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Gilles Ragot

Translator: Simon Pleasance

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REFERENCES

Guillemette Morel Journel, *Le Corbusier : construire la vie moderne*, Paris : Ed. du Patrimoine, 2015, (Carnets d'architectes)

Le Corbusier, William Ritter : correspondance croisée 1910-1955, lettres à ses maîtres III, Paris : Ed. du Linteau, 2014

Marc Perelman, *Le Corbusier : une froide vision du monde*, Paris : Michalon, 2015

Xavier de Jarcy, *Le Corbusier, un fascisme français*, Paris : Albin Michel, 2015

François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, Paris : Seuil, 2015, (Fiction & Cie)

Le Corbusier : mesures de l'homme, Paris : Ed. du Centre Pompidou, 2015

La Ferme radieuse et le centre coopératif, Piacé : Piacé Le Radieux, 2015

- 1 During the 1987 celebrations marking the centenary of Le Corbusier's birth, a Swiss draughtsman produced a caricature of him as a crazed giant, trampling on buildings in a traditional street, and pushing before him a terrified crowd in a scene of indescribable chaos. Not unwittily, the poster bore a title worthy of a bad B-movie: "Le Corbusier is Back!" The drawing referred as much to "the death of the street", words pronounced by Le Corbusier in the 1920s, as to the fantasies prompted by his work; it also illustrated the tidal wave of publications and exhibitions bestirred at that time by his anniversary. There is no exhaustive inventory of all the publications devoted to Le Corbusier, making it possible to define the outlines of the corpus of a historiographical study which still remains to be undertaken. Consulting the catalogue of the rich library of the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) helps us to approach the scope of this publishing phenomenon, which publications marking the jubilee of his death, in 2015, do not belie.

The CCA database offers no less than 781 entries for the name of Le Corbusier. Only Frank Lloyd Wright fares better,¹ with all other architects, from every historical period, coming way behind this leading twosome.

- 2 In his centenary year—1987—, more than sixty books displayed the interest aroused by this Œuvre, a success which has never since flagged. The unconditional opening of his archives held at the Fondation Le Corbusier, the computerization of his inventory, and the complete digitization of his 35,000 plans and 500,000 written documents have gone hand-in-hand with this phenomenon and made it easier. So we find an in-depth re-tracing of the outlines of this “Complete Œuvre”, which the architect himself had striven to forge through the collection of eponymous books which appeared between 1929 and 1965. Over the decades, Le Corbusier revealed himself to be impervious to the wear and tear of time, a quintessential figure who has a definitive influence on the history of art. If the knowledge we possess about this outstanding career is gradually waxing in both precision and nuance, it is also acquiring complexity, and being opened up to many different interpretations which make the man and his oeuvre equally impervious to certain all-encompassing formulae, which are simplistic, and at times marked by intellectual dishonesty.
- 3 The 50th anniversary of the architect's death gave rise to 46 exhibitions in 14 countries, and 44 publications. Among these latter, one or two re-editions of classics such as *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Form*, by William Curtis,² republications of the architect's writings such as a first Turkish edition of the *Charte d'Athènes*, and a Thai version of the *Entretiens avec les étudiants des écoles d'architecture*. The worldwide interest in this Œuvre and the publishing phenomenon that it has spawned are still with us; but this is no longer a time—as it was in 1987—for grand summaries and grand monographs about the constructed oeuvre. Guillemette Morel Journal nevertheless published a new monograph in 2015.³ This book brings us no new information about or vision of the architect and his work, but it is a high-quality recapitulatory volume, ideal for a first dip into this creative artist's career.
- 4 In 2008, Nicholas Fox Weber wrote the first biography of le Corbusier.⁴ It appeared just slightly ahead of the publication in three volumes of his correspondence with his family, with the first volume appearing in 2011 and the last one just recently published this year.⁵ To all this first-rate light shed on the architect's personality, Marie-Jeanne Dumont⁶ adds the publication of his correspondence exchanged with the mentors whom Le Corbusier himself chose to put the finishing touches to his training: the painter Charles Leplatténier, the architect Auguste Perret, and William Ritter. This significant critical apparatus, patiently compiled and commented, is rich in countless micro-data which will enrich future research for many years to come. The correspondence with William Ritter, which spans the period 1910-1955, but which focuses essentially on the period when Charles Edouard Jeanneret slowly metamorphosed into Le Corbusier in 1920, paints a subtle and complex portrait of this man. The succession of letters reveal not only the patience and thoroughness which helped him to construct himself both intellectually and culturally, but also his extraordinary capacity for work, and his astonishing visual keenness which was part of a rare critical sense. The young man matured as much as a result of doubt, which prompted his constant questioning, as through his desire to upset established lines, in which another factor was his fear of seeing his ambition prematurely stifled within the narrow confines of Switzerland. This fear was shared by William Ritter who, from his very earliest encounters with the young 23-year-old, had detected the

