Le Corbusier
History and Tradition

Edited by Armando Rabaça
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Picture Credits
1. Le Corbusier

“Palace of the Soviets of 1931, and its vindication, seen from the windows of the Paris-Rome express, on the 4th of June 1934, when passing the Campo Santo of Pisa.”

_Le Modulor_ (1950)
Armando Rabaça

ARCHITECTURE AS A WORK OF ART AND THE

SENSE OF THE HISTORICAL WHOLE

an introduction to

LE CORBUSIER, HISTORY AND TRADITION

I had a feeling, which became positively overpowering and could not find
wonderful enough utterance, that the past and the present were one. I saw
them in a way that brought something ghostly into the quality of the present.
This feeling is expressed in many of my larger and smaller works, and always
has a beneficial effect in my poems, although at the actual moment of direct
expression in life it was bound to appear strange, inexplicable and perhaps even
unpleasant to the reader.

Goethe (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*)

Tradition . . . involves, in the first place, the historical sense . . . and the
historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but
of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his
own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature
of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own
country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This
historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and
of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.
And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his
place in time, of his own contemporaneity . . .
No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists . . . what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervision of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. . . . the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.

. . . He [the poet] must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe – the mind of his own country – . . . is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route . . . But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past’s awareness of itself cannot show . . . [The poet] is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.

T. S. Eliot (“Tradition and the Individual Talent”)

Look at any building you like, as remote as you like from consciousness of aesthetic purposes, and you will notice how as soon as a choice of alternatives comes before the builder he inevitably conforms to some dimly perceived tradition of formal arrangement. There is no escape.

John Summerson (“The ‘Poetry’of Le Corbusier”)
While in certain academic circles the anti-historical bias of the Modern Movement still presents few riddles, the view of modernism as representing an epistemological break between technology and history and tradition has long been challenged. The influence of the past is recognizable in, for example, the blending of classicism and organicism in Alvar Aalto’s work, the legacy of Dutch town houses in Pieter Oud’s domestic architecture, and the composition of Mies van der Rohe’s buildings. In Le Corbusier’s work, however, this influence can be seen on the most abstract level. Le Corbusier’s assimilation of the past is shaped by his creative process which, as John Summerson had already noted in the 1940s, is comparable to the processes of avant-garde poets and painters: his experimental architecture resulted from subverting the logic of every situation, bringing different fragments together and fusing them in a new synthesis. Summerson’s comparison was made with specific reference to Picasso’s belligerent process of creation through destruction and subsequent transformation in order to achieve “a more substantial result and profound possession of form.” Just as in a painting by Picasso, Braque or Léger the appearance of a thing is torn to pieces, broken into bits and reconstituted in a ridiculous jigsaw which has, nevertheless, a perfect logic of its own,” Summerson writes, “so a building by Le Corbusier is a ruthless dismemberment of the building programme and a reconstitution on a plane where the unexpected always, unfailingly, happens. Herein is Le Corbusier’s poetry—or his wit.”

This comparison with avant-garde abstract art involves issues of form. For Summerson, for example, the tension in Le Corbusier’s plans is comparable to that of Picasso’s drawings. More than a problem of form, however, the similarities concern a fundamental problem of method and attitude towards the creative process. It is the interaction between this creative process and the past that would seem to explain why Le Corbusier’s work has proved to be an inexhaustible reference point in the debate on the relationship between modern architecture, history and tradition.

In fact, underlying the modernist “creation through destruction” is a deep historical consciousness that was common to Le Corbusier and his
modern contemporaries. He shared the same sense of the historical whole that can be found in T. S. Eliot’s view of the new in artistic creation as the coexistence of past and present. The search for unity of past and present was translated into modern art through various aesthetic principles. Two aspects in particular are worth noting. On the one hand, the creation of the new implied the abandonment or subversion of former conventions and a new form of interaction between multiple past and present references and discourses through fragmentation and the subsequent juxtaposition of contradictory allusions. On the other hand, the re-equation and re-elaboration of these fragments in new formal arrangements was guided by the attempt to attain the timeless through fundamentals. In this endeavour, the past acquired ontological weight and symbolic dimensions. The focus on form as a bearer of meaning was a means to bring past and present together. This is expressed, for example, in the role attributed to myth, seen as a means to secure transhistorical and cross-cultural ties and to construct a new order through universal values.

Thus we find two complementary aspects of the fundamental involvement of history and tradition in modern art and architecture. On one level, the past provided modern aesthetics with raw material, i.e. with referents equated through their intrinsic and operative qualities independently of any historical or temporal sequentiality, which could be fused with present references through innovative creative processes. On another level, these processes were informed by a sense of the historical whole which established the basis of the modern narrative—a metanarrative that was humanistic in nature, operating as the lens through which past, present and future could be viewed.

Colin Rowe’s seminal essay “The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa” (1947) marks the beginning of the debate on the first aspect—Le Corbusier’s use of history as a source of architectural referents. Since then, criticism has continued to reveal how Le Corbusier’s architecture constitutes a re-elaboration of, rather than a rupture with, the past, extending Rowe’s debate
on the links with the “high” tradition of architecture to include antiquity, the idea of origins, and the vernacular.\(^5\)

One milestone in this debate is Alan Colquhoun’s “Displacements of Concepts in Le Corbusier.”\(^6\) Colquhoun characterized Le Corbusier’s process of creation as a “displacement of concepts” which resulted from his approach to architecture as a work of art, consisting of an artistic reconciliation of opposites of two kinds. One kind of “displacement” occurred when elements of the “high” tradition of architecture were transformed, subverted and adapted to new solutions which contradicted their original use. In this process, the new was established with reference to a given tradition, knowledge of which was required in order to interpret its principles. To give one example, the rules prescribed in the “Five Points” entail a subversion of the tripartite division of podium, piano nobile, and entablature that characterizes the traditional articulation of building elements, and hence can only be fully understood with reference to the principles of classical composition.

