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# Le Corbusier and the Paris Exhibition of 1937

## *The Temps Nouveaux Pavilion*

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Historians have long accepted the notion that the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, built for the International Exhibition of 1937 in Paris, was a turning point in Le Corbusier's architectural career and the source of one of his most significant works, the Ronchamp chapel.<sup>1</sup> They have also described Le Corbusier's involvement with the Paris exhibition—the last major cultural event of the Third Republic—as an incessant struggle with a conservative exhibition leadership that stubbornly objected to his participation.<sup>2</sup> Scholars consider as well that Le Corbusier was able to take part in the exhibition (even if with just a canvas pavilion) only because of the dramatic last-minute intervention of Léon Blum's Front Populaire government.<sup>3</sup> Most significantly, Le Corbusier's involvement with leftist parties at the time of the exhibition, especially after the election of the Front Populaire, has been assumed to demonstrate a political *prise de conscience*, that is, Le Corbusier's embrace of the Left.

Hitherto overlooked evidence, however, suggests that significant aspects of current scholarship on Le Corbusier and the fair require reevaluation. The documents show conclusively that, far from expressing hostility toward him, the exhibition leadership made every possible effort to accommodate his wishes while firmly supporting his ideas throughout. At the same time, Le Corbusier's correspondence and other archival material fail to support the conclusion that his involvement with the exhibition solidifies his leftist reputation. Rather, letters, pamphlets, and telephone exchanges between Le Corbusier and various individuals show his simultaneous involvement with, and praise of, the political Left and Right. The documentation, indeed, reveals an almost complete absence of any coherent ideological position in Le Corbusier's thinking. Finally, documents not previously examined by scholars indicate that Pierre Jeanneret, Le Corbusier's cousin and partner, played a significant role in conceiving the celebrated Temps Nouveaux Pavilion. Without Jeanneret's felicitous design initiatives and the sustained support of the exhibition's chief architect, Jacques Gréber, Le Corbusier's

work would not have been represented at the fair in any form.

This essay examines the circumstances leading to the completion of Le Corbusier's and Jeanneret's pavilion and reconstructs the relationships Le Corbusier used in his partially successful effort to be represented in the fair. This episode sheds light on Le Corbusier's attempts at seducing the French Left, after a protracted yet futile courtship of the Right. While suggesting a new reading of Le Corbusier's design strategies in the larger urban system of Paris, I attempt to fill the gaps in our understanding of the ways in which the architectural avant-garde tried to identify and handle its clients and broader social groups.

### LE CORBUSIER'S PROJECTS FOR 1937

Between 1932 and 1937, Le Corbusier undertook seven projects for the exhibition. The first, in the Bois de Vincennes, was an attempt at building the entire exhibition on his own, in the well-tested tradition of the nineteenth-century *expositions universelles* [Figure 1].<sup>4</sup> The second and the third projects—a giant housing slab in 1934 and a skyscraper he called Patte de Poule (chicken foot) in 1935—was an effort to establish a building norm for the new urban housing of Paris [Figures 2, 3]. A fourth, more modest project was a proposal for a small Clarté-type apartment building on the Esplanade des Invalides. In November 1934, he also participated in the competition for two museums of modern art, intended as permanent buildings of the exhibition. Finally, the last two projects, which are the subject of this essay, were a museum of contemporary art conceived as a square “spiral” of glass [Figure 4], and an exhibition space housed in a canvas tent, known as the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion [Figure 5].<sup>5</sup>

In 1932, one year after France announced a new international exhibition—the last it would ever organize—Le Corbusier came up with the provocative idea of staging a counterproposal to the official project, an International Exhibition of Modern Dwelling [Figure 6].<sup>6</sup> Capitalizing on the success of the Colonial Exhibition of 1931, Le Corbusier placed his hypothetical housing exhibition in the Haussmannian Bois de

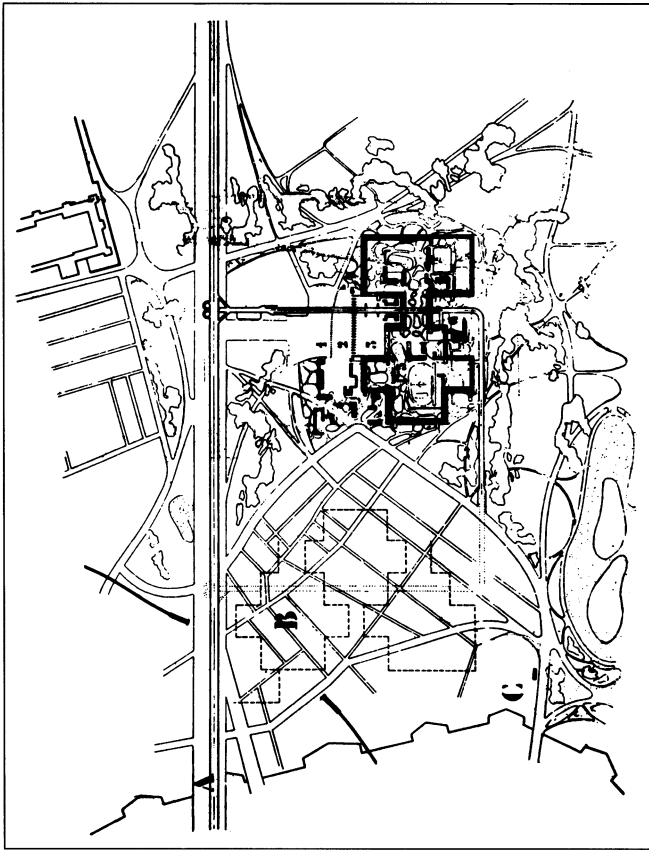


FIGURE 1: Le Corbusier, project (competition entry) for the International Exhibition of 1937, Bois de Vincennes, 1932

Vincennes, at the eastern edge of Paris. His exhibition was to be organized on the principle of the Radiant City, which he saw as the starting point of a radical, intra muros recasting of metropolitan Paris [Figure 7].<sup>7</sup> Le Corbusier's assumption was that big business, or "la Grande Industrie," as he called it, would certainly support a housing project responding to the challenges of industrial modernity. His design, however, anticipated the demolition of vast areas of historical Paris, turning the city instead into an endless park laced with ribbon slabs and tentacular skyscrapers. Public opinion rejected the project as utopian at best.

Two years later, as official plans for holding the exhibition of 1937 at the traditional Champ de Mars location were well underway, and in an effort to increase the credibility of his proposals, Le Corbusier sought and received the support of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM).<sup>8</sup> On the merit of this international backing, the exhibition granted him a site between the Bastion Kellermann (one of the last vestiges of the now-demolished Paris fortifications) and the Porte d'Italie—at the southeast edge of Paris—for the purpose of creating a housing annex to the exhibition. This time he responded by proposing an experimental building, half a mile long and fifteen stories high. Slightly tapered at both ends, this mega-housing slab was meant to ac-

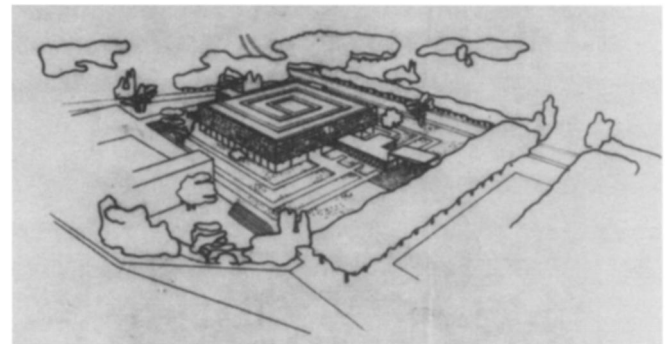
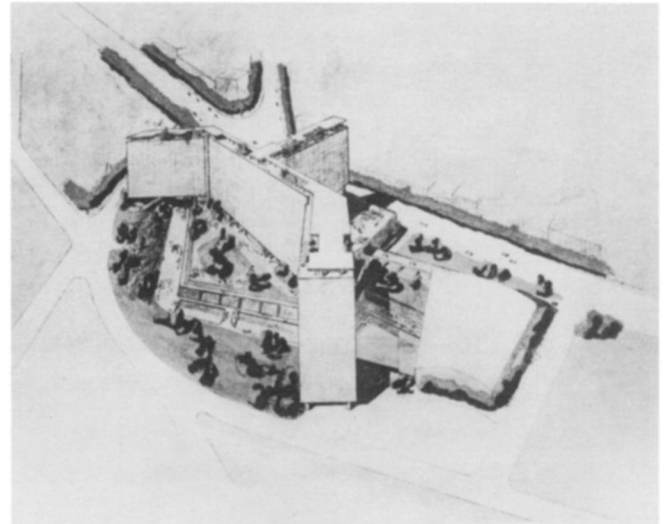
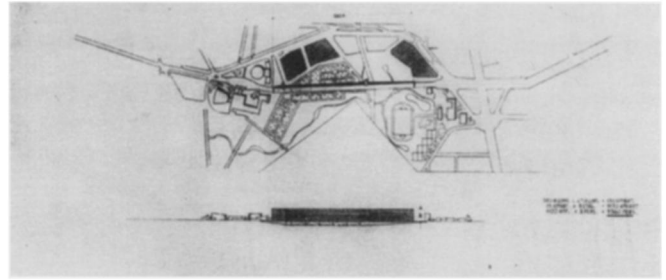


FIGURE 2: Le Corbusier, slab for 9,360 inhabitants project for a housing annex to the International Exhibition of 1937, Boulevard Kellermann, 1934

FIGURE 3: Le Corbusier, project for a housing annex to the International Exhibition of 1937, Bastion Kellermann, 1934, Patte de Poule ("Chicken Foot") Cartesian skyscraper for 4,000 inhabitants

FIGURE 4: Le Corbusier, project for a Museum of Contemporary Aesthetics, Boulevard Kellermann, 1935

commodate 9,360 inhabitants in a single block of 1,200 apartments, spanning, like a bridge, a major highway and the last vestiges of Napoleon III's monumental fortifications (see Figure 2). In his discussions with the exhibition leadership, Le Corbusier argued that developers eager to undertake the lucrative venture of modernizing both housing construction and the capital of France would readily finance the structure.

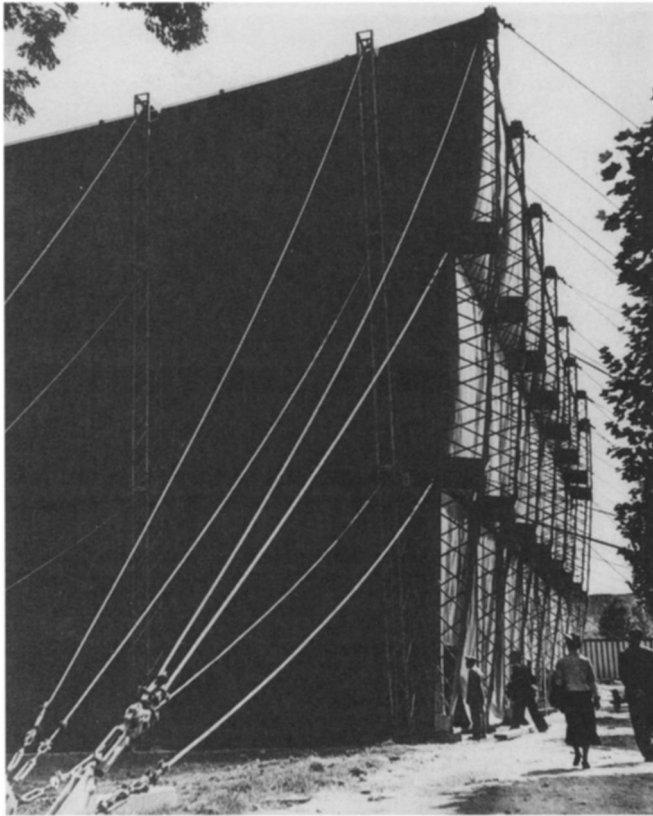


FIGURE 5: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion (destroyed), International Exhibition of 1937, canvas container with pylons

Yet, contrary to Le Corbusier's assurances, the building industry proved unyielding, as had been the case with his Plan Voisin of 1925. With determination, Le Corbusier turned to another one of his *projets-type*, which he now placed on the Kellermann bastion itself. This was the Patte de Poule high-rise, a "Cartesian" skyscraper he had originally designed in 1932 for his Barcelona plan (see Figure 3). The structure, now called T-CIAM, was to house four thousand dwellers. Combining state-of-the-art steel and concrete structural systems, the building was to be on view in successive stages of completion until the exhibition closed.<sup>9</sup>

Again, investors were uninterested. In his correspondence with the exhibition, however, Le Corbusier repeatedly insisted that funds were forthcoming. Faced with an almost certain collapse of the project for lack of financing, he took seriously Fernand Léger's humorous challenge to build a fifteen-story skyscraper in wood, for much less money. Undeterred by the contradictions inherent to the idea of a mockup wooden building meant to popularize the superior virtues of steel and concrete, Le Corbusier even solicited an estimate from the Charpentiers de Paris.<sup>10</sup>

#### A MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY AESTHETICS

With the failure of this third project, the Cartesian skyscraper, Le Corbusier's chances of participating in the exhibition of

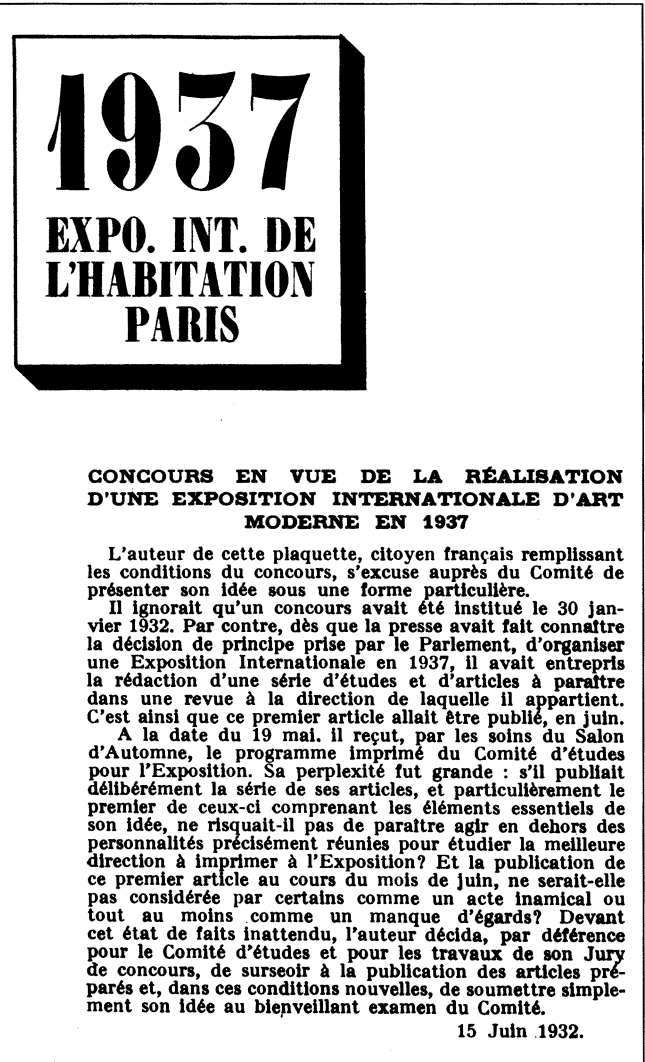


FIGURE 6: Le Corbusier, "1937 Exposition Internationale de l'Habitation Paris," 15 June 1932, front cover of *Brochure 37*, intended as a competition entry. Le Corbusier apologizes to the jury for the unusual format and late submission. Without directly signing this anonymous entry, Le Corbusier clearly identifies himself by referring to his published work.

1937 seemed seriously compromised. To help him out, the exhibition's leadership offered him, in the spring of 1935, an exceptional grant of 500,000 francs, but urged him to design a more modest, temporary building—an activity Le Corbusier disdainfully called *pavillonner*.<sup>11</sup> To reflect the expected change in the project's size, a new location was assigned, but still along the Boulevard Kellermann. Le Corbusier, however, hoped to obtain significantly more funding from the exhibition for a permanent structure, despite a city ordinance banning permanent exhibition structures.

