floor windows being of a generous size, the first floor of a similar size but more elaborate, and the residential rooms indicated by the smaller, plainer windows of the attic. No windows for the servants’ accommodations appear to the street, either in the mezzanine or, obviously, in the basement.

In summation, the essential architectural characteristics of this type are threefold: the facade, the *piano nobile*, and the courtyard. The facade consists of a singular monumental entrance against a backdrop of window fabric; the plan and section reveal a singular monumental room situated on the *piano nobile*, made possible by a fabric of minor rooms and corridors. The type thus provides the physical analogue for the socio-political power structure of capitalist patriarchy, a small, singular, ruling group whose position of privilege is at the expense of and set

against a *fabric* comprised of all the Others. The palazzo building type remains in use by Men's Clubs today,<sup>12</sup> and has come to be associated with a white male elite and their collective patriarchal values: war and imperialism, exploitation of the Earth's resources, economic class structure, the marginalization and exclusion of women, and racism, all apparently in the interests of accumulating power and profit.

This reading of the Men's Club is to deliberately clarify, in the context of a Women's Cultural Building, the common relationship between an institution—a collective of individuals who share a common set of values—and its architecture. First, the form is not *invented* for the purposes of the specific institution: there is no perfect one-to-one correspondence between form and content. Second, it may be necessary to conduct a conscious search among architectural types, and to employ rhetoric to argue for the chosen type. Third, a type can be deemed "appropriate" for a given cultural moment, but only by a willing audience. Eventually, an architecture can come to "embody" or "represent" an institution and its system of values. It is, therefore, entirely understandable that a certain reluctance to use such a form—the palazzo—may exist on the part of the Women's Cultural Building Collective, which does not partake of the same value system as the Men's Club. At this point, it is absolutely critical to recognize that this has been a reading of *conventional associations: a building type at inception contains no inherent or binding values*. Just as other readings can exist for the palazzo, so can other meanings, and therein lies the possibility of transforming its commonly understood meaning. Such a transformation can occur through the reappropriation of an architectural type for the use of another institution and by the rhetoric which accompanies the act of appropriation. The practice is as old as architecture itself: it includes for instance, the repeated use over the ages of the honorific column, the appropriation of Roman/pagan secular forms for Christian churches, as well as the occupation of the Renaissance palazzo by the modern-day Men's Club which has been described.

The reader will recall here that much of the material from the Women's Cultural Building Competition was of a non-architectural, anti-architectural, or "neo"-architectural nature, brought about, I have argued, by discomfort from subconscious ideological associations. Imagine instead, proposals for this institution which were able to partake freely and without inhibition of the immense range of potentially available architectures, with their multiple capacities for narrative and symbolic content. Imagine, for instance a Women's Cultural Building which chose to inhabit the Men's Club's palazzo. The mere act of occupying such architecture renders visible its normally latent ideological meanings. Architectural interventions could provide a critique, and ultimately *subvert the old meaning*.

A new narrative could be created, combining a reformulated vision of public and private with content from women's history. The project could be made deliberately analogous to women's culture and experience. The palazzo, once the Men's Club's own, comes to "represent" its ideological opposite, the Women's Cultural Building.

The essential and eternal forms of architecture which are constituted of mass and void, light and shadow, proportion, texture, colour, detail, etc., do not in themselves contain any intrinsic meaning; that meaning is always conferred by the given cultural context. For as long as architecture has existed, it has provided succeeding civilizations with their most complete cultural expression, and as such plays a major role in the maintenance of any prevailing ideology. Dissenting groups such as the Women's Cultural Building Collective, and their architects, must participate fully in architectural discourse and production in order to ensure their place in the City. By now it should be apparent that architecture for a Women's Cultural Building cannot be a search for the perfect counterform. It is instead an opportunity for the subversion of traditional associations between architecture and the dominant value system, allowing the appropriation of these same forms for the new institution and its dissenting values, all in the best historical tradition. It would seem that such a reappropriation of architecture, hitherto the exclusive property of the Patriarchy, is entirely appropriate to the Collective's subversive mandate.

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*Pauline Fowler graduated architecture from the University of Toronto in 1984. Her design thesis was a Women's Cultural Building. She has written for various journals and is now working in the field of architecture in Toronto.*

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#### NOTES:

1. Renée Bart and Jahanna Householder of the Women's Cultural Building, Competition brief, 1983, pp.6, 13.
2. Nancy Patterson, in a review of the exhibition "Architecture: Work by Women" at A.R.C. Gallery, Toronto, in February 1983. *The Fifth Column*, Vol. 3, No. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 1983), p. 92.
3. The five winning schemes include the Gas Stations, Snakes and Ladders, Lighthouse, Door, and Omphalos projects, published in the *The Fifth Column*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Winter 1984), pp. 5-10.
4. The Modern Movement, in its attempts at architecture "in the spirit of the times," produced instead that which was *not* architecture, and not New Architecture. The wreckage of our contemporary cities attests to the failure of their experiments.
5. This quotation and the preceding two are from Graham Owen in his "Critique of the Five Winning Schemes," *The Fifth Column*, op. cit., p. 10.
6. Also at issue is (analogously) the internal crisis of Modernism as a whole as it participates with the very dynamic outlined here. At the very least, however, it has itself begun for the past two decades to face the peculiar situation of a seemingly inexhaustible series of new architectures, suggesting that the wrong question is constantly being asked.
7. Similarly, the Modernist exponents of functionalism have been challenged by Jozé Plecnik on the basis that "their proposals, no matter how significant, were little more than polemical anti-projects." From "Plecnik and the Critics," by Peter Krecic, in *Jozé Plecnik 1872-1957: Architecture and the City*. Andrews, Bentley & Grzan-Butina, eds. Urban Design, Oxford Polytechnic, Headington, Oxford, 1983.
8. Leon Krier, as quoted by Maurice Culot in his "Introduction" to *Leon Krier: Drawings 1967-1980* (Catalogue to the exhibition at Max Protech Gallery, Jan.-Feb. 1981, in New York). A.A.M. Editions, Brussels, 1981, p. xiv.
9. In Chapter 6: "Design and Construction" of *Paul Philippe Cret, Architect and Teacher*. Theo B. White, editor, Philadelphia: The Art Alliance Press, 1973, pp. 71-72.
10. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 1964. English translation, Annette Lavers, New York: Hill & Wang, 1968, p. 5.
11. S. Hero, review of "Architecture: Work by Women." *The Fifth Column*, Vol. 3, No. 3/4 (Spring/Summer 1983), p. 93.
12. It is interesting to note that the modern corporate banking tower represents essentially the same institution, the same values, and many of the same individuals, which must further confirm that the relationship of form to ideology, as conventional, is far from one-to-one.

*Blanche Lemco van Ginkel a été employée quelques mois au bureau de Le Corbusier lors de la création de l'Unité d'habitation de Marseille. Elle nous fait part des leçons qu'elle a tiré de cette expérience.*

How can you think about one problem, one element, without thinking of the universe? What is the value of "office experience", "in-office training", "apprenticeship", in the education, formation, training, realization of an architect? What value? What is architecture?

These were the questions which first came to mind when I was asked to recount my experience in the office of Le Corbusier. It would not be difficult to write a personal and factual account of the months spent in the office. It might be amusing and contain titillating gossip about the denizens of the famous 35 rue de Sèvres—Wojensky, Candilis, Woods, Soltan, Xenakis—who later made their own mark in architecture, town planning, education, music, engineering and plastic arts; and the polyglot environment in which it was impossible to learn unadulterated French. I appreciated the luxury of working in a field in which the word matters less than the deed—expressed in lines on paper, engineering figures, coloured sketches—all translatable into a built form—to serve people without words—to be used, enjoyed, understood, no matter the tongue.

**Lesson:** *This is the essence of architecture—that it transcends verbal explanation.*

Of course. So do all the visual arts. But then how do you teach it? To verbalize is our most expedient method of communication. And this is undoubtedly the best method to transmit acquired knowledge and basic skills. But there comes a moment when, in order to learn—particularly in the field of design—the only way is, as Siasia Nowicki says, "Just do!"

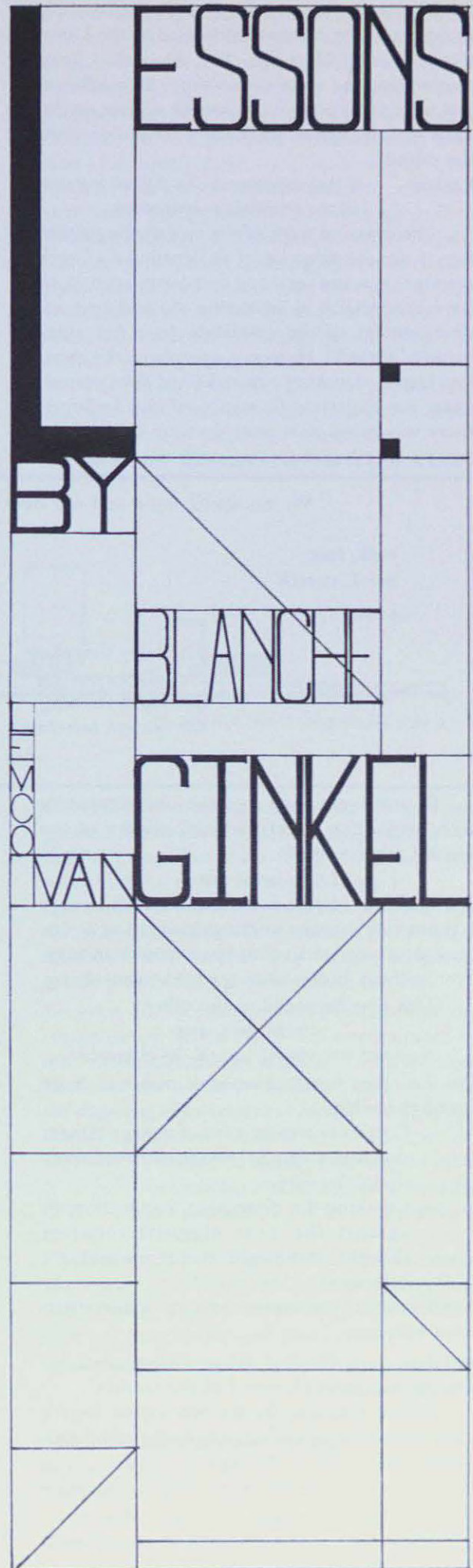
"Young graduate in architecture. Meticulous engineering draughtsman. Experience in managing an office. Writing, presentation, communication skills. Some experience in film and equipment design, data gathering and analysis in town planning office; theatre, acting, set and costume design. In school, demonstrated ability in building construction; user/building program analysis; spatial organization."

That is the professional description for job-seeking purposes of the creature who walked into Le Corbusier's office, wanting to start "doing" something in architecture. One might have added, "unskilled and unknowing in architecture and of a generally provincial background".

**Observation:** Not a likely candidate to work for a world renowned architect, much less to contribute to an architectural landmark building.

However, I was hired because, characteristically, there was a rush to finish some drawings.

**Lesson to the job seeker:** *It is providential if you happen to arrive in an office at the right time.*



Layout by: Stephen Silverman

I During the first weeks, I made engineering drawings of the concrete structure of the Unité d'habitation at Marseille. The pilotis had been poured, and the more conservative Marseillaises had mounted a protest against the project on the basis that the rats would invade the building via the pilotis.

**Lesson** *to the inexperienced: It is difficult to foresee all the objections to innovation.*

The exacting work of the engineering drawings under the direction of an Israeli and a Greek engineer may not seem, on first consideration, to have been useful in furthering the architectural development of the candidate (nor her command of French). However, apart from the absolute terror of making a mistake and thus prejudicing the entire performance of the building, there was more to it than drawing lines of the correct length and spacing, with the correct di-

mensions and notes.

**There was the magic measure of the Modulor.**

To some extent an intellectual conceit, it produces admirable proportion, balance, composition, design—but only in the hands of those skilled in using the tool.

- discard the inbred feet and inches
- visualize the Parthenon
- and its elements
- remember Vitruvius, Leonardo
- consider dimensions as proportionate
- consider the measure of man

**Lesson :** *All men are not created equal of stature. But there are basic proportions...more or less.*

**Question:** Is movement the common denominator?

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We sit, stand, bend and roll over the same way.....  
more or less

walk, run  
bend, stretch

The baby wriggling  
the infant crawling  
the youth running  
the ancient tottering

in proportion to the length of the limb  
with mechanics of joint and muscle.

Are they all paced by the Modulor Man with the upraised arm?

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In any event, how can the pre-occupation with proportion affect the performance of the beam I am drawing?

Let it be secure

Let it not waste material

It is possible to make working drawings of a concrete structure, under the supervision of an engineer, without understanding what you are doing.

This may be useful to the office  
useful to society

but not useful to self development.

On the other hand, drawing it makes it more comprehensible.

- Correct representation of a three dimensional element by means of two dimensional drawings:
- Checking the dimension, connection, fit against the next element requires thought, and maybe means consulting a colleague.

Much easier if you understand the whole structural system.

But that is not all—that slab and beam are insignificant except as elements in the totality,

Pirko is detailing the kitchen, whose service lines are earth-originating and the branched ventilation ducts rise to the sky.

Of course, every student knows that architecture presupposes a concept.

Of course, the concept stems from user requirements, from people-spaces

which must be contained by material  
supported by structure  
and serviced.

**Lesson :** *The proof of the concept is in the realization. But before the actuality, peopled and used, the test is in the working drawings.*

It was a concept of many facets

- to free the building from the ground
- to let the ground flow through undisturbed
- to give each family views, cross-ventilation and outdoor space
- to use technology for efficient/economic production
- to have all daily needs at the doorstep
- to create a pleasure garden for the community on the roof.

It was pre-computer era, but the program could have been translated into built form by computation.

It is doubtful whether this would have produced the actual form of the Unité d'habitation:

*Pilotis*

*sol artificiel*

*toit-terrasse*

—integral to the structure/concept but also unto themselves.

**Lesson :** *according to Le Corbusier (and others) "C'est dur, l'architecture."*

II Happy day! The candidate is charged with design of the *toit-terrasse*. Visions of little children enjoying life in the nursery school, skipping through the play spaces; everyone exercising in the gymnasium and running around the track (30 years before our fitness fetish); music and theatre under the sky; leaning on the parapet to absorb the Mediterranean view, air, sun; Wow!

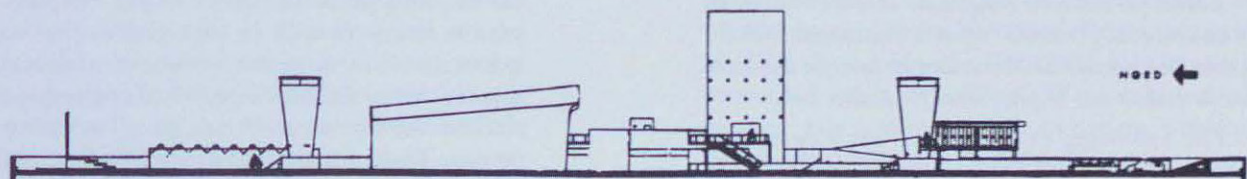
Given, were the structural and mechanical drawings up to roof level and a perspective sketch by Le Corbusier.

**Question:** Can you do a good job, earn your salary and learn at the same time? If you work for a great "master" do you only execute his wishes?

The overall design, "landscape", and part of the roof was self-evident. It grew from what was beneath it and from the program. If you un-

derstood the concept, if you absorbed the spirit of the design—and with the Modulor omnipresent—it was not difficult to design and detail. Nevertheless, there were some elements whose form was not obvious, for which the intellectual exercise did not produce an undisputed solution—for which there were options: the gymnasium, the nursery school and two ventilator structures. The gymnasium had been given form by Le Corbusier—a *casquette*. The nursery school was the second main building mass in the town-square-on-the-roof and was unresolved. The ventilators were in the form of cylindrical columns—the vertical elements, beloved of all architects in their compositions.

The nursery school became a pavillion, scaled to both adult and child (hopefully). It had walls. Concrete walls. Le Corbusier was not happy. Many illustrated lectures on walls—



Élévation du toit-terrasse

LE CORBUSIER 1946-52, LES EDITIONS ZURICH

dissertations over the draughting table for my edification. Reacting against the gratuitous decoration of my Montreal formation, I have nothing positive to offer. I question and demur. As Le Corbusier said, "You young people, you are such purists!"

After a week of struggle I discovered what the wall should be. (Premonitions of Louis Kahn?)

**Lesson:** *A wall is more than a wall.*

It had something to do with its Mediterranean context—an environment which I had not yet experienced. But by then, through immersion in the office, and in particular through Le Corbusier's life-simulating, poetic exhortation there was at least a vicarious experience.