Another kind of displacement consisted of the assimilation into architecture of elements outside this tradition. Summerson had already noted that Le Corbusier had found “fragments of real architecture” outside the traditional realms of the discipline. His modern buildings resulted from fusing fragments from the worlds of engineering, shipbuilding, industrial construction and aircraft.\(^7\) Continuing the thread opened up by Summerson, Colquhoun argued that Le Corbusier’s works achieved a new unity by bringing together opposite self-referential concepts and attempting to resolve the conflict generated by their dialogical juxtaposition. The self-referential concepts ranged from the vernacular to those from the “high” tradition of architecture, from antiquity to contemporary works of architecture and engineering, and from modern construction techniques to industrial equipments, i.e. the processes and grammar of industrial production.\(^8\)

In this artistic reconciliation of opposites, then, referents from the past and present were not only emptied of historical sequentiality, but their operative value was equally devoid of any disciplinary framework.
Ivan Zaknic


Klipstein was a student of Wilhelm Worringer, who taught at the University of Munich and was a sponsor at the oral defense of Klipstein’s dissertation, later to be published as Die Persistenz gotischer Kunstanschauung und gotische Rückfallserscheinungen in der Entwicklung der Renaissance des italienischen Quattrocento [The persistence of Gothic views on art and relapses into the Gothic in the development of the Renaissance in the Italian Quattrocento], Bern, 1916. In his August 3 diary entry on some disturbing aspects of Turkish painting, Klipstein cites Worringer: “The instinct for ancient art has nothing to do with reproducing nature. It seeks pure abstraction as the only way of establishing coherence in the confusion and obscurity of the world picture, and it creates out of itself, from pure, instinctive necessity, a geometric abstraction (from Worringer, Empathy and Abstraction).”

In his Orient-Reise Klipstein often notes his dissertation research. Among the Constantinople entries (mid-summer 1911), musing about upcoming Mount Athos, he writes: “We’ll probably have to stay in Athos a long time. The only thing is that it will be awkward with the language. They only speak Modern Greek and Russian there. I would particularly like to get a close look at the Byzantine miniatures.” A handwritten note appears to the left in the typescript on this page, in what appears to be Klipstein’s hand: “and see the frescoes and compare them to El Greco.”

These cities were recommended to Jeanneret by his mentors, Charles L’Epplatenier and William Ritter, who had provided him with contacts and letters of recommendation.

The Grand Bazaar, for example, fascinated and infuriated both travellers. Their mutual reactions, recorded in their separate accounts, reinforce a single reaction, although Jeanneret is the more irritable, Klipstein more philosophical. “So far I haven’t bought too much,” Klipstein noted in his diary, “since the prices are colossally high . . . I found only two pieces that I really liked. One costs at least 500, the other 600, although the dealer was asking thousands . . . I saw some very nice Persian brocade with gold, marvellous pieces. I did buy two scraps of that, and also two carpets from Anatolia . . .” And then he adds: “Edouard is in a bad mood. The antiquities dealer swindled him; he hung up in front of him a galvanized plastic instead of something handmade from Cambodia . . . he is incensed.” (Orient-Reise, 13-14). Jeanneret was indeed outraged, and the experience of being cheated would inspire an entire chapter, “Sesame,” in Journey to the East, where he describes with relish how he got his revenge for this incident. Jeanneret appreciated his friend’s support on the matter: “Concerning this subject,
Auguste Klipstein’s Orient-Reise

Auguste remarked gravely: ‘I believe these characters dream of the same hunger as do the bedbugs, during our absence from Bursa, but for gold!’” (Journey, 142).

8 Klipstein, Orient-Reise, Ch. 3, 34-35.
9 Ibid., 38.


11 After many inquiries, beginning in 2009, with surviving family members and friends, in 2015 I was able to locate in a private collection the sketchbook with annotations and many drawings, some of which are used as illustrations to the present article. The images recall Jeanneret’s own carnets d’Orient, 1911. But differences in approach and quality should be noted, given Klipstein’s careful attention to details.


13 Versions of the typescripts were deposited in the Bibliothèque de Ville-La-Chaux-de-Fonds, the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, and ETH Zurich.

14 The reference here is most probably to the Flemish Baroque master Jacob Jordaens, and his series titled Le Roi Boit [The King Drinks], ca. 1640.

15 Le Corbusier, Journey to the East, 160-161.

16 Ibid., 48-49.

17 Ibid., 162.

18 This passage appears in all versions of his manuscript, including Le Voyage d’Orient as published. We can only assume that the promise to delete was a stylistic deceit.
In this reference in his travel diary, Klipstein reverses the nouns in the title of Worringer's most famous book, which was also a doctoral dissertation. See also Jeanneret’s sketchbook no. 1, for a reference to Worringer’s *Abstraction and Empathy*. The note reads: “à lire dit Klipstein” [Klipstein says, this should be read]. Later, on June 1, 1914, Jeanneret wrote to Klipstein concerning his mentor: “So where’s the publication of the thesis? . . . I’m very interested in reading your work. Worringer was very smart to guide your research toward that theme. An abundance of facts and tendencies will be explained, and a tighter connection made between architecture and painting during those periods. I’m curious to see the illustrations which you’re using to enlighten your text.” (FLC E2-6 155-6)


Through the intercession of William Ritter, both men carried letter of introduction that would provide access to the two regal locations, Bucharest and the royal summer residence of Sinaia.

Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 50-56. This “unidentified lady” has now been identified as Editha Klipstein (1880-1953), the wife of August Klipstein’s brother Felix. I am grateful to Dr. Rolf Haaser, who kindly read a draft of this manuscript in April 2015, for clarifying the reference in his e-mail of May 10, 2015: “Before the Orient-Reise, the four of them were together for a few days. Editha and Felix met each other in Madrid in 1908 when the El Greco-mania reached the Spanish capital in the person of the art critic Julius Meier-Gräfe, with whom Felix traveled through Spain after the traces of El Greco. It was this milieu . . . into which August Klipstein entered when he joined Felix and Editha in Spain . . . Editha also showed interest in Carmen Sylva . . .” This might explain August’s infatuation with El Greco, as well as Jeanneret’s letter to
“a lady who told him of her admiration for the queen of Romania.”

33 Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East*, 55.
36 Ibid., 16.
38 In his letter to William Ritter on November 1, 1911, Jeanneret wrote: “Je suis fou de couleur blanche, du cube, de la sphere, du cylindre et de la pyramide du disque . . .” [FLC R3-18-130]
40 Jeanneret’s reaction to this city was negative as well, but limited mostly to its location and layout: “It is a ridiculous capital, worse even: a dishonest city, dirty and disorganized . . .” (*Journey to the East*, 43). Later, when re-reading his own notes in 1965, Le Corbusier commented on this passage with an apologetic footnote, explaining that he was only 23 years old, that Serbia at the time was “enslaved by the Hapsburgs,” and that the revolt in Sarajevo had triggered World War I, thus darkening the reputation of the entire region and giving rise to the hostile epithet “the Balkans.” Klipstein is both more precise and less generous, expanding his judgment from the city of Belgrade to the people and the country as a whole. “Serbia is a tiny military state which goes with the warlike spirit of the landscape,” he wrote. “Part of the Serbian character is to see enemies both on the left and on the right . . . everything that is not connected with the military seems in a bad way . . . All the public works, undertaken at huge financial cost, are only half-finished or not finished at all . . . Belgrade seems to have united in itself all possible negative characteristics . . . and there is a terrible lack of culture. You can hardly take one step in the city when disappointment begins to follow disappointment” (*Orient-Reise*, 6c-9).
42 Ibid., 12.
43 Ibid., 23.
44 Ibid., 25.
Ivan Zaknic

49 “A day of celebration / a day of mourning / Life is made / in the blink of an eye / St. George Island? / What a cut-throat place / What filth / In truth.” See also *Orient-Reise*, 65.
1. Window wall with paintings from Le Corbusier's collection in the apartment at 20 rue Jacob, ca. 1931.