From solving the housing problem, he switched to the study of museum typology, an issue that had held his attention occasionally since the previous decade. He chose, as mentioned, a flat, "square spiral" structure (see Figure 4), akin to his zigurat-like Mundaneum of 1929, published in the first

issue of *Cahiers d'Art*, in 1931 [Figure 8]. Le Corbusier conceived this “building with no façade” as a *bâtiment-type d'exposition*—a prototype for a museum that could be readily reproduced and multiplied throughout France.<sup>12</sup> Calling it a “Musée d'Esthétique Contemporaine,” Le Corbusier final-

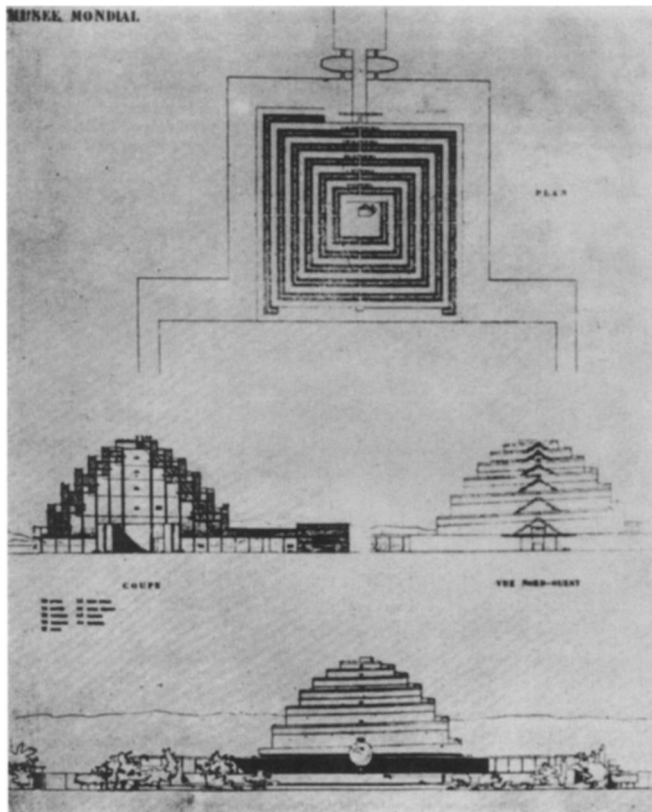
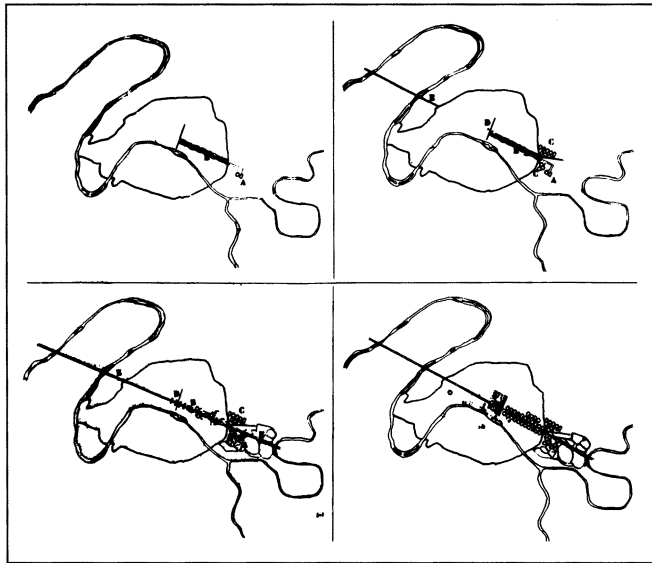


FIGURE 7: Le Corbusier, plan for an east-west transverse Parisian axis, 1932, four stages of a Ville Radieuse adapted to Paris, with Le Corbusier's International Exhibition of 1937 in the Bois de Vincennes

FIGURE 8: Le Corbusier with Pierre Otlet, project for a Musée Mondial or Mundaneum, 1929, an element of the Cité Mondiale for Geneva

ized this first museum project by early January 1936. Up to then the project carried no political connotations, but was meant to reflect Le Corbusier's ideological position of the preceding decade: his declared faith in the transcendent power of technology and form to serve the interests of social stability. Initially, therefore, in terms of both architectural container and content, Le Corbusier put the emphasis on formal issues. The purpose of the museum, “a museum of contemporary art,” was to bring together the most prominent artists, sculptors and painters “chosen among the elite for a *musée d'élite*.”<sup>13</sup>

The program of the museum was completed by 10 March 1935.<sup>14</sup> Le Corbusier sent a copy to George Huisman, Directeur des Beaux-Arts Office, in charge of the government agency concerned with the French artistic patrimony—a high government agent—from whom Le Corbusier hoped to obtain an additional grant.<sup>15</sup> To test his “type décisif à croissance indéfinie d'exposition de toute nature” (“specific type of general exhibition space capable of indefinite growth”), Le Corbusier needed a total of 2 million francs, a far cry from the 42 million he requested for his housing project, yet still four times the amount the exhibition was able to grant him. Primarily centered on formal and aesthetic issues of contemporary art, this museum, which was to become the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux a year later, was, by Le Corbusier's definition, an “instrument of visualization.” This “instrument” (the idea of “machine” or “tool” was behind it) included everything from urbanism to architecture. Nevertheless, the museum concept focused mostly on works of art such as “architectural painting and sculpture” and “free artwork (including tapestry).” In this sense it echoed the exhibition's official concept of “integration of urbanism, architecture, and art in modern life,” best exemplified by Jean-Claude Dondel's Musée d'Art Moderne, also built for the exhibition, albeit in a different architectural mode. Le Corbusier spent the second half of the year trying, unsuccessfully, to raise funds for his museum.

#### FROM A “MUSEE D'ELITE” TO A PAVILION FOR MASS EDUCATION

Faced once more with a financial crisis, in the short period between February and June 1936 Le Corbusier changed the name of his museum four times. The succession of names had an increasingly leftist ideological ring. The changes followed in step the changes in his perception of the true locus of the stabilizing “Authority” (*Autorité*) he tirelessly sought throughout his life. Attempting to adapt to the rapidly evolving political climate in France, Le Corbusier grafted each shift onto the same architectural object. The first name of his Musée à Croissance Indéfinie (Museum of Indefinite Growth) had been Musée d'Esthétique Contemporaine (Museum of Contemporary Aesthetics). By February 1936, as social unrest was

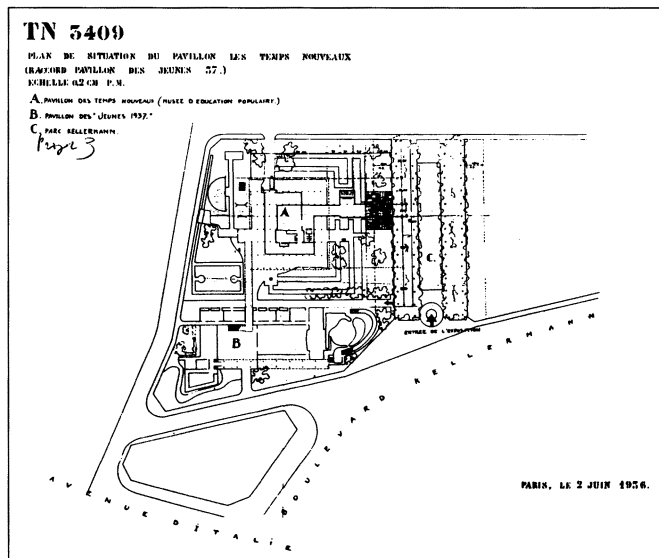


FIGURE 9: (A) Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, “spiral” museum as the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux: Musée d’Éducation Populaire, 2 June 1936, plan of main floor with movable partitions; (B) Jean Bossu and André Masson, Pavillon des Jeunes 37, 1936. The two projects share a site and are connected by a corridor.

mounting, he introduced a more engagé term, “Temps Nouveaux” (New Times), and the project became the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux: Musée d’Esthétique Contemporaine (Pavilion of the New Times: Museum of Contemporary Aesthetics). Soon after, he dropped the term “esthétique” and replaced it with “urbanisme” (a word commonly heard in leftist circles concerned with social housing), thus making his pavilion into a “Musée de l’Urbanisme.” Finally, when the Front Populaire came to power in May 1936, the museum’s name became Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux: Musée d’Éducation Populaire (Pavilion of the New Times: Museum for the Education of the People) [Figure 9].<sup>16</sup>

The shifts to the left reflected in Le Corbusier’s choice of names suggest a heightened political content in his programs, and may be interpreted as stemming from genuine modifications of his ideological position. One could argue even more convincingly, however, that the shifts simply reflected Le Corbusier’s perception of the true locus of current political power. By 1939, long after the Front Populaire had relinquished power, he made yet another shift. In his *Œuvre complète*, which Le Corbusier published periodically to promote his work, he returned to the old name for the spiral museum: Musée d’Esthétique Contemporaine.<sup>17</sup>

The shifts, therefore, started in February 1936 when, four months before the election of the leftist government alliance, the Musée d’Esthétique Contemporaine became the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux.<sup>18</sup> While “Temps Nouveaux” matched strikingly the dynamism suggested by the form of the building, the name also recalled the phrase *Novy Mir* (New World), often used in revolutionary Russia. The form of the building

and its name, however, were not the only direct references to the Soviet experience of the 1920s. In a program for the museum Le Corbusier dated 6 December 1936, as well as in a number of letters, he repeatedly requested that a railway carriage be installed on his site.<sup>19</sup> Like the agit-prop trains that transported the revolution to the far corners of Russia, Le Corbusier’s carriage would transport the museum to the most remote places in France.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of the museum was also related to the discussion in France before 1914 of the *Cité Mondiale*, which had already played a role in Le Corbusier’s concept of the *Mundaneum*— a visionary idea that could be related both to nineteenth-century French utopias and to Soviet visions expressed in the term *New World* (*Novi Mir*). Finally, *Temps Nouveaux* was the title of a noted anarchist journal published at the turn of the century in Switzerland and well known among the intellectual circles of Geneva.

Le Corbusier was careful to avoid the more static concept “Temps Modernes,” which conveys the idea of novelty, but a retrospective one, as it were: a novelty already established, and even codified—the modern as timeless. Conversely, the term “Temps Nouveaux” propounded, in Le Corbusier’s mind, aesthetic themes of the yet-to-come, of a present pregnant with future promises. The open-ended, dynamic term “nouveau” stood, in a sense, for another term Le Corbusier usually avoided: “avant-garde.” The term applied also to the museum’s prospective exhibits, to an art in constant flux, unfolding together with the spiral growth of the futuristic, indefinitely transformable spiral museum. The central piece of the museum, the nucleus around which the building was organized—called the Hall d’Honneur in a good *Beaux-Arts* tradition—was a ceremonial hall with four hundred seats, where conferences, film screenings, lectures, concerts, and performances of a New Theater were to celebrate novel aesthetics [Figure 10].

As the political climate in France changed—from the riots of the far Right, in February 1934 to the victory of the leftist Front Populaire in May 1936—Le Corbusier found increasing support among the left-oriented intelligentsia. That group regarded his participation in CIAM, and probably Pierre Jeanneret’s affiliation with the Communist Party, as inherent proof of progressive political commitment. Le Corbusier’s leftist supporters included prominent intellectuals such as Paul Vaillant-Couturier, director of the Communist daily *L’Humanité* and vice president of the exhibition’s Fine Arts Committee, and the writer Louis Aragon, director of the Communist-led *Maison de la Culture*. They generally, if at times ambiguously, favored avant-garde trends in the arts.<sup>21</sup> Le Corbusier’s own indifference toward political distinctions, however, is striking. His supporters were apparently unaware that in 1934, for example, he called the riots of the far Right the “awakening of

cleanliness,” referring to the reemergence of law and order (*Autorité*). In 1936, he gave the Front Populaire an identical salute, calling it “the young and *clean* authority.”<sup>22</sup> The Fascist or Socialist alternatives for Le Corbusier simply represented different authoritarian possibilities, more effective than the sluggish democratic process. In fact, one could argue that it was precisely his resistance to democratic institutions, demonstrated, for instance, in his disregard for the city ordinance requiring temporary structures for the exhibition, that almost cost him complete exclusion from the fair.<sup>23</sup>

In the fall of 1935, his friends Fernand Léger and Paul Vaillant-Couturier introduced Le Corbusier to the Maison de la Culture.<sup>24</sup> The Maison attracted a large number of prominent artists, scholars, and writers, and had a growing influence on Parisian cultural life. Quickly assimilated into this circle of politically motivated intellectuals, Le Corbusier saw in it an important instrument for advancing his ideas, and an opportune site for raising the funds he needed.<sup>25</sup> He reciprocated this adoption (even though with considerable irritation in private) by agreeing to share his exhibition site with a group of young leftist architects, the Jeunes 37, who planned a youth center for the fair.<sup>26</sup>

By June 1936, at a massive rally in favor of Le Corbusier, the Maison de la Culture created a Comité d’Honneur for the defense of “Corbu-1937” that included the most eminent names of French politics, science, and the arts.<sup>27</sup> Le Corbusier’s program soon became the property of the entire Left.

Precisely at that moment, and for purposes of the rally, Le Corbusier deleted from the pavilion’s name the term “Esthétique Contemporaine,” and added a new phrase, “Palais de L’Urbanisme.” Le Corbusier explained the term on 3 April 1936 as “Urbanism understood as social life translated into built objects,” suggesting his deep interest in social problems.<sup>28</sup> Soon after this name change, and without any other significant modifications, Le Corbusier moved his building, as mentioned, even further to the left, adding to the name Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux the fragment “Musée d’Education Populaire.”<sup>29</sup>

The climax of Le Corbusier’s efforts to find the correct spirit and a suitable name for his pavilion came when a Communist architect, Helena Syrkusz, wrote an ideological program for him.<sup>30</sup> The program, a document of twenty-four single-spaced pages, obviously aimed at a leftist audience, was a clear response to the criticism of “political vagueness” that had been directed at Le Corbusier. It seems likely that Le Corbusier read carefully only the first page of Syrkusz’s program, since it alone bears corrections in his handwriting—a probable indication of how little he cared to deal with such a document. On that page, Syrkusz mistakenly called the pavilion “Temps Modernes.” Le Corbusier made a point of crossing it out and replacing it with “Temps Nouveaux.”

Le Corbusier courted the Right as well, and sought to raise funds from his friends in the far-right Parti Social, founded by General de La Rocque. To ingratiate himself with the Right, he

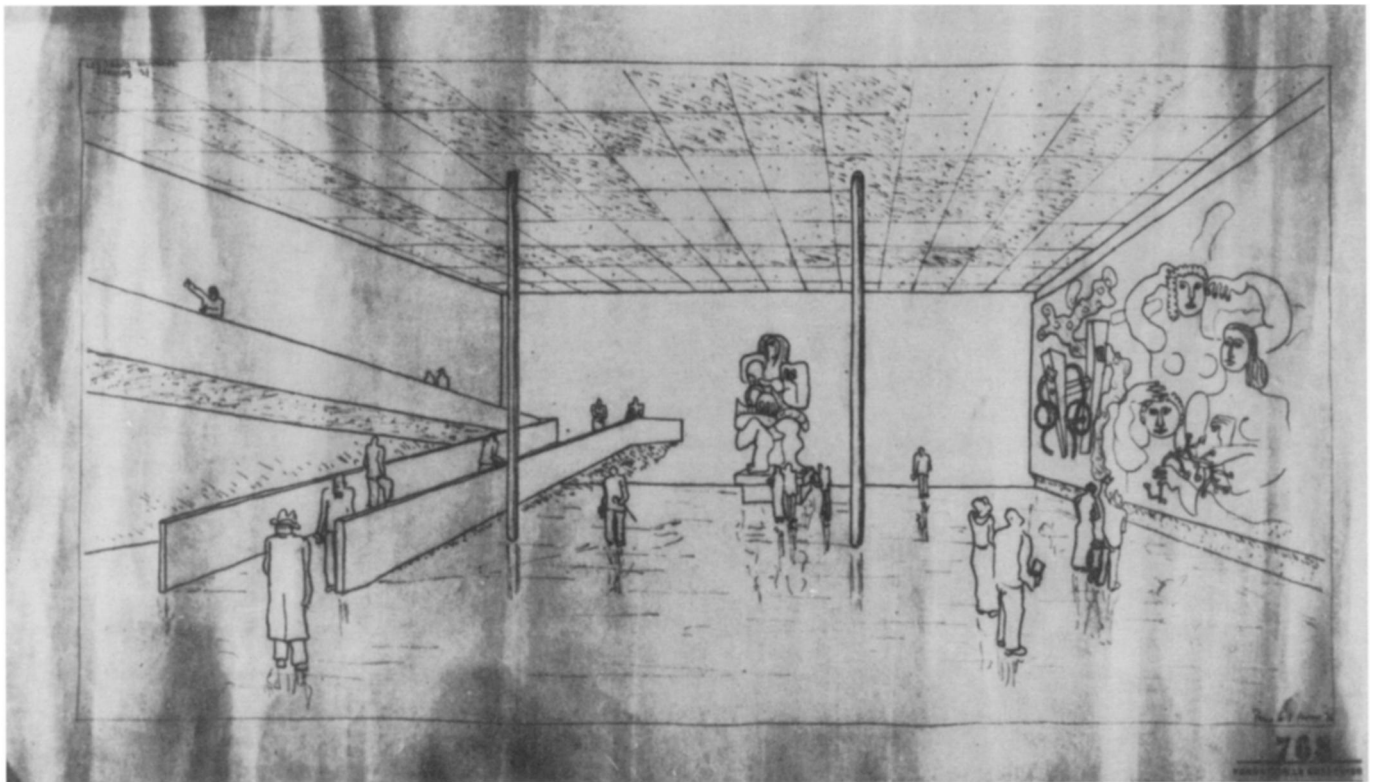


FIGURE 10: Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, “spiral” museum as the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, 6 February 1936, view of the Halle d’Honneur

not only expressed his agreement with the party's philosophy, but referred with some contempt to the Communist deputies he was equally soliciting.<sup>31</sup> Most important, the slogans later displayed in the pavilion, except for two, were neither his formulations nor selections. He himself admitted that the only "belle phrase" he could find was a quotation by Pope Pius XI, and even that quotation occurred to him only after the official opening of the exhibition, on 22 May 1937.<sup>32</sup> So eager was he to satisfy the new *Autorité* that he took no chances on the subject of politics and depended entirely on others. He wrote to the Communist Jean Nicolas, "Would you, please, bring me a few lapidary sentences that you would find useful to hang on the interior walls of the Pavillon."<sup>33</sup> A month later, he wrote to the same Nicolas, "You promised me the heavens. I beg everyone around to give me concise phrases to hang inside the main rooms of the Pavillon. Up to now, I got ZERO from you and your comrades."<sup>34</sup>

Even though Le Corbusier insisted his own quotation of the pope also be used, he urged both Jean Nicolas and "his comrades," in a number of letters, to find additional quotes: "This is more than urgent, and I despair to have constantly to remind you of things that need attention." In January 1936, he requested the same of an acquaintance at the Bureau International du Travail in Geneva, a person who had already supplied Le Corbusier with a citation by Francis Bacon and another by Charles Fourier.<sup>35</sup>

#### DECEIVING A FRONT POPULAIRE MINISTER

The euphoria created by the growth of a leftist mass movement between 1934 and 1936 and the impending victory of the Front Populaire raised hopes among many artists that the exhibition was about to be put under their direct control. Heated meetings, demonstrations, pamphlet distributions, and solidarity motions followed in rapid succession. Le Corbusier was mentioned often, and with adulation.

