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Le Corbusier. *Immeuble GB.*
Perspective extérieur.
FLC 12469.

**Insights into the daily life of Le Corbusier:
the agendas in the Fondation Le Corbusier**
Tim Benton

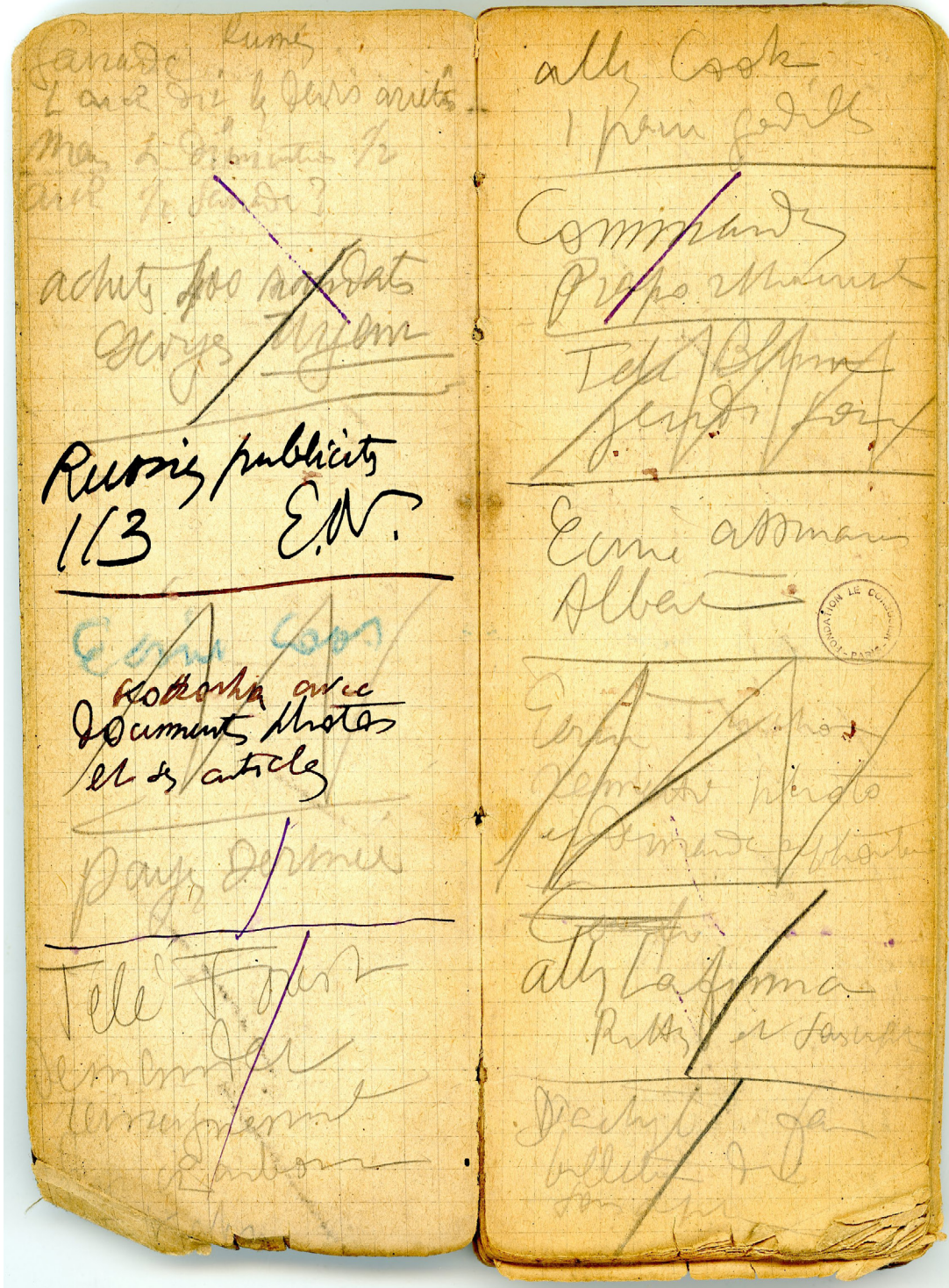


FIG. 1
Le Corbusier, Diary covering
June to September 1920,
fols. 3v et 4r FLC F3(3)1.

INSIGHTS INTO THE DAILY LIFE OF LE CORBUSIER: THE *AGENDAS* IN THE FONDATION LE CORBUSIER¹

Tim Benton

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Abstract: The resources available for research at the Fondation Le Corbusier are many and varied. Among these, the agendas (diaries) offer particularly intriguing insights into the public and private life of Le Corbusier. These diaries present a number of difficulties to the researcher: the notes are often difficult to read and even more difficult to interpret. The organisation of the diaries has to be understood. The pages of the diaries are undated. Establishing the approximate dates for each page presents a challenge that can only be overcome by reference to a wide range of other documentation. This paper offers suggestions for how to analyse and interpret this difficult material. With a number of worked examples, an indication is given of some of the insights that can be obtained from mining this data.

Keywords: Le Corbusier; archives; diaries; *agendas*.

Résumé : La Fondation Le Corbusier offre au chercheur(e) une richesse de sources archivistiques. Parmi elles, les agendas proposent des indications intéressantes et révélatrices sur la vie privée et publique de Le Corbusier. Ces documents présentent, par contre, des difficultés au chercheur(e). La lecture n'est pas facile et encore plus difficile à interpréter. Les feuillets ne portent pas de dates, comme un agenda normal. Attribuer une date à chaque page nécessite une recherche complexe dans la documentation de la Fondation. Ce texte propose quelques solutions pour arriver à analyser ce matériel, avec quelques cas études et quelques trouvailles intéressantes.

Mots-clé : Le Corbusier; archives; diaries; *agendas*.

Resumen: Los recursos disponibles para la investigación en la Fundación Le Corbusier son muchos y variados. Entre ellos, las *agendas* (diarios) ofrecen una visión particularmente interesante de la vida pública y privada de Le Corbusier. Estos diarios presentan una serie de dificultades para el investigador: las notas son a menudo difíciles de leer y aún más difíciles de interpretar. La organización de los diarios debe ser comprendida. Las páginas de los diarios no tienen fecha. Establecer las fechas aproximadas de cada página representa un desafío que sólo puede superarse mediante las referencias de una amplia gama de otra documentación. Este documento ofrece sugerencias sobre cómo analizar e interpretar este difícil material. Con una serie de ejemplos trabajados, se da una indicación de algunos de los conocimientos que pueden obtenerse de la extracción de estos datos.

