Le Corbusier: History and Tradition

Edited by Armando Rabaça
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 supervention 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”)

Versão integral disponível em digitalis.uc.pt