Carried away by this movement, Le Corbusier almost completely neglected the officials of the exhibition and ignored their pleas that he comply with the financial arrangements he had repeatedly promised, that is, to match their grant with the additional 1.5 million francs he needed. But, instead of looking elsewhere as he had promised (on 3 April 1936, he assured Gréber that he was about to put together a viable financial scheme of his own), he was now trying to secure a more generous grant from the exhibition itself. With this purpose in mind, he drew into his orbit, as mentioned, the leftist group *Jeunes 37* and wrote to Gréber, "The new articulation [the added group] will allow us to request from the Exhibition a different grant; 500,000 francs is absolutely miserable" (see Figure 9).<sup>36</sup>

On 29 May, urged on by Edmond Labbé, the exhibition's commissioner general, whose impatience was mounting,

Jacques Gréber telephoned Le Corbusier and followed up with a letter reiterating the conversation. He expressed concerns that, more than a year after the site and money were granted, time was running short. Gréber added that the landscaping of the future Parc Kellermann, which included the Temps Nouveaux site, was about to begin. He thus needed urgently—no later than 10 June—the exact location, footprint, and cost estimate for the building. Le Corbusier responded that plans and cost estimates would reach Gréber in a matter of a week at most. Gréber took notice, but felt it necessary to remind Le Corbusier that the grant and the site had been given to him on the condition that he find the additional money elsewhere. Gréber assured Le Corbusier that both he and Beaux-Arts director Huisman were "very favorably disposed" toward his project, but added that nothing above the promised sum was available. In case he could not secure additional money, Le Corbusier should work out a new project that could be accomplished with the sum of half a million francs. Gréber also reminded Le Corbusier that, according to the exhibition's bylaws, only architects who were winners at the competitions could be funded by the exhibition, and that Le Corbusier was a single exception to this rule. Gréber concluded by warning that the offer would be withdrawn if he failed to show, by 10 June, that he actually had at his command a source willing to supply the difference between the exhibition's grant and the actual cost of his building.<sup>37</sup>

Despite his tone, Gréber was perfectly conscious that Le Corbusier's absence would be a serious blow to the fair. It was precisely *because* the exhibition leaders wanted Le Corbusier on board that Gréber exerted pressure: if Le Corbusier continued to drag on with his project, hoping that a *deus ex machina* would solve his financial deficit, he would inevitably end up being excluded by force of circumstance. This is exactly what happened six months later.

In the intervening time, Le Corbusier carried his project from deadline postponement to deadline postponement. By mid-November, during Gréber's unexpected absence, exhibition commissioner general Labbé withdrew the grant and site. As soon as he heard about the catastrophe, Le Corbusier called upon Jean Zay, the education minister in the Front Populaire government and a friend since the days of the *Maison de la Culture*. Zay immediately asked for clarification from Labbé. The highly desirable site had been given away to the vice president of the city council, who sought a space in the same area—his electoral district—for a model youth hostel. The decision to take the site away from Le Corbusier could not be rescinded without a major scandal. Labbé's written answer to Zay cited, however, the difficulties the exhibition had experienced with Le Corbusier; his resistance to designing a temporary building, as required by the city; and his failure to produce a financial scheme that would

prove his ability to use the grant and the site effectively. Labbé also pointed out that the situation had dragged on for over a year, despite several warnings and deadline postponements.<sup>38</sup>

On 25 November, the art critic and historian Jean Cassou, who was a member of Jean Zay's staff at the time, showed Labbé's letter to Le Corbusier. Immediately, Le Corbusier wrote the minister a letter of three single-spaced pages denying Labbé's allegations and insisting that Labbé's claims were "absolutely arbitrary."<sup>39</sup> He asserted, contrary to all evidence, that the situation was under control, and that for the last eighteen months he had been ready to start building at any moment. It was the exhibition's representatives, he wrote, who opposed him; the Paris City Council had sabotaged him all along. Regarding the city's right to demolish the structures after the exhibition, Le Corbusier asserted, without a trace of the naïveté often ascribed to him, that he was "familiar with this clause in the Law but, since a large number of temporary constructions were to be built on the Kellermann Bastion, this little sentence struck me as one of pure form."<sup>40</sup> To impress the minister, he concluded with a statement that his project involved "the most prominent members world-wide of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne."<sup>41</sup>

In support of his case, Le Corbusier also provided Zay with carefully selected letters he had written to the exhibition leadership—but retyped and altered where needed. Crucial was the one of 9 June 1936, responding to Gréber's urgent telephone call and "ultimatum" letter, discussed earlier. Le Corbusier's altered letter of 9 June reads:

Dear Colleague,

I will be happy to respond to the questions in your letter dated 29 May 1936.

1. Please find enclosed the plans TN 3.409<sup>bis</sup> and TN 3.411<sup>bis</sup> which show the final location of the building as well as the precise dimensions of the building that *we will build with the 500.000 francs as well as the site Mr. Labbé granted us in his letter of March 11, 1936.*

2. Please find enclosed plans at three scales: [blank space left by Le Corbusier]

3. Please find enclosed the cost estimate of this construction. [Not provided by Le Corbusier.]

In one word, with no more commentaries, *our plans will show you that we are ready to start the work immediately and that our project is completely finished.*<sup>42</sup>

With the help of an ambiguous phrase ("the plans . . . which show the building that *we will build with the 500.000 francs as well as the site Mr. Labbé granted us in his letter of March 11, 1936*") the letter could imply that by 9 June 1936 Le Corbusier had a completed project; that the exhibition's grant was sufficient; and that Le Corbusier was ready to begin. Le

Corbusier, however, *did not* show the minister Gréber's reply of 11 June.

Dear Colleague,

I rush to answer your letter of 9 June. This letter, I must say, worries me considerably because you answered completely only half of my question, the half referring to the plans and cost estimates. But I am obliged to inform the Commissioner-General that you are [effectively] asking for a *new deadline* to find the money you need to match the grant we gave you. *You are still short of 1.500.000* (fifteen hundred thousand francs), salaries included. You should let us know as soon as possible of your exact plans regarding the financing of your project, and give us the names of people ready to pay for it. If this is possible, you will be welcome to start your work right away and, as far as I am concerned, I will be delighted.

Regarding the art-work that the Director-General of the Beaux-Arts is ready to finance [a grant for the artwork in addition to the exhibition's grant for the building], there has never been any problem with that. But what I want is to see you succeeding with your building.<sup>43</sup>

How could this letter—expressing concern that Le Corbusier was 1.5 million francs short out of 2 million—have been the answer to Le Corbusier's letter stating that the money was sufficient and building could start immediately? The explanation is simple. In his letter to Gréber of 9 June, Le Corbusier enclosed a total cost estimate which amounted to 1,914,455 francs—an estimate he withheld from the minister.<sup>44</sup> Reading in conjunction with this estimate, the muddled sentence becomes a bit clearer—it simply meant that Le Corbusier would use the grant offered him, but a million and half more was still needed. To justify to Zay his continual requests for additional funds Le Corbusier added: "We also gave [Gréber], in addition to these plans, a series of ten plans for the *other* project, estimated at two million and a half."<sup>45</sup> There was no "other project." The ten plans simply composed the complete portfolio of the spiral museum. This becomes evident only when the entire set of plans is examined.

This detailed chronology might seem superfluous, had the episode it describes not served as a basis for a widespread myth that Le Corbusier was persecuted and even excluded from the fair by "reactionary forces of academicism" and then rescued in extremis by Léon Blum himself. The French cultural world at the time accepted this myth, which prevails to this day.<sup>46</sup> The representatives of the Front (such as Zay, the education minister; Jean Monnet, the agriculture minister; and Jean Locquin, Léon Blum's delegate to the exhibition) ultimately did have to rescue Le Corbusier, but obviously for quite a different set of reasons.

What was then the actual course of events, between June and November, that led to the withdrawal of the grant and the site? How did Le Corbusier abuse the good will and confidence not only of Gréber, the architect in chief of an interna-

tional exhibition, but also of an important segment of the French intelligentsia?

Gréber's ultimatum on 29 May threw Le Corbusier into a fury. He wrote, almost immediately, a two-page note to his friend Paul Vaillant-Couturier, who was a member of the Comité d'Honneur. He referred to the Pavilion as "the highest didactic instrument ever conceived to explicate architecture and urbanism (the notion of the art of dwelling)." And yet, Le Corbusier raged, "the Exhibition has presented us with a *stern face* because we represent the radical reform that urbanism and architecture need today." He therefore asked Vaillant-Couturier to pressure the *Autorité* into granting him an additional 2 million francs to realize his project—a small amount "considering the Exhibition's budget of 800 million." After all, his pavilion would not only serve as "a didactic tool for public enlightenment," but would also be a "strong document the Authority will need when undertaking its own upcoming task: first and foremost, the general reorganization of the home [*logis*] in the machine civilization."<sup>47</sup>

Le Corbusier ended the letter by stating that Gréber's threat to withdraw the promised 500,000 francs "needed no comment." He also contacted the group Jeunes 1937, whose project depended on his own, urging them to exert pressure on the exhibition's directors.<sup>48</sup> To Romain Rolland, the Nobel prize-winning novelist who was on the Comité d'Honneur for the defense of the Musée des Temps Nouveaux, he wrote:

The fight continues and they are trying to push me out of the Exhibition, even though I received a 500,000 francs grant and a site. In this alarming situation, a Committee [the Comité d'Honneur] was created under the sponsorship of ARAGON, MALRAUX, GIDE, VAILLANT-COUTURIER. This Committee thinks it will be able to find the two million needed to build the project, either in the budget of the Exhibition, or in the budget of the newly elected City Council."<sup>49</sup>

Le Corbusier's letters achieved the desired effect. A call for the "defense" of the Temps Nouveaux was published and distributed by the Maison de la Culture as a leaflet. A public meeting with the committee was scheduled at the Salle Wagram. Informed by Le Corbusier's letter to Vaillant-Couturier, the leaflet urged that 1.5 million francs be found to build the pavilion and that an additional 410,000 francs be allocated for the original art work to be exhibited in it. The fair's organizers were criticized "for granting insufficient support" to a pavilion whose "mission is to truly advocate the new times."<sup>50</sup>

By now, Le Corbusier not only felt "besieged by innumerable enemies," but saw himself haunted by the Devil. In a long semi-allegorical pamphlet with mystical overtones—"Satan peut toujours être quelque part" (Satan can always be somewhere)—Le Corbusier claimed, using an imaginary

dialogue with "L'autorité juvénile et propre" (the Front Populaire), that the "riches of the Machine-Civilization [were] diverted and wasted by satanic forces" [the leaders of the Exhibition]: "The Exhibition of 1937 [was] born under the Devil's spell."<sup>51</sup> Le Corbusier concluded his pamphlet, which he planned to read at a second meeting of the Maison de la Culture on 3 July, urging the government to cancel "this event of the ancien régime" and schedule instead a new World's Exhibition for 1941.<sup>52</sup> He equally urged the Maison de la Culture to give up discussing 1937 at its upcoming meeting of 3 July and turn it instead into a "MEETING POUR LA PREPARATION DE L'EXPOSITION DE 1941."

Whatever happened at the meeting, this was the time when Le Corbusier decided (given that in 1932 he had been prevented from building the entire exhibition himself) that in 1937 he would "build" just the "Program of [his] 1941 Exhibition." In other words, instead of "printing the book" (a full-blown exhibition), he would merely print the book's "table of contents." Clearly, he was looking for a face-saving exit from a major professional debacle, and, as we shall see, this "table of contents"—a series of illustrated demonstration panels and exhibits—was the most important thing he designed and built for 1937.

#### PIERRE JEANNERET AND THE TEMPS NOUVEAUX PAVILION

On 6 July 1936, three days after the Maison de la Culture meeting at the Salle du Petit Journal, Le Corbusier departed for Brazil. Left behind, Jeanneret, with Charlotte Perriand's assistance, spent the month of July with Gréber trying to find alternative sources for financing the "spiral" museum, as the architect-in-chief had generously granted Le Corbusier's office a new deadline postponement.<sup>53</sup> On Gréber's advice, Jeanneret's efforts were directed toward the Front Populaire ministries that might be interested in the complex program of the museum itself and in its dependencies, such as the Maison des Jeunes. None of the ministries, however, gave more than vague promises. On 24 August Gréber wrote back to Jeanneret urging a solution:

In reference to my earlier letters, I would like to know if you managed to raise the money you counted on to match the budget you will need for the Palais des Temps Modernes [*sic*]. You know under what conditions you have been promised a site and a grant.

Only 8 months are left before the opening of the Exhibition and I am hard pressed by the Commissioner-General to get a final answer from you.

In case you would not be able to show that you can obtain the additional funds you need for your project, I will be obliged, to my greatest regret, to dispose of the site that was offered to you conditionally.<sup>54</sup>

The letter ended with a third deadline—31 August—for the additional financing to be found. The message reached Jeanneret after the deadline, on 7 September, at La Sarraz where he was, as he put it, “attending a Congress on architecture.”<sup>55</sup> Meanwhile, Gréber sent yet another desperate letter to Jeanneret. He wrote, “I would greatly appreciate it if you would be so kind as to write me back immediately and let me know if you are now able to give us some assurances on the financing of the Palais des Temps Modernes [*sic*], as I have to take a final decision in this respect by the end of the week.”<sup>56</sup>

On 25 September, Gréber finally met with Jeanneret and explained the pressure he was under, and the efforts he had made to preserve Le Corbusier’s site. In a last-ditch effort to salvage the museum, and given that Le Corbusier was still absent, the chief architect postponed the deadline for a fourth time. He even suggested some new approaches with domestic or foreign firms. He advised Jeanneret that, if the funds were not obtained within the next seven days or so, from either the government or private sources, he should give up on the spiral museum and present as soon as possible a new design for which the exhibition funds would be sufficient.<sup>57</sup>

The last-minute search for alternative financing of the project, however, produced no results. While remarkably absent throughout this dramatic process, Le Corbusier relied primarily on Jeanneret for a version of the project that interested him little.<sup>58</sup> Whatever the container was to be, at this point he cared primarily about the “program,” that is, the “table of contents” of his imaginary 1941 exhibition. Soon after his return from Brazil, he left again for Italy to attend a meeting at the Volta Royal Academy.<sup>59</sup> Pierre Jeanneret was now, in all likelihood, in charge of the pavilion. He first transformed the museum into a simple but delicate casket that would house the “1941 Program.” The new Temps Nouveaux was a pristine cubic volume, the dimensions of the spiral museum’s central core. Around this core “sans façades,” an orthogonal spiral could unfold further whenever a need for expansion arose. The future deployment of the spiral would be marked on the ground with landscaping.<sup>60</sup> For now, the building would be made of panels, thin Eternit and Rhodoid membranes that could be dismantled and reassembled at will. The “imploding,” trapezoidal section of the pavilion was based on the fast-assembly vacation houses Jeanneret was currently studying [*Figure 11*].<sup>61</sup> This would allow the displayed boards, ramps, and pathways of the exposition to be lit through an impluvium. Added to this Mediterranean imagery, emblematic of the cradle of democracy, was a small open-air amphitheater, alluding perhaps to the democratic character of the pavilion itself. The pavilion’s Rhodoid wall served as a backdrop resonator and movie screen. The disassembled container and content of the museum, packed into two distinct and manageable compact modular blocks, would be ready to

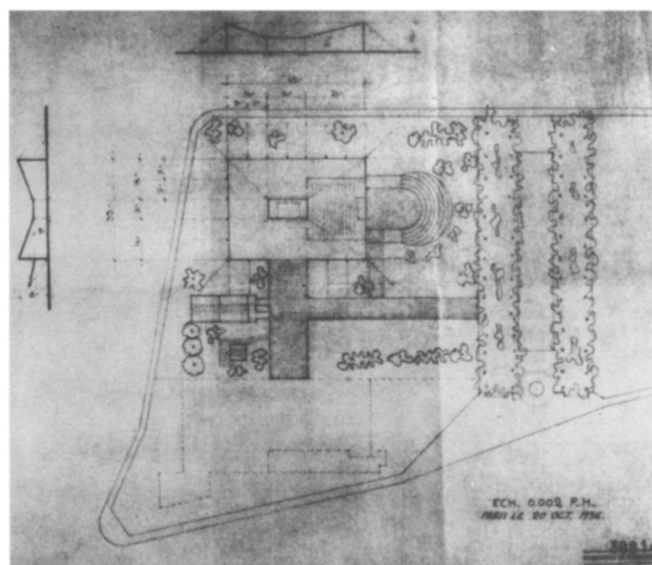
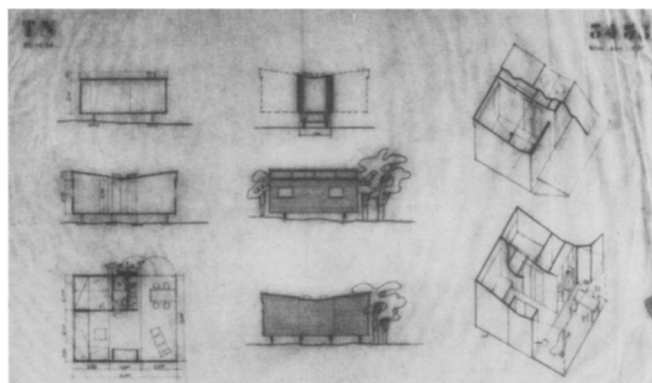


FIGURE 11: Pierre Jeanneret, mobile vacation house, 20 October 1936, collapsible and transportable on wheels

FIGURE 12: Pierre Jeanneret, Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, Paris exhibition, 22 October 1936, first canvas version with impluvium and open-air theater. Note the same imploding section as in Jeanneret’s vacation house.

travel throughout France, heralding the new times. In this version, the cost of the pavilion would not exceed the 500,000 francs the exhibition had offered Le Corbusier more than a year earlier.