**Lesson:** *The history of architecture is much more than AI Ortega's "blotting paper slides". The vicarious experience of the past is useful to the appreciation of today and potentially stimulating to a vision of the future.*

**Warning:** Distinguish between the spirit and the manifestation the philosophy and the principle the whole and the components.

The ventilators were another matter. They were taken for granted as tall concrete cylinders raised on a concrete cube. Perhaps I was intoxicated with personal discoveries—I dared question their form. The purist at work again. What was in the cylinder? What was in the cube? Tripartite mechanical equipment. Consequently,

the ventilator became a trefoil in section, and splayed out to the sky. (Comic strip representation of exhalation. Also the classic wind creatures blowing in the corner of a map.)

**Question:** Form followed function. But was this enough to make the ventilators of the Unité d'habitation at Marseille one of the most photographed architectural elements of its time?

Between the mechanical requirements and the resolution of airflow there still were options of line, subtle though they might be. And the line of Le Corbusier was most subtle. There was also the detailing of joints and of formwork, which ultimately produced the form.

**Lesson:** *Nothing has been designed until the smallest detail has been resolved, until every line and dimension is precise—and capable of execution.*

One could have learned this from a sculptor like Brancusi or Hepworth; or from an engineer like Maillart. But we are dealing with architecture—at once reality and simulation

for vulnerable people with durable materials, bread and dreams.

This, one could learn at the atelier of Le Corbusier, 35 rue de Sèvres.

*Blanche Lemco van Ginkel is currently a professor of architecture at the University of Toronto, and is a partner in van Ginkel Associates.*

# UNITE D'HABITATION Marseille

Sevag V. Pogharian



The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier, Russel Walden Ed.

Le Corbusier

*L'essai qui suit a été rédigé pour le cours "théorie de l'architecture du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle" offert à l'université McGill. L'Unité d'habitation de Marseille y est analysé selon une méthode établie par le professeur Radoslav Zuk.*

The following essay, written for a twentieth century architectural theory course at McGill, is an attempt to analyze Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation at Marseille. In our analysis, I will first look at the image which the Unité projects. That is, the idea which underlies the building, the symbols it contains and the experience of the building as a whole. I will then look at the space organization of the Unité and, finally, discuss its nine systems. The nine systems are: movement, space type, growth and change, space and volume, geometry, enclosure, services, structure and materials. I am entirely indebted to Professor Radoslav Zuk for the method of analysis which I have employed.

"Le Corbusier viewed housing and urban planning as a single problem—the problem of human shelter..."<sup>1</sup> The Unité, which is a response to this housing problem, "contained within it and in its extensions all the services necessary to complete family life; parking spaces, shops, a day nursery, a laundry, space for recreation and physical exercise."<sup>2</sup> A town planning programme is implicit in the wholistic approach Le Corbusier takes in the Unité. Hence, the city is the source from which Le Corbusier drew the idea for this building.

The underlying message in Le Corbusier's *Towards a New Architecture* is that "each previous generation whose architecture is admired had developed an architecture appropriate to the times, whereas the buildings in which most people were living in the 1920's were totally unsuited to their age."<sup>3</sup> Le Corbusier was preoccupied with the search for an architecture that symbolized its epoch. He anticipated, reacted to and influenced the rapidly changing social, eco-

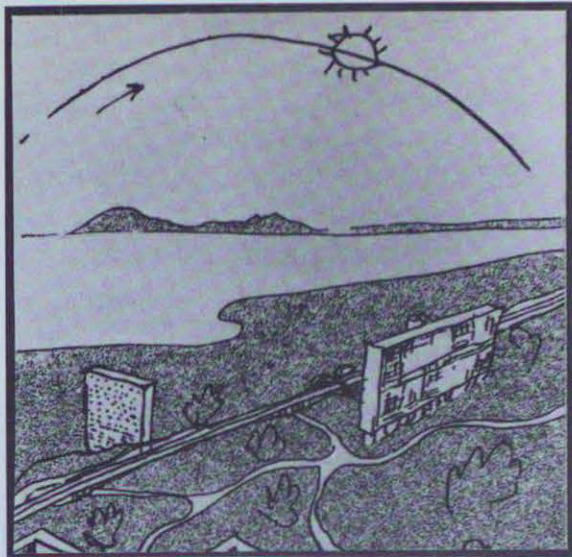
nomic, and political forces of his century. His genius lies primarily in this and in the consequent broadness of his vision of architecture. *Towards a New Architecture* is full of excited and optimistic statements such as, "A great epoch has begun. There exists a new spirit."<sup>4</sup> Or, "Industry, overwhelming us like a flood which rolls on towards its destined ends, has furnished us with new tools adapted to this new epoch, animated by the new spirit."<sup>5</sup> He appeals to technology to create a new and healthier way of life by creating an architecture that is born out of the machine age. "The Engineer's Aesthetic, and Architecture," he writes, "are two things that march together and follow one from the other: the one being now at its full height, the other in an unhappy state of retrogression."<sup>6</sup> Le Corbusier evolved an association between ships, i.e. the fruits of technology that belong to the "Engineer's Aesthetic," and an architectural system. "For him that association was a reflection of a new morality, new creative potentials, and above all a new way of life that was machine-oriented and machine based."<sup>7</sup> A specific aspect of technology which excited and absorbed Le Corbusier was mass-production.

He writes:

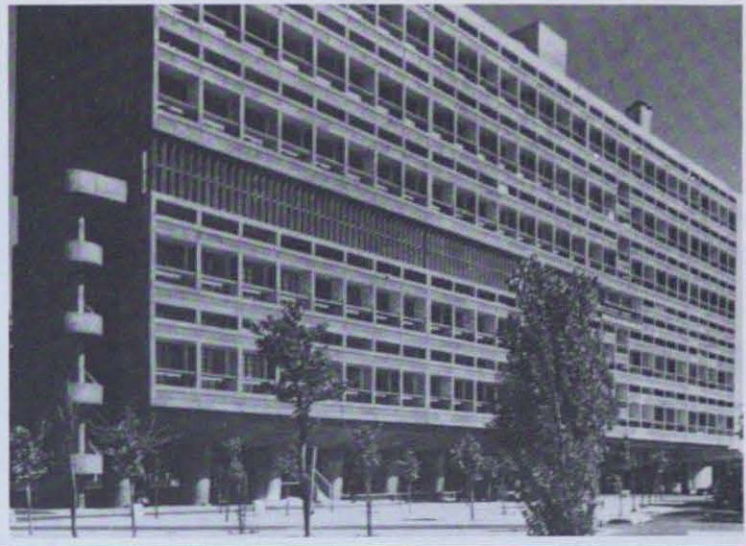
Architecture has for its first duty, in this period of renewal, that of bringing about a revision of values, a revision of the constituent elements of the house.<sup>8</sup>

He continues:

If we eliminate from our hearts and minds all dead concepts in regard to the house, and look at the question from a critical and objective point of view, we shall arrive at the "House-Machine," the mass-produced house, healthy, (and morally so too) and beautiful in the same way that the working tools and instruments which accompany our existence are beautiful.<sup>9</sup>



Sketch by Le Corbusier



Unité d'habitation

Le Corbusier wanted to free the house from all superfluous things in order to make mass-production possible. "To this end he designed a prototype house..., which he christened 'Citrohan'."<sup>10</sup> The Citrohan House later evolved into the Unité d'habitation. Hence, the Unité stands, in a symbolic way, as a proud monument to technology. It expresses, in its Mediterranean setting, resolute and profound optimism in the new creative potentials of this century.

Vincent Scully, referring to the Unité, writes:

It can be seen primarily in neither structural, spatial, nor abstractly massive terms—neither as a mountain, nor a cage, nor a box—but only as an articulated, unified sculptural body.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, like a Greek temple, the Unité is experienced only as a sculpture, i.e. as a thing in itself, and it does not spark an analogue in the observer's mind.

The highly organized and controlled quality of the Unité exerts a strong influence on its environment. Le Corbusier's conception of nature is central to understanding his architecture, which resembles, in its relation to nature, more to Hellenic than to Medieval architecture. Scully refers to Le Corbusier when he writes:

"The axis of the Acropolis," he wrote in his *Vers une Architecture*, of 1923, "runs...from the sea to the mountain." He went on: "The Greeks on the Acropolis set up temples which are animated by a single thought, drawing around them the desolate landscape and gathering it into the composition."<sup>12</sup>

He then refers to the Unité when he writes:

It is in relation to the mountains and the sea that the building as a whole should be seen. This is the larger, Hellenic environment that it creates.<sup>13</sup>

The organization of the Unité should be seen, as

Scully suggests, in broad terms to include the Mediterranean to its West and the mountains to its East. By looking at the Unité in such broad terms, we learn something of Le Corbusier's intention. His building stands in nature, confronts it and tries to order its intrinsic chaos.

Le Corbusier writes "Time, duration, sequence, and continuity are constituent elements of architecture..."<sup>14</sup> He also writes, referring to his Villa Savoie, that "...This house is a real architectural walk that offers a series of constantly varied, unexpected, sometimes astonishing views."<sup>15</sup> These ideas are clearly drawn from cubism. When one looks at the movement system of the Unité, one is struck by its straightforwardness in plan. To grasp the nature of this system, one must consider the following idea, which will also emerge in our discussion of the services system. The success of Le Corbusier's buildings must be ascribed, in large measure, to his brilliant blend of poetry and pragmatism. In other words, the circulation is straightforward, because this is most appropriate to the building type, but the opportunity is not missed to imbue it with poetry and raise it to an important position in the building. This occurs in the link between the seventeenth floor and the roof terrace and in the sculptural fire stair on the North side. As Scully points out, Le Corbusier's buildings are a stage for action; movement and action are highly valued by Le Corbusier and this finds strong expression in the Unité by the mentioned fire stair and by the running track which graces the top of the building. Le Corbusier writes:

Architecture can be seen only by a walking man...so much so that when it comes to the test, buildings can be classified as alive or dead according to whether the rule of movement has been applied or not.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, although the Unité does not offer an architectural walk to the same degree as the Villa

Savoie, the Capitol of Chandigarh or the Carpenter Centre, it is nonetheless a living building.

The Unité has twenty three different types in its 337 apartment units. But as Giedion points out, "Le Corbusier had two great gifts: he could reduce a complicated problem to astonishingly simple basic elements, and he could summarize these results in formulas of lapidary clearness."<sup>17</sup> The twenty three different apartment types in the Unité can be reduced to five space types. These five space types are in turn composed of only two elemental space types. Let us call these two generic types A and B. Type A is one by two grid modules in area and is one floor in height. The grid is based on square modules of approximately four by four metres. Type B is one by two and a half grid modules in area and is again one floor in height. The circulation is one module in width, one floor in height and stretches almost the entire length of the building.

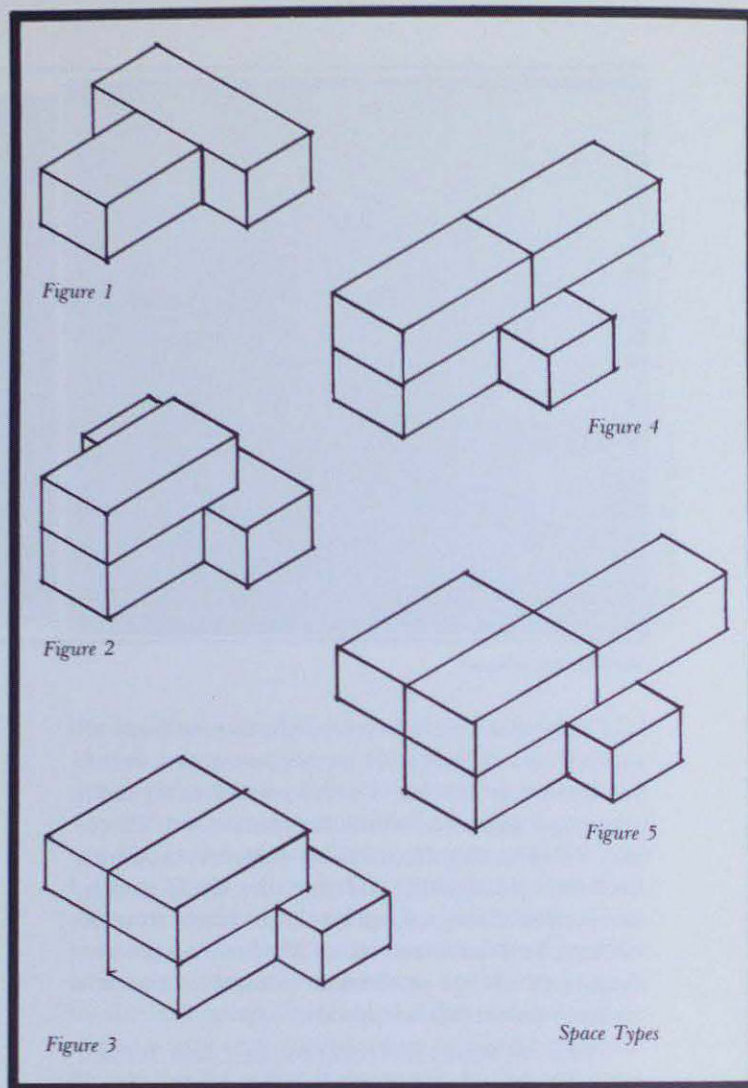
The simplest space type is itself elemental and consists only of generic type A. You will note that type A is always on the same level as the circulation and the two together form a T (see figure 1). The second space type, slightly more complicated, is composed of the vertical stacking of a type A and B (see figure 2). Type B is never on the same level as the circulation. The third space type is composed by the addition of another B to the side of the previous space type (see figure 3). Wherever a vertical stacking occurs, as in types two and three, a double height space is created. The fourth is again an addition of a type B to space type two, but now the two B's are connected at their ends (see figure 4). The fifth space type is composed by an addition of a type B to the latter, in the manner shown (see figure 5).

The clarity and the simplicity of this system is stunning and the efficient packing of the space types reduces interior circulation to every third floor. The shopping floors, seven and eight, are the only exception to this.

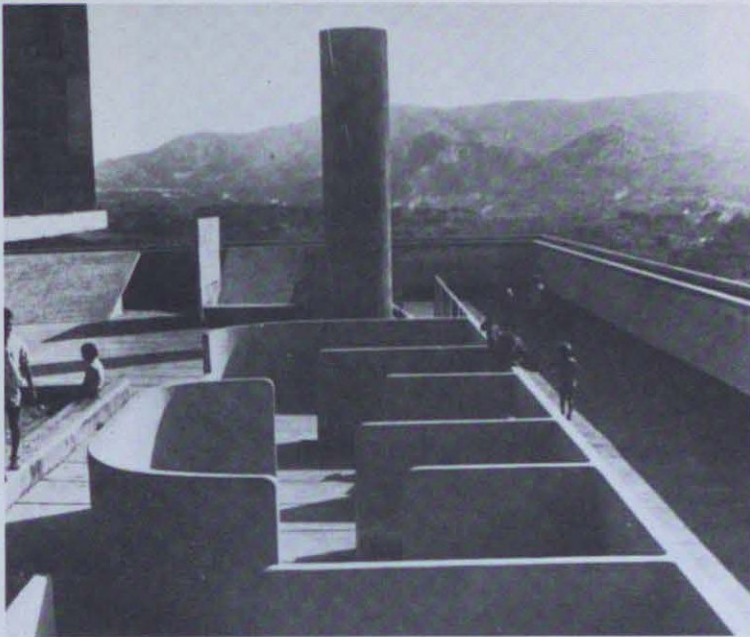
The necessity for the inherent capacity of growth and change, within a building, is a difficult idea to grasp. Its premise, however, is fundamental to the natural world. Heraclitus claimed that everything is in a state of flux and that never can we step in the same river twice; he also, claimed that even the unchanging hills change, but more slowly than other things. Serge Chermayeff brings this idea closer to us, i.e. to architecture, when he puts it in this way:

We are beginning to abandon the notion of creating "complete" things. We are recognizing that we are participants in a process of evolution: "change and growth."<sup>18</sup>

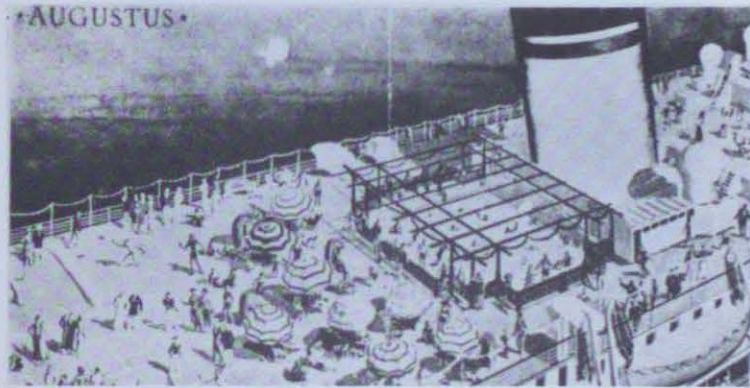
The needs of an occupant of a house do not undergo substantial qualitative changes over time. In other words, we will always need toilets, unless an unlikely evolutionary mutation makes this unnecessary one day, and the standard of the toilets at the Unité will probably remain ade-







Part of roof garden above Marseille apartments



View at the deck of the Italian liner Augustus



Le Corbusier at Marseille

quate for a long time. The concept of growth and change does not have as much significance to the Unité as it would to a factory where changing methods of production, changing products, expanding markets and countless other forces may require an internal reorganization or expansion of the facility. Growth and change would be important to an institutional building as well. It is true, however, that the spatial requirements of a family change. When a home becomes too small, two things may happen: i) move to a larger home, or ii) acquire the adjacent home and link the two. The former normally transpires. However, it should be said that, due to the inherent quality of the structure and services of the Unité, change in the form of the latter can conceivably take place without any difficulty.