Palabras clave: Le Corbusier; archivos; diarios; *agendas*.

1. The article was published in *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale, urbaine et paysagère*, September 2020. <https://journals.openedition.org/craup/4301>. I would like to thank the chief editor Frédéric Pousin for his support in allowing for this double publication.

FIG. 2
Le Corbusier, Covers of the
agendas F3(3)4, F3(5)7 and
F3(6)2.



2. Fondation Le Corbusier (FLC) F3-3 (1-11), F3-4 (1-8), F3-5(1-10) and F3-6(1-7). F3-6-7 is an address book.

3. Tim Benton. "From Jeanneret to Le Corbusier: rusting iron, bricks and coal and the modern Utopia." *Massilia* n° 2 (2003): 28-39.

4. Danièle Pauly et al. *Le Corbusier catalogue raisonné des dessins Tome I Années de formation et premiers voyages, 1902-1916* (Bruxelles: Archives d'architecture moderne; Fondation Le Corbusier, 2019). (Avec la collaboration d'Isabelle Godineau et de Gauthier Bolle). Giuliano Gresleri. *Le Corbusier, viaggio in Oriente: gli inediti di Charles Edouard Jeanneret, fotografo e scrittore*. (Venezia; Paris: Marsilio; Fondation Le Corbusier, 1985).

Tim Benton. *LC foto: Le Corbusier: secret photographer*. (Baden, London: Lars Müller, Springer distributor, 2013).
Le Corbusier, et al. *Album La Roche* [with an essay by Stanislaus von Moos translated by Irene von Moos]. (Paris: Gallimard-Electa, 1996).
Burriel Bielza, Luis and Giuliano Gresleri. *Le Corbusier la passion des cartes*. (Bruxelles: Mardaga, 2013).

Historical documents present many kinds of difficulty to the researcher. Legibility is the first obstacle. It is not only the medieval and ancient palaeographers who have difficulty deciphering manuscripts. I have worked on the 36 personal diaries ('agendas') that the architect Le Corbusier (1887-1965) owned, spanning the interwar years². Why study this material? The diaries are of particular interest because they record daily events, conversations and intentions for which no other evidence is available. The Le Corbusier archive is of interest beyond the biography of the architect. It presents a very complete record of architectural practice in the twentieth century, allowing for detailed analysis of successful and failed building projects. But it also contains a mass of material on the economic and cultural life of Paris and the many places Le Corbusier visited in his lifetime. For example, there are over one thousand letters and documents pertaining to the unsuccessful industrial and commercial undertakings that occupied Le Corbusier's time and energy from 1917 until his bankruptcy in 1923³. This documentation provides insights into the recession in France in the early 1920s and the problems posed by the war reparations clauses in the Treaty of Versailles. There is also a mass of documentation of Le Corbusier's attempts to lobby international leaders and opinion formers to support his project for the Palace of the League of Nations which reveals many of the diplomatic fractures that undermined the attempts to establish a stable world peace.

Among the sources available to scholars are Le Corbusier's sketchbooks and the little notebooks that he took with him everywhere and in which he noted things of interest and made sketches. These have been extensively studied, as have been his collections of postcards and photographs⁴. Many scholars have consulted the diaries in pursuit of particular pieces of information, but few have worked out how they were constructed and how to date the information. This is because, unlike conventional printed diaries, these *agendas* have no dates on each page. This note is intended to help scholars make use of this information. As I try to demonstrate, understanding the diaries requires lateral research into other sources. To this end, I have given a number of detailed examples showing how puzzles can sometimes be resolved by cross-checking with the correspondence, address books and other information.

The diaries

This paper focuses on the thirty-five diaries from the 1920s and 1930s with the addition of an address book. The diaries employ small squared paper with rounded corners and are hand-stitched. They have black imitation leather covers. Exceptions are the five diaries between 1932 and 1935 which have orange, green or grey card covers, three of them with the Gallia manufacturers stamp. The notebooks between 1920 and 1925 measure approximately 7 x 19 cm., several with the sticker of the Papeterie Normand, 32 passage du Havre, Paris. From February 1926 the notebooks are larger – 8 x 22cm – and some bear the sticker of the Papeterie Royer, 54 rue de Seine. Most of the notebooks have between 48 and 52 pages, but the first (F3(3)1) and several from the later 1930s have between 90 and 105 pages. Some pages have become detached over the years. The *agendas* for the 1920s and 1930s therefore contain over 1500 pages, or 3,000 sides of notes (recto and verso), a considerable mass of data.

Deciphering the handwriting

In these *agendas* Le Corbusier jotted down notes, often on the move or on the telephone, in pencil or pen. The clarity and legibility of the handwriting varies enormously, but it is impossible in some cases to decipher a name or word unless one has a good idea of what it might be. There are some aids to making reasonable identifications of names. An address book, mostly written by a secretary or assistant but with some additions by the master, covers the period of the 1940s with some names derived from the 1930s correspondence⁵. This is usually more legible than Le Corbusier's notes.

The names and details are clearly copied from Le Corbusier's notes, since there are frequent question marks, and many of the names are accompanied by 'M?', indicating that the secretary did not know the gender of the person or whether they had a professional title. A notebook including names, addresses and telephone numbers in Le Corbusier's hand also covers the 1940s⁶. A careful transcription of these two documents provides not only an index to around 700 names but in many cases identifications of their position or role, addresses and telephone numbers as well. Occasionally we find lists of people that can help decipher illegible names. For example, among the records for the *Esprit Nouveau* magazine we find some typed lists of subscribers⁷. In the diary for 1938 is a list of people to co-opt for his petition about the Palais des Soviets⁸.

Another useful source of names is the index to the interwar correspondence provided by the Fondation Le Corbusier⁹. Under the heading '*Correspondance*' the website includes some of the names of people with whom Le Corbusier corresponded in the period preceding 1946 arranged alphabetically. Organized separately are other collections of correspondence, such as that associated with the Briqueterie d'Alfortville, the *Esprit Nouveau* magazine and all the built and unbuilt architectural projects. After the war, the correspondence is listed under *Courriers Chronologiques* and organized by year. On the computers at the Fondation Le Corbusier, but not on the website, names throughout the database can be found using a global search. As a last resort, of course, names can be searched on the BnF Gallica site (for example, see note 41). To give an example among many: a name that could be read as 'Addoc', 'Addi' or 'Addo' appears frequently in the *agenda* for March to October 1935. The address book gives us R. Addor, engineer, of 16 Avenue Duval-le-Camus, Saint-Cloud, confirmed by correspondence in the archive¹⁰.