Jeanneret took this proposal to Gréber on 14 October 1936. In the course of the meeting, a new idea was discussed: Rhodoid panels could be replaced with canvas [*Figure 12*]. The pavilion would cost less and would gain in lightness and mobility. Gréber elaborated on the virtues of Austrian canvas, used for the Salzburg theater.<sup>62</sup> Jeanneret had already amassed considerable experience with small-and large-scale canvas structures. He had been involved with a broad program of experimentation with canvas, directly related to the Front Populaire leisure-time policies of the newly created Ministère des Loisirs (ministry of leisure). In addition to his involvement with canvas vacation houses, a response to the recent introduction of paid vacations for all workers, he was designing in rein-

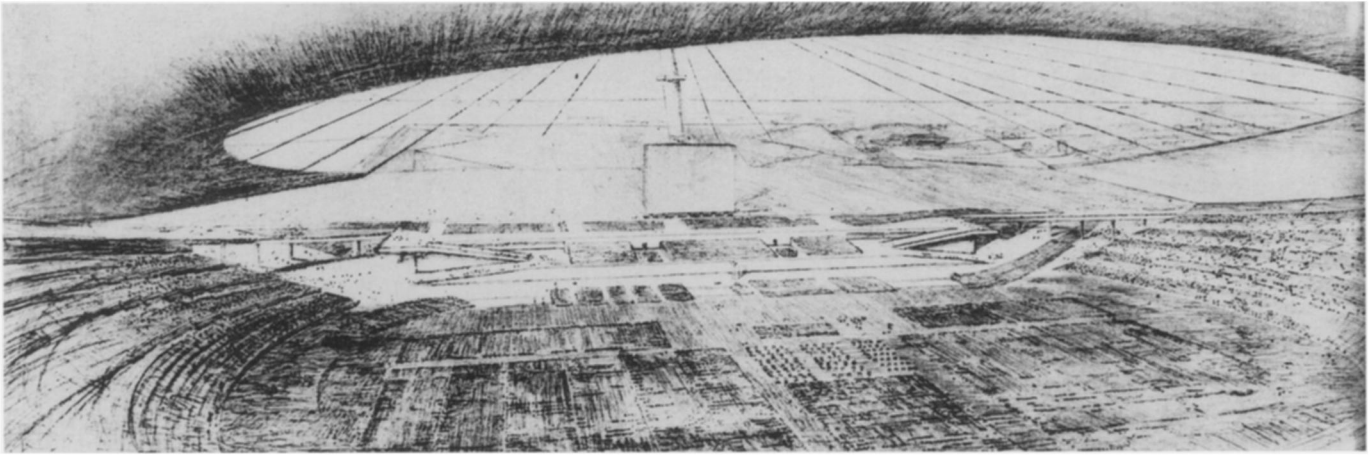


FIGURE 13: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, Centre de réjouissances populaires, Paris, 1936 (initiated 1922?), amphitheatrical stadium spanned with giant canvas held in tension by one single central pylon, exhibited in the final Temps Nouveaux Pavillon

forced concrete a multipurpose stadium for 100,000 people, probably started while he was still employed with the Perret brothers in 1922. The stadium, which he called Centre de réjouissances populaires, was also covered with a giant canvas tent, prefiguring the work of engineers such as Frei Otto [Figure 13]. Finally, Jeanneret was also working on a series of canvas pavilions commissioned through the Maison de la Culture for the Communist Party's traditional Fête de l'Humanité.

The Temps Nouveaux Pavillon was now launched on a new course, informed by Jeanneret's own architectural research and technical expertise Le Corbusier did not possess at the time. The pavilion's volume, that is to say, the suspended canvas container and its handsome structure, recalled Jeanneret's earlier work. The central massive pylon of the stadium served as a model for the pylons of the pavilion [Figures 14, 15]. By 4 November the impluvium was eliminated [Figure 16], but the imploding, trapezoidal profile, recalling Jeanneret's experimental houses, remained (see Figures 11, 12, and 21).<sup>63</sup> Light now flooded the space through a translucent yellow canvas top.<sup>64</sup>

The project was ready on 4 November. Freed from the need to accommodate the spiral immediately, the floor plan was abstracted into a square, a sacred geometrical form. In this sense, the new canvas pavilion already carried the future in its folds, as it were, both geometrically and symbolically.<sup>65</sup> While Le Corbusier sketched the conceptual and spatial unfolding of the exhibits, the "program" [Figure 17], Jeanneret took charge of the structural deployment of the ramps and platforms where the exhibits would be displayed, as he carefully designed every detail [Figure 18]. The rotating entrance door, probably Le Corbusier's, emulated the delicate curve of Jeanneret's pylons [Figure 19].

The collaborators at the Rue de Sèvres office were by now viewing the entire enterprise as a collective effort.<sup>66</sup> They

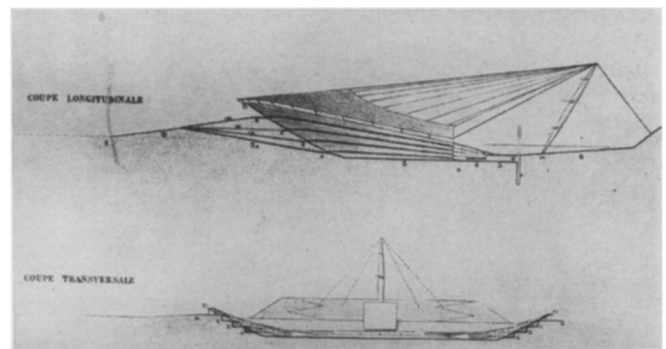


FIGURE 14: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, Centre de réjouissances populaires, Paris, 1936, section of the stadium with central pylon

finished the detailed plans of the canvas volume, ramps, and platforms by 10 November, and Charlotte Perriand, the job captain, presented the plans to Louis Hautecoeur, the new Directeur des Beaux-Arts. On November 23, Hautecoeur granted the project an additional 130,000 francs for the purchase of artwork, which for Le Corbusier meant the graphic translation of his 1941 Program into images—the "visualization" of his table of contents.<sup>67</sup>

In a joint effort with Juan Mirò, Jose-Luis Sert, Jean Effel, and others, Le Corbusier used this grant to infuse the interior with color, lettering, and overall graphic effects.<sup>68</sup> This gave the space the stamp of his art rather than of his architecture [Figure 20]. He called the interior "un grand livre d'images," as if referring to the colorful imagery of a medieval cathedral. The dominant red, white, and blue of the front façade—also dominant in the cathedral rose windows—was meant as much to appeal to the Popular Front's republicanism as to respond aesthetically to Gréber's insistence that color be used pervasively in the exhibition's architecture [Figure 21].<sup>69</sup> At the same time, this arrangement of colors, matching the French flag both in layout and proportion, would act, he must have hoped, as a rebuttal to

the attacks against him as an alleged “Trojan horse of Bolshevism.”<sup>70</sup>

The interior displays of the museum, of which Le Corbusier took charge by the end of December 1936, were to cover more than 1,200 square meters divided into three areas—urbanism, sculpture, and painting—with thirteen sections (see Figure 20). Adding to the medieval character of the setting was a temporary workshop cabin, placed in the pavilion’s vicinity, where the exhibits would be assembled (see Figure 16). Le Corbusier explicitly requested from the Education Ministry that such a *loge* be installed on the building site.<sup>71</sup>

Before Jeanneret delivered the new project on 10 November, however, Jacques Gréber left abruptly for Washington, as the participation of the United States was seriously threatened because the funds Congress had voted were insufficient. The opening of the exhibition was approaching amid continual

labor strikes, work disruptions, and last-minute demands from the new Front Populaire government for additional sites, while most pavilions were dragging far behind schedule, as the fair’s commissioner Edmond Labbé later dramatically described in his *Rapport Général*. In Gréber’s absence, Labbé gave Le Corbusier’s site to the city council’s vice president, André Boulard, who knew that Le Corbusier’s project had been hindered by insufficient funds for almost a year, and may have been unaware that Gréber and Jeanneret had arrived at a solution just a few days earlier.

After hearing Labbé, and after having read Le Corbusier’s three-page retort, as we saw earlier, Education Minister Jean Zay referred Le Corbusier to Jean Locquin, Léon Blum’s representative to the exhibition. The two met on 17 December. With aplomb, Le Corbusier wrote to Locquin the next day, “I wish to thank you with all my heart for the friendly recep-

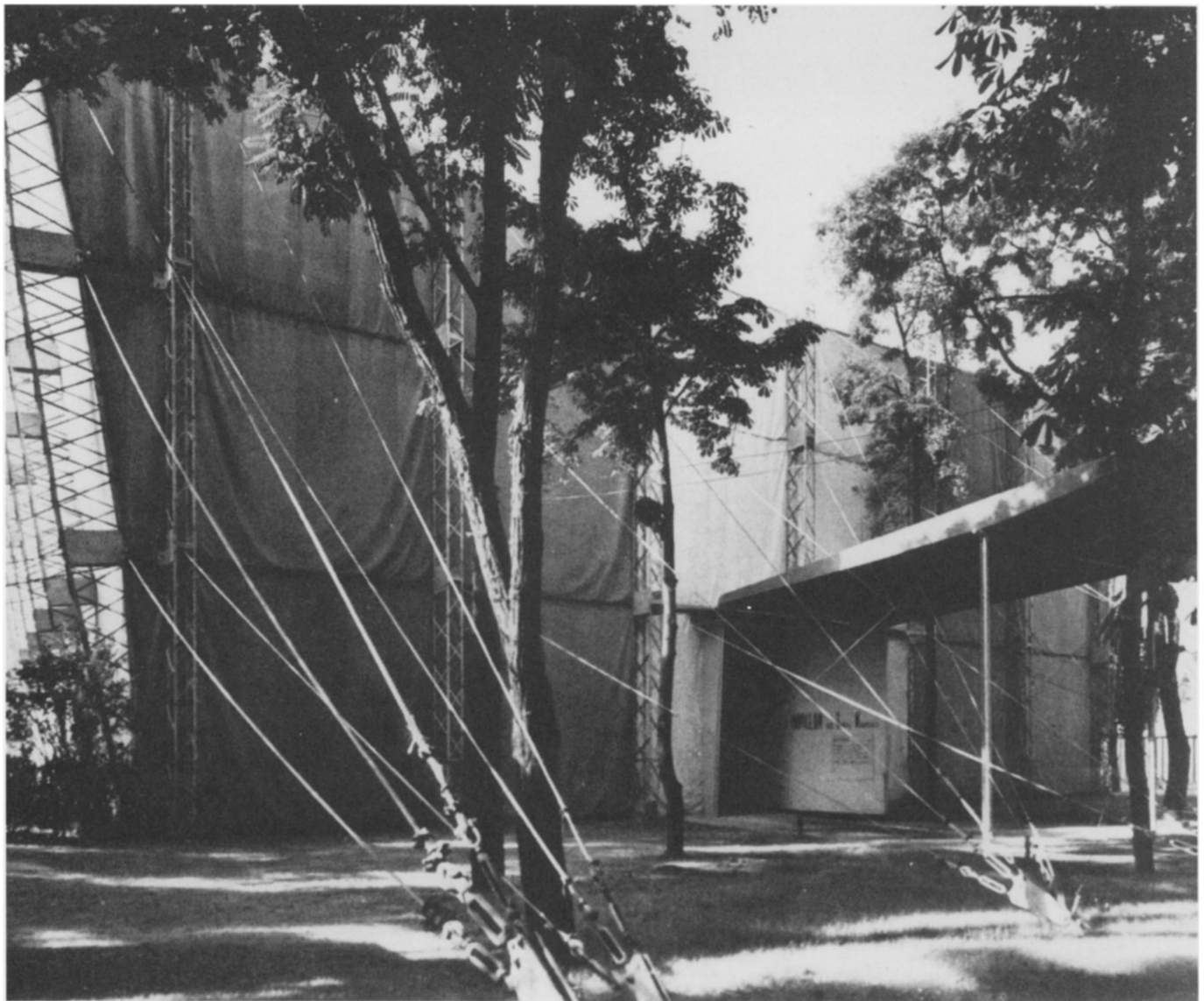


FIGURE 15: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, International Exhibition, 1937, main façade and entrance in blue, white, and red panels. Note the pylons, left, similar to those at the stadium (Figure 14).

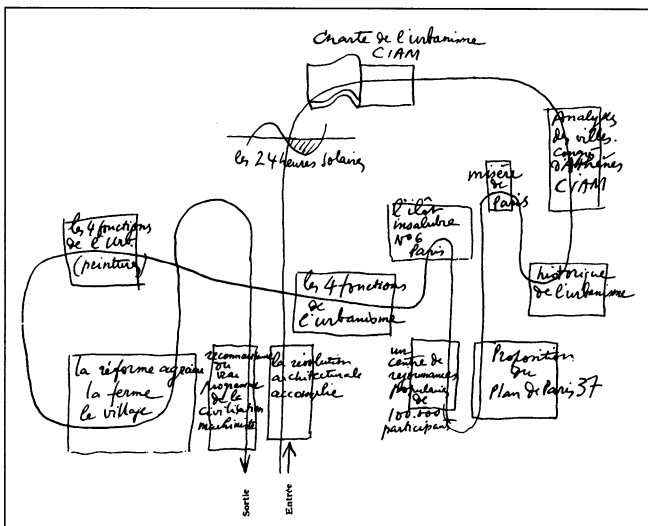
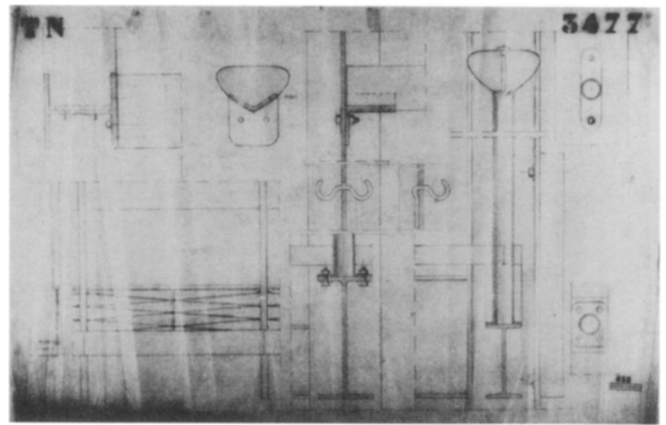
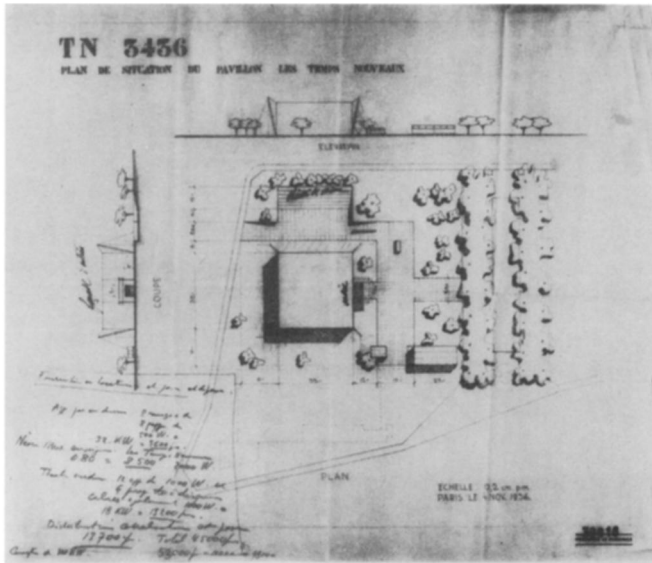


FIGURE 16: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, International Exhibition, 4 November 1936, second canvas version without impluvium  
 FIGURE 17: Le Corbusier, spatial organization of the pavilion's thirteen themes

FIGURE 18: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, canvas Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, December 1936, details of ramps  
 FIGURE 19: Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, canvas Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, International Exhibition, 1937, revolving entrance door, pylon, and awning

tion you gave me last night. Since 1932, you are the first in this Exhibition affair to have given me sincere encouragement. You could see for yourself that the requests I had in mind were both very reasonable and very modest.”<sup>72</sup>

Following some bargaining and Jean Zay’s efforts to obtain a new site, Jean Monnet, the agriculture minister, decided to offer Le Corbusier one section of his own ministry’s site at the Maillot Annex, meant originally to absorb the overflow from the exhibition’s main grounds. Monnet was, after all, a former member of Le Corbusier’s Comité d’Honneur at the Maison de la Culture. At the same annex, Charlotte Perriand was working for him on her own pavilion, “visualizing” the agrarian policies of his ministry, in collaboration with Fernand Léger. Le Corbusier also recovered his grant, but besides the Beaux-Arts grant neither more nor less was disbursed than

what the exhibition had offered him since the very beginning: a grant of 500,000 francs, and a site outside the main grounds.