Above: Georges Braque, *Clarinet and Bottle of Rum on a Mantlepiece*, 1911 (Tate Modern, London).

Photo: Brassai
From the 1920s to the 1930s, Le Corbusier’s visionary reform of the polluted traditional city underwent a number of changes. In the final version of his studies, he proposed meandering high-rise ribbons where workers might live high up in the fresh air, surrounded by sunlit green spaces, and far away from their workplace. Their transformable living units of only 14 square meters per occupant were to be artificially ventilated, according to the most recent knowledge of the respiration exacte. The conception of these spartan minimalistic apartments was not primarily determined by the pressures of the global economic crisis as one might assume, but—as Le Corbusier firmly stressed—“by the fundamental notion of human happiness, which is: a man in the city, a man at home, comfortable at home, happy in that home.” In fact, he could not think of a more convincing justification for the unrelenting logic of his urban studies “than their own origin, the cell,” and he himself would have lived in one of those cells “destined for the proletarians if you like, with the greatest of pleasure.” Le Corbusier’s rigor was frightening, not only for the general public: “That his curiosity for cities and for city building
should have resulted in the bureaucratic abstraction of the Plan Voisin or the Ville Radieuse was the most irritating aspect of his entire work,” summarizes even Stanislaus von Moos.5 In spite of this, it is quite a surprise to catch, right at the beginning of the opulent album that documented the studies of the Ville Radieuse (The Radiant City) in 1935, the very first glimpse that Le Corbusier ever allowed of his own old-fashioned and sympathetically messy living quarters, which represent quite the opposite of the tiny “machines for living” he was proposing to the inhabitants of his new city (Fig. 6). The subtitle is “The Free Man,” and the unerring comment to the photograph: “When the door is shut, I can freely enter my own world . . . At certain times I need solitude.”6

rue Jacob 20: A World of Objects

During the whole of the heroic phase of modern architecture and city planning, Le Corbusier was still living in an old, narrow, back-lot house at 20 rue Jacob, in the heart of the Latin Quarter, which had been the Parisian residence of the legendary tragic actress Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692-1730), as he liked to point out. He had settled there in early 1917 after his move from La Chaux-de-Fonds.7 From his three-room apartment under the steep mansard roof—probably the lodgings of Lecouvreur’s valet or chambermaid—he had an unexpected view of tree-filled gardens beyond the back façade of the courtyard, complete with a small temple built for the actress by Maurice de Saxe8: an idyllic setting right in the midst of intellectual Paris that did not hide the reality of a mercilessly frugal lifestyle. It was in this austere historical building that the young Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (his legal name) lived, wrote, and painted until 1934, giving little heed to his own radical postulates for all of 17 years.

Jeanneret had spent most of the first thirty years of his life in Switzerland, where he had achieved some measure of success with the construction of six private homes (several quite luxurious), a movie theatre, and numerous
2. 20, rue Jacob, Paris.
Le Corbusier lived in the attic and second floor of the courtyard building (left)

3. Second floor at 20 rue Jacob with bergères à paille, ca. 1920.
elegant interiors for the elite circles in La Chaux-de-Fonds, a city of watchmakers. Educational and acquisitional travels frequently took the *décorateur* to Paris, where an essential refinement of his repertoire, which had been largely influenced by German sources until that time, took place. In 1917, while Switzerland was increasingly experiencing the distinction between Francophile and Germanophile zones along its linguistic borders during World War I, Jeanneret made a definitive decision in favour of French culture and, after several career setbacks, moved enthusiastically to the French capital. Here he began to work on establishing a new identity, for which he invented the pseudonym Le Corbusier in 1920.

The telling iconic photograph published in *La Ville Radieuse* had been taken by the illustrious Hungarian photographer Brassaï (Gyula Halász) in around 1931. Le Corbusier was now living on the second floor of the same house, having already assumed the rental contract in October of 1919. Part of the attic storey still served as a painting studio. He was no longer living alone; in 1930 he had married his girlfriend of many years, Yvonne (Victorine) Gallis, and his cousin and business partner Pierre Jeanneret had also moved into the courtyard building. A considerable number of “private” photographs exist which almost always show the architect—now world-famous—in leisure poses; for example, reading the newspaper while lying on his wooden sofa, with indescribable slippers dangling from his feet and a pipe in his mouth. In contrast, Brassaï captures Le Corbusier in a moment of total solitude and concentration, in the act of thinking and writing. His desk is almost completely covered with papers and an issue of the monthly *Plans*—his new mouthpiece, where the articles on the Ville Radieuse project appeared. This iconic photograph is doubtlessly posed, which is common in the work of Brassaï, but it looks like a snapshot that offers a privileged view into the intimate world of the artist-cum-architect and allows the viewer to share in the creative process. The photographer positions the protagonist to one side of the picture, thereby drawing attention to the objects that surround him. Brassaï obviously wanted to portray the artist-architect as a literary “intellectual”—an *homme de lettres*, as stated in his passport—but he
Introduction: Sudden Change or Growing Interest in Classical Urban Design?