Interpreting the data

The problems do not end when an apparently illegible text has been transcribed. There is a big difference between data and information, between signs transposed into recognisable language and a full understanding of what the words mean. A correctly transcribed name can be considered as data: information involves knowing who the person is, why Le Corbusier might have wanted to meet or talk with him or her and why this might be important. Data about an event become information when one knows when it took place, where, who participated and what was its significance.

For example, in his diary begun on 20 May 1938 we read 'Pégurier' of 9 rue Falguière¹¹. This appears to be an invitation to lunch on Thursday 23 June 1938¹². The address book confirms this Paris address and adds that of her house 'Rev Estello' ('*près de Saint-Tropez*')¹³. A letter from this lady to Le Corbusier's mother of 31 March 1937 had invited her to stay at her house near Saint-Tropez, which she called 'Le Pelou'¹⁴. She clearly

5. FLC F3(6)7.

6. FLC F3(11)7. The first 15 folios include addresses, accumulated in haphazard order. The remaining pages include notes and appointments. At the end are some pages of visiting cards. Most of the addresses (folios 2-15) relate to the period of the war and shortly after. On folios 16v and 17r are lists of folders and suitcases left in the Queens Hôtel Vichy after Le Corbusier's departure in 1942. A card from Helena Simkhovitch is the only record of his trip to New York in 1946.

7. FLC A1(3)251-3. These lists include some information of place of origin. The spelling of the names is not perfect. Lists of names associated with the journal *Plans* can be found in FLC A2(3)93-98.

8. FLC F3(6)5 fol. 18v.

9. www.fondationlecorbusier.fr/Archives/Correspondance. Excluded from this list is correspondence associated with the architectural projects, travel, lectures, publications and some other subjects such as the Briqueterie d'Alfortville (1880 documents) or Société Éverite which are listed under 'Ateliers'.

10. Visiting card of René Addor FLC E1(1)8 and correspondence about various projects FLC E1(1)9-13.

11. FLC F3(6)5 fol 9r. The architect Henri Pacon also lived at 9 rue Falguière.

12. The Tuesday of the same week is dated 21 June 1938.

13. FLC F3(6)7 fol.36r.

14. FLC I1(1)130.

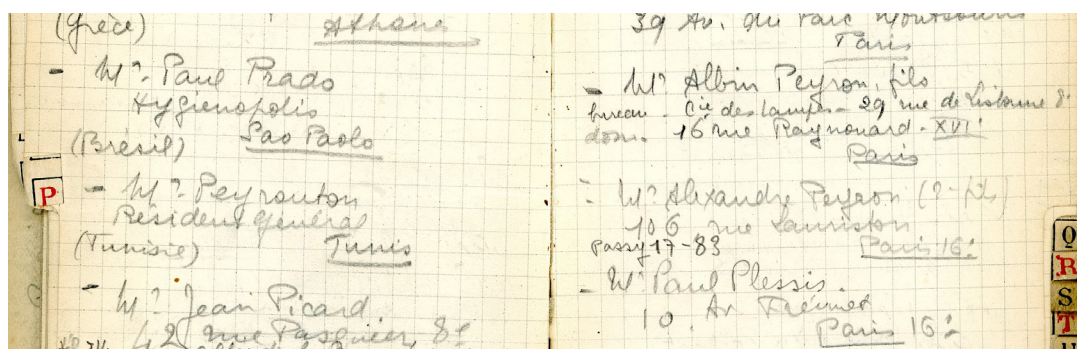


FIG. 3

Le Corbusier's address book, compiled in the early 1950s. FLC F3(6)7.

15. FLC H(1)132.

16. FLC F3(6)7 folio 42r.

17. Postcard from Le Corbusier's mother to Le Corbusier and Yvonne at Rev-Estello 12 March 1938, letter of 19 July 1938 to Mme Pégurier asking if he and Yvonne could stay (FLC E1(18)152, confirmed by a postcard from Georges Pelorson to Le Corbusier, readdressed to Rev Estello on 19 July 1938 (FLC E2(18)151 and another from Le Corbusier's brother of 12 August 1938, also readdressed to Rev Estello (FLC R1(10)19). A page of the diary F3(6)5 fol. 17v, that can be dated to around 18 July, address 'Mme Pégurier Rev Eestello, rue Gambetta Saint-Tropez, Var.

18. Letter of Le Corbusier to his mother 23 August 1938, with an account of his accident on the 13th (FLCR2(1)263).

19. Tim Benton. "Le Corbusier e il vernacolare: Le Sextant à Les Mathes 1935", in *Le Case per artisti sull'Isola Comacina*. (A. Canziani. Como: Nodolibri, 2010), 22-43.

20. FLC F3(5)4 fol. 8r Prof. Rudolf Fueter, Rector of Zurich University played a key role in supporting Le Corbusier against criticism from many compatriots.

21. FLC F3(3)3-47. These pages can only be dated approximately, to May 1922.

asked Le Corbusier to redesign her house because he responds to this effect on 8 April 1937¹⁵. On 13 May 1937 Le Corbusier writes to a Mr. Steele, explaining that Mme Pégurier is the widow of an artist with a large house at Saint-Tropez that she wants to sell for development as a hotel and for which she needs some finance. The address book informs us that Mr. Steele had an office at 33 avenue des Champs-Élysées and a home address at 21 rue de Pontoise and was presumably in a position to help her out¹⁶. Le Corbusier and Yvonne stayed with Mme Pégurier at 'Rev Estello' in March 1938 and again in July and August 1938¹⁷. This little snippet of life becomes interesting when we learn that Le Corbusier must have been staying at 'Rev Estello' on August 13 1938, when he suffered a terrible accident swimming in the harbour of Saint-Tropez¹⁸. It also dispels the idea that the only place Le Corbusier and Yvonne visited on the Côte d'Azur was the *Villa au bord de mer* – E-1027- designed by Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici in 1929.

The address book also supplies additional information. For example, under 'P' in F3(6)7 we find not only the retired General of the French Salvation Army Albin Peyron, but the names and addresses of his two sons, one of whom, also named Albin, was the client of the weekend house 'Le Sextant' at Les Mathes, designed by Le Corbusier in 1935¹⁹.