**THE FINAL TEMPS NOUVEAUX PAVILION**

On 17 July 1937, two months after the official opening of the International Exhibition, the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion was finally inaugurated, even though considerable work remained to be done inside. The canvas was put up on 10 June, amid a thunderous summer shower that almost brought it down.<sup>73</sup> The pavilion was fully furnished by mid-August.

Before leaving for a vacation on 13 August, Pierre Jeanneret wrote Le Corbusier, who had already left, about the work still to be done. More important, he referred to Jean Locquin, Blum’s representative to the exhibition, who complained bitterly that Le Corbusier had forgotten him and had omitted his name from the official list of guests for the grand opening of the pavilion. Jeanneret quoted Locquin as saying the list included “people who had done much less for Le Corbusier” than he had. Rather depressed, according to Jeanneret, Locquin also complained that he was receiving “from everybody”

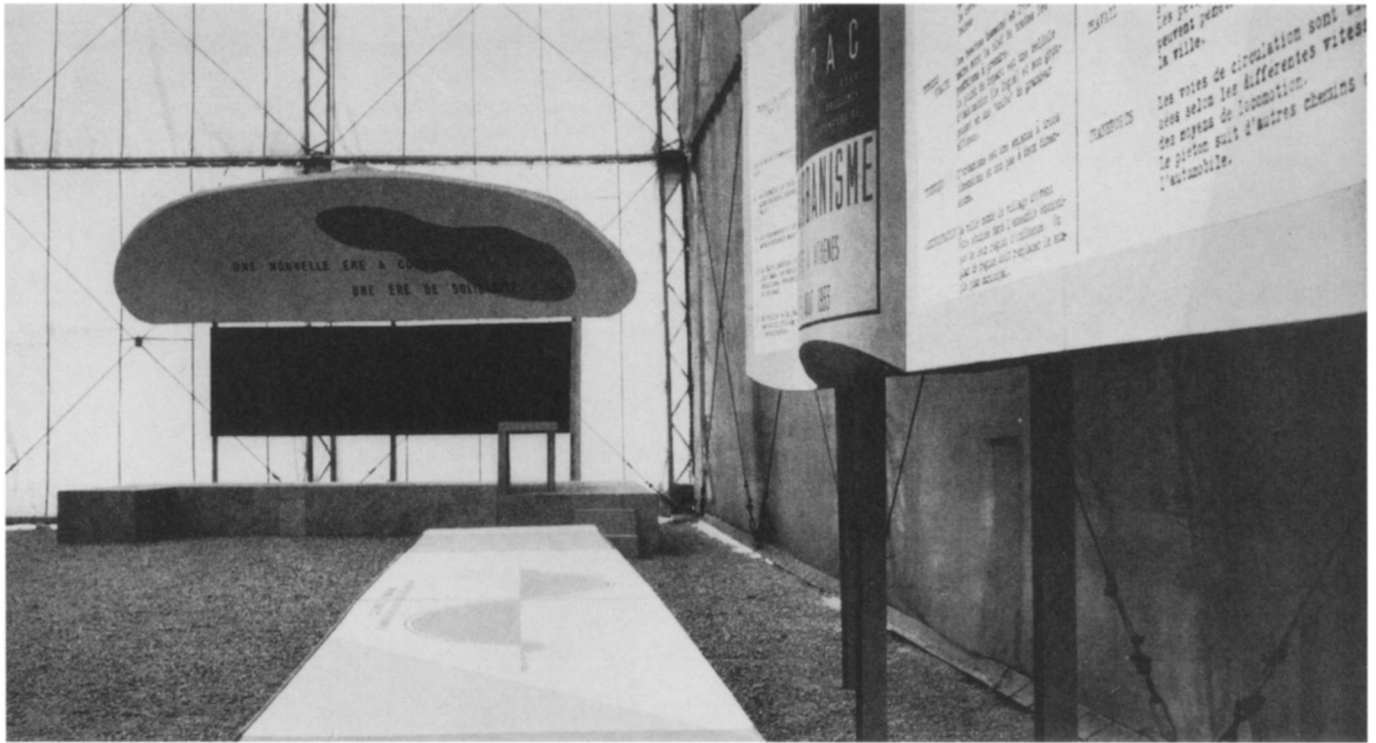


FIGURE 20: Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, canvas Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, International Exhibition, 1937, view of the speaker's platform

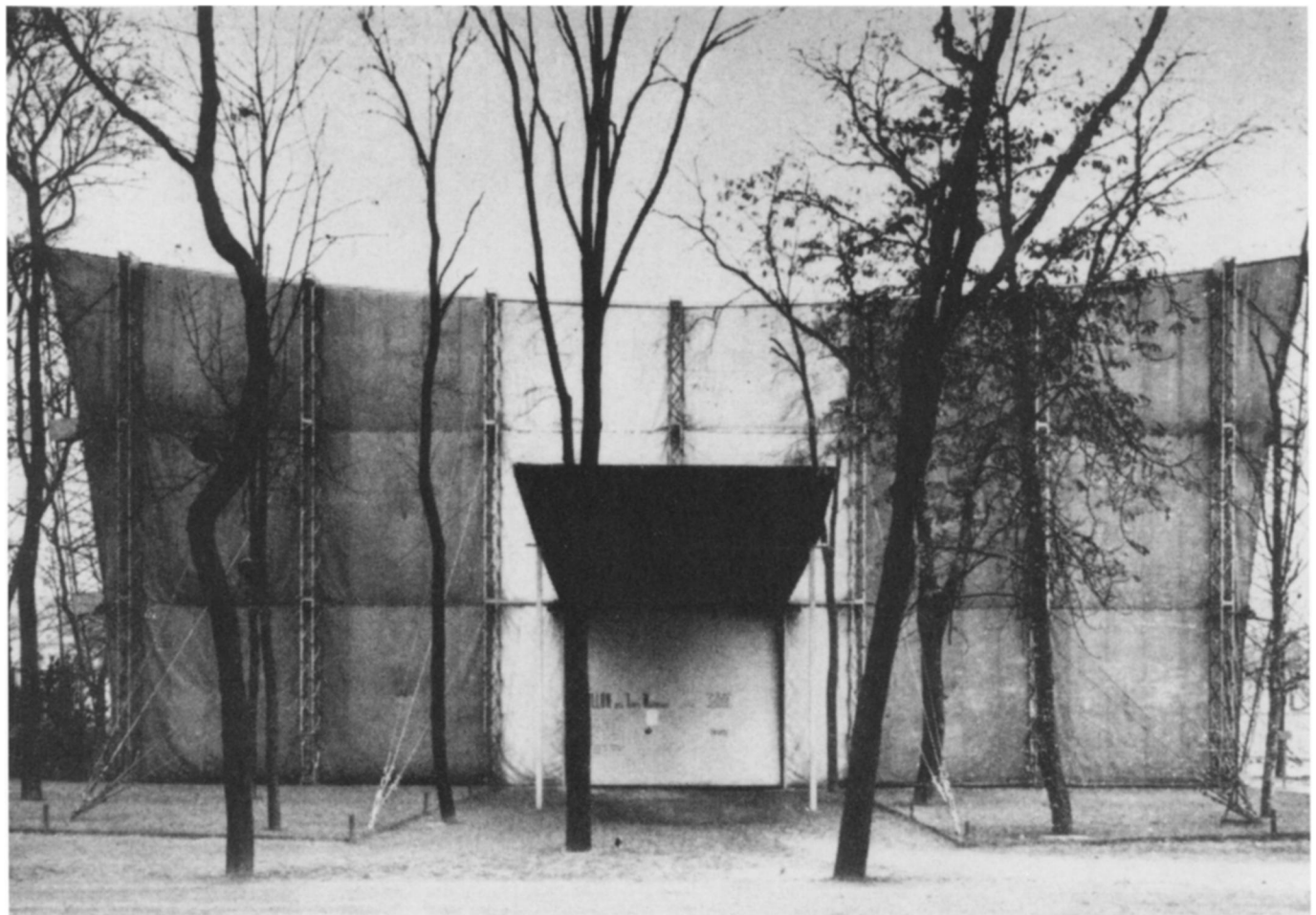


FIGURE 21: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, canvas Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, International Exhibition, 1937, the main façade as a French flag in blue, white, and red

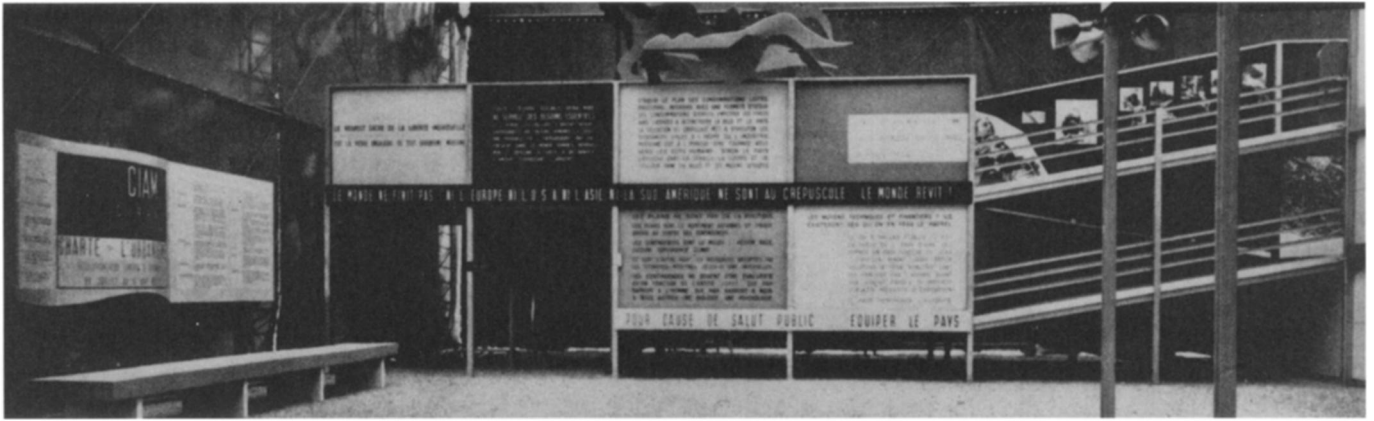


FIGURE 22: Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, canvas Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, Paris Exhibition, 1937, interior view of ramps and platforms with CIAM Charter at left

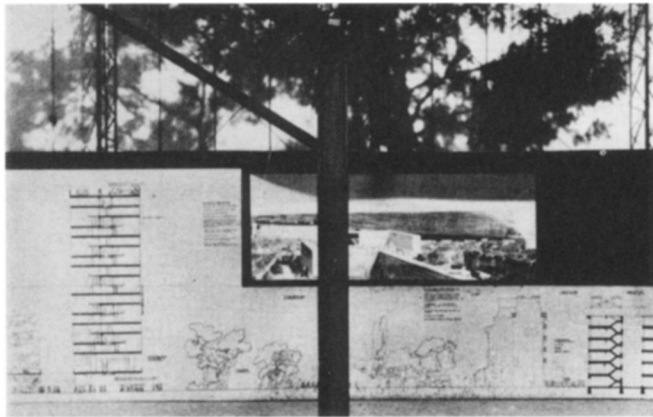


FIGURE 23: Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, canvas Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, International Exhibition, 1937, interior view with shadows of trees projected on the canvas

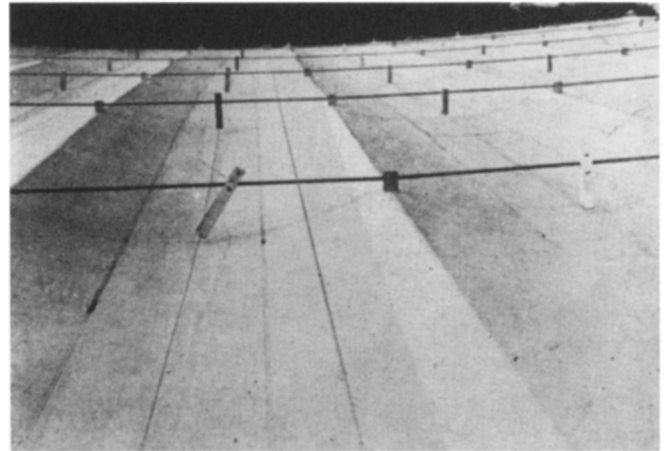


FIGURE 24: Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, Temps Nouveaux Pavilion, International Exhibition, 1937, suspended canvas roof

harsh criticism about the pavilion, including the opinion that “this was not Architecture”—a probable allusion to Auguste Perret’s well-known remark that a tent did not qualify as architecture. As a consolation—and quite in tune with the spirit of the time and his own political leanings—Jeanneret added that “one of the gardeners of the site told me that our Pavilion was one of the most interesting of all at the Exhibition.”<sup>74</sup>

The dynamic charge of a spiral open to the *temps nouveaux* was now replaced by “radiant promises” concealed in a translucent cocoon. As is evident from his *Des Canons, des Munitions? Merci! Des Logis . . . SVP*, a book relating the story of the pavilion, Le Corbusier did not see the latter as an achievement in its own right. He mainly considered it a shelter for the program of the real exhibition, the “book,” as he called it, the one he would organize in 1941.<sup>75</sup> For now, the book’s “table of contents”—the future exhibition’s program—was enshrined in Jeanneret’s soft envelope. Clearly distinguished from each other, the envelope and the program were ultimately destined for separation, like the womb and the embryo. The idea of building a program implied a disjunction between the building’s program and its envelope, the “content” and the “con-

tainer,” the substance and the skin. The disjunction between purpose, spatial program, and shape of the building resulted in an organic whole (Le Corbusier’s “biologie architecturale”), where the skin determined a volume unrelated to the organs: a volume undefined by the internal ordering of functions. The contrast between the rigid, opaque slabs and panels and the platonic abstractness of an elusive envelope catching moving shadows from an outside world accounted for the surprising lyricism of the whole [Figures 22, 23]. The collaboration between Jeanneret and Le Corbusier, reflected in the harmonious blend of the pavilion’s container and content, seemed to have reached its fullest expression.

Conceived, in Le Corbusier’s terms, as a “seed” of the future exhibition of 1941, the pavilion found its progeny instead, much later, in the chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut at Ronchamp. Begun in 1950, and leading to the work in Chandigarh, the chapel represented a radical turning point in the Corbusian architectural program.<sup>76</sup> Structurally one of the most complex designs Le Corbusier ever undertook, it could be explained in part as owing to the lessons of Jeanneret’s technical and formal expertise derived from the study of

canvas architecture and large-scale reinforced concrete structures. Itself stretched, as it were, over a gridiron armature resonant with the system of cables that held the pavilion's canvas, the chapel's immense concrete sail, floating above the nave, was held in suspension from similar diminutive contact points [Figures 24, 25].<sup>77</sup> In each case, the building's section forms a trapezoidal profile topped with a soft, broadly curved, inverted vault, already seen in Jeanneret's mobile houses. From then on, this feature never left Le Corbusier's mind [Figures 26, 27, 28, 29].