Whereas the Unité can easily accommodate internal change, it is a different matter when it comes to growth. Any kind of exterior addition to the Unité will enormously compromise the geometry and mass of the building, thus, making it absolutely undesirable.

Let us now discuss the spaces of the living units and then the volume or sculptural form of the Unité as a whole. Giedion explains that:

All of Le Corbusier's houses attack the same problem. He was always endeavoring to open up the house, to create new possibilities for connections between its interior and exterior and within the interior itself. We want rooms which can be thrown open or enclosed at will, rooms whose outer partitions fall away when we wish.<sup>19</sup>

This description applies also to Le Corbusier's apartment units in the Unité where spaces blend into one another. The parents' bedroom borrows from the living room, the dining room borrows from the kitchen and the play room flows into the children's bedrooms. This occurs both horizontally and vertically. The latter often occurs between the living room and the dining room. All the units, except for the bachelors and hotel rooms, have a double height living room. This high ceiling within the two storey apartments creates a tension and performs what Le Corbusier sets out to do as a cubist painter, produce spatial ambiguity. The result is what Giedion calls a construction in space-time. The double height living room also provides other benefits. It gives the living room the dignity of a high space and permits light to penetrate deeper into the dwelling unit.

Space types four and five, described earlier, constitute over two thirds of the apartment units in the Unité. An important feature of these two types is that they extend the entire width of the building. Their sides are closed, as in the other unit types, but are open at the front and rear which in combination with the open plan, allows cross-ventilation and creates a strong link with the exterior.

The following quote, also from Giedion, relates to the volume of the Unité.

At one period in his development Frank Lloyd Wright used to employ the smallest crevices in the rocks to help bind his house still more closely to the earth. In the Savoie house Le Corbusier did exactly the opposite. The city-dweller for whom it was designed wanted to look out over the countryside rather than to be set down amongst trees and meadows. He wanted to enjoy the view, the breezes, and the sun—to experience that unhurried natural freedom which his work deprived him of. This is another instance of opposed responses to nature: a contemporary reflection of the difference between the Greek temple, sharply outlined against its background, and the medieval town, attached like a plant to the site on which it stands.<sup>20</sup>

These two diametrically opposed responses to nature must stem from equally dissimilar conceptions of nature. Le Corbusier's Unité stands over and above the natural landscape. Nature, one is tempted to conclude, is perhaps seen by Le Corbusier as an alien and hostile force, a constant source of anxiety to man and a thing that must be overcome. Such an attitude towards nature might be the source for the highly ordered space organization of this building. Similarly, it might be the source for the volume, created by Le Corbusier, which stands in such sharp contrast to its background. Both might be attempts at overcoming nature.

Geometry is given a great deal of importance by Le Corbusier. He writes:

I built my first house when I was seventeen; it was covered with decorations. I was twenty-four when I built my second house; it was white and bare; I had traveled in the meantime. The plans of this second house were lying on my drafting board. The year was 1911. I was suddenly struck by the arbitrary placing of the openings on the façade. I blacked them in with a piece of charcoal; the black spots now spoke some kind of language. Again I was struck by the absence of a rule or law. Appalled, I realized that I was working in utter chaos. And I then discovered, for my own purposes the need for a regulating device. This obsession would henceforth occupy a corner of my mind.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of harmony and regulating diagrams plays an important role in Le Corbusier's theory of architectural design. He writes:

A regulating diagram is a way of ensuring ourselves against what is arbitrary: it is a testing device to check a work that has been conceived with passion.<sup>22</sup>

He points to the engineer while praising him for achieving harmony by obeying the law of economy and by letting himself be governed by mathematics. Unlike the engineer, Le Corbusier used regulating diagrams, the Golden Section and his Modulor to attain harmonious proportions. He explains that such methods were used in great periods of architecture up to and including the Renaissance and regrets strongly their



Detail of Unité d'habitation

Unité d'habitation de Marseille

subsequent neglect and disappearance. Le Corbusier developed the Modulor through his study of the Golden Section. He believed that the measures of the Modulor, which related directly to the human body, would make structures better adapted to human requirements, and thus create harmony. Unfortunately, Le Corbusier's methods of attaining harmony are widely misunderstood. "Many people believe that he was talking about ready-made formulas when he was talking about tools that like any tools, are effective when used effectively."<sup>23</sup> He is absolutely clear about the limitations of the Modulor or of the regulating diagrams when he writes:

The Modulor is a working tool, a precision tool. You could think of it as a keyboard, a piano that has been tuned. The piano is in tune; how well you play on it depends on you, and you alone. The Modulor does not give talent, or still less, genius. It does not sharpen dull wits. It gives its user the satisfaction of working with well-founded measurements. But out of the unlimited supply of Modulor combinations you are the one who has to make the choice.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, he warns that:

The regulating process, based on a geometric equilibrium, thus merely orders, clarifies, and

purifies a design that has already been drawn up. A regulating diagram does not supply poetic or lyrical ideas, it does not inspire themes, and it does not create. It is a source of equilibrium. It is a tool for solving plastic problems.<sup>25</sup>

Le Corbusier continues to say "I am, generally speaking opposed to modules when they get in the way of the imagination, and in pursuing absolutes, end up by paralyzing invention."<sup>26</sup> In *The Modulor* he writes: "Your eyes are your judges, the only ones you should know."<sup>27</sup> The Unité was, for Le Corbusier, the first experiment in applying the Modulor. All its proportions are based on the Modulor scale and the Golden Section. Geometry permeates every aspect of the building, from its overall form down to its cabinetwork. The grids, which generate the building both in plan and in section, are also based on the Modulor. The surprising thing about all this is that a sensitive observer of the Unité can feel the harmonious and mysterious presence of Le Corbusier's careful geometry.

"Around 1910 Picasso and Braque, as the consequence of a new conception of space, exhibited the interiors and exteriors of objects simultaneously. In architecture Le Corbusier developed, on the same principle, the interpenetration of inner and outer space."<sup>28</sup> By 1918, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant, who was an influence on Le Corbusier's work, had published their tract *Après le Cubisme* in which they argued against the decorative aspects of cubism and put forward a new art, purism. "Purism had taught Le Corbusier the merits of clarity of outline and geometric order combined with an ambiguity of spatial arrangement, of transparency in the service of dematerialization and of a restricted palette of broken pastel hues."<sup>29</sup> We find these elements in Le Corbusier's architecture and I will now try to relate them to the enclosure of the Unité.

The Unité, as mentioned above, resembles a Greek temple in the way it stands with its profile sharply outlined against the background. The pilotis, by lifting the building into the air, make it more plainly visible and heighten one's experience of the building's outline against its surround. Hence, the pilotis here serve as a device to achieve a compositional syntax taken over from painting.

Three of the four façades on the Unité are dematerialized. They are reduced to a transparent layer of *brise soleil* and balcony railings over an inner skin of glass. As a result, an ambiguity is created between the interior and exterior. The apartments spill into the exterior space since there is almost nothing to contain them.

All the façades retain a strong geometric order. This order is expressed on the three dematerialized façades by the *brise-soleil* and balcony railings. On its North façade, the only one that is left entirely intact, geometry is expressed

by the construction joints between the precast concrete panels.

The strong primary colours of the Unité are different from the hues characteristic of his pre-war schemes. Colour enlivens the façades and corridors of the Unité. Its polychrome façade, however, was the result of an accidental event. A mistake was made in some of the window divisions and in the modules used to cast panels. Le Corbusier writes: "I was so distressed by this off-hand treatment of measurements in the midst of the Modulor harmonies that, in a fit of exasperation, I hit on the idea of a polychrome façade. But the polychromy would be so dazzling that it would wrench the mind away from the dissonances by an irresistible torrent of major colour sensations...Had it not been for those mistakes, the Marseille building would perhaps not have had a polychrome exterior."<sup>30</sup>

Le Corbusier writes: "the elements of architecture are light and shade, walls and space."<sup>31</sup> Unlike the smooth white surfaces of his buildings of a decade earlier, the Unité plays on light and shade by its strong surface articulations and rough concrete treatment. This rough concrete treatment of the Unité provided inspiration, in the 1960's, to the school of thought called New Brutalism.

The following quote I think describes perfectly, though not entirely, the genius of Le Corbusier and at the same time it discloses one of the reasons the Unité enjoys such success. Referring to Le Corbusier, the author writes: "The particularity of his contribution is due to a characteristic blend of poetry and pragmatism that all his projects reveal."<sup>32</sup> The Unité is indeed a very sober building while being exciting and lyrical as well. When one looks at its services system, the point the author is making is brought home in full force.

The distribution of services is very pragmatic and intelligently solved by containing it in the transversal masonry partitions between each apartment unit. Hence, a multitude of vertical risers reduces horizontal distribution enormously and makes clever use of the construction. The services play no aesthetic role within the building. However, the genius of Le Corbusier does not miss the opportunity to blend poetry in the required air exhaust chimney which rises above the roof terrace. In doing so, "...a purely utilitarian development is transmuted into an expressive means."<sup>33</sup> Thus, by transcending a purely utilitarian need, architecture is created.

Le Corbusier's Unité, as Scully explains below, is not just a container for human action but is itself in action.

Le Corbusier, after a lifetime of consistent effort, finally discovered a means for embodying the human act in architectural form, "...His method became one which made a building not only a container for human beings and their functions—as most buildings

are—but also—as most buildings are not—a sculptural unity that itself seems to act, like figural sculpture, and so acting to embody the peculiar human meaning of the function it contains. In accomplishing this, Le Corbusier has created the monumental architecture of his time..."<sup>34</sup>

It is my contention that the building's structure holds a very important position in this respect. Naturally, other systems participate as well in producing a vibrant building. It is in the nature of good architecture and a sign of the presence of a coherent intellectual order, which permeates every aspect of the building, when in any discussion the various systems flow into each other and resist clear boundaries.

The most significant element of the structure, a poured concrete frame left rough, is the pilotis. Le Corbusier first saw pilotis during his travels along the Bosphorous. In the case of the Unité, thirty six pilotis raise the prismatic form into the air and give it monumental vitality. Scully writes in his *Modern Architecture*:

Le Corbusier's experiments of the thirties apparently attempted three things: to create a building more totally active, to unify that action into monumental form and to make the whole more structurally massive and solid.<sup>35</sup>

Le Corbusier was employed part-time in the atelier of Gustave and Auguste Perret. He was exposed, during this period, to the most advanced building techniques of the time, particularly to reinforced concrete. Le Corbusier writes in *Towards a New Architecture* that "Passion can create drama out of inert stone."<sup>36</sup> To create drama,

In an age of very advanced technology and building materials he favoured reinforced concrete because it appeared to him the most plastic of all available materials, endowed with texture and pure surfaces.<sup>37</sup>

The open stairs on the North side and the air exhaust chimney on the roof terrace are good examples of dramatic sculptural forms produced by the union of passion and concrete.

Giedion writes that "Le Corbusier took ferroconcrete as the instrument for the expression in architecture of his ideas."<sup>38</sup> This is indeed very true. However, something else also happens. The new materials, such as reinforced concrete, and their properties were in themselves generators of ideas for Le Corbusier. He writes:

Steel and reinforced concrete...led to the open plan; the open plan led to the nonbearing façade; the nonbearing façade led to the glass skin. It was a natural, inevitable evolution. Together with stilts, which entirely free the ground level, this evolution has created a revolution in architecture and urban design.<sup>39</sup>

He also writes:

New techniques have also produced a useful instrument for those who create plastic forms:

stilts. What a marvellous way to lift the center of proportions, the center of all measurements into the air, where its four sides are plainly visible! Thanks to reinforced concrete or steel, this raised prism is more legible than ever.<sup>40</sup>

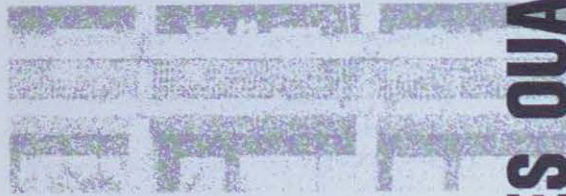
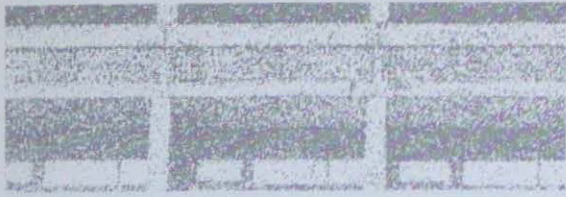
Concrete assumed the feature of natural rock in the hands of Le Corbusier. He considered it as "reconstructed stone worthy of being exposed in its natural state."<sup>41</sup> A few years later, New Brutalism arose in England which took this approach as its starting point.

This concludes our discussion of Le Corbusier's Unité d'habitation. Our analysis has taken us through every aspect of this building. Due to limitations on length, however, there remains a great deal that can still be said. It is clear that, despite certain faults, the Unité is a very successful building. It is also a very significant building because it embodies many ideas and attitudes of the modern period.

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31. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p.11.
32. Lesnikowski, p.10.
33. Giedion, p.534.
34. Scully, p.40.
35. *Ibid.*, p.43.
36. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p.11.
37. Lesnikowski, p.265.
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by François Chaslin

## QUE SONT DEVENUES LES QUATRE MAISONS DU FADA?

François Chaslin, after a five-year study on the four "cités radieuses" for the newspaper *Le Monde*, analyses two of them: Marseille and Brie-la-Forêt.

After recalling the historical context at the construction of the first Cité, François Chaslin shows the evolution of the two buildings.

À Marseille, dans l'immédiat après-guerre, Le Corbusier construit la célèbre Cité radieuse, première application de sa théorie de "l'Unité d'habitation de grandeur conforme", c'est la fameuse "maison du fada", immeuble prodigieux, visité par des flots de touristes, et sans doute le plus chic, le plus snob peut-être à certains égards, des ensembles de logements collectifs qui aient jamais été édifiés.

Trois autres suivirent, à peu près identiques: Rezé-lès-Nantes en 1955, Brie-la-Forêt en 1961 puis Firminy-Vert en 1967. Ici et là, on ne les appelle que les "Corbu". Ils ont focalisé haines et enthousiasmes et connu les destins les plus contradictoires. Et voici que l'un d'entre eux est mort. Depuis l'été dernier, Brie est fermé.

Les pages qui suivent sont le fruit de diverses enquêtes comparatives menées depuis cinq années auprès des quatre Cités, notamment pour le journal *Le Monde*. Nous n'avons retenu que deux d'entre elles: la plus heureuse, Marseille, et la plus triste, Brie, deux extrêmes.

Disons simplement que Rezé, que Le Corbusier disait être "la consécration de Marseille, car né de la demande spontanée d'usagers rassemblés et animés par des hommes magnifiques de courage et de foi", vit une existence calme, un peu moins ardente et conviviale qu'autrefois, animée par une association active qui maintient dans une large mesure l'héritage spirituel de l'ancienne coopérative. Firminy, en revanche, est à demi-fermé et largement déserté par une population locale généralement hostile; y coexistent dans un douloureux sentiment d'incompréhension et d'isolement, un mélange de populations marginales, souvent "soixante-huitardes", d'intellectuels et de travailleurs immigrés, en lutte constante contre la municipalité suspectée de vouloir fermer la cité.

Il est des constructions que l'on peut aimer passionnément, ou bien haïr, comme des personnes. Les quatre Cités Radieuses de Le Corbusier sont de celles-là. Presque identiques, elles ont pourtant connu les destins les plus divers. Pour Brie, c'est déjà l'âge de la mort, et Firminy est bien malade. Ailleurs, ça va très bien, merci! Nous sommes quand même allés y voir de plus près.

Marseille, printemps 1947.

