



---

Intersections: On Re-reading Le Corbusier

Author(s): William J R Curtis

Source: *AA Files*, No. 58 (2009), pp. 50-55

Published by: Architectural Association School of Architecture

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29544713>

Accessed: 25-06-2016 23:58 UTC

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Architectural Association School of Architecture* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *AA Files*

There is no single key to the enigmatic world of Le Corbusier. As well as being an architect and urban planner, he was a painter, sculptor, writer and designer of furniture. A founding father of modern architecture, he was constantly inspired by nature and tradition. His buildings move us directly through their control of form, space, light, material and proportion, but they also crystallise a vision of the world. They are like constructed myths combining utopian visions for the future with reminiscences of an idealised past. Le Corbusier is a figure of vast historical dimensions who presents multiple facets and identities. His realised buildings are but visible fragments of a much larger universe of ideas and forms. His examples remain active and continue to stimulate invention in places remote from the point of origin. The process of dissemination gradually reveals its own history, one involving intersections of people, societies and architectural concepts. Diverse lines of influence, revealing contrasting interpretations of Le Corbusier's seminal works, may now be traced around the world.<sup>1</sup>

But the very word 'influence' can be misleading since it implies a one-way flow from primary sources to the work of followers. In reality, the process of transmission is far more complex as it involves an active and sometimes critical re-reading of examples at the point of reception. Those who learn from masters project their own obsessions, sometimes even distorting what has gone before. In the case of Le Corbusier, there are superimposed layers of interpretation, some of them made in texts, some in personal memories, some in drawings, others in architectural projects themselves. Seminal architectural ideas operate in time on varying wavelengths. During his own lifetime Le Corbusier was like a prophet who revealed cogent ways of solving contemporary problems: his solutions seemed to possess a sort of inevitability. With more historical distance his prototypes may have lost this immediacy but they have taken on another role, providing lessons of a general architectural kind. The relativist may claim that they continue to function as paradigms because they still answer needs. The idealist will reply that they have the power to transcend time.

The event organised at the Architectural Association on 28 November 2008 to recall Le Corbusier's visit to the school in 1947 offered an intriguing case study in the reception and transformation of his architectural ideas, a sort of micro history in which the destinies of young architectural students and the trajectory of a major historical individual intersected for a short time. Present in a single room was a group of some 60 architects of the 'generation of 1947', many of whom had had the chance to hear Le Corbusier lecture 61 years before. Exhibited on the walls upstairs were the large free-hand drawings done in coloured crayon which Le Corbusier had used to illustrate his talk. Judging by these and by the accompanying text, he seems to have concen-