Content and organisation of the diaries

Le Corbusier used these slim diaries for various purposes: notes about meetings or about things he had seen, reminders of things to do (often labelled 'urgent'), appointments (identified by time and day of the week) and sketches or notes about things on his mind, for example, articles or lectures to prepare. He filled the notebooks from both ends. From the front (the 'front-matter') are the appointments and things to do; from the back (the end-matter) are the more discursive notes and sketches. When the notes from front and back met up, he began a new notebook. It follows from this that the pages in the 'front-matter' proceed chronologically from left to right, while those of the 'end-matter' advance from right to left (from the end in the direction of the beginning). Confirmation for this comes from one of the early *agendas* where he followed this system. On folio 41v (the penultimate page) of the *agenda* F3(3)2 which Le Corbusier says was started in February 1922, he noted events dated 16 and 17 February while on folio 40r he notes dates of the 19th to the 25th.

The value of these *agendas* lies in part in the inherent interest of the notes and observations. For example in late June 1932 Le Corbusier notes: 'Écrire Fueter; avons intention photo collage, envoyer des documents'. This is the first indication of the photo mural which he and Pierre Jeanneret would unveil in the dining room of the Pavillon Suisse a year later²⁰. Some of the notes in the end-matter include drafts of lectures or presentations, sketches of paintings or buildings and commentaries on things he had seen and heard. For example, on folios 46v and 47r of an *agenda* begun in May 1922 are little sketches in plan and elevation of skyscrapers associated with his project for *Une ville contemporaine de trois millions d'habitants* and a note to put the railway stations underground²¹. In another *agenda*, on folio 46v we find a delightful Purist still life and a note about his project of Immeubles-Villas for the Franco-American company, dated July 1922. On folios 45v and 46r, which follow on in date (being part of the 'end-matter') are a set of plans for a small house. Around 16 September 1932, Le Corbusier made three astonishing sketches of ideas for developing the area around the Salvation Army

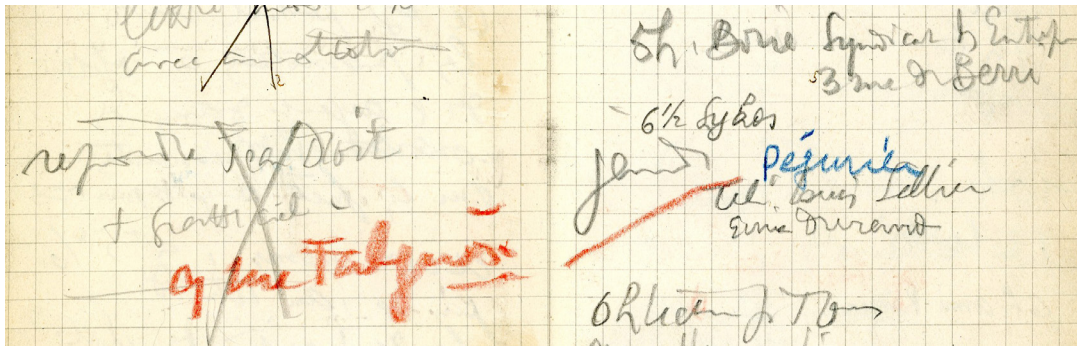


FIG. 4
Detail of folios 8v and 9r of
the diary covering May 1938
to November 1939.
FLC F3(6)5.

hostel on the rue Cantagrel. These are connected with the Cité d'Hébergement (or Cité d'hospitalisation) project, a massive extension of the Salvation Army hostel²². These sketches were done while he was at his mother's house, a visit that ended on 26 September 1932²³.

Sometimes, the preparatory notes Le Corbusier jotted down for his lectures are of particular value because we have little or no other record of their contents. For example, in June 1934, during his tour of Italy, Le Corbusier made sketches and notes for his lectures in Rome and Milan²⁴. On folios 77v and 78r, he inserts Italian examples, such as Bologna, with its famous medieval towers, and Genoa, into his usual arguments about town planning. In notes for an earlier lecture in Rome (folios 86v and 87r) he makes an interesting comment on the heavy burden placed by the past. Many buildings from the past reflect a loss of intelligence, he argues, but many remain irreproachable. On the facing page he illustrates the Cathedrals of Soissons and Notre Dame and, in a coloured sketch labelled '*Les Harmoniseurs*' he shows a view along the newly created via del Impero in Rome, with the Colosseum closing the view, the Basilica of Maxentius on the right and, on the left, a glazed façade. This was the site chosen for the Palazzo del Littorio, for the design of which a competition was being held. His argument is that old and new can coexist, united by the common scale of man.

Similarly, on various pages of the end matter of the *agenda* for February 1937 to May 1938 there are notes for his lecture on the '*Phénomène créateur*' at the Kunsthalle Zurich on 12 January 1938, on the occasion of the exhibition of his paintings. These preparatory notes for lectures are particularly valuable because very few of them were transcribed or described by journalists²⁵.

Clues to intangible memory

The abundant documentation in the Fondation Le Corbusier, including hundreds of thousands of letters, tends to record formal transactions. Most of the daily activity of the office – the telephone conversations, the meetings, the things to do that did or did not get done – are recorded in the diaries. Much of the information associated with these notes will never be known; we cannot tell what he said on the phone or in a meeting unless it led to a result worth documenting. But this fugitive record gives us a good idea about what was primarily concerning Le Corbusier. For example, Le Corbusier's devotion to his master Auguste Perret began to go sour in 1922, leading to all-out conflict from December 1923. An early bone of contention was the studio house for the sculptor and collector Pierre Gaut, an early subscriber to *L'Esprit Nouveau*. Gaut and Le Corbusier were in correspondence in January 1922 to design and build a Citrohan-like house in the square Montsouris, not far from Ozenfant's studio²⁶. All seemed to be going well until Gaut wrote on 8 May to say that he had bought the site at a price significantly less than that quoted by Le Corbusier and that he was consequently entrusting the project to another architect²⁷. This architect turned out to be Auguste Perret, and Le Corbusier was not pleased²⁸. The diary records a number of meetings and telephone calls connected with this unhappy story, including notes to 'écrire Lipchitz Gaut' (late April 1922) and 'aller Lipchitz p. Gaut' (c. 2 May 1922)²⁹. These mark Le Corbusier's efforts to have Lipchitz persuade Gaut to accept his project. These notes seem to have preceded Gaut's letter of rejection of 8 May. We also know from the *agenda* that Le Corbusier visited Gaut at 6.30 p.m. on a Tuesday, probably 23 May 1922³⁰ and rang Perret around 17 May³¹.