"Cette fois-ci, la chose se fait: l'Unité d'habitation de grandeur conforme se bâtit à Marseille...Elle est le fruit de vingt-cinq années d'études, inlassablement entreprises ou reprises." En ce printemps 1947, Le Corbusier exultait. Il allait bientôt poser la première pierre de la Cité radieuse de Marseille, dont il ne doutait pas qu'elle aurait une "répercussion mondiale". Pour la génération d'architectes qui piaffait d'impatience, cantonnée depuis vingt ans dans le ghetto de l'avant-garde, c'était l'heure du triomphe. C'était "la fin d'un monde", les doctrines de l'architecture moderne allaient enfin s'imposer et révolutionner le mode de vie.

Hélas! Le vieux monde avait déjà cette peau dure que nous lui connaissons; agressé, il prit l'offensive et lança contre Le Corbusier une campagne virulente. On se souvient peut-être du beau scandale que ce fut, du tapage que menèrent les institutions patentées et assermentées, tant architecturales que médicales, et des polémiques de presse où se déchainèrent "les manieurs de plumes acérées, ciseleurs de sagaies et distilleurs de poison" mais aussi, soyons justes, les dithyrambes.

Ce furent d'abord, on ne sait pourquoi, les architectes du Morbihan qui "à l'unanimité moins une voix" s'insurgèrent dans une pétition contre ce "monstre architectural à pattes" et invitèrent leurs confrères de tous les départements à élever la même protestation solennelle.



Puis le Conseil supérieur d'hygiène publique dénonça ce projet "insalubre"; enfin, le président de l'ordre des médecins de la Seine, dans un article de *La Presse médicale*, annonça que règnerait dans "ces boîtes" une atmosphère "confinée et malsaine" tandis que, par ailleurs, "leurs lignes rigides, uniformes", risquaient "d'avoir des conséquences pathologiques et névropathiques"; il disait craindre aussi qu'il n'y eût "de quoi devenir neurasthénique à être logé dans pareille prison" et certifiait que c'était là "un camp de concentration, pas une maison" alors que l'homme "a besoin d'un logis, pas d'un gîte d'insecte". On parla alors de "cantine nauséabonde" et encore de "clavier géant pour locataires cobayes". Les hommes de l'art puis les hommes de science ayant parlé, la justice fut enfin saisie, à l'initiative de l'Association pour l'esthétique générale de la France qui voyait dans cette construction de graves "inconvenients d'ordre moral" et l'estimait "contraire à l'esthétique et au style français" qu'elle se flattait d'incarner. Elle réclamait donc vingt millions de francs de l'époque à titre de réparation et, pourquoi pas, la démolition de l'immeuble.

"C'est un délit contre l'humanité", entendit-on dire au procès où l'on vit deux architectes défendre ce point de vue devant la Septième chambre du tribunal correctionnel: un expert près les tribunaux et l'aimable confrère Henri Vergnolles, président général des HLM et ancien président du conseil municipal de Paris, qui vint témoigner à la barre de ce que la Cité radieuse était une dangereuse "tentative de déshumanisation": extraits du monde extérieur, ses habitants allaient vivre dans une atmosphère artificielle, sans contact avec la nature. Le procès, rapporte *Le Provençal* de l'époque, fut "un cours d'esthétique architecturale qui, par la grâce du talent de quelques avocats, remonta au Parthénon de Phi-

dias et à la coupole de Saint-Pierre de Rome."

La revue professionnelle *L'Architecture française*, qui avait été créée en novembre de la belle année 1941 sous l'occupation nazie et les auspices de "la discipline" et de "la soumission au chef", contre "les vieux bobards libéraux" et les "affairistes, lotisseurs, marchands de biens de tout poil et de toute race", cette revue qui avait été l'organe officiel du régionalisme pétainiste publiait, à peine sortie des turbulences de l'après guerre, un supplément spécial consacré à la séance du 11 octobre 1948 de ce Conseil supérieur d'hygiène publique qui avait conclu à une "interdiction d'habiter" l'Unité de Marseille.

Le chantier fut un moment stoppé, sur décision du Conseil d'Etat; Le Corbusier batailla contre "la bête humaine" acharnée contre lui, conforté dans le sentiment messianique qu'il avait de son oeuvre, qui devait balayer le conformisme pour demain, pour les "nouvelles générations de la société machiniste". Son immeuble était un véritable laboratoire du futur, une "machine à habiter" qu'il fallait apprendre à utiliser. Il en appela aux "éducateurs", à "l'autorité", qui devaient "préparer les populations à ces modes nouveaux de vie domestique"; il s'adressa au Parti communiste et à la Confédération générale du Travail. "J'ai fait et je fais chaque jour encore ma part dans la révolution machiniste... Que chacun fasse le sien, prenant le relais utile afin que toutes choses soient coordonnées". Les logements de Marseille sont "extraordinairement efficaces...mais il faut savoir les habiter...C'est pour vous, il faut enseigner à vos gens la discipline nécessaire."

Si son volontarisme continuait d'être reproché à Le Corbusier, les malheureux cobayes installés dans l'immeuble du boulevard Michelet ne semblaient guère souffrir de leurs "gîtes d'insectes". La ville de Marius ironisait sur la "maison du fada" mais commençait à chérir cette "merveille du monde du vingtième siècle, telle que les Américains eux-mêmes en restent pantois". L'afflux des curieux était si grand qu'il fallut confier la gestion des visites à une agence de voyages. Moins de deux ans après l'arrivée des premiers locataires, la cité fêta son cinquante-millième visiteur, une jeune Marseillaise qui déclarait aux journaux: "J'ai voulu faire comme les touristes du monde entier. Quelle impression de grandiose! j'avais peur d'être déçue; je croyais que c'était inesthétique. Ce n'est pas le cas! Tout est étudié pour le confort."

Marseille, été 1980.

Aujourd'hui, presque trente ans après sa construction, cet immeuble que chacun désigne comme "Le Corbusier" est devenu l'un des plus sélects de la ville, lieu d'élection des professions libérales, inscrit à l'inventaire des Monuments historiques. L'oeuvre rebelle, "hors la loi", qui avait été "érigée contre les règlements désastreux", elle qui avait été dressée en pleine campagne "dans la nature du Bon Dieu, sous le ciel et face au soleil, oeuvre architecturale magistrale", a été rejointe par l'urbanisation qui a maintenant noyé la plaine jusqu'aux contreforts des montagnes de Veïre. Le grand paquebot altier ne domine plus un océan de chênes verts, mais un désordre de ville plus ou moins bien tenue: garages sordides, centre commercial, jaillissement d'immeubles spéculatifs.

Le toit-terrasse, traité dans une architecture "héroïque" inspirée des superstructures d'un grand navire, encombré de passerelles et d'énormes cheminées superbes, n'est plus cette "esplanade de la culture physique" où développer son corps dans un dialogue frontal avec la nature et "face aux sites admirables", mais, plus communément, le solarium où viennent grésiller et bronzer les dames.

Si le logis a pu, comme le souhaitait Le Corbusier, devenir le

“réceptacle parfait” des familles, vite adaptées à l'étrangeté des logements, ses “prolongements” se sont banalisés au fur et à mesure que s'affaiblissait l'idéal communautaire, remplacé par des rapports encore fréquents mais d'une nature parfois plus mondaine.



Les rues intérieures, avec leur confort ouaté et la mystérieuse symphonie de la couleur des portes, sont devenues des couloirs interdits aux jeux d'enfants et impeccablement cirés. La rue marchande, perchée aux sept et huitième étages, a perdu plusieurs de ses commerces, remplacés par les bureaux de professions libérales: agents immobiliers, experts de tout ordre, architectes bien sûr. Une boulangerie, une boucherie, la boutique d'un droguiste, un magasin Casino subsistent, mais le fleuriste, le libraire, le coiffeur, le pressing n'ont pas tenu. L'hôtel-restaurant reste un élément d'animation appréciable et offre aux locataires un service de plats cuisinés, distribués dans la rue par un guichet; on s'y rencontre au bar ou sur son balcon enso-



leillé.

Quelques clubs existent encore dans cet immeuble qui avait été conçu pour favoriser la vie collective mais ce n'est plus ce “quelque chose de mémorable” dont un ancien locataire garde la nostalgie: du ping-pong, un ciné-club, une salle

de lecture pour les vieilles dames; le gymnase de la terrasse a été confié à un gérant privé.

Le “Corbu” s'enfoncé petit à petit dans une copropriété classique, moins solidaire. Malgré le téléphone intérieur qui relie les appartements, l'indifférence aux autres s'installe lentement, comme partout. Et d'ailleurs, l'administration veut maintenant supprimer cette ligne devenue, trente ans après, contraire au monopole d'Etat. On se battra éventuellement pour obtenir une indemnité, pas pour conserver les lignes.

Des liftiers actionnent les ascenseurs, standing oblige, tandis qu'un gardien à casquette pourchasse les touristes qui n'hésitent pas, même à l'heure sainte de la sieste, à sonner aux portes pour “jeter un petit coup d'oeil, si cela ne dérange pas...” Après trente ans de va-et-vient, cela serait en fait bien étonnant. Ils se glissent partout, comme le mistral, inventent mille stratagèmes, prétendent vouloir “visiter une cousine”, ce qui ne prend plus; on en trouve même, les nuits d'été, campant à la belle étoile sur la terrasse, avec vélos et sacs à dos.

La “véritable communauté verticale sans politique” rêvée par l'architecte a disparu. Reste le confort, la splendeur formidable de ce bâtiment généreux, ses formes épaisses et son écorce rude. Pour la première fois dans l'histoire, le béton y était laissé brut, plein de malfaçons, marqué des planches du coffrage. L'architecture moderne, qui jusqu'alors avait poursuivi l'esthétique dépouillée et lisse du ciment blanc, découvrait la “splendeur nouvelle” de la rugosité. Le “brutalisme” était né: il devait faire école dans le monde entier. Il rappelait la dureté du chantier, donnait à l'oeuvre un air d'éternité et enthousiasma plusieurs générations de jeunes architectes qui s'en firent une doctrine.

A Marseille, la puissante expression des façades masque le repliement de chacun sur son logement. Le monument collectif reste très présent, tandis que dans l'alvéole des loggias transparait la vie des familles: stores vénitiens, bâches colorées, treillages porteurs d'ombre, balconnets d'aluminium et filets anti-pigeons... tout un petit désordre familial se niche dans les interstices de l'oeuvre.

Beaucoup plus ouvrières, les trois autres Cités construites par Le Corbusier en France ont connu une histoire différente. Celle de Rezé, près de Nantes, construite par une coopérative de 1953 à 1955 est restée relativement “radieuse”; en revanche, celle de Briey-la-forêt, édifiée de 1958 à 1961 dans le bassin noir de Longwy (non loin d'Hagondange), et celle de Firminy, réalisée à l'initiative du maire Claudius-Petit de 1964 à 1967, posent des problèmes catastrophiques et sont partiellement désertées. Pourtant, ici comme là, il s'agit du même objet architectural.

#### BRIEY-LA-FORET

Dans le froid et la brume, la Cité qui se voulut radieuse, émergeait, sinistre du carré de pré que lui tailla Le Corbusier dans la forêt lorraine et qui était devenu semé de débris épars; ustensiles ménagers jetés du dix-huitième étage, épilochures, serviettes hygiéniques, canettes de bière. Il restait au printemps trois voitures sur le vaste parking. Le magasin Coop avait fermé; le hall de l'immeuble était en ruine, ses vitres cassées ou grises de crasse.

La boutique du rez-de-chaussée, jadis lieu essentiel de la vie collective, avait été désertée par son propriétaire vers la fin de la belle saison. Elle offrait ses planches arrachées; des néons déchassés y diffusaient une lumière blême. Dès l'entrée, on était en plein fantasme: “Escaliers dangereux, risque de viol (sic), de vol et d'homosexualité, etc.”, prévenaient des graffiti à la craie. C'était bien la fin. Quelques familles subsistaient là, une dizaine quand l'immeuble comptait trois cent trente-neuf logements.

On avait depuis longtemps coupé le chauffage d'une partie

de la cité; puis tout interrompu à la fin février, prêtant un convecteur électrique aux locataires solvables. Une rue intérieure était fermée d'une porte de fer; certains interpaliers condamnés au chalumeau. Il y avait autrefois trois ascenseurs: on mit fin, le 31 mars, au fonctionnement du dernier. Il ne restait plus qu'à emprunter les cages d'escalier qui, rongées par le vandalisme, pouaient la pisse; les fers y rouillent comme sur un navire de haute mer. Partout les inscriptions, amoureuses, obscènes, racistes ou simplement punks, et aussi d'extraordinaires lettres d'adieu: "Folle de Cité", "La Cité est l'un des meilleurs monuments historiques" et encore "Pourquoi s'aimer alors qu'on n'est fait pour se séparer" et ailleurs plus prosaïque, "La Cité vous dit merde."

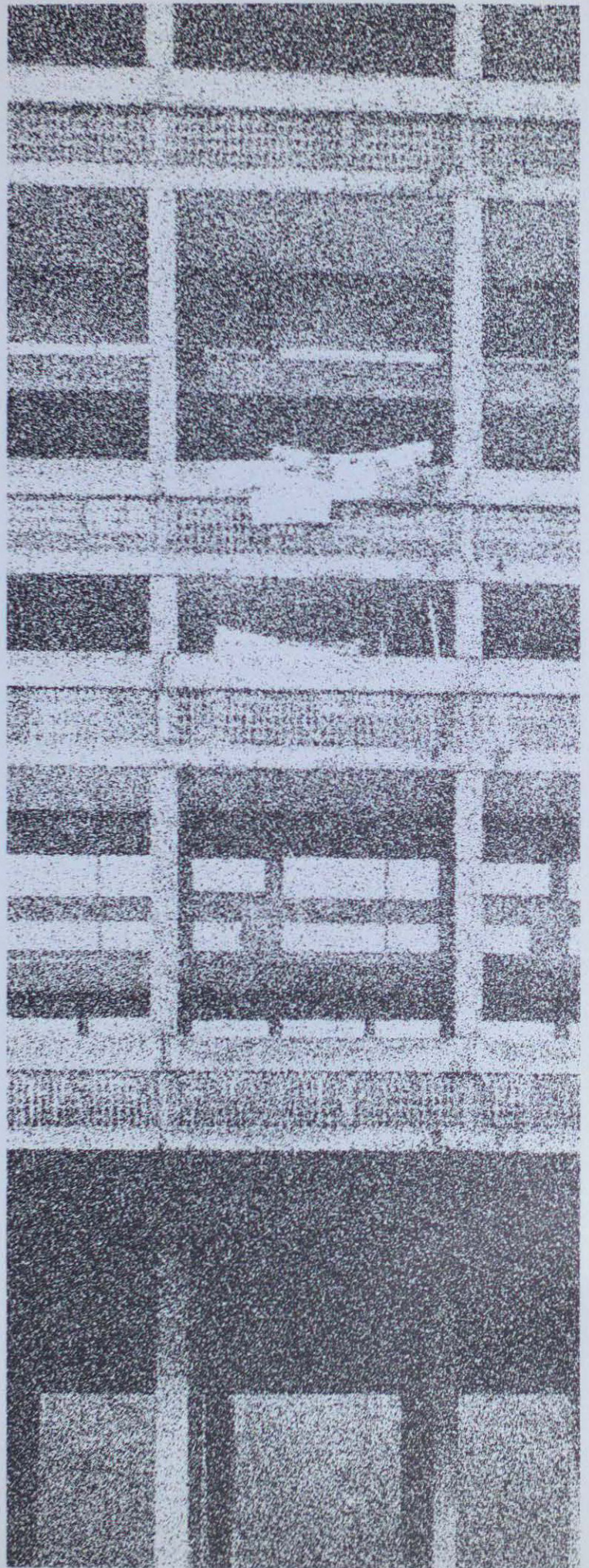
Et ce long texte sur l'un des pilotis qui porte l'immeuble et qui devaient assurer le passage de la nature et de la lumière: "Adieu ma Cité radieuse, et pourquoi que, quand on aime quelqu'un, il faut qu'il nous quitte. Adieu ma Cité, adieu; mais je t'aime; adieu! je ne t'oublierai pas."

Les rues intérieures, ces couloirs généreux qu'avait voulu Le Corbusier, étaient borgnes; les lampes avaient claqué à causes des courts-circuits engendrés par les prises électriques pirates. Le sol était dégradé, les boîtes aux lettres arrachées.

A l'automne précédent, quand vivaient encore ici une quarantaine de familles, il traînait partout des vélos et des chiens; des gosses jouaient au foot à grands coups de ballon dans les portes. Les diverses rues avaient leur réputation. A l'entrée de la troisième, cette inscription: "rue des cons" et "des espions morpions"; à la quatrième: "rue des sympas".