# Intersections: On Re-reading Le Corbusier

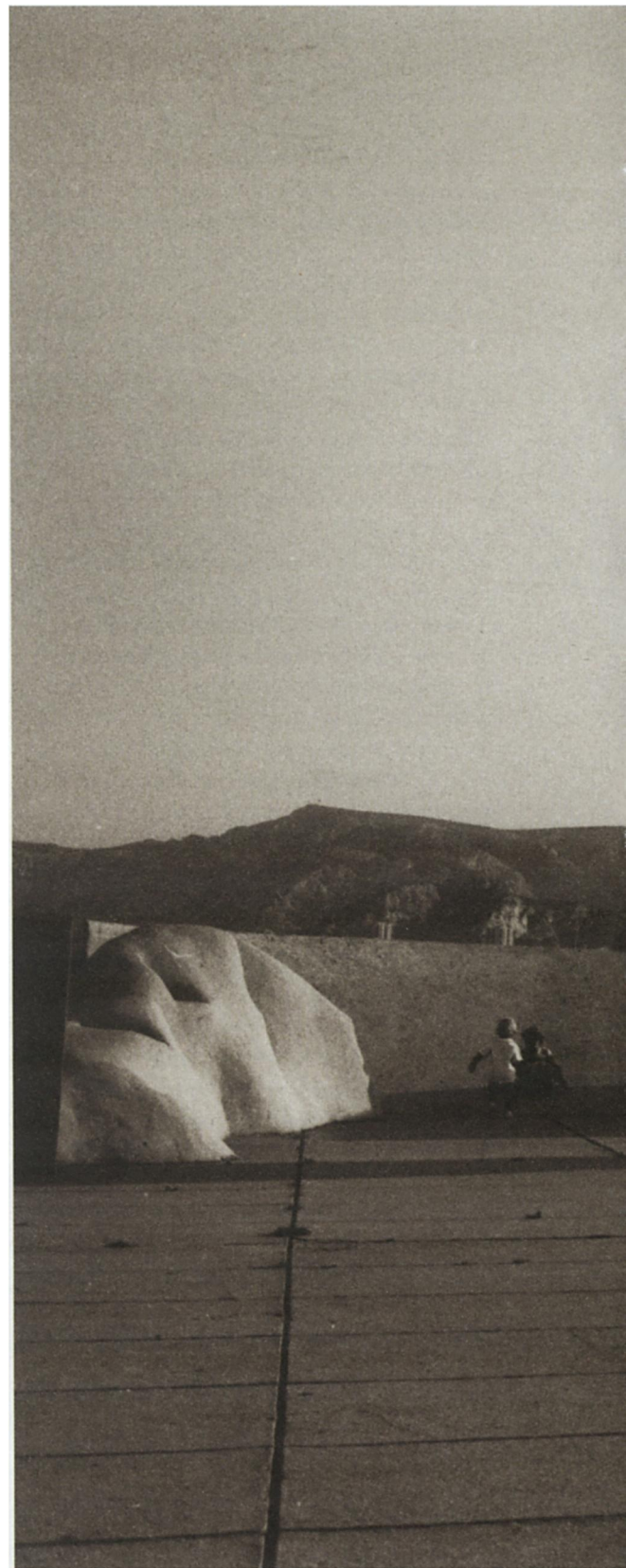
William J R Curtis

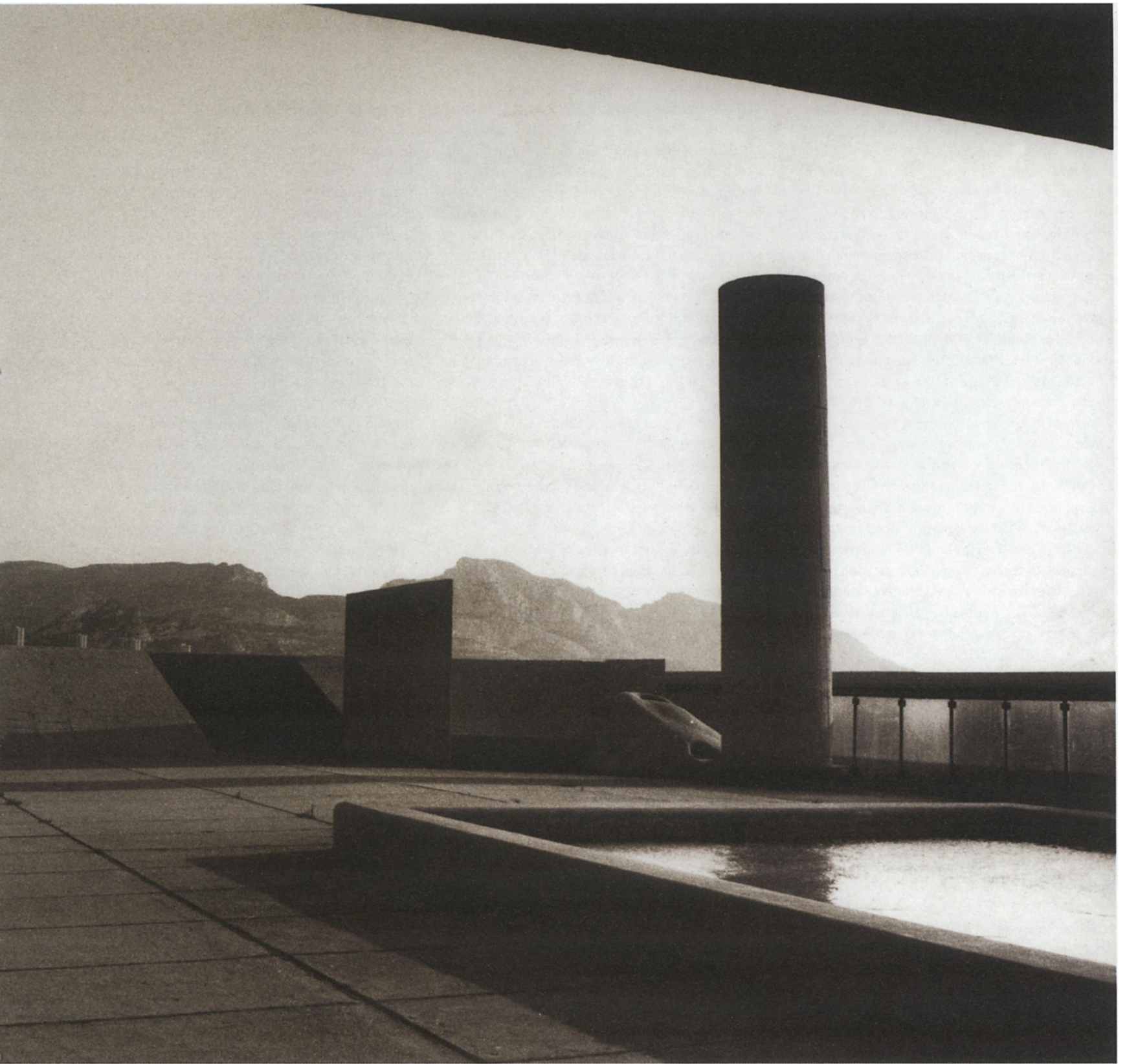
*Every important work of art can be regarded both as a historical event and as a hard won solution to some problem ... other solutions to this problem will most likely be invented to follow the one now in view. As the solutions accumulate the problem alters. The chain of solutions nonetheless discloses the problem.*