Le Corbusier readily made use of history to develop his own designs. He was, however, not interested in historical accuracy. He brought together historical models from periods distant and close, moulding them into one architecture that often did not even allow to easily discern these influences. The same is valid for his urban planning. Already in his early book *Le Corbusier. Elemente einer Synthese*, Stanislaus von Moos made his readers aware of the synthesis of arts in Le Corbusier’s work.¹ And Colin Rowe, noticed an “involvement with a specific rather than ideal Paris... an empirical Paris which Le Corbusier so often quoted in his buildings but never in his urbanistic proposals.”² Indeed, Le Corbusier was a master in bringing together material from the most diverse sources—be they persons, places or epochs—into a single, well-designed synthesis. Accepting this as one of the most important traits of Le Corbusier’s design and writing, this essay, however, does attempt to distinguish between the historical and the contemporary themes that influenced Le Corbusier in his understanding of the city. Focusing on the period between 1910 and 1915, the period of his manuscript “La Construction des villes,” leading towards the development of the *Ville contemporaine* and *Urbanisme*, this essay investigates the influence of
urban history on Le Corbusier’s urban design thinking. It wishes to show how Le Corbusier—not necessarily consciously—instrumentalised history, both through his studies and observation of the built reality, to aid in preparing his design thinking to conceive new urban forms.3

As Harold Allen Brooks and others have demonstrated, Le Corbusier, then still Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, started his architectural development with a strong Ruskinian bias. During his first visit to Florence in 1907, he almost completely ignored any building from the Renaissance and concentrated on medieval architecture instead. During his year (1908–09) in Paris as apprentice of Auguste Perret, he studied and endlessly drew and redrew the Cathedral of Notre Dame instead of appreciating any classical architecture or urban design. Similarly, an Arts-and-Crafts bias applies to his early houses in La Chaux-de-Fonds.4

For this reason, historians have for a while now attempted to nominate a point at which Jeanneret’s architectural conviction shifted from favouring the medieval and picturesque to the classicist and monumental. Of interest here is the change in his perception of principles of city planning. Antonio Bruculeri and Harold Allen Brooks have set such a point of change in Jeanneret’s view of the city at 1915.5 Brooks says: “This time he conducted research at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris where he became fascinated with classical principles of town planning.”6 However I have already shown that one crucial challenge to his belief in picturesque urbanism clearly happened as early as January 1911. While working for Peter Behrens in Neubabelsberg, Jeanneret read Marc-Antoine Laugier’s Essai sur l’architecture (in the second edition of 1755) at the Royal Library Unter den Linden in Berlin.7 And even that is not the first instance of a change of mind. Francesco Passanti has suggested such a change may have occurred in June 1910—but without finding a specific event that would have caused this.8

The reality may have been a little less black and white. Curiously, an affinity towards the monumental classicism of the French architects and planners of absolutism (Mansart and others) can be observed from the very moment at which Jeanneret developed his notions of a picturesque urbanism,
i.e. parallel to his reading of Camillo Sitte’s *Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* in early 1910. It seems that the picturesque and classicist monumental direction fought for his attention, i.e. that he struggled to develop arguments for either, although it is indeed noticeable that he was quite drawn to the grandeur of classicism, as Francesco Passanti has observed.\(^9\) So while absorbing, digesting and reformulating Camillo Sitte’s theories (Fig. 2), and those of Sitte’s followers like Karl Henrici, Paul Schultze-Naumburg, Theodor Fischer and others, he read Albert Erich Brinckmann’s *Platz und Monument* of 1908, and it was through Brinckmann’s discussions of French urban squares and monuments that Jeanneret began to grasp the grandeur of the powerful unified French designs of the 18th century. Thus Jeanneret was able to develop a fascination for seeing the city of Paris in a way he had hitherto completely ignored.

**Brinckmann, *Platz und Monument*: History of Urban Squares and Monuments**

From April 1910 to March 1911, Jeanneret composed a complex manuscript on questions of urban design. While he had received a travel scholarship by the town of La Chaux-de-Fonds for research into schools and practices in Germany related to the Arts-and-Crafts, he was also asked by his teacher, Charles L’Eplattenier, to write a piece on urban design, to be presented at the Assembly of Swiss communities, scheduled for September 1910 in La Chaux-de-Fonds. Following L’Eplattenier’s own interest in art and urban design, this piece was to be based on the theories of Camillo Sitte, as outlined in his 1889 volume, *Der Städte-Bau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen*.\(^10\) Directly after having arrived in Munich in April 1910, Jeanneret began his urban design research, mostly in what is today’s State Library, the Royal Library (*Bayerische Hof- und Staatsbibliothek*), and also in the smaller library of the National Museum. Only interrupted by a summer break that was spent with further writing and editing, back in La Chaux-de-Fonds,
en 1889 par l'architecte vénitien Camillo Sitte. C'est un livre plein de joie, de logique, de construction en entier qui éclaire le cœur de nous, tout de suite. Quelques années plus tard, de plus en plus d'indifférence. Puis en Allemagne, des protagonistes d'un art nouveau de la ville, écrivaient de l'histoire, parlant justement, sans de convenance, proclamant un nouveau projet. Plutôt qu'une idée, le but, l'objectif; l'un grand livre en tant qu'un nouveau livre; le monument, que Sitte s'est élevé avec son livre, sera connu de nous au monde de l'art, comme celui de la réformation de la construction de la ville allemande. Cette construction des villes de Sitte, nous engage plus encore, autant que cette esthétique, a été l'architecte viennois, afin de donner une chance, sans cesse, de plus en plus solide.

2. Le Corbusier. Page from the manuscript “La construction des villes.” Lcdv34
Jeanneret worked on his bouquin almost without interruption. Having begun as a small piece, this work soon turned into a major undertaking, so much so that at times Jeanneret felt lost in the material. As a result he did not finish anything for the September convention—L’Éplattenier ended up writing an article himself.\textsuperscript{11}

Jeanneret studied a multitude of texts on questions of Städtebau in 1910, mostly in Munich. The majority of these texts, written by German-language architects (Sitte, Henrici, Schultz-Naumburg, Hubatschek, Fischer), deal with contemporary questions of the relationship between architecture and the city.\textsuperscript{12} Even if they use historical forms as examples, as Sitte and Schultz-Naumburg do, this happens in a manner of theoretical discourse, not historically. Of those texts that Jeanneret studied in great detail, the only one which treats the city and its public spaces from a historical perspective, is Albert Erich Brinckmann’s *Platz und Monument* of 1908.\textsuperscript{13} Brinckmann (1881–1958), German art historian with a specific interest in Baroque architecture in the Latin countries, was to write many books on urban space. In his approach to the \textit{Zeitgebundenheit} (era-based quality) of art he was specifically following his mentor and supervisor, art historian Heinrich Wölfflin. *Platz und Monument*, “Squares and Monuments,” investigates the relationship between public urban space and its monuments from the Renaissance to the turn of the 20th century. As Jochen Meyer reminds us, “A particular achievement of Brinckmann is the reconsideration of urban planning achievements of the Renaissance, Baroque and Classicism.”\textsuperscript{14} For Brinckmann, there was no question that the building of a city was art, calling one of his presentations “The City as Work of Art (Die Stadt als Kunstwerk).”\textsuperscript{15} This should be appreciated accordingly: here was a book which differed from the contemporary architects’ assessments of urban spaces. Brinckmann was breaking new ground with an art historical investigation of \textit{Städtebau}. When Jeanneret studied Brinckmann’s volume, it had been published just two years earlier. And it is no small thing that Jeanneret found this source useful for him—particularly in guiding him toward the French urban designs of the Baroque and Classicist periods.
It seems that Jeanneret began to read Brinckmann in May 1910—this is the date to which the earliest excerpts can be dated. More than twenty pages of Jeanneret’s manuscript directly paraphrase Brinckmann or are related to his historical accounts of Italian and French urban spaces and the respective placement of monuments. But more than that, he would find in Brinckmann’s book judgements on the general appearance of a city. Thus, in a phrase that strongly resembles Laugier’s famous formulation of the order in the detail and the variety, even tumult in the whole, Brinckmann claims that each effect, no matter whether of a building or urban intervention, is relative to the context:

Nothing is achieved by simply setting something down in a city or building something up within it; everything depends on how. The various beautiful elements result in the city’s overall beauty; the well-formulated harmonious details will develop into a great, rich manifoldness in overall impression [emphasis by author].

This paragraph and others from Platz und Monument did not go unnoticed with Jeanneret at all. He developed his own first theory of well-designed public squares almost equally from Brinckmann’s as well as from Sitte’s theories. It is fascinating to see how close Sitte and Brinckmann are in much of their argumentation, and where they differ. Both strongly advocate a sense of spatial enclosure in public urban spaces. However, Brinckmann postulates a sense of spatial unity more strongly than Sitte. While for Sitte, enclosure was possible with varying façade treatment, Brinckmann was closer to what Walter Curd Behrendt would argue for in his dissertation a few years later: Die einheitliche Blockfront als Raumelement im Stadtbau—the unified enclosed street front in urban design.

In one of his cahiers (Fig. 3), Jeanneret sketches the end of his chapter Des moyens possibles: taking up Brinckmann’s dictum that the city is to be understood as architectural unity, starting from the rooms, to single buildings, to groups of building, seeing them as “material of Stadtbaukunst,” Jeanneret
3. Le Corbusier.

Page from the manuscript
“La construction des villes.”
Lcedv448
calls for a sense of space to guide urban design.

Now a building, a city, a room, these are all merely the applications of a taste for beautiful *volume*. It is this volume which we must teach the crowds to understand, and the architects to create. They will make a room, and then a house; and then a street, then a square, with the right volume, with beautiful volume. Let us conclude with what Mr. Brinckmann summarises perfectly [in] his book. *To construct cities is to shape spaces using buildings as material!* (Städte bauen heißt: mit dem Hausmaterial Raum gestalten!).

For Jeanneret, Sitte and Brinckmann become the starting point of, if one will, two contradicting principles for placing monuments on a public square. Jeanneret chooses to present these principles in such a way that today’s reader is able to perceive a struggle within his understanding of public space: firstly, he expands on the notion of the “dead point”, as explained by Camillo Sitte. This is the placement of monuments in a corner or other part of the square undisturbed by traffic.

Why do so many old squares, which have remained sheltered from planning devastation, offer strange undulations in their surfaces? These are grooves dug little by little by carriages passing repeatedly along the same track, making slightly raised areas which have, as if by design, become pedestals seemingly designed for siting monuments. It is precisely at these points that one should seek antique fountains, wells, wayside shrines, big trees and their stone benches, the quiet evening meeting places. Sitte claims to have observed that, in winter, children in villages always instinctively build their snowmen at the ‘dead point.’ Here then is the public square divided into areas propitious for placing monuments.

However, Jeanneret also recognizes that there are situations in which this rule might not apply. Turning to the French models of the symmetrically shaped squares, in particular designed for Louis XIV and XV, he follows
Brinckmann’s examples. These absolutist kings generally had their sculpture placed in the geometric centre of the square. For his analysis of these urban situations, Jeanneret relies on Brinckmann but does not copy him, rather summarizes and discusses in a more general fashion. Although Jeanneret shows fascination for the centralized square, only very few of the many sketches and hard-line drawings that he crafted for the manuscript in 1910 do represent French centralized squares. At least the Place des Victoires in Paris and the Place Royale (Carrière/Stanislas) in Nancy figure in his body of drawings, both copied meticulously from Brinckmann’s *Platz und Monument* (Fig. 1). The latter is important here: Jeanneret would visit Nancy in 1914 and sketch, on site, its various architectural and spatial characteristics.

But whereas Brinckmann’s aim is to demonstrate historical differences between epochs and cultures, and thus is historically as precise as possible, Jeanneret seems more interested in the principle than the historical detail. It could be said that he is closer to Camillo Sitte in this. And for our discussion it is crucial to see that history and historical events are being used by Jeanneret at this point to argue for a grander aim, which I believe is the notion of urban space as a contained entity between the mass of buildings.

Towards the end of *Platz und Monument*, Brinckmann attempts to distance himself from the ever-present Sitte, by criticizing his leaning toward the curved and irregular elements of city planning: “A street is not made beautiful by bending the façades of apartment blocks like playing cards.” And Brinckmann weighs the curved against the straight street: “A desire to open up the view gave rise to the straight, tidy street. As much as the meandering, irregular street . . . on hilly ground . . . is justified aesthetically as a contrast to the straight, open street, it cannot create a perfectly monumental situation.” Spurred by Brinckmann’s view, Jeanneret comments on the grandeur and beauty of the long and straight road, pointing out that the “straight line in nature is the noble line par excellence; but of course it is also the rarest,” and highlighting some of the grand roads in Paris and Berlin:

A certain slope or dip will benefit this street, and it will always be enclosed at
4. Le Corbusier.
Sketch of the Place de la Carrière, Nancy.
Carnet 1914, 12, 13.
14. Plan of the top floor.
The La Roche unit is on the left, the Jeanneret unit is on the right.
From Œuvre Complète 1910-1929.

15. Living space of the Jeanneret unit, looking diagonally from the dining room towards the living room. The study (not visible) would be on the right.
and then learning to let the “ensemble” arise from the mutual interaction of open rooms, without the presence of an a-priori hierarchy.

Early and final designs for the Jeanneret house were not very different.\(^{18}\) Once the location of the composite house, at the end of the short street, had been settled, its initial design was for three and then four units (Fig. 16); the final design was, of course, for two units (La Roche, Jeanneret). But several key features of the Jeanneret unit were already present at the beginning: the unit is located within the long wing, as one of two symmetrical units; the outline of the unit is a rectangle, expanded in front by a projecting bay and diminished to the rear by a small garden court; the living spaces are on the top floor; kitchen and circulation are in the far corner against the two blind party walls; the rest forms one undivided space with multiple wings and continuous ceiling, open to the street through an ample studio window in the projecting bay, and open to the rear through two narrow horizontal ribbon windows across both court walls; and the dining area, between court and kitchen, can be temporarily set off by a curtain or folding partition. We are interested in how that undivided space is conceptualized in the early and final design.