Le racisme divisait quelques familles qui avaient campé tout l'hiver dans la grande carcasse. Cette dame, affligée d'un enfant handicapé, se déclarait tout de go "cas social". Et en effet: avec un revenu de 1 600 francs par mois, elle devait à l'office HLM un arriéré de loyers de 11 230 francs; assignée en référé avec d'autres locataires devant la tribunal d'instance de Briey, elle collectionnait les sommations d'huissier. Une lettre lui avait signifié son expulsion pour le 22 novembre; on ne chasse personne durant l'hiver, bien sûr, mais elle savait qu'elle n'en avait plus que pour quelques mois. Au printemps, la Cité serait vidée. "De toute façon, ils vont la refaire. ils refont déjà des logements; on a vu des baignoires", inventait-elle.

Son grand problème, ce n'était pas sa misère à elle mais les Arabes: "D'ailleurs on ne leur parle pas! Tout a commencé avec leur arrivée... On ne peut plus sortir, ni aller voir la famille... Tout le monde peut rentrer; ils ont les clés; leurs enfants passent par les passe-plats." Pauvres passe-plats du "Corbu" qui devaient faciliter la communication! On ne pouvait plus chauffer cette immense baraque vide; malgré le déficit qu'assumait l'office départemental HLM, les





charges étaient trop lourdes et le loyer d'un quatre pièces, passait de 892,35 francs l'été à 1 425,09 francs l'hiver. Au mois de mai 1983, alors que plus de cent logements étaient encore occupés, un article du *Républicain lorrain* affirmait déjà que le déficit d'exploitation s'était élevé, en quatre années, à plus de 6 millions de francs.

Alors, fallait-il détruire le "Corbu"? Personne n'en prendrait jamais la responsabilité. Et pourtant, on avait épuisé toutes les solutions de rechanges. En 1980, comme la gendarmerie nationale était à l'endroit, on avait envisagé d'y installer la brigade de Briey et le commandement de l'escadron d'arrondissement; on parla d'une prison, faux bruit; on pense aussi à une rue de personnes âgées, à un hôtel, à un institut universitaire de technologie; et les représentants d'un important groupe de promotion privée seraient venus en catimini y étudier la possibilité d'une réhabilitation générale et de la vente des appartements en copropriété; car, paradoxalement, on manque de logements dans la région.

Mais tout cela était abandonné: trop tard pour quoi que ce soit; alors, on a songé à détruire cette énorme masse de béton armé. Une estimation du coût de l'opération, effectuée à la demande du conseil général au printemps 1982, en a montré l'absurdité; il en aurait coûté pas moins de 30 millions de francs: 12 pour détruire et 18 pour évacuer les gravats!

Il n'y avait plus d'autre solution que la fermeture de la Cité radieuse. Bientôt, un mur de parpaing obturera l'entrée, isolant l'immeuble du reste du monde. Il lui restera désormais, vide, à constituer une ruine grandiose et à laisser le temps éroder sa façade et l'inscrire à l'inventaire des Monuments historiques.

Comme celle de Firminy qui connaît aussi de gros problèmes, cette Cité aura pâti d'un environnement économique catastrophique, marqué (peu après son achèvement) par la fermeture des mines à la suite de la crise de septembre 1963; elle aura souffert aussi de son isolement physique par rapport à la ville ancienne, isolement voulu par l'architecte qui espérait que sa construction lorraine constituerait ainsi "le bout de la preuve... une Unité d'habitation en pleine campagne".

Dès l'origine, les rapports furent difficiles avec le chef-lieu. "Une ville factice de trois mille quatre cent quarante-quatre habitants sera-t-elle construite à Briey?" s'inquiétait *L'Est républicain* du 31 octobre 1957. L'isolement, l'inachèvement du plan masse, le changement des élections de 1959, devaient s'associer pour faire de cette opération un désastre social.

Quoi de plus significatif que le revirement d'un journaliste, André Falk, qui, après avoir tiré dans le numéro de septembre 1959 de *Sciences et Vie*: "Un paradis de millionnaire pour les salariés de Briey", écrivait au début de 1962 dans le *Figaro littéraire*: "C'est un fait: le sous-prolétariat des corons, qui s'est trouvé un toit de l'an 2000 à Briey-la-Forêt, y est opprimé par sa solitude."

Rapidement s'enchaînèrent une suite incontrôlable de faits avérés et de rumeurs fantaisistes. La Cité radieuse fut la ville étrangère, inquiétante; chaque fait divers y prenait une résonance qu'il n'eût pas connue dans la vieille ville. Falk notait que "dans la Cité modèle, un quart des habitants sont italiens (des Calabrais surtout), frustrés, dépaysés, qui ne peuvent se passer de la rumeur des voisins et transformeraient volontiers les rues intérieures en marchés publics."

On a aujourd'hui oublié les Calabrais pour ne retenir que les Nord-Africains, "qui, dès le début, mirent des lapins dans leurs baignoires"; et la peur du souk a remplacé celle du marché méridional.

Toujours est-il que, de cinquante logements vacants en 1977, on passa à cent en 1978, cent trente en 1979, cent cinquante en 1980, deux cent dix en mai 1983, trois cent trente l'année suivante, puis zéro. Briey-la-Fôret avait vécu.

Née avec une crise de la métallurgie, morte avec une autre après un peu plus de vingt ans de malheur, cette Cité radieuse a connu un destin radicalement différent de celui des Cités de Marseille, Rezé et Firminy, constructions pourtant assez semblables. Cela prouve que, même conçue par un créateur d'exception, l'architecture n'est pas maîtresse du destin des hommes qu'elle abrite; les jeux imprévisibles de l'histoire, des situations locales, des flux et reflux de l'économie, des querelles de clochers et des archaïsmes régionaux bouleversent le cours des choses de manière capitale. Cela prouve aussi que la particularité de l'organisation interne des Cités radieuses de Le Corbusier, tant au niveau des logements que des rues intérieures, est, selon les circonstances, susceptible de faire naître les réactions les plus divergentes: de l'hostilité sans appel, que chaque détail quotidien ne cesse de renforcer, à l'adhésion enthousiaste et parfois presque fanatique, conduisant certains groupes humains à y déployer une capacité d'organisation collective, d'entraide et d'esprit de clan tout à fait exceptionnelle.

L'analyse des "Corbu" montre que la cohésion du groupe, la cohabitation de populations de cultures différentes n'est possible qu'au prix de discussions, de rupture de l'anonymat, de militantisme des locataires, liés entre eux en grande partie par le fait même de se savoir l'objet d'une expérience très particulière.

Elle prouve encore que les Cités avaient absolument besoin d'être "complètes": l'école sur le toit-terrasse, à Firminy, maintient la solidarité d'un ensemble humain déjà très ébranlé; à l'inverse, l'inéquipement de Briey a beaucoup compté dans son échec lamentable, dans la mesure où il a manifestement renforcé le sentiment de solitude éprouvé par ses habitants.

Cette solitude (partiellement voulue par un architecte dont il ne faut pas sous-estimer la lucidité mais qui était quand même tout imprégné du mythe splendide du paquebot et des "hommes admirables" et voyait, dans l'isolement, le moyen de faire se développer une communauté humaine nouvelle et harmonieuse) est peut-être sa plus grande erreur; si elle a pu, dans l'après-guerre, aider à l'animation de la vie collective, elle est en retour totalement responsable des drames de Briey dressant la haine du vieux bourg, accentuant les réactions d'antipathie; au contraire, à Marseille et à Rezé, la proximité de la ville enrichissait les Unités de tout ce qui leur manquait et offrait aux habitants le bonheur d'un nouveau mode de vie qu'ils avaient le sentiment d'avoir choisi, tout en conservant à quelques pas de chez eux les plaisirs urbains traditionnels.

François Chaslin, architecte et collaborateur aux journaux parisiens *Le Monde* et *Libérations*, oeuvre également au sien de l'institut Français d'Architecture.

Des écrits nombreux, tous aussi complexes que son répertoire bâti, plaçant Le Corbusier dans ce mouvement d'Avant-Garde qui existe depuis 1850. L'examen de quelques unes de ses œuvres démontre ce désir d'une esthétique nouvelle.

The context of Le Corbusier needs to be re-examined. A small aspect that this article will draw into question will be the fallacy of Le Corbusier being connected to a notion of avant-garde. A scenario for comparison will be provided by an examination of the term avant-garde and a subsequent examination of some of Le Corbusier's writings and buildings. There has been and will continue to be a concern over art and architecture as art. This debate can be enriched once a more historically placed definition of art is protracted. Since around 1850 there has been a notion of art which functions as what has been termed the avant-garde. There has been no path delineated in architecture. However, a unique situation exists in the case of Le Corbusier wherein a substantial amount of complex architectural work is matched by equally complicated written information. The writings and the works of Le Corbusier attempt to procure/pose a complicated art/architecture relationship. Analysis is necessary in order to see how his work functioned.

If one looks for a notion which could define modern art of the 20th century, then the term avant-garde has been historically legitimized to do this.

...avant-garde, as an artistic concept, had become comprehensive enough to designate not one or the other, but all the new schools whose aesthetic programs were defined, by and large, by their rejection of the past and by the cult of the new.<sup>1</sup>

This avant-garde was not, as would be expected, a group of artists who researched, discovered and led the way for other artists to follow (a process contained in the military connotations of the term). True avant-garde exists only in retrospect, that which is avant-garde today avoids co-optation and is thus outside of mainstream present day discourse. "The avant-garde does not announce one style or another; it is in itself a style, or better, an anti-style."<sup>2</sup>

The critic, poet, theoretician Guillaume Apollinaire was a leading exponent of the French avant-garde in the first decades of the 20th century. His use of the words *esprit nouveau* (in his important lecture *L'esprit nouveau et les poètes* of 1917) were meant as a synonym of *avant-garde*. Apollinaire saw the 20th century avant-garde as somewhat anarchic. "To destroy is to create."<sup>3</sup> Thus all anti-traditional movements would be incorrectly termed by these words—the avant-garde.

It is believed that the modernist notion of the avant-garde developed when certain artists became socially alienated and felt the need to disrupt and overthrow the bourgeois value system, "with all its philistine pretensions to universality."<sup>4</sup> Under the present system (capitalism), every attempt to criticize its values fails as it is quickly subsumed and co-opted by the system.

An avant-garde man is like an enemy inside a city he is bent on destroying, against which he rebels; for like any system of government, an established form of expression is also a form of oppression. The avant-garde man is the opponent of an existing system.<sup>5</sup>

By this reasoning, the avant-garde developed from the very beginning as a "culture of crisis". Barthes points out how in his/her defiance of the bourgeoisie (*épater le bourgeois*) the avant-garde artist tried to resolve a specific historical contradiction.

That of an unmasked bourgeoisie which could no longer proclaim its original universalism except in the form of a violent protest turned against itself; initially by an aesthetic violence directed against the philistines, then, with increasing commitment, by an ethical violence, when it became the duty of a life style to contest the bourgeois order (among the surrealists, for example): but never by a political violence.<sup>6</sup>

The rejection of the elitism of art and its institutions became a fundamental precept for the avant-garde. A continual challenge had to be put forth to place the culture in a dialectical position. The avant-garde is specifically defined as having a social role. The avant-garde's embodiment of the "culture of crisis" then guided its activities in discovering or inventing new forms of crisis. This notion became built into its concept.

## of Crisis the and

# LE CORBUSIER

# CULTURE

Aesthetically, the avant-garde attitude implies the bluntest rejection of such traditional ideas as those of order, intelligibility, and even success (Artaud's "No more masterpieces!" could be generalized): art is supposed to become an experience—deliberately conducted—of failure and crisis.<sup>7</sup>

With the large amount of writing done about the art and by the artists/poets/critics of the early 20th century, including the cubists, futurists, dadaists, and surrealists, one can easily see the slot into which Le Corbusier was trying to place himself.

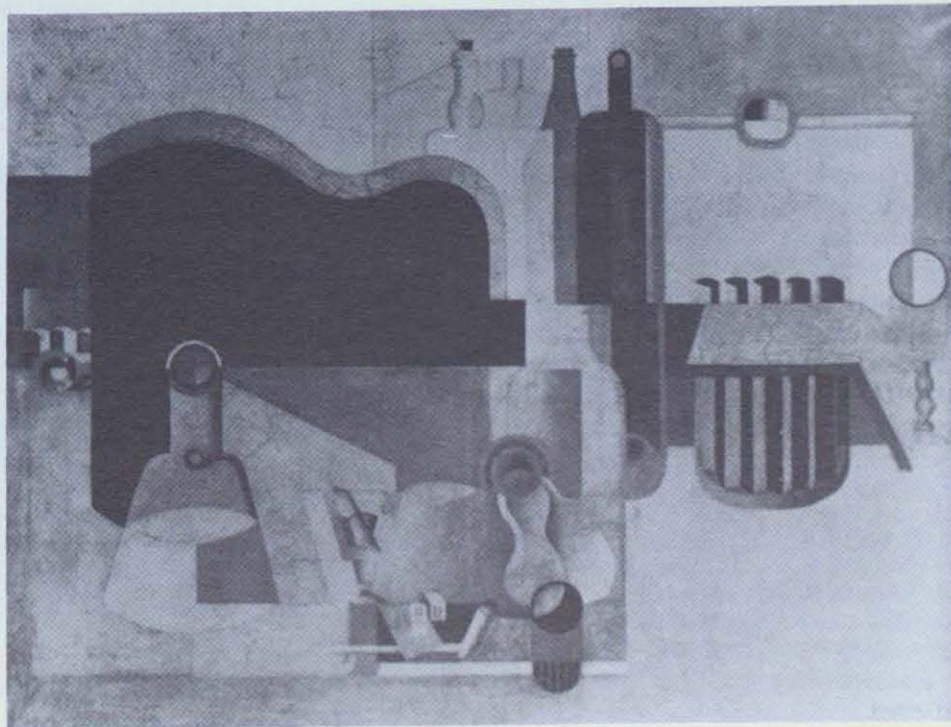
By the time of his and Ozenfant's Purist manifesto (*L'Esprit Nouveau*) of 1920, there was a well established tradition of "Modern" manifestos. The term *L'Esprit Nouveau*, commonly assigned to Le Corbusier, had three significant historical precedents.

In 1890, Havelock Ellis published a book entitled *The New Spirit* which approaches the modern sensibility as a reconciliation of religion and science. The following year François Paulhan applied almost identical analysis to *l'esprit nouveau* in a work aptly called *Le nouveau mysticisme*.<sup>8</sup>

Closer to the time of Le Corbusier was Apollinaire's use of the term in his critical lecture of 1917. The text described the new aesthetic as "a particular expression of the French nation, just as the classic spirit is a sublime expression *par excellence* of the same nation."<sup>9</sup> The excitement and energy contained in these thoughts is similar to that of the Italian futurists who also adored everything modern (including warfare) but to an extreme.

## George McCutcheon

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*purist painting, 1922*

Le Corbusier jumped into the dialogue with his *Après le Cubisme* (1918) which he wrote with Ozenfant. There was something very different about how these ideas were expressed as compared to those of avant-garde critical writing. Le Corbusier's writings lack an edge. Le Corbusier was comfortably challenging with his notions, and hopeful in the new rational way of modernity (unlike the fascist futurists). He saw reason, order and "Purism" as the guide for modernism. Le Corbusier embraced the new technology rather than questioning it and sold himself to the new bourgeoisie. In defying the possible role of avant-garde artist, Le Corbusier accepted a position which he felt bridged art and architecture but in fact operated in an architectural realm only.

In his *The Theory of the Avant Garde*, Renato Poggioli states:

...purism served the classical and neoclassical need for elegance and correctness and formulated a series of rigid norms applicable only to the grammar of art.<sup>10</sup>

The key word here is grammar. Purism added nothing on the level of social content or regard for context. Purism merely updated old ideas with new practices and failed to change the way the world was perceived because of its failure to deal with *issues* due to complacency and a lack of "ethical violence". Thoroughly caught up in the new materials and new techniques of modern construction, Le Corbusier saw the truth in materials as a means to an end. This attitude led to the development of the notion of the *objet-type*.

Ultimately this led to the abandonment of context and the elevation of form. Le Corbusier states that he

...stopped exhibiting (painting and sculpture) in Paris in 1923. He retreated because the battles of painting, sculpture and architecture can not all be fought at once.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, in 1925 he says he reached a point of catharsis.

Between architectural forms born of reinforced concrete and painting there was now complete agreement. His paintings, like his architecture and even his town planning are animated by a love of pure form.<sup>12</sup>

Le Corbusier acknowledges his lack of content and utter formalism at this point. The idea and search for pure form overwhelmed Le Corbusier. In his and Ozenfant's essay on Purism, which appeared in *L'Esprit Nouveau* in 1921, there are some very telling ideas expressed about art.

An art that would be based only upon primary sensations, using uniquely primary elements, would be only a primary art, rich, it is true, in geometric aspects, but denuded of all sufficient human resonance: it would be an ornamental art.