George Kubler,  
*The Shape of Time*

trated upon urbanism – in fact upon two major high-rise types, the skyscraper (considered in relation to his contemporary proposals for the United Nations Headquarters in New York) and the Unité d'habitation (a version of which was being planned for Marseilles). Each of these projects in turn grew from the philosophy and imagery of the 'Ville Radieuse' or Radiant City, Le Corbusier's urban utopia which was supposed to counter alienation by reinstating a lost harmony between society, mechanisation and nature.<sup>2</sup>

These were heady and compelling ideas, far beyond the usual Anglo-Saxon pragmatism, and Le Corbusier evidently delivered his message with great skill and charisma. The problem on everyone's mind in postwar Britain was that of reconstruction. At least for idealists of left-leaning opinion there was the hope of building a more just world, a saner city, which would supposedly rise like a phoenix out of the ruins of the bombed urban landscape and the unhealthy slums produced by the industrial revolution. Le Corbusier's sermon was precisely what an emerging generation seeking a cause wanted to hear. Moreover it combined images and technical proposals with an urban theorem of renewal. Not that every individual received the message in the same way: one of the intriguing features of the 'reception' of Le Corbusier in postwar Britain is the multiple interpretations which were made of his examples. His concept of a Unité d'habitation, for example, was reworked at Roehampton, transformed in an inventive and critical way in Lasdun's 'cluster blocks' and in certain 'street deck' housing proposals by the Smithsons, and trivialised in numerous diagrammatic point-block schemes. The point





**Le Corbusier, Unité d'habitation,  
Marseille, 1947-52  
© William J R Curtis, 1985**

here is not so much to judge the ensuing results (which combined the good, the bad and the indifferent), as to suggest how individual interventions may reveal larger historical patterns.<sup>3</sup>

Le Corbusier's AA visit of December 1947 was but one piece of a larger development, the absorption and adaptation of strands of continental modernism in Britain, a process which had been underway since the early 1930s. In fact, there had already been several effective translations of Corbusian urbanistic lessons on British soil, not least Highpoint One in Highgate, designed by Berthold Lubetkin and TECTON in 1933–35, a project which Le Corbusier admired and referred to as the 'Vertical Garden City'. The influence of Le Corbusier pre-war was very much on my mind when I gave my talk, 'Transformation and Invention: On Re-reading Le Corbusier' at the AA event in November 2008. Being present in the lecture hall with its view onto Bedford Square took me back nearly 30 years to the spring of 1979 when I gave a series of nine lectures on Le Corbusier to a packed audience of students in that very same room.<sup>4</sup> Sitting in the back row had been a friend who had himself studied at the AA in the early 1930s – Denys Lasdun, the architect of the Royal College of Physicians (1960) and the National Theatre (1964–76). Lasdun always admitted to two 'historical mentors' – Nicholas Hawksmoor and Le Corbusier. In fact he made a pilgrimage to Paris in 1934 when he was twenty years old in order to experience Le Corbusier's works first hand.<sup>5</sup>