22. See axonometric view FLC 10919. Brian Brace Taylor, *Le Corbusier la Cité de refuge Paris 1929-1933*. (Paris: L'Équerre, 1981), 74-79; and Fig. 82 and *Oeuvre complete 1929-1934*, 109.

23. Letter to his mother 27 Sept. 1932 (FLC R2(1)178).

24. FLC F3(6)4 90r-75v passim. On folio 89v a sketch of a landscape is annotated '14 heures 45 (Rome) 4 juin 1934.' The lecture notes and other observations extend to 75v.

25. Tim Benton. *Le Corbusier conférencier*. (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2007).

26. See e.g. a letter of 13 February 1922 in which Le Corbusier offers to build a house based on his Citrohan project for 60,000 francs, plus 40,000 for the land (FLC E2(3)66) and the reply of 18 February in which Gaut accepts these terms (E2(3)69). Le Corbusier proceeded to present his client with the tenders on 11 March, amounting to 50,500 francs, complete with fittings except for the central heating (E2(3)71).

27. FLC E2(3)72.

28. Le Corbusier wrote to Perret on 18 May calling on him to stand aside and complaining that Perret viewed him as a rival who had stolen his ideas. FLC E2(3)74.

29. FLC F3(3)3 fol 2v and F3(3)3 fol. 6v

30. FLC F3(3)3 fol. 22r.

31. FLC F3(3)3 fol. 14r.

Personal life

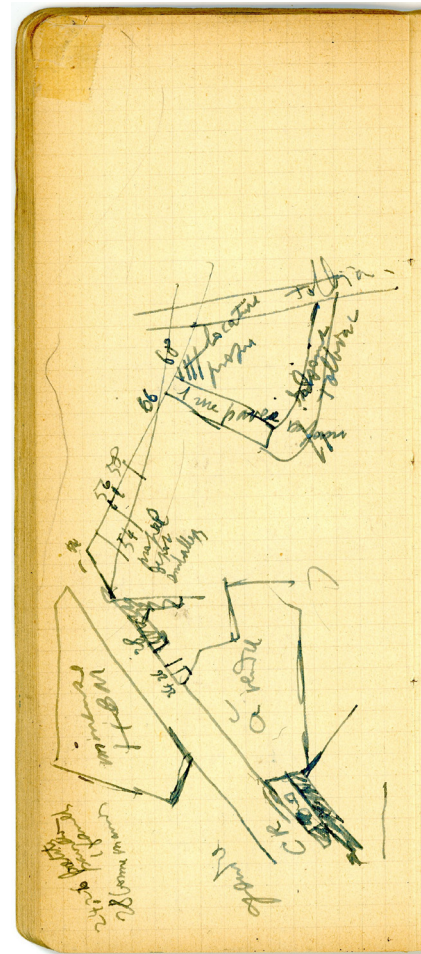
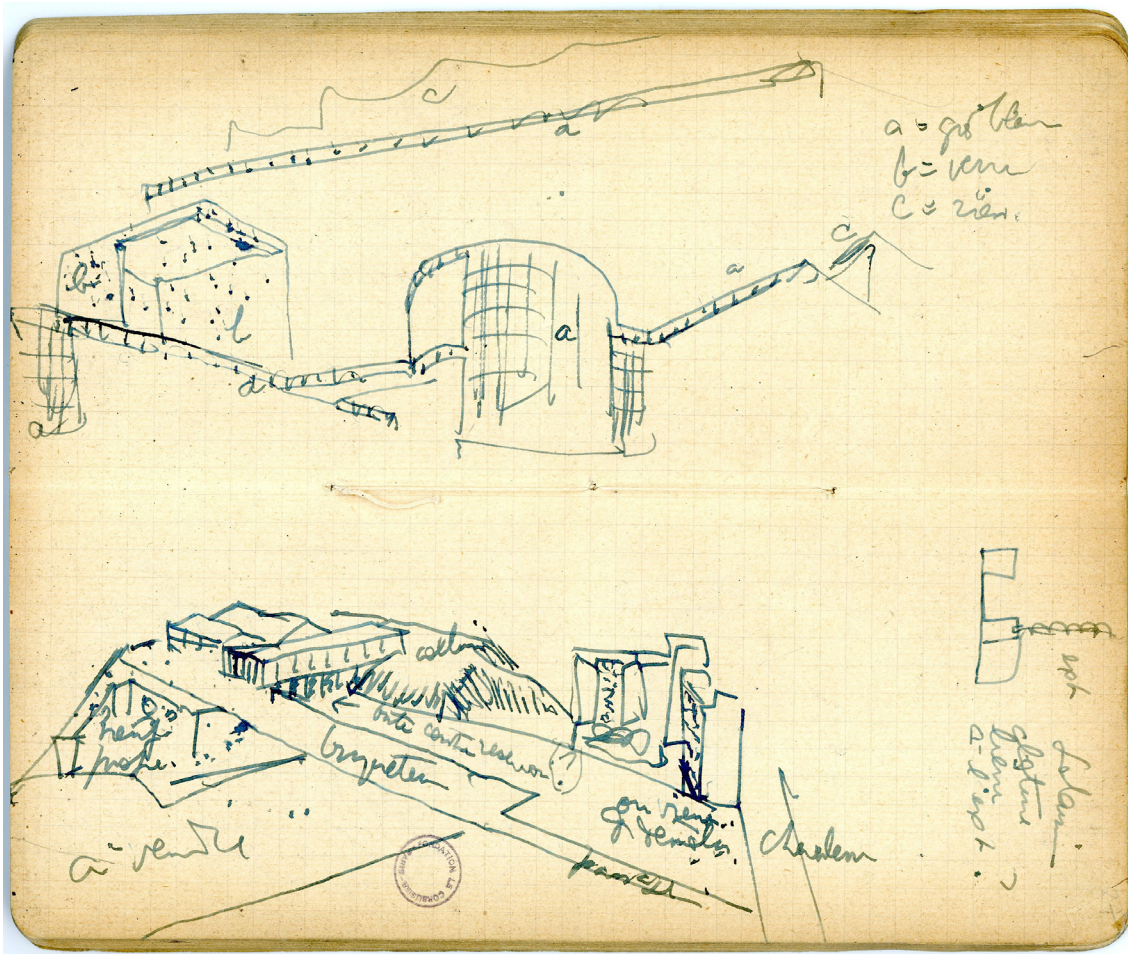
The *agendas* also give us a glimpse of how the personal and professional lives of Le Corbusier intertwined. Although there are few references to his relationship with Yvonne Gallis, we do find notes about setting up a bank account for her with the Crédit Lyonnais bank in May 1928³². And on 30 September 1935 we find an enigmatic note, 'Dr Von', presumably a rendez-vous with a doctor for his wife Yvonne³³. On September 26 he notes the registration plates of a number of cars involved in a car accident, complete with sketch plan. He later complains that the insurance company had only reimbursed him 726frs against his repair bill of around 1,800 frs³⁴. The diaries hide hundreds of little secrets like this which often fill in gaps in the documentation or, like these examples, provide unique insights into his activities. In *Agenda* F3(3)5, covering the period July to November 1922, we find several references to doctors. For example, on fol. 6r he lists an appointment with Dr Renaudoux at 26 avenue Wilson, probably on Monday 10 July. Another appointment on Thursday 13 July confirms that something was amiss. Then, on fol. 21v, among a string of daily professional appointments, we find 'Winter; je dois 32.00 + 15p divers + ambulance'. This must refer to paying back his friend and personal doctor Winter for accompanying him to or from hospital for a painful operation on his colon that he describes to his mother on 15 August³⁵. The operation had been much more disagreeable than he had thought, and he was still on a diet.