An art that would be based only upon the use of secondary sensations (an art of allusions) would be an art without a plastic base. The mind of some individuals—only those in intimate resonance with the creator—could be satisfied with it: an art of the initiated, an art requiring knowledge of a key, an art of symbols. This is the critique of most contemporary art; it is this art which, stripped of universal primary elements, has provoked the creation of an immense literature around these works and these schools, a literature whose goal is to explain, to give the key, to reveal the secret language, to permit comprehension.

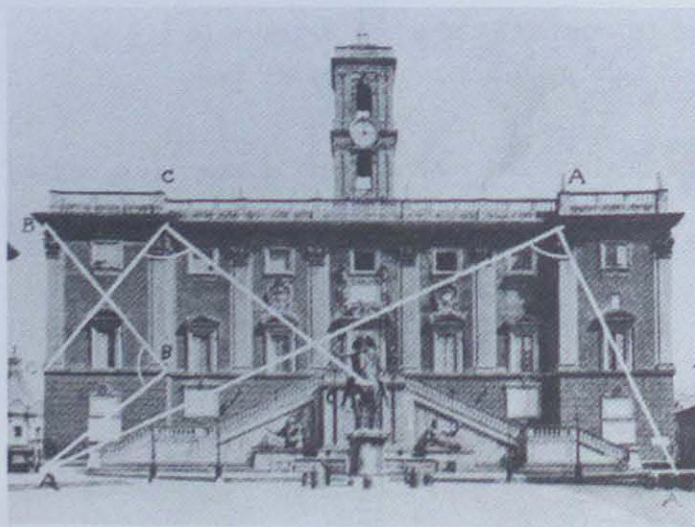
The great works of the past are those based on primary elements, and this is the only reason why they endure.

Superior sensations of a mathematical order can only be born of a choice of primary elements with secondary resonance.

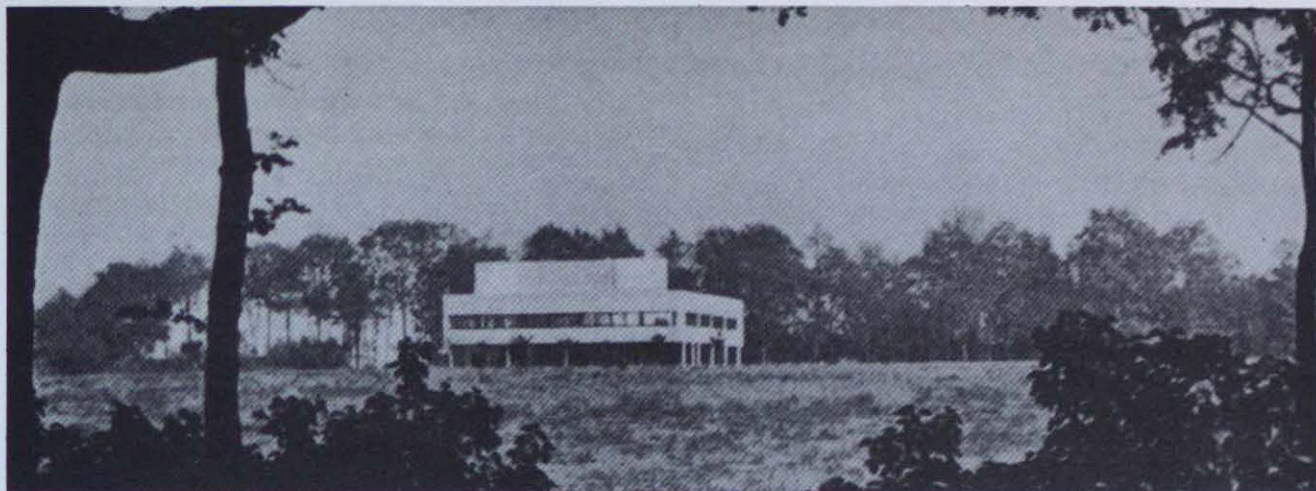
Purism strives for an art free of conventions which will utilize plastic constants and address itself above all to the universal properties of the senses and the mind.<sup>13</sup>

Though this passage confuses other statements made by Le Corbusier, it does define the idea of pure form and the position to which he aspired—that of the procreative genius. His striving for universals is an admittedly simplistic stance without dialectical intonation or any sense of crisis. Geometric relationships have some mathematical principles which one might want to consider universal but it is ridiculous to go as far as Corb's colonizing clichés. To say that there are universals, without questioning or situating the idea is pure elitism. Le Corbusier's writing poses the notion of himself as genius whereas the avant-garde poses questions about society.

The notion of pure form progressed to the idea of the object-type and developed into an incredibly useful one for Le Corbusier. He thought that an idea, if totally developed would



classical regulating lines



villa savoye

reach a specific form, thus becoming its own object-type. This idea is presented in *Vers Une Architecture*.

Our modern life...has created its own objects: its costume, its fountain pen, its over-sharp pencil, its typewriter, its telephone, its admirable office furniture, its plate-glass and its *Innovation* trucks, the safety razor and the briar pipe, the bowler hat and the limousine, the steamship and the airplane.<sup>14</sup>

In architectural form, Charles Jencks considers "the ramp or bridge, the double-height space, the scissor and spiral staircase; the curved bathroom or curved solarium (a tertiary space)..." as "elements of a new architecture as comparable to the *objet-types* in a Purist painting."<sup>15</sup> Jencks does not carry this idea further, which is a mistake since the most fascinating aspects of Le Corbusier's buildings are the forms that are developed from the notion of the *objet-type*.

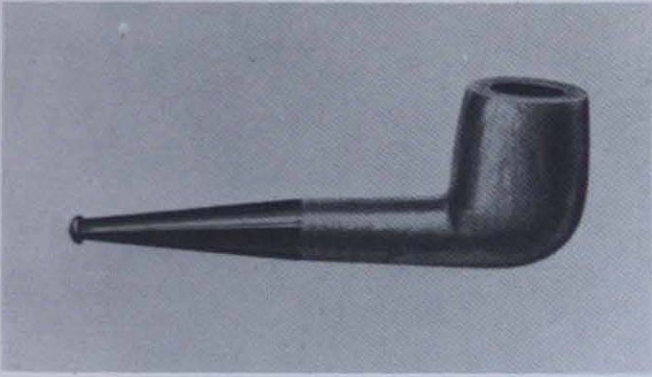
Le Corbusier describes the house as "a machine for living in."<sup>16</sup> He continues and deals with objects viewed as modern objects and their functionality and purity. He states "Our epoch is fixing its own style day by day."<sup>17</sup> By this he says that the methods and utilization of modern objects and techniques should be utilized in a pure method (the medium is the message). In order to simplify this far reaching and significant stance it is valuable to see how Le Corbusier had seen the potential use of the architect's materials. With his *Maison Domino* concept of 1914 Le Corbusier has reduced the house to the absolutely basic physical elements (floors, stairs and columns) necessary to support three levels of living space. He shows the extent to which modern building techniques via engineering have cleared a new path for the architect (artist). Now he finds the architect is free to use the various formal elements at his disposal. The relationship of

the built form to the space around is probably the primary thrust of architecture for Le Corbusier (a sculptural problem), whether the building was a pure prism or not. The integrity of the building and the surrounding space remain an important aesthetic concern.

The Villa Savoye at Poissy is an example of the way Le Corbusier looked upon the building as a form unto itself. Arguably this building more than any other stands "alone" as a statement of "architectural" form controlled by a master of architectural/sculptural form. The Villa Savoye is challenging in terms of how it attacked notions of what house or home meant at the time of its construction. However, the style of presentation is a neoclassical reinterpretation. The columns, balance, order and openness to the sky are as visible at Pompeii as at Poissy. The physical functioning (circulation, zoning) of this building is clearly worked out and seems to conform to a formal simplicity stated with the same abruptness as of the form.

The point to Le Corbusier's work is that it does have an "artistic sensibility", one rooted in the myth of the creative (male) ego. This "artistic sensibility" strives for and determines its own aesthetic and formal viewpoint and does *not* operate as a dialectic. Le Corbusier was concerned with the development of his own personal architectural expression based on the ideas about pure forms. It disregards what has been defined as an artistic avant-garde in favour of an unabashedly subjective stance. It is in this realm that words such as genius abide. This is a very dangerous position since criticism from this viewpoint directs artistic notions and rarely vice versa (hegemony). That is, supporters of the notion of genius are not interested in trying to create an objective position through dialectics.

Le Corbusier, with his constant stream of publications, was somewhat able to control the viewing of his own work, a further step up from the critic. He imposed a rationale on his work that many architects/critics/formalists would say worked better without one. Starting with *Vers Une Architecture* through to the development of and subsequent addition to his Modular system, Le Corbusier maintained a modern movement aesthetic. His writings were aimed not at changing the status quo, but at making people understand his own genius. He was not avant-garde because the avant-garde required art to be socially critical. An important aspect to the avant-garde, its negativism, was lacking in Le Corbusier. In addition, Le Corbusier denies himself the



a briar pipe—the final image of *Vers Une Architecture*

possibility of reaching a public too far below his good taste and prophetic insight.

Le Corbusier blatantly states in *Vers Une Architecture*, “Art is in its essence, arrogant.”<sup>18</sup> From here he says he wants to overthrow this circumstance and has determined that an enrapture of the new age and rejection of the “contemptible enslavement to the past” is the solution to a love of nostalgia.

A line of thought that is worth pursuing is this idea of rejecting the “enslavement to the past”. Since Le Corbusier goes on in the book to deal with specific examples of fine architecture from the past, he is saying something apart from disregarding everything from the past. If anything, he identifies exquisite spaces in Pompeii and Istanbul and he sees distinct qualities in each which show respect and integrity of the period of time and the culture in which each was created. The context in which these places are viewed is constantly changing and progressing, but for Le Corbusier the essential character of a space does not change. In this description of Casa Del Noce in Pompeii, Le Corbusier states—

Out of the clatter of the swarming street which is for every man and full of picturesque incident, you have entered the house of a Roman. Magistral grandeur, order, a splendid amplitude: you are in the house of a Roman. What was the function of these rooms? That is outside the question. After twenty centuries, without any historical reference, you are conscious of Architecture...<sup>19</sup>

After reading this, Poggioli's definition of Purism becomes very clear. In effect Le Corbusier hangs himself.

Though Le Corbusier tried to challenge the art/architecture world with his writings and work, there remains his idealistic and self-supporting attitude. As a result of this pursuit of genius or superman there was an inability to criticize the society which he fed and which very effectively fed him. By his methods he affirmed and reinforced the position of an elite group in society. It is because of the lack of questioning throughout his methods that one can conclude that Le Corbusier was not the avant-garde artist he imagined himself to be.

It is interesting to note that while Le Corbusier was delivering sermons on the refinement and simplicity of objects which end in their resolution as object-types or pure forms, a group of artists were questioning the entire notion of reality and form and its perception of/through the senses. The surrealists worked in a direction opposed to Le Corbusier and his vaguely concealed neoclassical understandings. Rene Magritte's painting *The Treachery (or Perfidy) of Images* quotes Le Corbusier directly and confronts the viewer with a contradiction unresolved and curious. The dialectic of this work is absent in the work of Le Corbusier. Le Corbusier chose form without content. The genuine lack of social criticism, directed at established social and cultural values negates the possibility of Le Corbusier being considered avant-garde or an avant-garde artist.



the treachery (or perfidy) of images, Rene Magritte

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2. *Ibid*, p. 119.
3. *Ibid*, p. 117, quoted from Bakunin.
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# Les Sculptures de Le Corbusier et de Joseph Savina

par Pierre Latouche

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*If Le Corbusier is, without any doubt, one of the most important innovators in architecture, his contribution to the art of sculpture is not as well known. The minor role he played in this field was due to the time at which he started. It is only in 1945, when Le Corbusier met the ebenist Savina, that he decided to transpose his paintings in sculpture.*

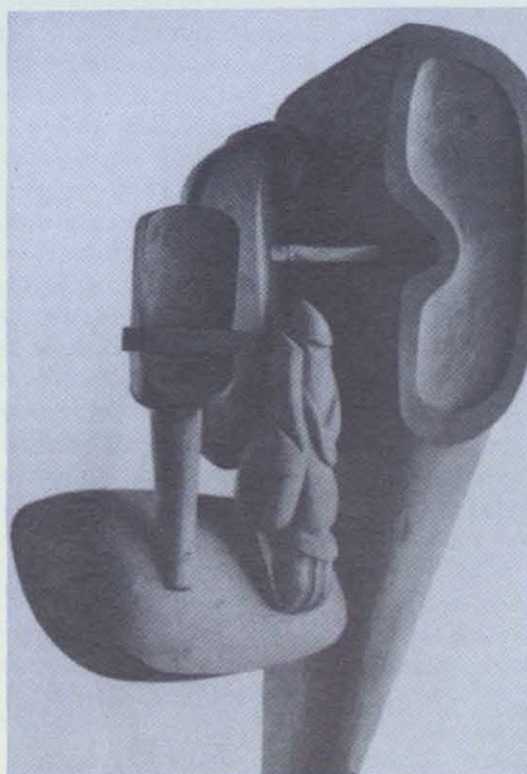
Si Le Corbusier avait considérablement peint dès l'âge de trente ans, ses activités plastiques commencèrent tardivement. En fait, ce n'est qu'à partir de 1945, peu après sa rencontre avec l'ébéniste breton Joseph Savina, qu'il eu l'idée d'adapter, ou plutôt de transposer ses toiles en sculptures.

Lorsque l'on considère l'évolution de l'architecture moderne, c'est sans hésitations que nous plaçons Le Corbusier parmi ses plus grands innovateurs. Par contre, sa place dans l'évolution de la sculpture contemporaine est moins catégoriquement définie. En fait, il a joué un rôle plutôt obscur. Ceci est dû au caractère tardif de son oeuvre, à la place prise par ses activités architecturales, mais aussi à sa méthode de travail.

Comme nous l'avons dit, Le Corbusier, à l'aube de la Seconde Guerre Mondiale, était surtout connu comme architecte, mais également comme peintre, puisque ses toiles n'étaient pas totalement ignorées. C'est en 1943 que Joseph Savina, prisonnier de guerre fut libéré et renvoyé en Bretagne où il vivait. Ayant une formation d'ébéniste, il rencontra Jeanneret en avril 1935 grâce à un ami commun, Pierre Guéguen. L'architecte était à la recherche d'un ébéniste innovateur, capable de réaliser ses projets d'ameublement. Etant entré en contact avec Savina il lui soumit en 1936 des projets de meubles, sous forme de dessins, contenant des décorés de rochers et de paysages marins. Ces reliefs auraient sans doute décorés les pans d'un bureau ou la tête d'un lit. Mais Savina, mal à l'aise avec le nouveau style qu'il créait, ne fut pas capable de matérialiser les projets de Le Corbusier. Ce dernier, dans une lettre<sup>1</sup> de mai 1936, le critiqua sévèrement:

*...vous n'avez que peu d'amour pour les formes magnifiques qui sautent aux yeux (Rochers de Plougrescant)... je ne puis pas, quant à moi, admettre une légèreté de main, et permettez-moi de le dire, d'esprit aussi grande que celle que vous vous êtes permise par ces linéaments sans grande signification.*

Mais Savina ne fut pas découragé par cette réponse. Après sa libération il se remit à sculpter pour son propre plaisir. Par coïncidence, Le Corbusier eu l'occasion de voir ces premières sculptures. Il fut très impressionné par leur taille relativement modeste (18cm). Elles étaient d'une proportion parfaite pour un appartement, pour un collectionneur amoureux des objets. L'idée de



Ubu

Aujourd'hui, novembre 1966

pouvoir établir un contact personnel avec l'objet, de pouvoir le manier, le peser, le déplacer, fascinait l'architecte. Il avait en horreur les énormes sculptures décorant les façades des bâtiments publics, monstres de bronze, de cuivre et de pierre, écrasant par leur monumentalité. Il faut également se rappeler que Le Corbusier souffrait d'une myopie prononcée. Lorsqu'il ramassait des roches, des cailloux, des os (certains de ces morceaux peuvent encore être vus à la Fondation, à Paris), il enlevait ses lunettes et approchait ces objets de ses yeux pour admirer leurs lignes, leurs formes. C'est avec le même esprit qu'il abordait la sculpture, le rapport devait être physique, tactile.