Lasdun had read Etchell's English translation of *Vers une architecture* with its somewhat misleading title *Towards a New Architecture* and had absorbed several of its central lessons via its text and images, not least the idea that modern architecture could celebrate the machine age while also transforming tradition. But the real key lay in the direct experience of the buildings themselves. During his Paris visit, Lasdun was particularly moved by Maison Cook (1926), the Pavillon Suisse (1931) and the Armée du Salut (1933). His own third year AA project for an Academy for Colonial and Dominion Scholars was an intelligent reinterpretation of the Pavillon Suisse with carefully proportioned and stratified facades recalling his interest in classicism, while his house in Newton Road, Paddington of 1937 was a competent homage to Maison Cook. Lasdun remained obsessed with the Pavillon Suisse, rejecting the utopian clean sweep urbanism but absorbing the image, idea and spatial organisation (traceable to Cubist painting). His Royal College of Physicians designed a quarter of a century later contains many echoes of the prototype in its formal hierarchy, its contrasts of material and its articulation of space. As for Lasdun's urban landscape vocabulary of strata and towers, in full evidence in the National Theatre, this would have been impossible without a spatial and metaphorical transformation of Le Corbusier's Domino skeleton of 1914.

The Pavillon Suisse was a turning point in Le Corbusier's development and was rich in ideas and devices which exposed new possibilities to others. He revealed new ways for confronting the mechanistic and the organic. Echoes can be found in Oscar Niemeyer's early works at Pampuhla, Brazil in the early 1940s and in Kenzo Tange's Hiroshima Memorial Museum in Japan of 1950. The free-standing slab with attached curved volumes for communal functions (itself an arrangement with debts to Soviet avant-garde architecture of the 1920s) was a formula which could be reinvigorated or reduced to cliché. Much depended upon the depth of interpretation and the architectural skill of the interpreter, but there was also the matter of injecting a cogent new content. It so happens that the Pavillon Suisse had a formative impact on another British architect, half a generation younger than Lasdun, namely James Stirling, whose student thesis of 1950 at Liverpool University School of Architecture was a clever reinterpretation of the model, but carried out with more distance, even with a degree of self-consciousness. Stirling's Florey student residence at Queen's College, Oxford (1968) fused the *parti* of the Pavillon Suisse with some features of Aalto's Baker House student residence at MIT (1947) and others from the Oxbridge courtyard tradition, manipulating these precedents in a knowing, mannerist way – a playful and mildly cynical stance which owed more than a little to the architect's intellectual mentor Colin Rowe.<sup>6</sup>

Every individual touched by the work of Le Corbusier has their first point of contact. In my case it was at the age of 15 when I discovered the volumes of the *Oeuvre complète* on the shelves of the library at school. The library was one of the few things which I liked about the place. It had long oak tables and superb views into a park. By a happy turn of fate it was well stocked with Gallimard editions of French modern classics, books on modern art and a handful of books on architecture. One day I noticed a set of oblong shaped volumes with bold red letters stencil-stamped on rough cloth covers. At first I took these to be geographical surveys, medical textbooks or something of the kind. When I took them down and opened them I discovered the extraordinary universe of Le Corbusier for the first time, a world of white villas and black cars, of pen and ink sketches of oxen and men in turbans, of crystalline skyscrapers and rough concrete forms gashed by shadow. When I was supposed to be resolving problems in calculus or learning irregular Latin verbs I was in fact immersing myself in Rimbaud's poetry, the paintings of Picasso and the dreams of Le Corbusier.

Not content with just photos I decided that I must travel to Ronchamp to see the building itself. I lived in Kent so it was relatively easy to take a ferry from Dover to Calais and my aim was to hitchhike my way south. I set out soon after my 16th birthday and on arrival in France quickly got a lift as far as Boulogne-sur-Mer, but there I got

stuck until nightfall watching the same seagull walking around a chimneypot for hours on end. Late in the evening I was given a lift as far as Abbeville where I ended up spending the night in a wood in the pouring rain. Humbled by my lack of hitchhiking skill, I took a local train the next morning to Amiens and then an express to Paris. So instead of seeing Ronchamp I saw the Pavillon Suisse. It was the first building by Le Corbusier that I experienced directly. Architecture speaks its own language in silence and appeals to all of the senses. I responded to the thing itself, its spaces, materials, textures, proportions and forms. I was intrigued by the circuitous entrance sequence, the noble space under the *pilotis*, and the sculptural curves of the bare concrete structure. I did not really know what I was looking at but I was deeply moved by it and the Pavillon Suisse was imprinted on my memory for evermore. I returned to this building in numerous later studies.<sup>7</sup>