32. FLC F3(4)6 fol.28v.

33. FLC F3(6)1 fol. 43v.

34. FLC F3(6)1 fol. 45r and 50r.

35. Le Corbusier to his mother, 15 August 1922 (FLC R1(6)191).



Dating

It is clear from these examples that it would be very helpful to know as precisely as possible when each note was made. The question of dating presents particular difficulties. As has been said, unlike conventional diaries, these notebooks are undated. Although the Fondation calls them 'agendas' (diaries), only the later ones, after the Second World War, are commercial diaries with printed dates. When he noted forthcoming meetings, he noted only the time and day of the week. From 1922 he developed a technique of filling pages of the front-matter, occasionally, with the days of the week (Monday to Sunday) in order to list his appointments. I will call these 'week-pages'. The trick is to identify to which week he is referring, which then dates the notes on the adjoining pages. Very rarely, he attributes a date to these 'week-pages'. An example is in the diary F3(6)4 (25 February 1937 to 20 May 1938) where, on folio 47r he notes 'lundi 29 nov' [1937], 'mardi 30 nov' and 'mercredi 1 dec'³⁶.

Folio 10r of FLC F3(3)5 is a 'week-page'. Against 'mardi' he notes '2 [14.00] Lipchitz', one of his regular lunchtime appointments with Jacques Lipchitz, for whom he was building a studio in Boulogne-sur-Seine³⁷. For Friday he notes an appointment at 8.00 pm with Raymond Cogniat who had written a generally favourable account in *En attendant* on Le Corbusier's project for the City for Three Million people, exhibited at the Salon

36. He makes similar notes of dates on several pages in this diary.

37. The first sketches for the Lipchitz and Miestchaninof studios were done around May 1923 but the project only got under way in January 1924 with the first set of numbered drawings. See: Tim Benton. *Les Villas parisiennes de Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret, 1920-1930*. (Paris: Editions de la Villette, 2007).

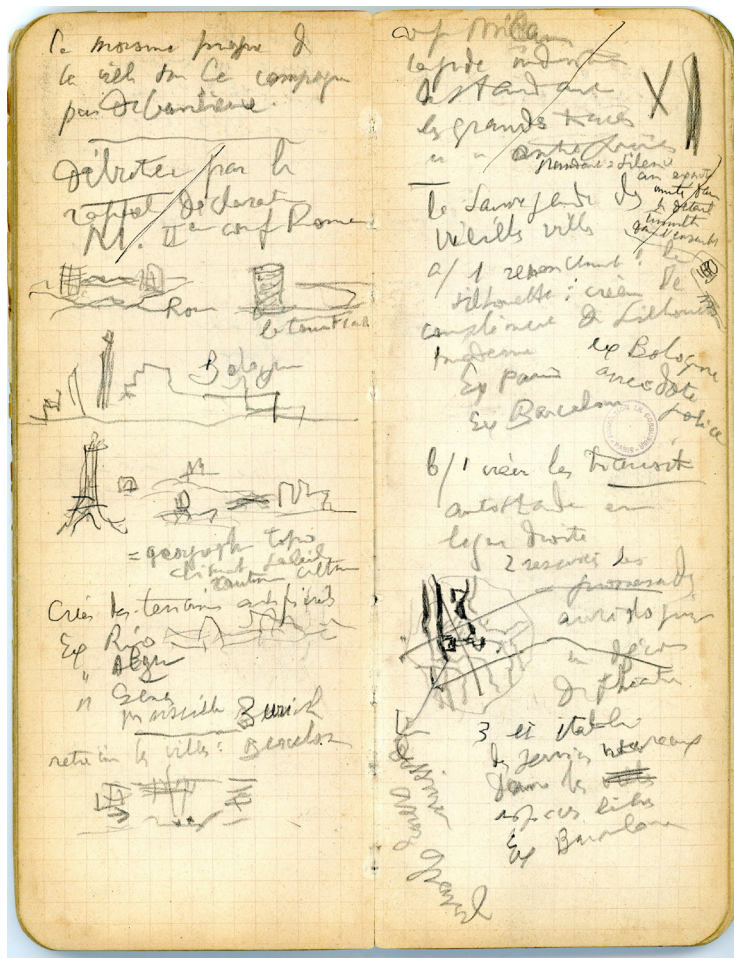


FIG. 5
Le Corbusier, fanciful perspective of Cité de Refuge, already in construction (above) and project for developing the surrounding area with a Cité d'Hébergement. FLC F3(5)4 fols. 26v and 27r.

FIG. 6
Le Corbusier, sketch plan of area to North of the Cité de Refuge, as far as the rue Tolbiac, indicating location of 'immense housing estate'. FLC F3(5)4 fol 27v.

FIG. 7
Le Corbusier, notes for a lecture in Milan, June 1934. FLC F3(5)9 77v and 78r.

38. FLC G1(01)33. SEIE (*Société d'entreprises industrielles et d'études*) was the company set up in 1916 to supervise the brick factory at Alfortville and for Le Corbusier to design projects for the parent company SABA (*Société d'applications du béton armé*) managed by Bornand. H. Allen Brooks. *Le Corbusier's formative years: Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 473.