Petit Jean, Le Corbusier Lui-même

#5

Progressivement une étroite amitié se développa entre les deux hommes. En 1947, pour l'exposition "Synthèse des arts décoratifs," Jeanneret, souhaitant faire participer Savina, lui soumit quelques projets de sculptures. C'est à partir de cette date que se forma vraiment le tandem Le Corbusier-Savina. Le Corbusier dessinait les sculptures, Savina les exécutait. Mais peut-on, en tenant compte de cette méthode, inclure ces sculptures dans l'oeuvre de Le Corbusier? Si on sait que la grande partie de la statuaire mondiale a été exécutée par des artisans (comme Savina) exécutant les projets d'artistes (comme Le Corbusier) grâce à de petits modèles (Bozetto) ou de dessins, on doit donc inclure ces sculptures dans l'oeuvre de l'architecte. Mais il y a toujours un moment où l'oeuvre finale se distance trop de l'idée originale (entre en jeu tout le problème des reproductions, des gravures, des copies...). Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle avait amené cette séparation entre l'artiste et l'oeuvre finale (implicitement entre l'artiste et l'artisan) à un degré malsain. Ces deux facettes de la création se distançaient de plus en plus. Le résultat étant un objet dépourvu de la vie que confère le burin et la sueur de l'artiste qui conçoit l'oeuvre. Ceci mena Modigliani à dire: *The only way to save sculpture is to start carving again.* Avec le XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, et l'héritage d'Hildebrand, cette tendance fut renversée. Lentement les artistes apprirent à sculpter et les artisans devinrent artistes. Le tandem Le Corbusier-Savina correspond-il à cette évolution? Si Le Corbusier savait peindre et dessiner, il était peu enclin à manier le burin. L'étape de création formelle était laissée entièrement à Savina. Mais Le Corbusier restait impliqué à toutes les étapes de la création. Le concept original était toujours le sien. Une fois l'oeuvre terminée, il discutait avec Savina, suggérant telle nouvelle approche (à cause de nombreux voyages ces échanges se faisaient fréquemment par lettres et par photos).

Si le premier essai ne lui convenait pas, aucune gêne ne volait ses critiques. Ainsi, dans une lettre de juillet 1948, il écrit:

Mon cher Savina, tenez vous bien! Je ne suis pas du tout content de votre statue n° 5...Le 5 est retombé dans un art hâtif, et une interprétation cafarde de calvaire breton... Nos sculptures (les miennes, mes dessins) n'ont aucun esprit gothique nordique? Du roman, oui, du sel attique, je crois.

Il ne faut pas confondre ce ton légèrement patriarcal avec les remarques d'un professeur aux Beaux-Arts. En fait, Le Corbusier s'insère bien dans ce renouveau de la sculpture. Si son implication n'est pas manuelle, elle l'est par l'esprit, par l'échange. Par contre, il va demander que l'oeuvre porte leurs deux noms, reconnaissant ainsi l'importance de l'artisan et du geste créateur.

Avant d'aborder les sculptures mêmes, il est nécessaire d'analyser le matériel dans lequel elles étaient sculptées: le bois. Des marbres surpolis, du bronze ressemblant à du papier mâché, avaient rassasié l'oeil de bien des artistes. Contrairement à la pierre, le bois, fait de fibres organiques, pouvait être approché comme un matériel "chaleureux". De lui, émanait la vie manquant au marbre et au bronze. Sa présence était ressentie en Europe depuis la "découverte", par les cubistes, des masques africains au musée ethnologique de Paris vers 1910. Mais également grâce à l'oeuvre d'artistes tels que Moore ou Nevelson. Mais le bois avait une longue tradition en Europe. Utilisé au Moyen-âge et à la Renaissance, sa vogue fut maintenue par le baroque allemand et espagnol. Les statues, surtout religieuses, étaient recouvertes d'une pâte faisant disparaître le grain du bois. Puis cet apprêt était peint afin de représenter les vêtements, l'épiderme, les cheveux. En Nouvelle-France les sculptures étaient peintes de couleur argent ou or, afin de suggérer l'emploi des précieux métaux. Bref, quelque soit l'objectif recherché, le bois était toujours peint (polychromé). Avec des siècles de tradition, on ne peut donc pas considérer l'emploi du bois par Jeanneret comme révolutionnaire.

Plus tôt, nous avons mentionné l'intérêt porté par Le Corbusier aux dimensions des premières sculptures de Savina. C'est avec le même esprit que nous devrions étudier l'ensemble de ces sculptures. On devrait toujours les diviser en trois catégories: Celles mesurant moins de 60 cm, celles mesurant entre 60 cm et 1,83m, et les reliefs. Il y a, bien entendu, des exceptions. Par exemple, *la Main* à Chandigarh, ou les très grands reliefs ornant certaines Unités d'habitation. Mais aucune de ces exceptions ne sont en bois.



Nous avons également mentionné que leur petite taille permettait leur maniement. En fait, si vous n'étiez pas enclin naturellement à saisir et caresser les objets, la technique de Le Corbusier vous forçait à développer cet instinct. Traditionnellement, le fait d'enduire le bois d'une pâte, laissait une surface parfaite, mais qualifiable de "glissante". Rien n'accrochant le regard, aucune imperfection, aucune strie du bois n'anime la surface. Savina, après quelques tentatives ratées de Jeanneret, proposa de peindre le bois directement, sans couche intermédiaire, avec une peinture plus fluide. Ceci permettant au grain du bois d'apparaître. Cette technique fut utilisée pour la première fois en 1947, dans la sculpture *Femme*. Les deux hommes se démarquaient donc d'une longue tradition, et retournaient consciemment vers un archaïsme où la matière prend un caractère autonome. Voilà pourquoi le bois est parfois laissé au naturel, notamment dans certaines petites sculptures, tel *les Mains*. Cette caractéristique révèle l'attention portée par Le Corbusier à la surface des objets. Qu'il s'agisse de la façade du Secrétariat à Chandigarh avec ses centaines de fenêtres encastrées, créant une façade pleine d'ombre et de lumière; du traitement du béton à Ronchamps, laissé dans sa rugosité, il y a toujours un élément agitant la surface. Le même effet existe dans le bois. Lorsqu'il est polychromé, sans couche intermédiaire, il ne perd pas cette qualité. En fait le pigment et la surface peuvent s'enrichir mutuellement. Comme dit Henri Laurens: "La couleur est la lumière intérieure de la sculpture." La surface, s'éloignant ou s'approchant, les couleurs deviennent mobiles dans l'espace. Mais la subtile relation entre surface et couleur est mieux expliquée par Le Corbusier lui-même, dans cette description du Bal des Quatz'arts à New York:

Chacun était chamarré, couvert de brocarts, de turbans à aigrettes, d'écharpes de boyadères; La soie rutilait; L'ensemble était terne et fade, sale et sans le moindre éclat. Pour briller, il ne faut pas de soie. Pour costumer en couleur, il faut beaucoup de tons neutres... des étoffes mates...Lorsqu'entrèrent les éléphants, ce fut enfin de la somptuosité...dans une foule bigarrée, affublée de soie, la peau grise d'éléphant fait l'habit de luxe.

Ces quelques lignes sont essentielles pour comprendre comment Jeanneret voyait la couleur. Celle-ci, est pour lui, intimement liée à la surface. Ces réflexions sont dignes d'un peintre, habitué à utiliser le tissage de la toile pour obtenir un effet esthétique. Mais si cet effet reste limité à la peinture, qu'en est-il d'un relief polychromé sur bois, de la taille d'un tableau. Est-ce peinture ou est-ce sculpture? Les limites entre ces arts semblent se confondre. Il en est ainsi du relief intitulé n° 2, réalisé en 1946. Il ne fut jamais peint, mais son état actuel ne reflète pas l'objectif initial

de l'artiste. Ce panneau doit être imaginé couvert de couleurs, car les formes en sont à peine détachées, et il était originalement encadré. Le Corbusier semble s'amuser avec l'observateur, la couleur incitant ce dernier à songer à une toile, les reliefs, séduisants par leurs formes, faisant appel à la sculpture. Ce jeu sera mieux compris si nous expliquons de quelle façon Savina transposait les peintures, et les dessins, en sculptures. Les tableaux de Le Corbusier étaient généralement formés de larges bandes entourant des zones de couleur (ces couleurs créant l'effet d'espace). Une forme que l'on retrouve fréquemment est celle du *lobe d'oreille*. Pour adapter ce motif, Savina dans *Ozon*, n'a qu'à représenter l'intérieur du lobe comme une dépression, les lignes du tableau servant de bordures. Le second plan de la peinture, ou du dessin, serait légèrement en recul dans la sculpture, ou formerait carrément un élément séparé, comme dans *Panurge* où, autour du lobe, gravite d'autres volumes, leur indépendance étant amplifiée par la couleur. Ces progrès sont évidemment dûs aux recherches des Constructivistes russes et de Picasso. Mais on peut également songer aux théories d'Hildebrand qui écrit:

*To bring order in the tri-dimensional world that surrounds us, the artist has to organize it in a number of imaginary layers of uniform thickness... Sculpture developed from drawing, first leading to relief by carving along the contours.*

Cette méthode est particulièrement appréciable dans la série *Femme* (1952-1962). Au cours de trois phases, on peut remarquer des transformations dans la forme du buste et des épaules. Dans la première sculpture, les deux parties étaient nettement séparées. Après quelques modifications, le tout fut aplati, les éléments ne se laissant distinguer que par des lignes d'ombre. Les mêmes transformations eurent lieu avec le visage et la chevelure. Clairement la méthode d'Hildebrand était suivie.



Femme

Aujourd'hui, novembre 1966

Il est intéressant de noter que Le Corbusier qualifiait ses sculptures d'être acoustiques. Non pour les qualités sonores du bois, ni pour le lobe d'oreille, mais parce que ces sculptures combinent la volonté de deux hommes, et peut-être un amalgame de tradition et d'innovation.

#### NOTES:

1. Leur correspondance sera au cours des années un élément essentiel de leur coopération.

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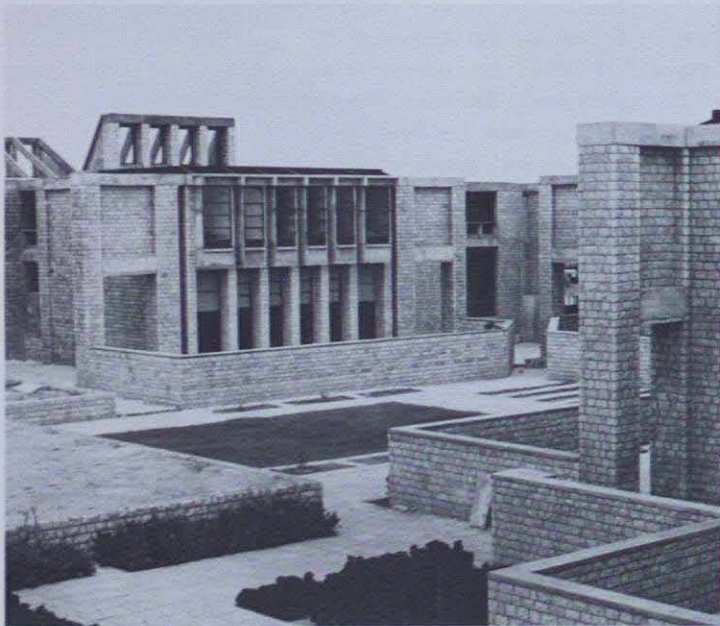
INTERVIEW WITH:

# BATKRISHNA V. DOSHI



Doshi's Office, Ahmedabad

*Batkrishna V. Doshi, fondateur de la jeune école d'Architecture d'Ahmedabad, a travaillé pour Le Corbusier au début des années 50. Architecte en charge de la maison Shodan, il a également contribué à la planification de Chandigarh. Il fut aussi responsable de l'engagement de Louis Kahn pour la création du Indian Institute of Management à Ahmedabad. Récemment de passage à l'Université de McGill, il a été interviewé par notre comité de rédaction.*



Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore

**TFC:** What aspects of Le Corbusier's architecture are still relevant today? What did you learn from Le Corbusier, particularly in reference to Chandigarh?

**DOSHI:** Chandigarh, I think, is one part, but there is a lot to learn from his architecture. For example, I have not seen as yet somebody having such a wonderful sense of space. I think the poetry of space is unmatched. Louis Kahn when he went to see the Assembly building (at Chandigarh), came back to Ahmedabad and said, "My hat's off to this old man Le Corbusier, because he is the only man I know in my whole life, in history or otherwise, who knew how to freeze dreams."

Therefore, this was one man who was able to not only build up his own language—he had his own alphabet. He made his own language and he wrote the complete book. And in that whole thing, he talks about not only space but the juxtapositions and the inventions that he made—for example, so many interpretations. He saw India and he interpreted it very interestingly.

So it was a question of concern, he was quite sensitive to surrounding areas but extremely inventive. So the thing that I learned from him, which I remember, is that you must be able to make much out of every problem, so that every problem that comes about should be taken as a positive thing.

**TFC:** What is Indian about Chandigarh?

**DOSHI:** The silhouettes, the skylines are Indian, the transparency is Indian. I am not talking about the sunbreakers and all that, they are part of India, because you find verandahs, jali and porches there. But his architecture, if you look at the Assembly or the High Court, and you look at those walls, you find that they are really the negative of the positive space. If you did not have the umbrella - the parasol which he put on top - if you remove that and you really imagine the transparent was really the dome, you find again another sort of skyline. It is almost as if you saw the building in black and white, you know, reversed. And this, I have seen. The 'other Indian things are really many. For example, his house in Ahmedabad which has a ramp, I found that the ramp was also there in a palace in Jaipur, with similar openings, which he had never seen. So one other thing which I again found from Le Corbusier, is that he was sensitive enough, like a doctor who looks at your pulse and knows what has happened to you; I think that he knew how to feel the pulse of the place.

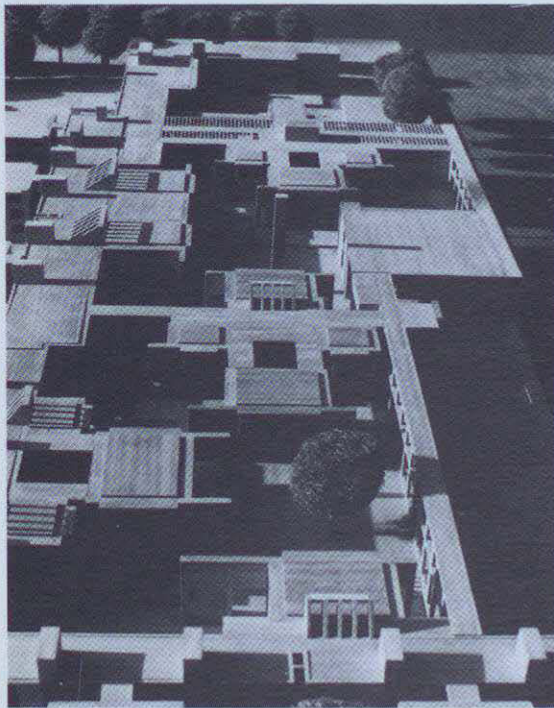
**TFC:** Is the Indian architecture of today in danger from American and other outside influences? Is tradition threatened, do people fear this?

**DOSHI:** After independence, we had a lot of Indian architects who were trained abroad, at Harvard, M.I.T., and other places—then came Le Corbusier. So at that time there were British architects who were practising, not many other foreigners, some Italians who did some International style buildings. The British people were doing building but there were also some British architects who intended to revive buildings. I remember there was one architect, Claude Batley.

Claude Batley, from Bombay, who did a lot of studies of Hindu temples and Hindu architecture and who was probably to me the first Indian architect after Lutyens and Walter George and others. At the same time he was also using the Indian overhangs and mouldings in his buildings.

But then these foreign trained architects came and did buildings in the Bauhaus style, the Gropius style, in the sense of Harvard and what not. Independent volumes which are put together into a space so that you really have each volume speak for itself and you juxtapose them together as a composition. So it was the International style which came up and quite a few buildings were built and Le Corbusier came and he influenced a lot. And there were buildings which were almost done like disciples of Le Corbusier, by people who had never worked with Le Corbusier but who knew about his work.

I learned from Le Corbusier one simple thing. Never imitate a master, because it does not pay you in the long run. I mean, he told me that—that there was no question, he says what you do, you do. So the first thing I did was I said that I will never use sunbreakers, and if he is going to use rough materials, I will use smooth materials. I said let me reverse the order and see what I can do.



*Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore*

So there were people who started thinking about it. Then there was a question of finding other people who work in planning areas. Gradually, things began to change, and now in the last decade because of lots of new schools, and I suppose also because of the change in the attitude of architecture in the West, we don't want to talk about the International style, you know, this Modern architecture, from Modern to Post-Modern. I think that this has shaken the Indian people quite a bit because really you don't know what to follow, so the best is to follow your own place. So now there is a concern about this in India, a lot of young people and practising people my age are going back and asking questions which are from India. So a good deal of

studies are being done now on traditional Indian house forms, Indian temples, streets, cities and literature. So I would say that it is not a revival, but it is now searching for the identity of the place.