Le Corbusier's buildings communicate before they are understood. Most people who have been to the Chapel at Ronchamp (1954) come away transformed by the building's intangible presence, its interior space bathed in dim light, its unfolding convex and concave forms, its magical relationship to the surrounding landscape. Even those who think that they know Le Corbusier's architecture from books or through the astonishing black and white photographs of his *Oeuvre complète* (in effect an architectural treatise) revise their opinions when they see the buildings first hand. No photograph or drawing can replace the experience of ascending the ramp of the Villa Savoye at Poissy (1929) through different intensities of space, light and transparency. From reproductions it is impossible to grasp how the Capitol in Chandigarh seems to pull the vast Indian sky down to earth and to launch the eye towards the foothills of the Himalayas: it is both a cosmic landscape and a piece of 'land art' before its time.<sup>8</sup>

To understand Le Corbusier properly it is necessary to find the right balance between the unique order of his works, and the general principles which inform them: there is a constant oscillation between the individual statement and the type. The Villa Savoye, for example, is an inimitable work but it also crystallises the architect's ideas about the modern dwelling and is virtually a demonstration of his 'Five Points of a New Architecture'. The Pavillon Suisse (1931) is a student dormitory raised up above the ground on *pilotis* but it is also an urbanistic manifesto like a slice of the collective housing from Le Corbusier's ideal city, the 'Ville Radieuse'. Le Corbusier had definitions for things at all scales – cities, skyscrapers, windows, chairs – in fact the entire range of equipment for modern life. A number of his formulations, such as the Domino structural skeleton in reinforced concrete of 1914, were fundamental to his architectural language, later becoming part of the collective unconscious of modern



**Le Corbusier, Parliament, Chandigarh, 1952-63;**  
**Le Corbusier, Clarté Apartments, Geneva, 1931-32**  
© William J R Curtis, 1983/1984

architecture. Learning from Le Corbusier seems to involve moving back and forth between the direct experience of his buildings and a critical reflection upon his texts and theoretical propositions.

Le Corbusier referred to his own life as a 'recherche patiente' or 'patient search'. In his paintings, sculptures, buildings and urban schemes, he reverted time and again to a limited range of types and motifs which underwent constant transformation as he discovered new combinations of form and content. His creative process seems to have involved a perpetual oscillation between reason and intuition, observation and abstraction. For him, drawing was a way to penetrate the spirit of things and to study the principles behind phenomena: clouds, boats, shells, trees, bones, machines, the human body. Particular things captured in sketches would be gradually translated into symbolic motifs and spatial ideas which nourished all of his activities. Painting was a daily discipline through which he probed simultaneously the outer world of the senses and the inner world of memories, images and dreams in search of the roots of form. Le Corbusier hoped to understand the underlying order of nature and, through a kind of abstraction, to transform this order into his architecture.

Le Corbusier's art was influenced by several major twentieth-century developments from cubism to surrealism and beyond. His debts to Picasso were immense, especially concerning fragmentation, spatial ambiguity and collage. Le Corbusier's visual ideas seem to have worked on several levels at once. His lines could suggest different things simultaneously – musical instruments, bottles, women, landscapes, buildings – but they also possessed a life of their own as hieroglyphs. He stole things from the world and submitted them to alchemical changes, translating them into the stuff of his imagination. A root found on a mountainside would gradually turn into a bull's head in a painting, and would then undergo further transformations in a wooden sculpture or in the profile of a building. A Roman ruin sketched during his youthful travels (to the Canopus at Hadrian's Villa) would contribute to the idea of top-lit light towers in the Chapel at Ronchamp 40 years later. Le Corbusier declared that the past was his only real master but he transformed it in unexpected ways. Metamorphosis was central to his way of seeing, thinking and inventing.<sup>9</sup>

Naturally all of this leads to the question: what is the relevance of Le Corbusier's legacy today? When Le Corbusier's buildings were first built they had the force of immediate revelations of modernity. With distance their role shifted to that of historical exemplars and these have since been experienced, reinterpreted, absorbed, internalised and transformed in unexpected and unpredictable ways. In the process they have been cross-bred with diverse intentions, societal agendas and architectural traditions. Each generation 'finds' its own

version of Le Corbusier, usually by projecting its own concerns upon the powerful yet somewhat ambiguous forms which he has left to the world. His works seem to clarify dimly felt historical imperatives for others, even to address some of the contradictions of modernisation itself. Machinism and nature, modernity and tradition, the universal and the local (to name some of the recurrent polarities) coexist as forces within a complex structure of thought, feeling and form. It is precisely because they contain these oppositions that Le Corbusier's prototypes can be read in such diverse ways.