potential lurking in him, and would make him promise to leave the town of La Chaux-de-Fonds, where he was born.

- 5 An exhibition titled *Le Corbusier: le jeu du dessin*, presented in turn at the Picasso Museums in Münster and Antibes, also reveals the secret toil and the share of privacy in the artist's training and approach. Using the same corpus of some 6,500 drawings, Danièle Pauly has written a book titled *Le Corbusier et le dessin*, in which she reveals all the facets and successive functions of this medium in the praxis first of Jeanneret and then of Le Corbusier:⁷ an analytical tool and one of apprenticeship, a tool of observation, a tool of artistic creation and one also involving project process. Built on a parallel consideration of drawings and letters. Danièle Pauly's study finds a remarkable echo in Marie-Jeanne Dumont's books, so often did the artist and his mentors discuss the virtues of drawing and the quality of those of the architect-to-be.

- 6 The publications thus far mentioned have all the guarantees of a scientific approach, helping towards an in-depth and plural reading of the man and his oeuvre, well removed from the approach which hallmarks three other publications which appeared in 2015, and which monopolized the interest of the media by offering them a subject that would sell, and an eye-catching one to boot—an alleged hidden side of Le Corbusier. Two of these books, the one by Xavier de Jarcy titled *Le Corbusier: un fascisme français*, and the one by François Chaslin, titled *Un Corbusier*, are presented like revelations implicitly accusing the international scientific community of having closed its eyes to Le Corbusier's real personality.⁸ These two works try essentially to demonstrate that Le Corbusier was anti-semitic, a collaborator with the Vichy government, and a fascist. Yet no revelations emerge from these books, which are based on texts and known facts that have been published and commented upon over several decades. The authors construct a trial in their selection of facts and references which are exclusively accusatory. Le Corbusier's anti-semitic utterances, which are indisputable but limited to a few sentences or a few words in the ocean of the architect's writings and stances, come from his private correspondence. Le Corbusier held to ideas which are those of a latent anti-semitism, sadly widespread in Europe in the first half of the 20th century, which, by being put back into a historical perspective, would re-assume their proper weight. On the other hand, the architect's public declarations, in which, on several occasions, he lamented the fate earmarked for the Jews, are never mentioned. And yet how many intellectuals, artists and politicians spoke out against "the threat of annihilation" weighing over "six million Jews" the way Le Corbusier did from 1938 onwards?⁹ We already know that Le Corbusier stayed for a year in Vichy, where he thought he would be able to find an authoritarian power capable of providing him with the means to realize his principles of a radical and reform-based manner of city-planning. He failed to attract any commissions, denounced nobody, and did not take part in any evaluation of Jewish assets, as was conversely the case with a very large number of French architects who could not possibly fail to know that they were thus taking part in the despoilment of the Jews, and their deportation. His sole "crime" was to seek out a mission to get rid of the numerous insalubrious areas which made Paris at that time the capital of a country where the mortality rate due to tuberculosis was one of the highest in the world. These two books proceed by way of an exclusive focus on Le Corbusier's friendships with fascist-inclined circles in the between-the-wars years, systematically creating an impasse with regard to his other networks of relations. Added to this approach involving exclusion was also a total absence when it came to putting into context the conditions of the debate about architecture and city-

planning between the wars. More than a third of France's population was at that time living in slums and hovels, or in thoroughly insalubrious accommodation bereft of any comfort whatsoever, a situation which the powers-that-be turned a complete blind eye to, apart from passing the odd law introducing housing assistance measures that were both ill-suited and ineffective. The projects of the moderns were one of the rare responses to this major challenge.