### CONCLUSION

Once convinced by an idea, Le Corbusier had a rare ability to infuse with the same poetic intensity both the grandest and the

most minute projects—even when they were not his own. Whatever he dealt with, be it the cathartic reassembling of Paris or the delicate spanning of a simple canvas cube, he imbued the work with some transcendental quality. He almost never considered a scheme that would not be at the same time a logical imperative, an element of some other, much grander design. He never imagined a space that was not at least implicitly endowed with a broader teleological intent—in this case the program for his hypothetical 1941 exhibition, which he colorfully injected into the pavilion's canvas container. The lyrical interpretation he gave of the pavilion through photo-

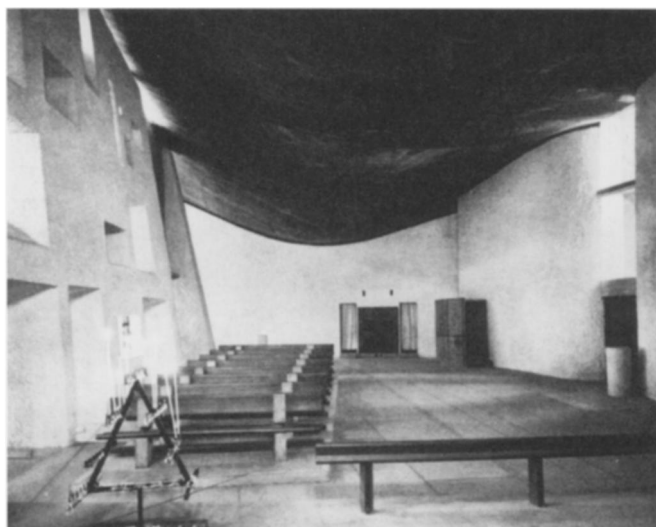
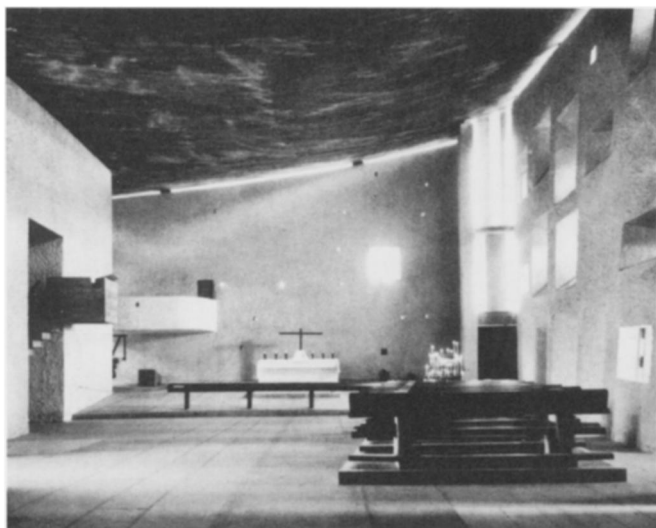


FIGURE 25: Le Corbusier, Notre-Dame-du-Haut, Ronchamp, France, 1950, interior view, suspension of the inverted sail vault from diminutive contact points (note similarities with the stadium, Figure 14)

FIGURE 26: Le Corbusier, Notre-Dame-du-Haut, Ronchamp, France, 1950, interior view of sail vault and trapezoidal wall

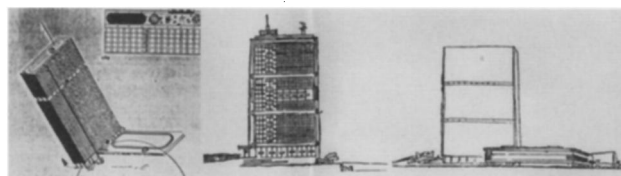
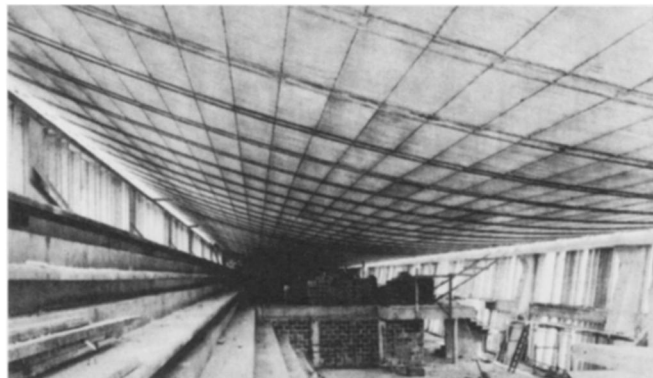


FIGURE 27: Le Corbusier, Maison de la Culture, Firminy, France, 1956–1965, interior view with suspended canvas

FIGURE 28: Le Corbusier, School of Architecture, Chandigarh, India, 1952

FIGURE 29: (left to right) Ivan Leonidov, Ministry of Industry competition entry, 1929; Le Corbusier, a high-rise for Algiers, 1938; Le Corbusier, United Nations Headquarters, New York, 1945

graphs and comments in the book he later wrote about it was one of the clearest comments on his approach to architecture and, in a sense, to the problem of authorship itself.<sup>78</sup>

Still, he never unambiguously acknowledged Jeanneret's very specific and significant role. Le Corbusier's charismatic fervor and talent, which Jeanneret was always the first to celebrate, made such unchallenged appropriations possible.<sup>79</sup> These appropriations occurred most often through literary polemics that lent the work both its publicity and its teleological power. Significantly, Le Corbusier valued such polemics and literary interpretations—those “beaux livres” in which he recycled ideas, not always his own—almost as much as the built artifact itself. Like his projects, but more intensely than them, these literary assemblages served as codes and paradigms of some other, transcendent reality.

From the grandiose project of a Radiant City to be started in Paris on the occasion of an International Exhibition, Le Corbusier's seven successive proposals were ultimately reduced to a simple tent conceived by his cousin. Le Corbusier's long avoidance of the “pavilloner” syndrome and his pursuit of a permanent structure was resolved through a witty paradox. Permanency was to be achieved with canvas, the material of an archetypal anti-architecture, contradicting the solid, enduring, and firmly rooted architectural object that was Le Corbusier's whole mark. Celebrating the prearchitectural, nomadic age and echoing the poetics of wandering entertainers and popular tribunes, the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion acquired its permanency through its ephemeral nature. It was a body of sculpted spaces that could be folded and raised again at will. The pavilion embodied the essence of an artwork that could be reconstructed repeatedly anywhere.

Ultimately, however, the reconstruction did not occur. The canvas structure was never raised again.<sup>80</sup> The “permanency” reemerged only in the form of a “beau livre”—of a virtual museum. The book, *Des Canons, des Munitions?*, was in many ways aimed at justifying not only Le Corbusier's troubling inability to bring about the union of architecture and modern building technology that was the bedrock of his ideology, but also at masking a major professional debacle.<sup>81</sup> Through clever publications like this one, Le Corbusier later managed to convince the public of his own version of the story. Thus he ultimately cast opprobrium on the exhibition of 1937 itself, as a center of conservative, academist satraps, from which he, and many other progressive artists, had to be salvaged by the Socialist government of Léon Blum. Similar to this manipulation of the media was Le Corbusier's adroitness in instrumentalizing his shifting political alliances, pointing to his ideological indifference and an absence of any substantial political evolution in the period between the two world wars.

Whereas formal connections between the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion and the seminal chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut

seem rather convincing, the discovery of the key role Jeanneret played in the design of the pavilion naturally raises the intriguing question of Jeanneret's influence on the chapel. More generally, while Jeanneret's role in the design of the pavilion may represent an initial step toward assessing his stature as architect, his actual achievement in the Rue de Sèvres office is one that, no doubt, should invite a broader investigation leading to a more precise attribution of authorship of the canonical *Œuvre Complète*. A better understanding of Jeanneret's role as Le Corbusier's associate could add some nuances to the understanding of Le Corbusier's work itself.<sup>82</sup>

## POSTSCRIPT

At the close of the Paris exhibition of 1937, looking back at his victories and defeats, Le Corbusier mused over the flaws in the methods he used in the past, desperately seeking an access to the *Autorité*, to the levers of power that would finally enable him to undertake a fundamental reform of the human condition. After two decades of unsuccessful efforts to force his convictions on what he believed to be the *Autorité*, he was beginning to doubt the correctness of his approach: “May be that just by starting small at first,” he suggested in late February 1938 to Philippe Serre, his friend and the former labor minister, “one can open the doors more easily later on.” Trying to redefine his strategies accordingly, he asked the minister, “Wouldn't there be a way, in order to penetrate the *Cercle des Grands Travaux d'Etat* [Large Government Public Works], to join any odd Ministry, on any occasion?”<sup>83</sup>

Whatever Philippe Serre's response, Le Corbusier found the “odd Ministry” on “any occasion” when he joined the Vichy government in 1941. This was also, ironically, the year of his imaginary “World's Exhibition of 1941.”<sup>84</sup>

## Notes

This essay is based on research begun in 1989 as part of my doctoral dissertation under Stanford Anderson at MIT. I presented parts of it at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, Seattle, in 1995. I benefited greatly from valuable comments and editorial suggestions from colleagues and friends on earlier versions of this paper, and am particularly indebted to Mary McLeod, Francesco Passanti, Sarah Williams Ksiazek, and Richard Cleary. I am also grateful to Charlotte Perriand for interviews on several occasions between June 1989 and July 1996. Research has been supported in part by a grant from the University of Texas Research Institute.

<sup>1</sup> See Kenneth Frampton's claim in *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London, 1992), 228.

<sup>2</sup> Such assertions are usually based on Le Corbusier's own claims in a book he published after the close of the 1937 exhibition. See Le Corbusier, *Des Canons, des Munitions? Merci! Des Logis . . . SVP: Monographie du “Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux” à l'Exposition Internationale “Art et Technique” de Paris 1937* (Cannons, ammunitions No thanks! Give us homes, please: A monograph on the Pavilion des Temps Nouveaux . . . ; Paris, 1938). Le Corbusier refers to his dealings with the exhibition in similar terms in the second edition of his *Ville radiieuse* (Paris, 1965; first published, Paris, 1933) See also the English translation, *The Radiant City* (New York, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> See Pascal Ory, “Le front Populaire,” *Exposition de 1937 Cinquenaire* (Paris, 1987), 32; William Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.,

1987), 413. See also Mary McLeod, "Urbanism and Utopia: Le Corbusier from Regional Syndicalism to Vichy" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> From 1855 on, each French Exposition Universelle was conceived and built as a homogenous space by a single authoritarian figure, predominantly under the influence of Saint-Simonian technocratic concepts, themselves not foreign to Le Corbusier. In the spirit of French nineteenth-century utopias, he considered for a while reviving his Cité Mondiale of 1937, initially designed for Geneva in 1927 with Paul Otlet, director of the Palais Mondial in Brussels.

The International Exhibition of 1937, officially called "Exposition internationale des arts et techniques appliquées à la vie moderne," was the first French world's exhibition to be conceived exclusively as an assemblage of pavilions designed by a plethora of architects, a concept Le Corbusier despised. The exhibition's chief architect, Jacques Gréber, designed only a master plan.

<sup>5</sup> In his book *Des Canons, des Munititions?* (see n. 2), Le Corbusier claimed that all his projects were banned from the exhibition; in fact, apart from the Vincennes project, they were all accepted, and he even received, as recounted below, a grant from the exhibition as a special favor to him personally. The main problem was the size of the projects, and Le Corbusier's inability to raise funds from the building industry, an essential element of his urban and housing reform strategy.

<sup>6</sup> Le Corbusier produced an anonymous brochure he sent to a national competition organized on the occasion of the future exhibition. During the 1930s he sent his brochure to a number of public figures in order to support his claim to full control over the organization of the exhibition.

<sup>7</sup> The housing exhibition, itself a segment of his Radiant City, was conceived as a starting point for the radical transformation of Paris along an east-west axis.

<sup>8</sup> In the spring of 1934, in London, Le Corbusier requested the executive body of CIAM, the Comité International pour la Réalisation des Problèmes d'Architecture Contemporaine (CIRPAC), to get involved with his project. He deliberately created the impression that CIAM would play a much greater role than the one he actually had in mind. His intention was not so much to share the project with other leading CIAM members, as was the case, for instance, with the Stuttgart Weissenhof Siedlung exhibition organized by Mies van der Rohe, but rather to secure a broader, international backing for his own project. Le Corbusier's manipulation of various CIAM members to this effect caused serious conflicts within the organization. He also provoked a scandal with unauthorized use of the name of Eugène Beaudouin, a CIAM member, in an official letter to the exhibition. In this letter Le Corbusier presented Beaudouin as a collaborator in his own project and implied Beaudouin's financial responsibility without ever contacting him. Le Corbusier was trying to shore up his own project through the use of Beaudouin's prestigious Prix de Rome title. Embarrassed by the discovery of his maneuver, but not willing to plead guilty, Le Corbusier even threatened Cor van Eesteren, CIAM's president, with resignation from CIAM. (Le Corbusier to Cor van Eesteren, 29 December 1934; Foundation Le Corbusier [hereafter FLC] H2-13 145).

<sup>9</sup> This proposal met with an enthusiastic reception from the exhibition's chief architect. He found Le Corbusier's idea to be exactly what he himself had thought should be done at the Bastion. (Jacques Gréber to Le Corbusier, 6 March 1935; FLC H2-13 192).

<sup>10</sup> See the carpenters' estimate, FLC H2-13 232. Without specifying how he would manage to build a fifteen-story wooden skyscraper, Le Corbusier wrote to Gréber,

We will build at the Kellermann Bastion a complete, life-size model according to the plan. We have translated our concept into a temporary structure that will maintain all the educational aspects of the program. This means that we will build on the Kellermann Bastion a full-blown model of the dwelling, i.e., at real scale, in accordance with the plans T CIAM 3.309 to 3.314 completed in March 1935. By doing so, we will provide [the public] with all the elements needed to evaluate the relationship between the building and the surrounding space: architectural and urbanistic event. (Le Corbusier to Gréber, 3 October 1935; FLC H2-13 238).

This seems to indicate that Le Corbusier may have been less interested in establishing his proclaimed "Statut du Logis des Temps Nouveaux" ("Housing statute for new times"), than in testing some *formal* aspects of his T-CIAM project. His own justification for accepting a surrogate (to provide the public "with all the elements needed to evaluate the relationship between the building and the surrounding space") clearly indicates that he would have contented himself

with probing the *sculptural* effect of the structure.

<sup>11</sup> *Pavilloner*, or the superficial business of "pavilion making," was Le Corbusier's pun on the word *papilloner*, to flutter like a butterfly. For comparison's sake, the grant Le Corbusier received equaled the cost estimate of Georges Pingusson's splendid pavilion for the Union des Artistes Modernes (UAM). The officials' approach to Le Corbusier was part of a concerted policy sympathetic to the Modernists. The organizers of the Paris exhibition violated several times their own bylaws (that the exhibition could give commissions only to the winners of the official competitions) in order to include the largest possible number of progressive artists. As Jacques Gréber wrote: "We were able to partially correct the unfortunate accident of the competitions by hiring for special tasks distinguished architects who were or were not winners in the competitions. Such were Expert, Gonse, Herbst, Hermant, Le Corbusier, Mallet-Stevens, Moreux, Perret, Pingusson, Royer, Vago, and others." *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 8 August 1937, 3. All these artists received commissions before the Front Populaire came to power.

On 11 March, Edmond Labbé, the commissioner general of the exhibition, officially informed Le Corbusier that a site had been granted him to present "les Temps Nouveaux à l'occasion de l'Exposition Internationale de 1937." He emphasized that the structure should be "strictly a temporary one" to honor the agreements the state signed with the city. In addition, continued Labbé, the exhibition had granted him a maximum of 500,000 francs as a contribution to the expenses. Additional funds would be raised from sources such as the Direction des Beaux-Arts, which Le Corbusier claimed to have secured already. Labbé ended his letter with a request that Le Corbusier promptly confirm his agreement with the conditions, and asking that Le Corbusier inform Gréber of the date he would be ready to deliver his project. Le Corbusier ignored this letter. Labbé letter to Le Corbusier, 11 March 1936 (copy in Archives Nationales, F60-970).

<sup>12</sup> Le Corbusier continued developing this museum type for the next two decades. The last version was called "Musée du Vingtième Siècle." It was commissioned in the early 1960s by André Malraux, then the first minister of culture under De Gaulle. Le Corbusier died before building started and the museum was never built.

<sup>13</sup> See "Note relative à la création d'un musée d'art contemporain à Paris, à l'occasion d'une exposition des arts modernes de 1937," 30 April 1934 (FLC H2-13 38 39).

<sup>14</sup> Le Corbusier anticipated a section dedicated to "art vivant," displaying some "œuvres annonciatrices" of painters and sculptors created in the last thirty years, in addition to new work created specially for the museum. Set "among these productions," in defiance of the concept of "grand art," would appear paintings by children who worked under the direction of a reputable artistic educator, Pierre Guéguen. This feature was maintained in the final, "canvas" version of the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux. The public would also be presented with a didactic exposition, explaining "the reasons for the modifications that occurred in contemporary architecture," including the most striking aspects of the new "équipement domestique." Finally, with due respect to CIAM, an account of the forty-three cities studied at the Athens Congress would be displayed along with some examples of the architectural production of the CIAM international groups. Artists ready to contribute to the museum were, besides Le Corbusier, Picasso, Miró, Léger, Delaunay, Brancusi, Helion, Lipschitz, Giacometti, and Laurens.