39. FLC F3(3)1-3.

40. This refers to the illustration advertising the Dalcrozan class of 'Cours de Rythmique' run by Le Corbusier's brother Albert (*L'Esprit Nouveau* No 1 p. 123, October 1920).

41. See: Tim Benton. "From Jeanneret to Le Corbusier...", 28-39.

42. FLC A1(14)269.

43. FLC G1(2)271. One of the difficulties of using simple digital search engines in archives is that spelling of names is critical. Le Corbusier spells Praportchetovitch three different ways in his correspondence with him (none correct). I have taken the spelling from an advertisement in *Le Petit Parisien*, Paris 28 April 1920, page 4 promoting the Praportchetovitch 'baraquements pliants' for 'agriculteurs' (BnF Gallica).

44. Eg Le Corbusier to Praportchetovitch 13 July 1920 (FLC G1(2)265). Le Corbusier refused to pay for the *baraque* and later tried to return it to Praportchetovitch (9 March 1922, FLC G1(3)473).

45. G1(2)285.

46. Le Corbusier to Adolf Loos, 3 Gisela Str. Vienna, chasing him up for articles that he had promised the editors of *L'Esprit Nouveau* (FLC E2(9)72).

d'Automne. The clipping provided by the Argus press agency gives the date as 'décembre 1922'. On the facing page he made notes on a possible trip to Germany on 15-16 December. The week can be fixed precisely, however, by the note against Friday: '6 ½ [18.30] conseil SEIE'. We know from the minutes of the Assemblée Générale of SEIE held on 29 December that a meeting of the Conseil had been held on Friday 8 December 1922³⁸.

Le Corbusier usually dates the first page of the diary. For example on the diary F3-3-5 he wrote: '*commencé le 20 nov 1922*'. Given that he dated the beginning of the next diary 23 January 1923, we have a clear *terminus post quem* and *terminus ante quem* for F3-3-5. In this case, there are ten 'week' pages, sufficient to cover the entire period. We can date each of these week-pages, therefore, and assume that any pages of notes before these week-pages relate to things before that week. By this calculation the third week after 20 November 1922 (F3(3)5 fol. 10r) begins with Monday 4 December, once again confirming that the meeting with Lipchitz on the Tuesday took place on the 5th of December.

Unfortunately, there are usually insufficient 'weeks' to fill the period covered by each diary. Le Corbusier did not usually note appointments during his vacations and only sporadically during his travels. This means that we can set aside weeks in August and at other times when we know he was travelling or was ill. For example, in the case of another diary – F3(6)1 – it is sufficient to discount the four and a half weeks of his vacation in August to fill the period of the diary with 'weeks'. The chronology is confirmed by a reference on folio 42v to 'lundi 16 sept.'

When there are insufficient 'weeks' to cover the period of a diary, dating relies on comparing the notes to letters or other pieces of information in the archive. In the first three *agendas*, dealing with the period June 1920 to November 1922, there are no 'weeks' at all³⁹. In F3(3)1, folio 78v we find '*Albert illustration 11 Sept Rythmique*', which gives us one fixed point⁴⁰. To fix the approximate dates for each page, we have to look for connections with other documents. Fortunately, we have a lot of dated correspondence from this period, when Le Corbusier had a secretary and was engaged in a number of failed business schemes linked to the Briqueterie d'Alfortville⁴¹. So, on folio 2r Le Corbusier notes '*voir Wallace prospectus*' and there is a letter to Wallace et Dreger about publicity for *L'Esprit Nouveau* magazine dated 31 May 1920⁴². On folio 3r is a note '*Étudier tuyaux Eternit*'. Eternit was the name of the French company that Le Corbusier wanted to direct, supplying asbestos tiles and tubing manufactured by the Swiss Everite company. Sure enough, there is a letter to Everite on 15 June about Everite asbestos tubes. Next to this is a note 'Écrire Loos' which follows on from a telegram Le Corbusier sent to Adolf Loos on 26 May. And so on. Piecing together the fragments of surviving correspondence gradually builds up a chronological picture.

Sometimes, we can triangulate different clues. For example, on folio 39v, we read, '*écrire Bonifas Prapo Voisin*'. In a letter to Paul Bonifas of 20 July 1920, Le Corbusier refers to Praportchetovitch's prefabricated wooden houses (without naming him)⁴³. Le Corbusier had ordered one of these prefabricated houses from Praportchetovitch, and there is correspondence about this in June and July 1920⁴⁴. We must assume that Le Corbusier was not happy because he strongly advises Bonifas not to use these houses which, he says, are merely *baraques* and unsuitable for use in winter. Instead, he urges him to use the Voisin prefabricated houses currently on show at the *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs*. The letter also mentions the Voisin aeroplane and automobile company. A Voisin prefabricated house by Noël and Patout is illustrated in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, and Le Corbusier was writing the articles for this book in 1923. On folio 39v Le Corbusier notes, 'Télé[phone] Lafuma' and on the facing page 40r specifies: 'Lafuma 31 ct [31 July] 13 538'. On 30 July Le Corbusier sends Lafuma a cheque for 13,538 frs for the purchase of paper for the magazine, specifying that the cheque is predated 31 July⁴⁵. On folio 39r we find another instruction: '*écrire Loos*', and there is indeed a letter to Loos dated 21 July 1920⁴⁶. All this is sufficient to date the entries around folios 39r to 40r to late July 1920.

It can be seen that this kind of research depends on a considerable backlog of data. In my own case, I have accumulated a database of around 20,000 documents, mostly concerning Le Corbusier but also some other fields I have studied. This has enabled me to 'decode' the *agendas* that overlap with my own research interests. But my personal database only records documents relevant to research projects I have undertaken. Beyond that, the significant database at the Fondation Le Corbusier must provide the basis for further work.