- 7 Assimilation between private words and public positions, partial selection of information, amalgams, detailed introduction of figures who had been thoroughly compromised in fascist circles and with Vichy, as so much proof of the architect's own hypothetical compromised position, absence of any historical perspective, these are the main shortcomings of these books. Xavier de Jarcy explains in the blurb on his book's back cover that Le Corbusier's fascism would explain his "reinforced concrete cynicism", and his "anthills with their austere and haughty aesthetic", borrowing, almost word for word, from Camille Mauclair,¹⁰ the ideas that he was already holding to back in the 1930s, when this latter railed against "the anthills" of the "high priest of concrete nudism". The author here topples over into the hackneyed criticism of a totalitarian modern architecture oppressing and shaping bodies, a thesis long championed by Marc Perelman, and one which this latter takes up once again in his book *Le Corbusier: une froide vision du monde*.¹¹ This last offering adds nothing more to his previous essays. The analysis is based exclusively on texts and projects examined outside the dramatic context of the housing situation. The accusatory thesis is also completely detached from the consideration of constructed reality and the analysis of the features of Le Corbusier's architecture: distributive qualities, spatial qualities, attention to light, and to comfort in general. These qualities, analyzed by a very large number of historians but also by sociologists, are not those of an architecture that formats minds and bodies; they are, what is more, approved by users who, today, still live, work, study and pray in constructions designed by the architect.
- 8 The exhibition on *Le Corbusier : mesures de l'homme*, at the Centre Pompidou, and the accompanying catalogue, reinstate the fundamental place occupied by the body in Le Corbusier's thinking and oeuvre: the human body as the measure of all architecture, the body as a source of inspiration for a pictorial oeuvre, the body around which is cast a new kind of furniture which authorizes relaxation, and the body as a recipient of many different forms of plastic expression, those resulting from matter that is either smooth or rough, and from colour and light.
- 9 Le Corbusier's oeuvre is protean, complex, paradoxical and contradictory. This is why it makes it quintessential in the history of contemporary architecture and uncompromising to any kind of partial approach. Only a consideration of it in its entirety and in its developmental context can make it possible to understand why, beyond any value judgement, it occupies an exceptional and lasting place in the history of architecture.

NOTES

1. Wright's name occurs 1,128 times.
2. The first edition was published, like that of 2015, in London, by Phaidon, in 1986.
3. Morel Journel, Guillemette. *Le Corbusier : construire la vie moderne*, Paris : Ed. du Patrimoine, 2015, (Carnets d'architectes)
4. Fox Weber, Nicholas. *Le Corbusier : A Life*, New York : Knopf, 2008. Published in 2009 in French under the title *C'était Le Corbusier*, Paris : Fayard.
5. *Le Corbusier. Correspondance. Lettres à la famille 1900-1925*, vol. I, edition compiled, annotated and introduced by Rémi Baudouï and Arnaud Dercelles, Paris : Fondation Le Corbusier ; Infolio, 2011. Vol. II : 1926-1946 (published in 2013) ; vol. III : 1947-1965 (published in 2016).
6. *Le Corbusier - William Ritter. Correspondance croisée 1910-1955*, edition compiled by Marie-Jeanne Dumont, Paris : Le Linteau, 2015. By the same author with the same publisher: *Le Corbusier. Lettres à Auguste Perret* (2002) ; *Le Corbusier. Lettres à Charles Leplatténier* (2006).
7. Pauly, Danièle. "Ce Labeur secret". *Le Corbusier et le dessin*, Lyon : Fage, 2015
8. Jarcy, Xavier de. *Le Corbusier : un fascisme français*, Paris : Albin Michel, 2015. François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, Paris : Seuil, 2015
9. Le Corbusier, Introduction to the C report made for W. Von Weisl, a German Jew and supporter of Zionism. November/December 1938. Archives FLC C3 (12) 1.
10. Camille Mauclair (1872-1945) published in particular, in 1930, *Les Métèques et l'art français*. When France was liberated, the National Committee of Writers included him in the list of "banned" authors.
11. Perelman, Marc. *Le Corbusier : une froide vision du monde*, Paris : Michalon, 2015