<sup>15</sup> As government archival evidence shows, Jacques Gréber continued to support Le Corbusier's idea and urged him to find, by all means, a donor ready to help. In a tone of friendly "conspiracy," Gréber even recommended that, for tactical reasons, Le Corbusier not make it immediately clear to the city officials that he had a permanent structure in mind. This detail alone shows to what lengths the exhibition officials were ready to go to ensure that Le Corbusier would be adequately represented at the fair. Le Corbusier received the same advice from the mayor of Paris, as a way to avoid antagonizing the city councilors (Gréber to Le Corbusier, 7 April 1936, FLC H2-14 7). This fact, of course, invalidates as well Le Corbusier's later disingenuous claims that he did not know the law against permanent buildings applied to his own project. Georges Huisman, Directeur des Beaux-Arts starting in February 1934, belonged to the political Left and had a passionate interest in contemporary art, which he actively promoted. He remained head of this administration under the Front Populaire government. He thus ensured a continuity in progressive art policies throughout the period, despite the changes of regime. His close

collaboration with the exhibition leadership was paramount in their artistic choices, and his personal friendship with such artists as Le Corbusier, Perriand, Herbst, Léger, Yves Brayer, Chaplain-Midy, Othon Friesz, and Édouard Goerg served as a bridge between these artists and the exhibition long before the arrival of the Front Populaire. He had strongly supported Le Corbusier's projects since 1934, including the Vincennes project of 1932.

<sup>16</sup> Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres, Jean Locquin papers of the Front Populaire (F60 970).

<sup>17</sup> See Boesiger, ed., *Le Corbusier et P. Jeanneret, Œuvre complète, 1934–1938* (Zurich, 1939), 153. In fact, Le Corbusier had reintroduced this name by December 1937, when he proposed the museum for the New York World's Fair of 1939 (Le Corbusier to Madame Cuttoli, 21 December 1937, FLC, H2–14, 51). By this time the Front Populaire was already in deep crisis.

<sup>18</sup> See the perspective drawing of the spiral museum, dated 6 February 1936 (Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres, F60 970).

<sup>19</sup> Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres, F60–970.

<sup>20</sup> On 17 December, he even requested a four-car train for this purpose. For a broader discussion of Le Corbusier's Soviet connections, see Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier and the Mystique of the USSR: Theories and Projects for Moscow, 1928–1936* (Princeton, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> In the memorable debate on Realism organized in 1935 at the Maison de la Culture, intellectuals such as Aragon and Jean Lurçat, both CP members, held at times opposite points of view, Lurçat favoring Socialist Realism in the arts. Le Corbusier also participated in these debates. The Maison de la Culture was created in the early 1930s by the Communist-led Association des Écrivains et Artistes Révolutionnaires (AEAR).

<sup>22</sup> “Le Réveil de la Propreté” was a caption printed under a night view of the riots in *La Ville Radiieuse* (Paris, 1933), 23. The image is reprinted in the English edition, *The Radiant City* (New York, 1967), 23. For the salute to the Front Populaire see unpublished manuscript, FLC H2–14 165.

<sup>23</sup> From the first rejection of his plans for Algiers in 1932, Le Corbusier saw himself as a victim of that process. On the Algiers plan and Le Corbusier's trouble with its implementation, see McLeod, “Urbanism and Utopia” (see n. 3), 345.

A number of Paris councilmen were, to be sure, hostile to Le Corbusier. This included the council's president, George Contenot, a center-right businessman and secretary general of the Office d'Habitation à Bon Marché (low-rent housing), who refused even to meet with him (November 1934). A search through the proceedings of the city council's debates for 1934 and 1935, however, showed no evidence for the harshest accusations Le Corbusier leveled against Contenot (Le Corbusier, *Des Canons, des Munitions?* [see n. 2], 11). Yet Le Corbusier also had numerous powerful friends and sympathizers on the city council, both on the Right and on the Left—notably Henri Sellier, the urbanist. Le Corbusier enjoyed particularly strong support from the chief architect of Paris, Robert Martzloff, who vehemently defended his project in the City Hall. For a discussion of the debate of May 1934 on the ordinance prohibiting permanent structures, see Danilo Udovicki-Selb, “The Elusive Faces of Modernity and the Invention of the 1937 Paris Exhibition” (Ph.D. diss., MIT, 1994). See also proceedings of the Paris Conseil Municipal, *Bulletin Municipal Officiel* (12 May–16 May 1934), 1802–1865.

<sup>24</sup> The moving spirit and secretary general of the Maison de la Culture, according to one of its founders, Charlotte Perriand, was the young architect Jean Nicolas, who served before and after the war as a link between the French Communist Party and the intellectuals (conversation with Charlotte Perriand, December 1986). In his role as an *éminence grise* he was instrumental in coordinating the activity of the French CIAM Section, Le Corbusier, and the Maison de la Culture with respect to the exhibition. Nicolas was also secretary general of the Fifth CIAM Congress, held at the Maison de la Culture during the exhibition. See Anatole Kopp, *Quand le moderne n'était pas un style mais une cause* (Paris, 1988), 162. For more on Nicolas and his cultural role as mediator between the Communist Party leadership and the members of the leftist artistic elite, see Jean Maitron, ed., *Dictionnaire Biographique du Mouvement Ouvrier* (Paris, 1976) (see in particular entries by Jean-Louis Cohen).

<sup>25</sup> In July 1936, for example, the pamphlet of the Maison de la Culture described the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion as the work of “Messieurs Le Corbusier & P. Jeanneret (Architectes), Les Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (Groupe France) et La Maison de la Culture.” In other pamphlets Le Corbusier was described merely as the “initiator” of the pavilion.

<sup>26</sup> According to Charlotte Perriand, Le Corbusier was privately quite hostile to this group of young architects, who appeared on the official list of his collaborators in creating the pavilion. The Jeunes 37 was an ad hoc group of professional and technical school students and other young professionals of Paris assembled spontaneously in November 1934 in the aftermath of an inspiring speech by Francis Jourdain on the future exhibition. The group was invited by Charlotte Perriand to join the efforts of the UAM artists. Under the circumstances, Le Corbusier was compelled to share his site with the Jeunes 37. His museum was connected to their building. The two leading figures of the Jeunes 37 group, André Masson and Jean Bossu, worked later in one of the teams that put together the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux, but their own project never materialized. The group, later replaced by the group Mai 36, finally built a youth hostel under P. R. Houdin and Jack Neel, as commissioned by the Paris City Council vice president.

<sup>27</sup> The list of the committee members included Louis Aragon (author, Communist Party Central Committee), J. Richard Bloch (author), Marcel Cachin (Communist Party Central Committee), Jean Cassou (art historian, deputy curator of the Musée du Luxembourg), Eugène Dabit (politician), Yvon Delbos (politician), Elie Faure (politician, former minister), André Gide (author, Académie française), Marcel Gitton (Communist Party Central Committee), Justin Godard (politician), Édouard Herriot (Radical Party president and former French prime minister), Pierre Joliot Curie (Nobel Prize), Léon Jouhaux (politician), Francis Jourdain (architect), Paul Langevin (scientist), André Malraux, Jean Monnet (future Front Populaire minister), Henry de Montherlant (author, Académie française), André Morizet (Socialist senator), Léon Moussinac (author, Académie française), Jean Perrin (scientist), Paul Rivet (scientist, Radical Party), Romain Roland (author, Nobel Prize), and Paul Vaillant-Couturier (director of the Communist daily *L'Humanité*) (FLC H2–14 16). Most were members of or sympathizers with the Communist and Socialist parties.

<sup>28</sup> See unpublished document, “Pavillon des temps modernes-1937: Palais de l'Urbanisme” (FLC H2–14 104). The concept was another of those borrowed from the Soviet avant-garde. Because of their rich “architectural biology,” to use a Corbusian term, closely reflecting the general social experimentation Russia was undergoing in the first decade after the Revolution, the highly standardized but flexible housing structures were known as “social condensers.”

<sup>29</sup> See document prepared for distribution as a flyer at the Maison de la Culture protest meeting, “Pavillon des temps Nouveaux—Musée d'éducation Populaire” (FLC: H2–13 306, 6 June 1936). Le Corbusier claimed that “the Pavilion no longer represented just an urbanistic or housing fact; it [had] come to represent the PROGRAM itself.” In designing the program, he had in mind the “education of the masses” as it related to “social problems; economy; architecture; home architecture; urbanism,” and finally, to the “*évènement plastique*” (FLC H2–13 36). In trying to please the Left, Le Corbusier deemphasized his main concern, aesthetic form, placing the “*évènement plastique*” last on the list of the program. The same order of citation characterized Le Corbusier's list of the fourteen alleged project “collaborators” of the museum: the Socialist-led workers' union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT), came first, the avant-garde artists last. Thus the “collaborators” were listed as “La Confédération Générale du Travail C.G.T.; L'Union des Municipalités; L'Union des Locataires; Fédération de l'Enseignement; Le Comité National des Femmes; Médecins et Travail; Fédération Sportive et Gymnique du Travail; L'Université Ouvrière; Les Architectes et les Jeunes Architectes de la Maison de la Culture; Les Jeunes 1937; Les Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne; des Artistes d'Avant-Garde.”

<sup>30</sup> See document dated 15 June 1936 (FLC H2–14 104 125). As the expression of a collective consciousness, this program was not signed. My philological and ideological analysis showed that the author could be a Communist Party member or closely associated with the party, and a foreigner (albeit perfectly fluent in French) of Germanic (possibly Slavic) extraction. When in June 1990 I submitted these inferences to Charlotte Perriand, she immediately declared that only Helena Syrkusz could have written the text. Her guess was confirmed by a former director of the Fondation Le Corbusier. Married to CIAM member Simon Syrkus, Helena Syrkusz was a Polish architect (Slavic linguistic background) working in Le Corbusier's office; she was of Jewish origin (Yiddish linguistic background); she had lived in France for many years; and, most important—still according to Perriand—she was particularly vocal in the CIAM

Communist faction that criticized Le Corbusier at the time for his political vagueness.

<sup>31</sup> See Le Corbusier's letter to Dr. Pierre Delore, a physician of the Lyon hospitals, who was an influential member of the right-wing Parti Social, founded by Colonel de La Rocque. In the same letter Le Corbusier thanks Delore for quoting him in the party's publications (3 April 1936, FLC H2-14 1). Le Corbusier, however, did not always hide his multiple allegiances. At times he openly expressed resentment of what he referred to as a lack of "flexibility" in leftist and Communist circles. For example, in a letter to Jean Nicolas about the people to include on his committee, he wrote with studied naiveté about Dr. Pierre Winter, firmly affiliated with the Right, "I also raise the question of my friend Pierre Winter: he is in a certain way ostracized in your circles. I truly deplore such an attitude, and I can't resign myself to seeing Winter barred from the list above which is not a political list, but a list of specific personalities. Anyway, he and I think exactly the same on almost everything, and I really do not see where it is that we disagree." (Le Corbusier to Nicolas, 26 June 1936, FLC H2-17.)

De La Rocque is better known as the founder of a right-wing veterans organization, Les Croix de Feu, one of the many Ligues de Droite that proliferated in the 1930s. That Le Corbusier was aware of the affinity between the Parti Social and the Ligues is implicit in a lapse he made in a letter, where he wrote "ligue" instead of "parti."

<sup>32</sup> The quotation, as Le Corbusier wrote it down from the pope's 1937 encyclical, read: "La réalisation de la justice sociale produit une activité intense de toute la vie économique" (FLC H2-14 236). Those words, however, were never exhibited in the pavilion. Out of thirty slogans displayed, the two that Le Corbusier signed were: "Il faut renseigner l'autorité" and a long quotation from *Plans 31*, dating from his "syndicalist" period. Terms such as "permissible," "proscribe," "forbid," and "sterility" punctuate the second quotation (FLC H-217 666-669). Five slogans, of clear Marxist vintage, were supplied by Jeanneret.

<sup>33</sup> "Veuillez, s'il vous plaît, m'apporter quelques phrases lapidaires que vous jugerez utiles pour figurer en tant qu'inscription au long des murs intérieurs du Pavillon." (Le Corbusier to Jean Nicolas, 13 April. 1937, FLC H2-17.)

<sup>34</sup> "Vous m'avez promis la lune. Je réclame partout des phrases lapidaires pour mettre à l'intérieur des grandes salles du Pavillon. J'ai eu jusqu'ici ZERO de vous et de vos camarades." (Le Corbusier to Jean Nicolas, 22 May 1937, FLC H2-17 20.)

<sup>35</sup> Le Corbusier, letter to one Dubreuil, 1 February 1937, FLC H2-17 111.

<sup>36</sup> "C'est donc la nouvelle articulation qui nous permettra de demander à l'Exposition un subside autre que le subside absolument misérable de 500,000 francs." (Le Corbusier to Gréber, 4 July 1936, FLC H2-14.)

<sup>37</sup> Gréber to Le Corbusier, 29 May 1936, FLC H2-13 205. This letter demonstrates again how much Le Corbusier's participation meant to the exhibition leadership, despite Le Corbusier's repeated claims to the contrary, i.e., that he had been "expelled" from the exhibition, "sent to the antipodes of the Exhibition" so as not to be a "nuisance" to the displays of luxury on the main grounds of the fair—even though the site at the Bastion Kellermann was Le Corbusier's own choice.

<sup>38</sup> I did not find Labbé's letter, but its content can easily be deduced from Le Corbusier's response to it as well as from contextual documents.

<sup>39</sup> Le Corbusier to Jean Zay, education minister, 25 November 1936. (FLC H2-14 26.)

<sup>40</sup> "Comme il était prévu sur le terrain du Bastion Kellermann des quantités d'installations provisoires, cette petite phrase m'a paru question de pure forme" (ibid.). In fact, Le Corbusier knew very well, as mentioned earlier, that this clause concerned him directly. He even commented on this fact in his letters. He had followed the debate in the City Hall regarding his Bastion Kellermann annex very closely, as testified by numerous annotations on the *Journal Officiel* in his possession. He underlined in particular article 10 of the convention governing the building policies the exhibition had to respect (FLC H2-14).

<sup>41</sup> "Les plus éminents membres des Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne dans le monde entier." Le Corbusier's letter to Zay also contained a number of humorous contradictions, such as the assertion that the project—which was conceived as a "Musée Ambulant," a traveling museum—could not be moved to any other site of the exhibition but the one initially granted him.

<sup>42</sup> "Mon cher Confrère, J'ai le plaisir de donner satisfaction aux demandes

contenues dans votre lettre du 29 Mai 1936. Veuillez trouver, annexe, les feuilles de plans TN 409 bis et TN 3.411 bis qui donnent l'implantation définitive, ainsi que la dimension exacte du bâtiment que nous élèverons avec le crédit de 500 000 francs alloué, ainsi que la concession du terrain, par M. LABBE, Commissaire Général de l'Exposition, dans la lettre du 11 Mars 1936, etc. En résumé, sans plus de commentaires, nos plans vous permettront de vous rendre compte que nous sommes prêts à commencer immédiatement le travail et que notre étude est terminée complètement." (The emphasis appears only in the "copy.") Le Corbusier to Gréber, 9 June 1936 (FLC H2-14 24).

<sup>43</sup> "Mon cher Confrère, Je m'empresse de répondre à votre lettre du 9 juin qui, je dois vous l'avouer, me met dans un grand embarras, car vous avez parfaitement répondu à la moitié de ma question en ce qui concerne les plans et devis, mais je suis obligé d'aviser Monsieur le Commissaire Général que vous me demandez un nouveau délai relativement aux moyens financiers par lesquels vous comptez compléter la subvention de l'Exposition.

"Il vous manque en chiffre rond Fr. 1. 500. 000 (quinze cent mille francs) honoraires compris, je crois donc qu'il y aurait urgence à ce que vous nous apportiez les précisions les plus complètes relativement au financement et que vous présentiez les personnes qui peuvent s'engager à faire cette dépense. Dans ces conditions, vous pourrez commencer votre travail et j'en serai, pour ma part, enchanté.

"En ce qui concerne les oeuvres d'Artistes que Monsieur le Directeur Général des Beaux-Arts veut bien prendre à sa charge, cela n'a jamais fait la moindre difficulté, mais c'est pour le bâtiment lui-même que je suis impatient de vous voir réussir." (Gréber to Le Corbusier, 11 June 1936, FLC H2-14 12).

With genuine feeling for Le Corbusier, Gréber insisted in the letter on his eagerness to see Le Corbusier "succeed in your enterprise."

<sup>44</sup> Between 9 June 1936 (when Le Corbusier answered Gréber) and 25 November (when he addressed Zay), as documents show, Le Corbusier had been consistently trying to raise the missing 1.5 million francs.

<sup>45</sup> Le Corbusier to Zay, 25 November 1936 (FLC H2-14 26).

<sup>46</sup> See Pascal Ory, "Le Front Populaire," 30-35.

<sup>47</sup> "Le plus haut outil d'enseignement des choses de l'Architecture et de l'Urbanisme (notion savoir habiter) qui aura été réalisé jusqu'ici. L'Exposition nous a fait grise mine parce que nous représentons la réforme radicale à apporter dans l'urbanisme et l'architecture." (Le Corbusier to Paul Vaillant-Couturier, 2 June 1936, FLC H2-14 17 19.) "Un outil didactique pour l'enseignement du public . . . un document fort dont aura besoin l'Autorité au moment d'entreprendre sa tâche imminente: tout d'abord, la réorganisation générale du logis de la civilisation machiniste." (ibid.) This characterization of the "exhibition's" attitude has to be contrasted with Jacques Gréber's actual characterization of Le Corbusier's proposals. In earlier letters regarding the project, Gréber insisted not only that he would defend Le Corbusier's ideas with all the force they deserved, but that those ideas coincided with *his own* longstanding convictions and beliefs. Besides the two site plans—TN.409 bis and TN.3411 bis—quoted in the altered letter (as above), the plans erased from the list, and allegedly belonging to some "other project," were as follows: "a: 1 cm = 1 m-TN 3.410-ground floor plan. TN 3.412-second floor plan. TN 3.413-two elevations and a section. b. 2 cm = 1 m TN 3.414-ground floor plan. TN 3.415-second floor plan. TN 3.416-longitudinal section. TN 3.417-transversal section. TN 3.419-perspective. c. 2 mm = 1 m TN 3.409-ground floor plan. TN 3.411-second floor plan."