For the early four-unit design we have a telling plan of the living spaces on the top floor (Fig. 17). The plan is actually for the left one of the two symmetrical units, in the middle of the long wing, whereas it is its mirror image, at the end of the wing, that eventually became the Jeanneret house. So, in comparing the early plan with the final one (Fig. 18), we need to mentally flip the early plan in our mind.

In the early plan, within that undivided space with multiple wings, one can identify a long rectangular space taking the full depth of the house, from the projecting façade bay with studio window to the rear party wall. Because of its depth and its big window, this long rectangle seems to provide the principal reference for the plan, as if it were the nave of a church, from which emanate two “transepts” or “chapels” of different sizes.

Thus described, the early plan brings to mind the house for Le Corbusier’s parents in La Chaux-de-Fonds, ten years earlier (Figs. 6, 7), that we already
16. Early scheme for four units, May 1923, top floor.  

17. Early scheme for four units, May 1923, top floor.  
Plan for one of the two symmetrical units in the long wing.  
Detail.

18. Final plan of the Jeanneret unit, top floor.  
Detail from Fig. 14 earlier in this essay.
discussed: indeed it is both likely and touching that Le Corbusier’s early idea for his brother’s house would be based on the one they had both called home as young men. And we saw that the house for the parents, in turn, was partly inspired by Pompeii. But in La Chaux-de-Fonds the central hall had clearly legible longitudinal walls and a clear rectangular ceiling, separate from that of the other rooms; and the other rooms abutted the central hall through subordinate openings. There was a clear hierarchy and narrative. In Paris, instead, the ceiling is continuous, with nothing to separate central rectangular space from side rooms.

Note also that, in the early plan for Paris (Fig. 17), the central “nave” can be read in two different ways, because the dining corner at its rear end can be set off by drawing a curtain, indicated in the plan: because of this potential separateness, the dining corner could be seen as a niche room by itself. Diminished of the dining corner at its far end, the central rectangular space would now be reduced to a square in front of the big studio window, flanked on three sides by three “Roman Rooms” for library, dining, and living.

In reinterpreting his parent’s house in La Chaux-de-Fonds, then, Le Corbusier is, on the one hand, continuing his original reliance on the Pompeian hierarchical precedent. But on the other hand, Le Corbusier is undermining the primacy of its central space through continuous ceiling and comparable dimensions, thus generating a near-egalitarian assembly of “Roman Rooms”: the only faint echo of the original hierarchical ordering principle is provided by the placement of the projecting bay with big studio window at the pivotal centre of the composition.

In the final design, even this echo is removed. The pivotal centre, with its projecting bay and big window, has been shifted to the corner, completely clear of the place where the other wings cross. There is no Atrium in the final scheme any more, only rooms with different characteristics communicating with each other through open walls.

If we now think again of the undivided quality of the living area in this house (Fig. 15), it becomes evident that its spatial continuity has a particular
character. This area is not conceptualized as “flowing space,” as a continuum that has been partitioned by floating vertical and horizontal planes, like Mies’s Barcelona Pavilion. Whereas Mies is thinking Space, Le Corbusier is thinking Volumes or Rooms—Roman rooms, open and directional.

Of course, much of the architectural power of both Miesian and Corbusian space comes from the tension between continuity and discrete parts. But the direction of that tension is different. In Mies the tension goes from continuity to discrete parts, and in the Pavilion’s enclosed pool with statue we almost see “a room in the process of becoming” but not quite there yet. In Le Corbusier, the tension goes from discrete parts to continuity, and in the Jeanneret living room we see “several rooms in the process of becoming an ensemble.”

Vevey

While designing the house La Roche-Jeanneret in Paris, in the winter of 1923-24, Le Corbusier also started work on a house for his parents near Vevey on the Lake of Geneva—the house that is also known as “Le Lac,” or “Petite Maison.”19 While very different in location and budget, the two designs are not unrelated, and our discussion of the house in Vevey will begin by analyzing a drawing for the house in Paris, specifically for the La Roche portion of the house.

This drawing (Fig. 19) is for an intermediate stage of the design, when the curved La Roche gallery at the end of the street was already in place, but when La Roche’s sleeping quarters were still on the ground floor under the curved gallery, instead of their final location upstairs in the long wing. The drawing is a plan of those sleeping quarters.

This plan, I propose, was inspired by those two sketches that Le Corbusier had made at Hadrian’s Villa. Two bedrooms and a bathroom between them face the garden along the rear wall—thus, three rooms in a row, much like in the sketch from the Water Court (Fig. 3). Each of the bedrooms is closed
In this scheme, the La Roche unit was at the end of the street (with a curved façade) and to the right, with bedrooms and services downstairs, living and dining upstairs. The unit to the left was intended for somebody else at this stage.
Francesco Passanti

on three sides and ending with an apse of sorts, recalling the sketch. On the fourth side, the two bedrooms and the bathroom abut a continuous window towards the garden, which gives these three very different spaces a common view and datum, like in both sketches from Hadrian’s Villa, especially the one from the Library Court (Fig. 4), if we equate the regular mullions of the La Roche window with the regular columns at Hadrian’s Villa. The doors connecting the shared bathroom to the two bedrooms come up against the continuous window and thus define a layer along the window, like the two openings at the ends of the lateral walls in the Library Court sketch.

A couple of months later, I propose, the same concept governed the internal layout of a little house for his parents (Figs. 20, 21, 22). In contrast with the House La Roche-Jeanneret, of course, this house is extremely modest, a plain rectangular box set parallel to the shore: indeed, Le Corbusier’s father referred to it as a “maison forme wagon,” a train-car house—in modern American English one would say a “trailer.” The house has only a ground floor, with a single ribbon window taking up 2/3 of the long side towards the lake. The bulk of the interior consists of one large undivided space corresponding to the length of the ribbon window: going from right to left in the plan, it includes living, sleeping, and bath, with curtains for privacy. Kitchen, laundry, toilet, and closets are separate, tucked at the far end in the back.