Le Corbusier tried to understand the forces and contradictions of the industrial revolution at the scale of city, landscape, even territory. He was a prophet who was also the bearer of the bad news about the price to be paid for progress. He even became a convenient scapegoat as if he were somehow personally responsible for every freeway wrecking a city and every banal housing block. Le Corbusier wished to channel the inevitable into a more coherent urban form where mechanisation, society and nature would achieve a utopian harmony. Understandably his plans have been criticised for their reductionism but they may also be seen as theorems or hypotheses which do not need to be taken literally but which force a new way of looking at problems. In so many ways Le Corbusier anticipated the forces and building types of globalisation. His prototypes, such as the *Unité d'habitation* in Marseilles (1949), so influential in the 1950s, still have many lessons to teach. They may be re-read at the level of principles and core ideas then transformed in a critical way: such are the dynamics of a modern architectural tradition.<sup>10</sup>

The historian who wishes to investigate the impact of a major inventor upon followers can have a field day with Le Corbusier. The results cover the whole range from rich transformations to stale imitations and academic clichés. A broad distinction can be drawn between the letter and the spirit, between those who copy and devalue, and those who dig down to principles and architectural ideas before effecting transformations of their own. Does one need to be reminded that all traditions contain chains of solutions stemming from strong prototypes? Every generation has found some new implications in the Domino idea: tropical transparency with Niemeyer; geological strata with Lasdun; interlocking floors with Koolhaas; hollow tree-like columns with Ito. Or take Le Corbusier's vaulted house type known as the 'Monol' (1919) which formed the basis for the *Petite Maison de Weekend* (1935), the *Maison Sarabhai* (1954) and a host of unbuilt projects. This Corbusian formulation, rich in possible *rapprochements* between the vernacular and the industrial, the modern and the traditional, was later transformed by Balkrishna Doshi into the terms of a 'new Indian architecture', and by the Colombian Rogelio Salmona into a synthesis addressing issues of local climate and Latin American identity.<sup>11</sup>

It is as if later architects continued lines of research that Le Corbusier had already set in place. Take the question of democratic monumentality, addressed in the state buildings on the Capitol in Chandigarh. One of the central themes of these buildings is the giant, protective portico open to public space: an idea fusing reinforced concrete, a response to climate, ancient halls of justice and an image of both strength and availability. Echoes of this idea can be found years later in two major statements of republican monumentality: the *Grande Arche de La Défense* in Paris (1985) by Spreckelsen, and the masterly Supreme Court in Mexico City (1988) designed by Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon (who worked in Le Corbusier's atelier in the 1940s). Or consider the string of works inspired by Ronchamp (1954) even decades later, all the way from the concave and convex sculptural curves of Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum, to the light, space and silence of Tadao Ando's religious buildings. In each case different, even contrasting aspects of one and the same prototype were absorbed then rethought in another personal language. Such is the power of a major work to stir the imagination through the direct experience of architecture. In effect Le Corbusier has functioned as both 'mirror' and 'lens' for numerous later architects: he has helped them to find themselves, to define a focus of interest and to give shape to their own ideas.<sup>12</sup>

This process has continued in the recent past, continues in the present and is likely to continue well into the future. There are contemporary architects whose style is clearly marked by Le Corbusier, and others who have absorbed less visible lessons. Fundamental concepts such as the 'free plan' are forever being rethought under various guises, while certain of the architects who understand Le Corbusier best, produce buildings which do not resemble his work at all. His impact upon others is as much about ways of seeing, thinking and imagining as it is about final forms. Shortly before he died, Le Corbusier wrote a piece in which he reflected upon his legacy, entitled 'Nothing is Transmissible but Thought'.<sup>13</sup> For him, architecture was the outer expression of a complex content, a means of giving material shape to ideas. His prodigious forms continue to hold our attention because they have the power to transmit through time. Le Corbusier is still very much with us. There is scarcely an architect alive who has not been touched by his example in some way. Meanwhile, younger generations look at him with fresh eyes. Armed with new questions, they discover unprecedented dimensions in this challenging and charismatic figure. Like the mysterious Sphinx, Le Corbusier haunts the observer with his riddles and enigmatic presence. He is likely to be with us for a long time to come.