Le Corbusier to Gréber, 9 June 1936 (FLC H2-14 24)

<sup>48</sup> Le Corbusier to Masson, secretary of Jeunes 37, 2 June 1936 (FLC H2-17).

<sup>49</sup> "La lutte continue et on cherche à me chasser de l'Exposition, bien qu'une concession m'ait été accordée de 500 000 francs et d'un terrain. Dans cette situation alarmante, un Comité [i.e. the 'Comité d'honneur'] s'est institué sous les auspices d'ARAGON, de MALRAUX, de GIDE et de VAILLANT-COUTURIER . . . ce Comité pense pouvoir trouver les deux millions nécessaires à la réalisation de l'oeuvre projetée . . . soit dans le budget de l'Exposition, soit dans les nouveaux budgets du Conseil Municipal." (Le Corbusier to Romain Rolland, 9 June 1936, FLC H2-17-210.)

<sup>50</sup> A paragraph that made a derogatory reference to Gréber's letter of 29 May was wisely deleted from the final version of the leaflet. (Pamphlet, 6 June, 1936 FLC H2-14.) It is interesting to note that, even though Le Corbusier used the Jeunes 37 building as a reason funds should be increased, he was requesting money only for his museum.

<sup>51</sup> "L'Exposition de 1937 est née sous le signe du Diable." ("Satan peut

toujours être quelque part” unpublished handwritten manuscript dated 27 June 1936, FLC H2–14 165.)

<sup>52</sup> To compensate for the losses artists and workers would suffer from such cancellation, Le Corbusier advised the government to give all the artists concerned a monthly stipend for about a year, and to start some “grands travaux” for the workers. The year 1941 was probably not chosen arbitrarily, as Mussolini had scheduled his own exhibition, the Esposizione Universale di Roma (EUR), for 1942. Unable to attract Mussolini’s attention, despite numerous efforts, Le Corbusier could easily see himself competing with the dictator, who was known for his interest in modern architecture.

The meeting of 3 July was chaired by Francis Jourdain with three speakers: Le Corbusier, the art historian Jean Cassou, and two distinguished Communist leaders, Paul Vaillant-Couturier and Marcel Gitton (president of the Paris council).

<sup>53</sup> Note, “Compte-rendu de la visite à M. Gréber,” 20 July 1936 (FLC H2–17 31).

<sup>54</sup> “Comme suite à mes précédentes lettres, je viens vous demander si vous avez pu réunir les concours sur lesquels vous comptiez pour compléter le budget nécessaire à la construction du Palais des Temps Modernes [sic]. Vous savez sous quelles conditions un terrain vous a été attribué et une promesse de subvention vous a été faite. Mais nous sommes maintenant à 8 mois de l’ouverture de l’Exposition et le Commissariat Général me presse d’obtenir une réponse définitive . . . Au cas où il ne vous serait pas possible d’apporter justification d’un financement complémentaire pour l’édification que vous avez projeté, je me verrai, à mon grand regret, dans l’obligation de disposer du terrain qui vous a été attribué conditionnellement.” (Gréber to Jeanneret, 24 August 1936, FLC H2–17 52.)

<sup>55</sup> Jeanneret to Gréber, 7 September 1936, (E), Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres (F60–965).

<sup>56</sup> “Je vous serais reconnaissant de vouloir bien me dire, par retour de courrier, si vous êtes en mesure, maintenant, de nous apporter une garantie de financement pour l’exécution de votre Palais des Temps Modernes, car je suis obligé de prendre une décision définitive avant la fin de cette semaine.” (Gréber to Jeanneret, 15 September 1936 FLC H2–17 54.)

<sup>57</sup> Pierre Jeanneret, typewritten note dated 25 September 1936 “Visite à M. Gréber” (FLC H2–17 58).

<sup>58</sup> Le Corbusier’s projects, as we know, were usually idealized images endowed with a visionary and didactic character. Especially in the period under consideration, he rarely dealt with projects conceived for immediate execution. This fact is clearly confirmed by the prototypical character of all of the projects he proposed for the exhibition. Conversely, the last incarnation of the Temps Nouveaux Pavilion had a highly practical and immediate purpose, and was almost by definition less prone to arouse Le Corbusier’s interest. All sketches, notes, and letters throughout this period regarding the 1937 project and the contacts with the exhibition leadership are by Jeanneret.

<sup>59</sup> His frequent absences and the fact that he no longer had direct contact with the exhibition leadership after June 1936 does not necessarily mean that he had no involvement whatsoever in this phase of the venture. Nevertheless, his silence carries a certain weight at the moment of a major crisis.

<sup>60</sup> See Boesinger, ed., *Œuvre complète, 1934–1938* (Zurich, 1939), 152.

<sup>61</sup> The sketches of the houses and of the pavilion are dated 20 and 22 October 1936, respectively, and thus are clearly part of Jeanneret’s current repertoire.

<sup>62</sup> Le Corbusier refers to the Jeanneret-Gréber meeting in a letter in which he asserts: “Mr. Gréber has recommended canvas produced in Austria . . . He claimed this canvas was tested . . . for the Salzburg Theater.” (Le Corbusier to Jean Locquin, 24 March 1937, FLC H2–17 164.)

<sup>63</sup> Charlotte Perriand, who served as the job captain on the project and maintained working contacts with the Directeur des Beaux-Arts, claims that Jeanneret indeed derived the pavilion’s tent from his experimental and temporary canvas structures (interview, June 1996).

<sup>64</sup> In fact, the yellow canvas was a mistake. It did not admit sufficient light, and Jeanneret tried in vain to exchange it for a white canvas. The Austrian makers, M. J. Elsinger und Söhne (Fabriken Wasserdichter Stoffe, Wien), however, refused to take back the yellow canvas.

<sup>65</sup> Gothic architects used the square and its rotation to derive most of their design elements. See L. R. Shelby, *Gothic Design Techniques: The Fifteenth Century Booklets of Master Roriczer* (Carbondale, Ill., 1977). See also, by the same author,

“The Geometrical Knowledge of the Mediaeval Master Masons,” *Speculum* 57 (1972): 395–421. In the case of the pavilion’s temporary space the square would be the generator, as it were, of the future spiral.

<sup>66</sup> Jeanneret promoted this kind of approach in the office. A similar understanding of art production propounded by the Communists—especially on the occasion of 1937—was fully embraced by both Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand at the time (see, for example, Perriand’s letter to René Herbst, in which she refers to the artistic activity to be launched on the occasion of the exhibition as “une action commune sur les bases les plus larges possible, pour la réussite de 37 comme nous le voulons, contre 37 comme il est.” (Charlotte Perriand to René Herbst, 5 July 1935, UAM archives, Musée des Arts Décoratifs. No accession number.)

<sup>67</sup> These dates contradict Le Corbusier’s later assertions in *Des Canons, Des Munitions?* (see n. 2), in which he says, on page 12, for example, “Le 15 Décembre je suis appelé par Delaunay: ‘On vous exige à la Présidence du Conseil.’ J’avais 4 mois pour élaborer le projet.” Later, he states, “Une équipe provisoire est hâtivement constituée: Perriand, Bossu, Effel, Gischia.” In these “recollections” Le Corbusier succeeded in conveying the impression that everything had to be done from scratch, following the government’s intervention—a fact clearly contradicting his own claims elsewhere that he had been ready to start since June. In fact, the plans were ready more than a month earlier, and his team of artists, far from being hurriedly improvised after 15 December, had already received nominal payments from the Direction des Beaux-Arts. Le Corbusier confirms it himself in a note to the minister, dated 17 December: “Nous pouvons dès demain . . . commencer la réalisation du Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux. Tous les plans sont terminés, toutes les prévisions sont faites, toutes les collaborations sont assurées.” (Le Corbusier’s emphasis. See Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres F60 965.)

<sup>68</sup> The list of collaborators presented to the Beaux-Arts Director included: CIAM France architects Badovici, Beaudouin, Beauge, Bossu, Boyer, Chareau, Jeanneret, Le Corbusier, Lods, Nitzchké, Perriand, Sert (as delegate of the GATEPAC, Spain), Szivessy, Weissmann (as delegate of the Yugoslav group), members of the Maison de la Culture Adam, Barret, Brisset, Maréchal, Masson, Mercier, Roux, Senevat, Woog; other CIAM members; Henes, Christen, Dakin, De Graap, Dupré, Xenia Grisogono, Groscurin, J. Laurens, Nowitzka, Milan Pantovic, Pollak; painters Bauquier, Marianne Clouzot, Effel, Gischia, Le Corbusier, Léger; sculptor: Henri Laurens; artisans Lasnon (model maker), and Prevost (“dioramist”); sound engineer Albert Jeanneret; and specialist Elie Faure. Juan Mirò was not listed. Le Corbusier appeared twice, as CIAM architect and as painter. Le Corbusier participated in this effort from a distance. For a substantial part of the period devoted to the making of the pavilion’s interior, he was seriously ill with an ear infection. He was confined to his bed from March to July.

<sup>69</sup> On various occasions Gréber himself made this requirement explicit to Le Corbusier. (Gréber to Le Corbusier, 22 April 1936, FLC H2–14; and 11 June 1936, FLC H2–14 12.) The green canvas of a side wall added to the sense of a joyful “fête populaire.”

<sup>70</sup> “Cheval de Troie du Bolchévisme.” Throughout the 1930s Le Corbusier had been accused of “Bolshevism” in conservative circles. This characterization disturbed him not so much because of the charge itself, but because it depicted him as alien to French culture and its national interests. Emphasizing his political indifference, and still defending himself from the accusation of being a supporter of the Bolsheviks, on another occasion Le Corbusier asked the editor of *Quadrante*, Massimo Bontempelli, to send him all the issues in which his projects and articles were published so that he could prove to his “innumerable enemies” that he hardly could be a “Bolshevik” since his ideas were accepted “en pays fasciste d’Italie.” (Le Corbusier to Bontempelli, 26 October 1934, FLC H214.)

<sup>71</sup> Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres, F60–695. The workshop was meant to be mobile and transformable, like Jeanneret’s vacation houses.

<sup>72</sup> “Je tiens à vous remercier de tout cœur de l’accueil si aimable que vous m’avez fait l’autre soir. Depuis 1932, j’ai trouvé hier en vous, pour la première fois, dans cette question de l’Exposition, une sincérité encourageante. Vous avez mesuré que les demandes que je me suis permis de soumettre à votre examen sont très rationnelles et très modestes.” (Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres, F60–965.)

The painter Robert Delaunay was also present at the meeting. He encour-

aged Le Corbusier and exhorted Locquin to put together a bigger and more inclusive pavilion, closer to what the spiral museum would have been. Le Corbusier refused, claiming that it was too late. In fact, it was clear that the only option he was left with was to build the canvas version of the museum. The plans were rather advanced, and some working drawings had been ready since 8 December. He also wanted to prove, as he made a point of emphasizing in the letter to Locquin, that his requests to the exhibition had been reasonable and modest throughout. Le Corbusier did, however, have a request for Locquin. He asked if the government could offer his pavilion a better site than the one at Kellermann. What Le Corbusier wished was a space within the exhibition grounds, in fact just next to the Eiffel Tower “en plein Champs de Mars.” This would be “a full rehabilitation for me,” he wrote to Locquin. He had already gone to find a spot and had chosen the site assigned to his friend, the designer René Herbst. The dimensions of the site were right for the canvas cube, and Le Corbusier thought that Herbst’s pavilion could easily be moved somewhere else. Included in this plea to the Socialist Locquin was the official plan of the exhibition on which Le Corbusier had pasted, at scale, his own pavilion, highlighted in red. (Archives Nationales, Présidence du Conseil des Ministres, F60–680.)

<sup>73</sup> Even natural elements seemed to be among Le Corbusier’s “innumerable enemies”: the fire department long denied its approval of a canvas pavilion. (See letter, 26 March 1937, FLC H2–14 33.)

<sup>74</sup> Jeanneret to “Cher Ed.,” 13 August 1937 (FLC H2–14 34).

<sup>75</sup> *Des Canons, des Munitions?* (see n. 2). It is interesting to note that the pavilion disappears from the first postwar synthetic edition of *Œuvre complète* covering 1910–1960, published without Jeanneret’s name. The same is true for the second edition, published after Le Corbusier’s death. W. Boesiger and H. Girsberger, *Le Corbusier 1910–60* (Zurich, 1967).

<sup>76</sup> Jeanneret himself played a more significant role in Chandigarh than is usually assumed. His work in India includes a library Le Corbusier held in high esteem, a memorial to Jawaharlal Nehru, and a number of schools and housing projects—a pursuit that kept his attention throughout his career, starting with the Maisons Loucheur projects in the 1920s.

<sup>77</sup> Note the analogous way in which the canvas canopy of Jeanneret’s stadium meets the upper edge of the amphitheater (see Figure 14).

<sup>78</sup> *Des Canons, des Munitions?* (see n. 2), 123.

<sup>79</sup> Just as intriguing in terms of authorship and precedence is the connection between Ivan Leonidov’s 1929 design for the Ministry of Industry, which Le Corbusier appears to have reused in his sketches for the United Nations in 1947 [Figure 29]. A flat slab squarely set on pilotis with a variable elevation, Leonidov’s high-rise seems also to have played a role in the transformation in the 1930s of Le Corbusier’s Cartesian skyscraper, the last expression of which was the East River project. After his trip to the USSR in 1928, where he met Leonidov, Le Corbusier took back to France a number of blueprints of projects by the Constructivists—notably plans of M. Ginzburg’s communal housing projects. For an example of blueprints the architect brought back from the USSR, see Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Corbusier and the Mystique* (see n. 20), 123.

<sup>80</sup> The pavilion’s last traces appear in a letter Le Corbusier sent to Jean

Cassou, by then deputy curator of the Musée du Luxembourg. In the letter, written on 14 May 1938, Le Corbusier begged the curator to take charge of a cube 8 meters high, 3.5 meters long and 3 meters wide containing the packaged exhibits, still at the Porte Maillot and in great danger of deterioration (FLC H2–14). On 24 May 1938 he wrote to Guillaume Janneau, curator of the Mobilier National, that Cassou had not been able to take care of the pavilion. Le Corbusier was now begging him to find “un petit coin tranquille pour ces documents des Temps Nouveaux” (FLC H2–14 56).

<sup>81</sup> *Des Canons, des Munitions?* (see n. 2).

<sup>82</sup> Besides being an acute and uncompromising critic, who also at times vigorously opposed Le Corbusier, Jeanneret seems to have had a primary role in a number of projects produced after 1924, when he joined Le Corbusier. See Alfred Roth, “Pierre Jeanneret 1896–1967,” *L’Architecture d’Aujourd’hui* (March 1968): 12. This may have been the case at least with the Maisons Loucheur, which addressed social issues (1929), and the Villa Les Mathes (1935).

<sup>83</sup> “C’est peut-être en commençant par de petites choses que les portes s’ouvrent plus facilement après. N’y aurait-il pas moyen, afin de pouvoir entrer dans le Cercle des Grands Travaux d’Etat, que je sois attaché à un quelconque ministère, à une quelconque occasion aussi . . . ?” (Le Corbusier to Serre, 26 February 1938, FLC H3 10.)

<sup>84</sup> In 1940, after the fall of France to the Nazis, members of the French government and National Assembly were arrested when the boat *Massilia*, on which they were trying to escape to France’s overseas territories, was sent back to Vichy France. The Front Populaire minister Jean Zay—an intellectual and politician of Jewish descent, whom Le Corbusier befriended at the Maison de la Culture—was among those captured on the boat. In an event widely publicized by the media, which Le Corbusier could hardly have missed, the Vichy government deported Zay to Germany. Brought back to France in May 1944, he was executed by the pro-Nazi *milices* at the news of the Normandy landing.

#### Illustration Credits

Figure 1, 6, 7, 9. Archives Nationales, Paris

Figures 2, 3, 4, 10–14, 16, 18. Fondation Le Corbusier

Figure 5. Pierre Verger

Figure 8, 25, 26. Willi Boesiger, ed., *Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Œuvre Complète, 1910–1929* (Zurich, 1929), 193, 33, 35

Figures 15, 17, 19–24. Le Corbusier, *Des Canons, Des Munitions? Merci! Des Logis . . . SVP: Monographie du “Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux” à l’Exposition Internationale “Art et Technique” de Paris 1937* (Paris, 1938), 22; 13, 25, 32, 24, 36, 66, 21

Figures 27, 28. Willi Boesiger, ed., *Le Corbusier: Last Works* (London, 1969), 36, 109

Figure 29. Left to right, Leonidov, from *Architectural Record* (1971), 71; Le Corbusier, from Boesiger, ed., *Le Corbusier, Œuvre Complète, 1910–65* (Zurich, 1966), 125, 130.