In this discussion we are interested in the articulation of the main space (Figs. 22, 23). While open from end to end, this space is richly differentiated into parts by two wall panels perpendicular to the length of the house, by curtains that can extend those panels for privacy, and by the variable depth of the three parts (the depth from ribbon window to back wall of each section). As a result, the main space can be seen as a suite of three “Roman Rooms,” much like the early La Roche bedroom scheme and like the sketches from Hadrian’s Villa: three rooms of differing size and shape (living, sleeping, bath), set in front of the ribbon window and all directed towards the common domain of the lake. Like in the sketch from the Library Court at Hadrian’s Villa (Fig. 4), the two wall panels stop short of the ribbon
House for Le Corbusier’s parents near Vevey on the Lake of Geneva, 1923.

20. Plan.
From Œuvre Complète 1910-1929.

21. View from the lake (the house is on the left, the garden wall is on the right).
House for Le Corbusier’s parents near Vevey on the Lake of Geneva, 1923.

22. Internal view.
   Living-dining room

23. Plan (already seen in Fig. 20) with the main space along the big window highlighted.
window, thus leaving a floor-to-ceiling passage and defining a layer parallel to the window; and outside the window, the parapet of the sea-wall defines a second parallel layer (like the two layers of columns in the sketch).

Yes, this is a “maison forme wagon,” to use Le Corbusier’s father’s language: but it took Hadrian’s Villa to conceptualize it. Helped by his experience there, Le Corbusier could exploit the emotional potential of a play between two orthogonal directions—two directions that also have symbolic meaning: on the one hand the lateral direction from room to room suggested by the layer of space along the ribbon window, implying movement and the functional requirements of daily life; on the other hand the “centripetal” direction from each of the rooms to the lake, implying contemplative gaze and the light and view from which the rooms draw their shared meaning.

Notes

1 Alan Colquhoun hinted at similar points in his pioneering article “Displacement of Concepts in Le Corbusier” (1972), where he wrote that “However ‘free’ a plan of Le Corbusier’s may be, not only does it consist, in large part, of quite traditional ‘rooms,’ but a certain axial magnetism persists which has the effect of emphasizing the process of explosion and distortion to which the plan has been subjected. Such a spatial ‘discourse’ does not exist in De Stijl plans, where the blowing apart of the ‘box’ and the assertion of crystalline structure are never met with any resistance.” Reprinted in Alan Colquhoun, Essays in Architectural Criticism. Modern Architecture and Historical Change (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 62. On Miesian space see Barry Bergdoll, “The Nature of Mies’s Space,” in Terence Riley and Barry Bergdoll, eds., Mies in Berlin (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Abrams, 2001), 66-105.

2 Christoph Schnoor, “Le Corbusier’s early urban studies as source of experiential architectural knowledge,” Universitat Politècnica de Valencia, International Congress on Le Corbusier, 50 years later (DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.4995/LC2015.2015.1547) which builds upon his earlier book La Construction des villes, Le Corbusiers erstes städtebauliches Traktat von 1910/11 (Zurich: GTA Verlag,
When questioned about the impact of India on Le Corbusier’s work, Doshi answered:

Well, mainly that he was looking at things in a different way than he had in the West. What do you do in a country where there’s no technology but lots of skilled people, people with ideas; a country far behind in time but also very vital—full of energy! He began to think of using natural materials in a different way. When he came to Ahmedabad in 1951 and he saw the concrete column at Kanvinde’s ATIRA building, I know that he took pictures, back to Paris and said: ‘why not use concrete like this?’

Doshi knows that Le Corbusier did not discover rough concrete in India. He had already used it before. In India, however, he learned how to take further advantage of its texture and plasticity.

No, not really discovered—Marseilles had already been in rough concrete. But we had to do the form-work in small plates, because pouring and casting is difficult. And he said, ‘why not take planks and do what we call shuttering?’ He also used steel form-work and said ‘why don’t we show the rivets also so we can feel how the concrete is poured.’ In India he looked at concrete as texture. What he did here was to add plasticity. Le Corbusier was a man of great plasticity.

So, he explains how, feeding upon the Indian miniatures he had drawn, Le Corbusier attempted to intensify the visual depth of concrete:

He spent a lot of time looking at Indian miniatures and he once showed me a painting of Krishna and Radha dancing and he said, ‘You see, how front and back are shown, how you can twist the plane to get a complete image.’ The problem that was intriguing him was how to get another dimension within the
same plane. And this is what he did in Ahmedabad, he made the form-work go against the nature of concrete, i.e., normally the form-work is designed vertically, but here he placed the shuttering planks diagonally, so that the shadows cast are diagonal, while the basic level remained horizontal. This was done with the idea that the plane must get another dimension through shadow. So he discovered that you can use planes in a different way. No one really invents, you know, only re-discovers.¹⁹

In the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan (as in the Mill Owners’ Association, the two projects of Ahmedabad where rough concrete acquires greater expression) the concrete texture is vertical and horizontal, never diagonal. Concrete texture does not lack purpose, however. When the form-work footprint is horizontal, it accentuates the depth of the brise-soleil and extends the length of the façades. In contrast, when the footprint is vertical, it emphasizes the strength of the load-bearing elements.

**Third Level: the Spatiality of the Suspended Garden and Traditional Indian Terraces**

The Indian miniatures seem to have awakened in Le Corbusier another architectural aspect: the new spatiality that his concept of suspended garden could acquire, a spatiality now multiplied in platforms of different levels, connected by stairs just as in traditional Indian architecture (Figs. 9-12). This new conception of the suspended garden can be found from the beginning of the design process to the built version.

Various authors, including Le Corbusier himself, compared the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan with Villa Savoye. Some of them, as Prasad and others, have argued that a shortfall of the Indian villa resides in the interruption of the ascending path along the ramp, ending on the first floor. It is further argued that the specific problem of the ramp is that the end occurs at a small and secondary point: the first floor hall. One must however ask how the Villa
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9. Section across the suspended garden with the ramp leading to the first floor.

10. Suspended garden from level 2bis.
From Œuvre complète, 1952-1957.

11. Suspended garden and sunshade.
From Œuvre complète, 1952-1957.

12. Traditional Indian architecture.
Courtyard with ladder to the roof terrace.
Hutheesing-Shodhan should be looked at in light of Villa Savoye, with the end of its journey at the toit-jardin, facing a window framing the landscape.

This questionable comparison seems to rest on the premise that both villas take into consideration the surrounding natural environment in the same way. This, I think, is not the case. Whereas the Villa Savoye struggles against nature, considers it antagonist to architecture, is overwhelmed by it, and only manages to counterpoise its strength and order at the end of the path through the window on the toit-jardin, the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan dialogues with its natural environment as an equal. This is because Le Corbusier did not feel here the harassment that Western nature imposed in the 1920s. Unravelling the issue is necessary to understand Le Corbusier’s position with regard to nature when he designed these two projects, distant from each other by over thirty years.