*In memory of Denys Lasdun*

1. See, for example, William J R Curtis, 'Le Corbusier, Objectif et Miroir', in *Le Corbusier, Voyages, Rayonnement International* (Paris: Les Rencontres de la Fondation Le Corbusier, 1997), p 47. This book published the acts of an event held at UNESCO, Paris on 6–7 June 1997 which summed up a series of interventions made in the mid-1990s investigating the interaction between Le Corbusier and several countries.
2. Le Corbusier also spoke about his new proportional system, the Modulor. The text of his AA talk was published as 'Le Corbusier: Address to the Students of the Architectural Association School', *Architecture and Building News*, 2 January 1948; it is reproduced in Irena Murray and Julian Osley (eds), *Le Corbusier and Britain: An Anthology* (London: Routledge, 2008).
3. See William J R Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (London: Phaidon, 3rd edition, 1996), chapter 24, 'The Unité d'habitation as a Collective Housing Prototype', p 437. Those AA students present at Le Corbusier's lecture in 1947 who were of 'left-leaning opinion' politically (and I got the impression from things said at the AA on 28 November 2008 that there were many), and especially those who had just returned from fighting the war, might have made a cooler assessment of their guest lecturer if they had known of the architect's entanglements with the Vichy regime. Possibly there is a broader issue here to do with the evident capacity of Le Corbusier's utopian proposals to cross political and ideological frontiers.
4. The title of the series of lectures which I gave at the AA in February and March 1979 was 'Interactions of Form and Meaning in the Work of Le Corbusier'. The individual lectures were as follows: 1. 'The Formation of Le Corbusier's Architectural System and its Demonstration in the Maison Cook (1926)'; 2. 'Form and Meaning in the Villa Savoye at Poissy (1929)'; 3. 'Pavillon Suisse (1931) as a Fragment of Le Corbusier's Utopia'; 4. 'Politics and Planning: Le Corbusier's Urban Schemes of the 1930s'; 5. 'The Unité d'habitation at Marseilles (1947–52) as a Prototype'; 6. 'Primitivist Metaphors and Ancient Associations: The Chapel at Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp (1953)'; 7. 'Le Corbusier's Idea of the Skyscraper from the Ville Contemporaine (1922) to the UN Project (1947)'; 8. 'The Parliament Building at Chandigarh (1952–62) and the Imagery of the State'; and 9. 'From Idea to Form: The Design Process of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts (1953)'. See AA Events Lists 8, 9, 10, Spring 1979. For a reflection upon the significance of the lectures see, for example, Annette LeCuyer, 'Spotlight on Le Corbusier', in *Building Design*, 8 March, 1979. LeCuyer spoke of the 'the affirmative stance' of the lectures in contrast to the demonisation of Le Corbusier then current in both the British popular press and in the emergent polemics of postmodernism: 'In this atmosphere, a current series of lectures at the AA rings like a voice in the wilderness'. The lectures stirred up a lot of enthusiasm and debate at the AA but there were also some tensions with 'believers', especially those who had swallowed whole Colin Rowe's views on Le Corbusier, reducing the matter to a sort of Corbusian academy of formalistic tricks: the letter and not the spirit. Then there were the suave cynics who had picked up a few notions from Foucault. The students applauded loudly when I took to task a rather pretentious exhibition in the room opposite the lecture hall showing photos of the Villa Savoye in its once abandoned state and claiming (according to one of the accompanying texts), 'The most architectural thing about this building is the state of decay in which it is'. It seems that this was the line of Bernard Tschumi at the time.
5. For a full discussion of Lasdun's work and debts to both Le Corbusier and Hawksmoor, see William J R Curtis, *Denys Lasdun: Architecture, City, Landscape* (London: Phaidon, 1994). Lasdun often spoke to me of the importance to him of the Pavillon Suisse. In 1957 he and J H V Davies published anonymously in *Architectural Design* a series of dialogues under the title 'Thoughts in Progress'. Among these was a piece entitled 'Pavillon Suisse as a Seminal Building' (July 1957). Lasdun later published a graphic description of the Pavillon Suisse and his reaction to the building in 'An Architect's Approach to Architecture', *RIBA Journal*, April 1965. These articles can be found in *Denys Lasdun, op cit*, pp 211, 217.