The other thing which luckily has happened is that, when you have affluence, you can do anything. Supposing that you have very little work, you have more architects and little work, then you start thinking about what to do, and you intellectualize. If you have a lot of money and a lot of materials which you can buy and get, then you can start doing many things also. If you don't have this tool, that means you don't have the resources. If you have opportunities, then it doesn't give you much time to think, but your resources are there, and your problems are very basic—like say housing, shelter or something else. You say, I have brick, I have concrete, so what do I do with it? I have to build a house or a building in not very expensive cost, so I must build it very simply. So we ask a question, saying, well if this is to be simple it must be made very easy. And so maybe one can talk about space and form but then it becomes very simple, so therefore, one is going into low technology but high visuals. You get into really a visual expression out of this technology which is minimum. And that today is what is happening to many people. You find that one is talking about climate more, peoples' habits more and using these as a tool to manipulate the kind of projects each one is doing.

**TFC:** The metaphysical or spiritual aspect of architecture that you described in your lecture, do you think this is a concern of most architects?

**DOSHI:** I think it is coming. There are few architects who are talking about this now, really there must be something there which we have not found. Once we start going into the background and history, you begin to ask, why is a house the way it is? For example, we did a study for the Aga Khan program at M.I.T., a document on the Bohna houses, a community which is Ismaili, and this Ismaili community is 150 years old. They came from the West, but they really converted a lot of Hindus, so the Hindu conversion into Ismail, but they were using a Hindu house with a courtyard and then they got into business with the British. So they went out and therefore their house has really three facets. Their many rituals are Hindu and Ismaili; in many rituals you'll find Hindu and in many Muslim, their costumes are mixed. The houses are Hindu, but the facade is colonial. So we are talking really about the Post Modern and what not. I think there are examples where you see the layering of a house so the facade is shown as what I belong to the outside world. Inside, when I have come in it, I am still somebody else. So this layering is very interesting and I think one is going to have phenomena, and I am more interested in that kind of phenomena today. How does one accept things and then get that as part of your culture, absorb it. Those houses don't look Indian on that street. What is amazing is that beautiful street, those staircases and columns, you feel that you are somewhere in England, but the moment you go in, then you find now that it is not England at all, it is somewhere else. The moment you go in the rooms it is quite different. So my

interest in this study was to find what was the past, what is the present and what will be the future and I am sure there are many other people who are thinking like this. So when we talk about past we want to find out those rules which were there before and what is it you can do today.

**TFC:** What makes your architecture Indian?

**DOSHI:** In my architecture, I think, I am trying to get into this question of duality and a little bit of open-endedness or ambiguity. But you have an architecture which is slightly shifted from definition. So there is amalgamation of many things put together in a different way. So it is not a very clear fundamental definition. For example, let's take my office. If you look at the plan of the office it has three structures put together. There is one structure which is a pure one, another one with columns and walls and the third one is only columns. So the three storey building has a column structure, the two storey building has some columns and walls and the single storey one is only brick. But then the main space and the subspace really change and they really meander—the form is not finite. So you don't make a regular, definite form, but you make a definite form and destroy that form. And this you find in the Indian miniature, this you find in the Indian scriptures, this you find in the Indian sculpture. You will find you see the elephants going in a line and one elephant will turn. The idea is not because the elephant has turned, it is an idea of a reality that all will not follow the rule. The rule is necessary, you have to make an exception to prove the rule. This is a very important thing to understand, if you want to make an exception to the rule, then you must change it. Similarly, you find that the kind of movement that is there, you never move into the direct axis. You shift the axis as you go along, so that your vistas are not the same. Because you can never go to the destination only by one direction, you can go by many directions. So this is another philosophical aspect, that the destination is not one way, you can go and turn and come back, and you can go, pause and also go. So the question is not necessarily time oriented, there is neither time nor space because it shifts, because you are also constantly evolving. And, therefore, this experience is very interesting when you shift—the moment you shift, then your building isn't the same either. Because the moment you shift, your facades don't have to be similar because now you are in a different world altogether. Which means you are into the stage. Man is really a performer on the stage. So as he evolves he is also looking at many vistas.

In fact Le Corbusier talked about this very interestingly. One day, he drew me a drawing on a wall, a river, and he said these are the two banks and somebody asked him where is the truth. So he says the truth goes like this, it goes very close

to the bank but it never touches either of the banks, it is always between the banks. It comes close but it never stabilizes there because you cannot say that truth is only in one place. So truth is constantly modified and so your experience must modify that. So you can never say that you are sure about it. In architecture you bring this little uncertainty about things, a little doubt—what I call ambiguity.

So the moment you bring this ambiguity you find that this ambiguity has a quality which is not specific. Then you are no more specific, you are a little more generous. So the function doesn't become very defined, it modifies. Your function has become another function also, because there are many greys between black and white, so you get into that kind of a shift. So if one was trying that, then one can do it in architecture, really. How do you arrive, how do you really go in. For example, I enter my buildings diagonal to the wall or at right angles to the wall but never parallel to the wall, because that is an effort that normally I will not do. One would enter into the wall straight, it is nice to enter at a right angle or a diagonal and then see the wall and then shift it. So I think that the kind of experience is different. Then the other thing is that structure changes but it doesn't matter at all. I mean, after all, pure and impure is a ques-



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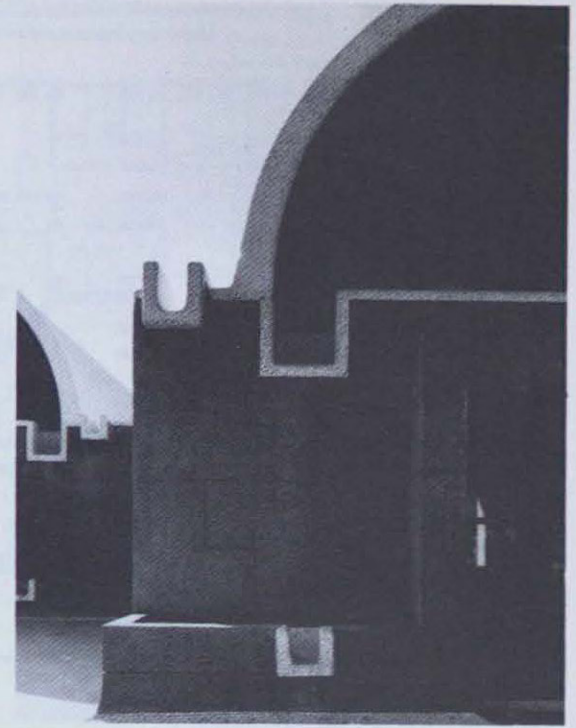
tion of emotion. It is an emotional thing, if you really make things that work then they are correct. For example, experience is more important than the kind of material that one uses. We have a saying which is interesting, somebody asking somebody, "You tell me what it is that makes sense." What we call in the Indian language, *rusa*, the theory of *rusa*, is making sense. So he says if you go to a friend's house for a dinner and in the evening I say, "How was the dinner?" what will you say, you will say, "The dinner was good", or, "It was not good". But would you say, "No, I think the dessert was good," or, "The main dish was good," or, "The soup was good." No, I think that it is the totality of the experience, that is very important. So maybe it was made of many parts but the total experience becomes very important in the end. What is the ultimate experience which you remember? That memory is very important. So what one is talking about, what I think at least is that one is trying to find out memory through this building. Supposing one was drawing the building after seeing it. You may not be able to draw at all the building, I think that that is the richness of the place because you cannot draw but you can remember. You have felt something but have not drawn. This is an effort which I am trying to do. So through that then you come and talk about how do you

use the space at night and how do you use the space during the day and how many days can you be really active in the place, so that it is not dead. These are all issues of function, but attitude-wise, this is important, how does one really get into this sense of time and space, there is a disorientation in time and space.

**TFC:** Some of the values you are talking about are International and some Indian. Where, if you do, does one draw a line between the two?

**DOSHI:** I don't think one can draw the line at all. Because, really you will find similar things happening in Italian buildings also. European buildings have also the same experience. I mean all this Baroque, there are so many experiences, the perspective, the change of perspective, the change of materials. I was in Mantua and I saw this Palazzo del Te by Romano and it is an amazing building because outside it is all stone, but actually it is not stone at all, it is all plaster like stone. Since you don't know, you begin to think it's stone and you don't know and you go inside and the facade is bricks to show you whatever I show you is not true, this is true. Then he shows you the arches which are made false and the keystone is taken out and shown half of it down, saying that if the keystone is not made then the arch is false. So these are the questions I am really now thinking and intellectually saying, what is it that you are really looking at a building for, you are looking because you want to have a dialogue with that building. It depends upon what kind of dialogue you are looking at. So if between us we have to have a dialogue, so we say let's have a dialogue around this particular project—then I say, well my dialogue is going to be that I would like to show that my building, the office building, as you arrive it's a small building, but actually, it is a big building. But again, it is really small, so this kind of contradiction that there is a small and big, I must express. The second one is that if you want to express small and big and then you say well you want to enter the building and then you say should I enter from the top or the side. You begin to ask questions of yourself and maybe this is interesting and you get into constantly this question of whether this is right or that is right. The other thing is that one looks at the building and says well I am sitting here and because of the window I can feel the night or the day. That is a question of not only climate but also relating yourself to the place. So if you make the walls around and if you find a nice skylight and the light changes inside, you begin to wonder what is it that gives this and so you begin to get another kind of feeling. Now the relation of light is very important, the volume of light, the kind of quality of light becomes very essential and this is what I learned from Le Corbusier. How does one really create the light into volume and not in a sharp edge? When you get a light into a volume it glorifies, when the light is sharp it makes you very hard. So I think this is one of the fundamentals I learned from Le Corbusier, volume and space articulated through light, which is his major theme all his life. The other one is that you must play counterpoint; thick and thin, solid and void, rough and soft. So you play the game all the time with two themes so that because of the two, each one exists. Like positive will not exist without negative, this is the other thing that one learns from Le Corbusier. So if these two things are understood then you can see that he will use a big square column and a round column, he has no hesitation. Or he will have a sunbreaker which has no relation to the column, because it's a skin. So the skin has nothing to do with the structure, though it is attached it is independent and the structure which is doing something else, the structure and the surface are not necessarily the same.

**TFC:** At what point does the ambiguity get resolved?



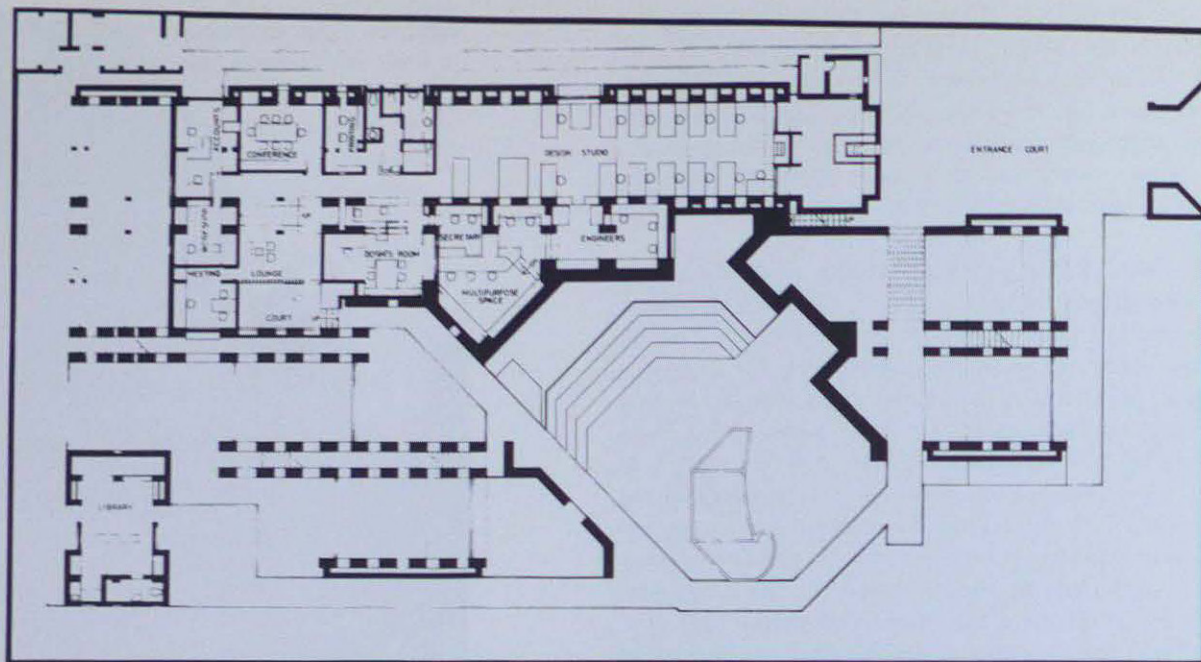
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**DOSHI:** I think the ambiguity and the resolution come when you have intentions. I think it is a question of intentions. At what point do you find it resolved? In very good work, in Le Corbusier's work, the workmanship seems to be resolved very well because he knows when to stop. And I have not found that yet. I don't know how to resolve it, really. It is very difficult, because one is playing a game which doesn't have any rules. The most difficult thing to do is to know that you are playing the game without knowing and you must know when to stop.

**TFC:** There seems to be an influence of Kahn—you were a close friend of his.

**DOSHI:** Well, I tell you, I was quite involved with his work and my school building I did when he was there. I think I was influenced quite a lot by him because it was really saying how do you make, when do you draw the line which really holds by itself. So how do you really make it a minimum which you can't really change. I think it is still valid, certain things you can do but then you ask for the resolution. I think this is where Kahn counts. You must know after having done six alternatives, which alternative is the closest, and then you say, "Like a puzzle, it fits and nothing else is possible". Then I think the resolution is there. This I found from talking to Kahn.

It is very funny, I can give you an example, I was doing the tower in my township. The tower, the water had to be one hundred feet high. I made a tower saying I don't want to make a normal tower, I want to make a tower which is tall, but it goes down increasing in diameter to columns below and a little theatre below. Because to me the water was a symbol and so people will come underneath and this is a symbol of the



ALL PHOTOS ARE COURTESY OF MR. DOSHI'S OFFICE

*Doshi's Office, Ahmedabad*

place and so they will come there and they will sing there, they will dance and there was a staircase which will go up and you come before the water body. Lou was in the office and I said, "What do you think of this building?". He says, "I don't know but if I would do this building, I would not ask this building to do too many things. Why should the tower do more than what it should support?". So I listened to him, but finally I built the way I wanted to build. Then I took the photographs to him to Philadelphia, after two years. I said, "Louis, see this what I have done". He says, "My God, this is wonderful!" I said, "You know what you have mentioned to me?" He says, "What?". Then I told him this. "Ah!" he says, "but I don't know anything".

It depends, what is interesting about disciplined people is that they are not conventional people. They are subject to change, modify their views. I think this is another thing one learns from people, is that those people who make a religion, the first dictum of theirs is never follow the guru.

You must really follow what you believe in, what they are telling you is, "Go to the source". This is what they always do, go back to the source.

**TFC:** How do you try to integrate some of these ideas into teaching? Do you try to impress students to be multi-dimensional in their thinking?

**DOSHI:** Yes. I think I would talk about all this that I have talked about here. Just tell them stories about things, never talk about projects.

It seems now that things exist by themselves, this is a very important thing to understand, things do not exist just because you say so. I think there is a good deal of cause and effect which really works into this. One of the things which I have discovered is that things which last long, don't last because somebody else has said it, but because there is a lot more merit. Therefore, the role of designers is to find out how many ways it can satisfy many situations. So it is not the singularity but it is the plurality. So I am interested in this phenomenon of plurality. A rationalist or a purist will think of only one at a time. I think in a pluralist society you are talking about many ways to reach the ocean. One doesn't really know the source of the river, because the source of the river is very small but there are so many other rivers which join that river—it is not one river.

—it is not one river. How many tributaries must have joined? And finally when it goes to the ocean and we don't know which one is the real Amazon.

The culture is like this, the flow goes this way, we have to get into that kind of attitude first to design. The other thing is to solve what is relevant, what you think is relevant, not because somebody else says. Try it out, there is no harm in trying. So what I am doing is only trying.

**TFC:** You worked for a long time with Le Corbusier, does your office work in the same spirit as his?

**DOSHI:** It tries to do it in the spirit. First of all, I don't have time scale in the office like the other offices have. So, it is similar in terms of behaviour. The second one is that in either Kahn or Le Corbusier's office, it was easy to have ideas, to talk with the people who work with you. I suppose it would be in other offices also, but it is more so in the offices of these two. The third one is if you don't like a project, throw it away and start again. So if it takes time, it will lose money—it doesn't matter. This is another thing which I have learned from these two offices. Le Corbusier once said, "Remember that you will never get another chance, you could be dead tomorrow". So this is very different from the other offices, who say, "Well, look, we have done this drawing, let's finish it, when we get the next project we will modify it". It is totally different from that. What you do today is the best you can offer. And this is the thing I learned from these great architects.

**TFC:** How do you survive economically?

**DOSHI:** Well, if you believe that this is what you want to do, you survive anyway.

Note: The presentation of this article would not have been possible without the help of Professor Vikram Bhatt, McGill University.

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