In Vers une architecture, Le Corbusier had written: “A house that will be this human boundary that encloses us from antagonistic natural phenomena, giving us, giving man, our human milieu.” In Almanach d’architecture moderne, he added:

What do you see developing before your eyes, if not an immense setting in order? Fighting against nature to dominate it, to classify it, to profit from it, in a word, to settle oneself in a human world that is not the milieu of antagonistic nature, a world of our own, of geometric order?

For Le Corbusier, in the 1920s, nature meant chaos, and only architectural order could neutralize its negative effects, tame it with its geometrical laws to reverse the relationship of domination. It is the window at the end of the path that organizes the initial chaos in every suspended garden of the 1920s:

Because it is in the window that nature becomes landscape, where the ultimate focus of the path is to be found, the episode that puts an end to representation, where the initial antagonism between nature and man is overcome, fusing both characters.
The impact of what he saw after reaching India, however, led Le Corbusier to recognize the need for reconciliation with nature which he once considered antagonist, the need to make a pact with it:

He saw many things for the first time, the bright blue sky, the relentless sun, the hot winds, the cool moon, the beauty of tropical nights, the fury of the monsoon, and he said to me once that while his work so far had been a counterpoint to nature, he now realized that he had to make a pact with nature.23

In comparing the Villa Savoye and Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan, it is possible to argue that in the latter, the ramp reaches the point it should reach. There is no path end. Neither is there a window framing nature. There is no such window because nature is no longer a chaotic entity for Le Corbusier to tame. Instead, there is: a suspended garden deployed across multiple platforms topping the villa, multiple path endings, and various windows (Figs. 9, 10). There is a ramp that has expanded into multiple steps through which the continuity of the climb to the toit-parasol is assured. In reality, the ascent provided by the villa is achieved through the conjunction of the ramp, the roofs of the inner spaces, and stairs. It is this conjunction that guarantees the path, which is not linear, as in the 1920s, but zigzagging, with intermittent openings and closures, full of events. Only through the platforms that cover the inner spaces, in the suspended garden, is it possible to reach the stairs, which, reinterpreting the ladder of traditional Indian architecture, serve to reach the toit-parasol, even if the main spaces remain underneath, protected from the Indian sun.
Conclusion

A cross-reading of the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan, combining the principles of modern Corbusian architecture with Indian tradition, allows us to understand the relevant experience that building in India meant to Le Corbusier. Knowing what Greece and the Middle East had also meant to him in his youth, Doshi wrote:

. . . he admired most profoundly the quality of activities around the huge water tank enclosed by the spaces and forms of the Sarkhej mosque and tomb complex. His only comment to me was ‘Doshi, you do not need to go to the Acropolis, you have all that we seek from architecture.’

For Le Corbusier, India meant looking backwards into his youth and, at the same time, the confirmation of the timelessness and universality of some of the architectural tools that he had explored throughout his work. Indian tradition led him to reinterpret and re-elaborate his modern design, just as Mediterranean culture had participated in the basis of his architecture. The design of the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan illustrates how, until the end of his life, Le Corbusier’s architecture results from a continuous dialogue between tradition and modernity, allowing him to further develop the architectural elements of his researches, from the depth of the brise-soleil to the relevance of its texture, and from the spatiality of the suspended garden to the paths it generates, ultimately expressing a dialogue between architecture and nature that he had discovered forty years earlier in the Mediterranean.
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Notes

1 The museum was commissioned by the Mayor of Ahmedabad, Chinubai Chimanbhai, who also asked Le Corbusier for the design of his house. The building for the Mill Owners’ Association was commissioned by Surottam Hutheesing, president of the association and Chimanbhai’s cousin, who also asked Le Corbusier for the design of a house. The third house was commissioned by Manorama Sarabhai, Chimanbhai’s sister. These commissions date from March 1951, during Le Corbusier’s first trip to Ahmedabad, except for that of Sarabhai House, dating from November 1951, during Le Corbusier’s second trip.

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2 The house was designed for Surottam Hutheesing. The final plans were then sold to Shiamubhai Shodhan, Hutheesing’s friend, for whom the villa was eventually built.

3 Versions are dated October 1951, November 1952 and May 1953. The first and third versions were published in volumes 5 and 6 of Œuvre Complète. Nevertheless, the Registration book from the atelier reveals the existence of a fourth “avant-projet” dated June 1952 which would have been sent to Hutheesing (FLC 6445).

4 FLC P3-5-2.

5 Le Corbusier, Œuvre complète 1952-57 (Zurich: Artemis, 1957), 134. The French version of this text adds more information: “Par bonheur, les projets indiens de Le Corbusier sont toujours dictés a priori par le soleil et les vents dominants qui sont constants, par régions de l’Inde. Le transfert de cette habitation sur un nouveau terrain se fit donc assez naturel.”


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Le Corbusier, Œuvre complète 1946-52 (Zurich: Girberger, 1953), 114.

10 “La vérandah (mot indien) est la condition même du logis . . . La nuit on dort sur le toit d’avril à octobre sauf juillet et août = pluie / on dort dans le vérandah.” Le Corbusier, Album Punjab

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“Les villas et maisons alignées de Delhi sont une coquetterie charmante (Bd où est l’Hôtel Ambassador). Mais le soleil fait ce qu’il veut. Il faut partir des 4 orientations off Thapar et créer ce qu’il faut: ce qui est indispensable: des sujets du soleil avec les techniques disponibles.” Ibid., ill. 653.

During my research it was not possible to find information about the miniatures drawn by Le Corbusier. The figures and scenes represented lead us to suggest their relationship with the Basholi School (and even with the Mewâr School). Commissions for Ahmedabad would have led Le Corbusier to the study of this school’s miniatures in the 1950s. Note that he had already shown interest in other Oriental miniatures in 1911, having bought some Persian exemplars during his journey to the East. Images of Indian miniatures can also be found in books on Indian painting belonging to Le Corbusier’s personal library, although not being the ones depicted in the sketches of Carnet E23.

“Miniatures / la niche modulorée [?].” Ibid., ills. 611-612.

Balkrishna Doshi was an Indian architect who collaborated with Le Corbusier on the projects for Ahmedabad, including the Villa Hutheesing-Shodhan. Later, Doshi moved to Ahmedabad to replace Jean-Louis Véret in the building supervision. He had met Le Corbusier in London, while studying there, during the CIAM congress in Hoddesdon in 1951. He was the only Indian architect to attend the congress.

Le Corbusier named this façade “les brise-soleil en alvéoles.”


“Ibid.

Ibid, 5-6.


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