6. James Stirling's thesis project was for a 'Community Centre and Town Centre Plan for Newton Aycliffe'. See *James Stirling: Buildings and Projects* (New York: Rizzoli, 1984), pp 28–29. For a discussion of Stirling's 'mannerism' in the Florey Building see William J R Curtis, 'L'Université, la ville et l'habitat collectif: réflexions sur un thème de l'architecture moderne', *Archithèse* 14, 1975. The same article discusses the role of the Pavillon Suisse as a prototype, and the development in postwar Britain of the theme of university residences as models for collective living (for example in the work of the Smithsons, Lasdun and Stirling). Concerning the impact of the Pavillon Suisse on Japan, there are several paths to follow, especially in the work of Kenzo Tange, Kunio Maekawa and Junzō Sakakura. Sakakura sketched the Pavillon Suisse from the window of the Maison du Japon in 1934 and seems to have absorbed several lessons from it. In 1941 he collaborated with Charlotte Perriand on the exhibition 'Sélection, Tradition, Création' (Tokyo and Osaka) which brought together traditional Japanese design and the orientation towards organic forms manifest in some of Le Corbusier's works of the 1930s (eg, the bone-like profiles of the *pilots* of the Pavillon Suisse).
7. See, for example, William J R Curtis, 'Ideas of Structure and the Structure of Ideas: Le Corbusier's Pavillon Suisse, 1930–31', the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, December 1981, p 295. The Pavillon Suisse also plays a pivotal role in William J R Curtis, *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* (London: Phaidon, 1986) and in *Modern Architecture Since 1900, op cit*. In other words, its significance has been reworked in several texts at different historical scales. In 1985, I learned that the Pavillon Suisse was the first Le Corbusier building seen by the Mexican architect Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon who came to work in the atelier in Paris in 1947. In fact, he visited the building the very evening he arrived in France (having crossed Mexico by train, the USA by bus and the Atlantic to Le Havre by 'Liberty ship'). He subsequently transformed some themes of the building in a remarkable early work, the Casa Catan in Lomas, Mexico City 1950–52 (since demolished). See William J R Curtis and Miguel Adria, *Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon: Obra completa* (Mexico: Arquine, 2004), pp 36–39.
8. See William J R Curtis, 'Abstractions et représentations: Le Capitole de Chandigarh, paysage de symboles', in Bruno Reichlin and Guillemette Morel Journel (eds), *Le Corbusier: L'Atelier intérieur, Cahiers de la recherche architecturale et urbaine 22/23* (Paris: Les Editions du Patrimoine, 2008), p 151. See also William J R Curtis, 'Le Corbusier: Nature and Tradition', in *Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century* (London: London Arts Council, 1987), p 13.
9. For a perceptive essay on Le Corbusier's translations from one context to another, see Alan Colquhoun, 'Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier', *Architectural Design*, April 1972, pp 220–43, republished in Alan Colquhoun, *Essays in Architectural Criticism: Modern Architecture and Historical Change* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), p 51. On the theme of metamorphosis see William J R Curtis, *Fragments of Invention: The Sketchbooks of Le Corbusier* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).
10. William J R Curtis, 'Transformation and Invention: On Re-reading Modern Architecture', *The Architectural Review*, March 2007, p 37; also Curtis, 'On Transforming Le Corbusier', from the colloquium 'Le Corbusier and Japan', Tokyo 1997, published in *Le Corbusier et le Japon* (Paris: Rencontres Fondation Le Corbusier, Japanese edition, Kajima, 1999); published in French as 'De l'imitation à la transformation critique: l'interprétation des oeuvres de Le Corbusier', *Le Corbusier et le Japon* (Paris: Picard, 2007), p 99; see also Curtis, 'Le Corbusier: The Life of Forms', *The Architectural Review*, October 2008.
11. For the transformation of Le Corbusier's vault ideas in two contrasting cultural situations, see William J R Curtis, *Balkrishna Doshi: An Architecture for India* (New York: Rizzoli, 1988) and Curtis, 'Materials of the Imagination, Rogelio Salmona', *ARK* 4, 2003, p 21.
12. For the idea of Le Corbusier as 'mirror' and 'lens' see William J R Curtis, 'Le Corbusier: Objectif et Miroir', *op cit*, an article which also deals with the impact of Le Corbusier's buildings and projects using vaults. In addition to Doshi and Salmona, the article discusses the influence of Le Corbusier's Petite Maison de Weekend of 1935 upon Aldo van Eyck.
13. Le Corbusier, 'Rien n'est transmissible que la pensée', in W Boesiger (ed), *Le Corbusier: Oeuvre complète*, vol 8, 1965–69 (Zurich: Artemis, 1975), p 168.

© William J R Curtis