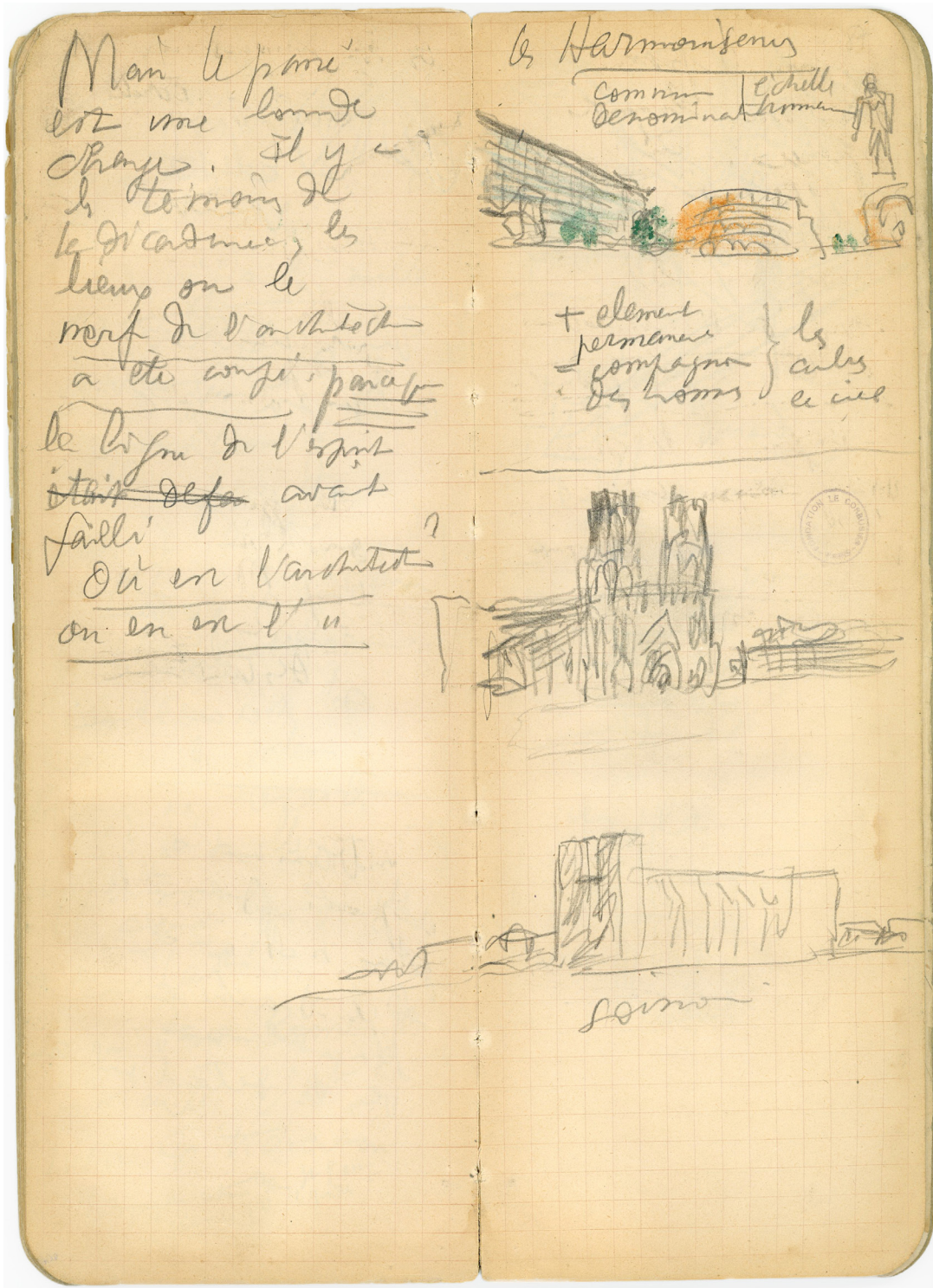


FIG. 8
 Le Corbusier, a note on the
 past and sketches of the
 via del Impero Rome, June
 1935. FLC F3(5)9 86v and
 87r.

The Fondation Le Corbusier archive

The Fondation archive includes around 400,000 documents of various sorts that have been digitised and can be accessed through a database. Unfortunately, this database has certain limitations. Most of the documents are held in A4 cardboard boxes, containing up to 200 sheets each. These were originally given alphanumeric identifications (eg H1(1)1) and the individual documents inside each box given numbers. Unfortunately, these numbers have been changed twice in the history of the Fondation but are now stable. The current database consists of an index of the label of each box rather than an index to each sheet. Over the years, the archivists have added considerable further information to each 'label', which has enriched the search engine. For example, the labels of boxes including the post war correspondence, which are ordered chronologically, have the names of each person included. When you find one of these names in the search engine, the database leads you to the box, and you must scroll through all the documents in that box in order to find the document you want. This is not a problem, but many of the labels of boxes dealing with specific subjects have not been annotated in this way. For example, there are several boxes of documents for each of Le Corbusier's built and unbuilt projects, containing tens of thousands of letters to clients and entrepreneurs. These names do not all appear in the general online index. To give one example, the painter and glazier used by Le Corbusier and Jeanneret in almost all their constructions of the 1920s, A. Célio, is referred to only once in the Fondation database under correspondence⁴⁷. To find documents associated with this man, you have to search the boxes for each project on which he worked. Similarly, there are over 1,700 documents connected with the Briqueterie d'Alfortville and the various agencies for which Jeanneret worked between 1918 and 1923, mostly consisting of letters to business associates. Hardly any of these names appear in the index under 'Correspondance'. Or again, Le Corbusier engaged in a massive propaganda campaign to reverse the judgement of the competition for the Palace of the League of Nations including several hundred letters. Many of these have been identified under *Correspondance*, but not all. For example, seven letters are recorded to or from the Czech ambassador Stephen Osusky, but many more exist in the archive. This is a problem when dealing with the *agendas* for 1930-1931, which are full of references to Ambassador Osusky.

When did the Jeanneret-La Roche project begin?

Part of the function of the *agendas* is to provide negative evidence of contacts. For example, Le Corbusier dated the large house projected for the mouth of the square du Docteur Blanche as 1922, but there is no documentation to support this. This project was located on land being managed by the Banque Immobilière de Paris and its director Esnault⁴⁸. In the *agenda* for January to April 1923 we find several mentions of 'Jasmin' and 'Montmorency' – indicators of the sites in Auteuil Le Corbusier was researching. He was familiar with the area, having adapted the house of M. Berque in the Villa Montmorency in 1921-2 and worked on a big project in 1922 to build a block of apartments for the Franco-Américaine company and its director Charles Sée. The first precise mention of any of the stakeholders in the projects that eventually led to the La Roche and Jeanneret-Raaf houses is in *agenda* F3(3)6 on folio 36r which I date to 29 March 1923. He writes, '5 Esnault' – a meeting with Esnault at 5.00 p.m. On the previous page he had noted: '*Aller Esnault p. Sarmiento lui demander les combinaisons hypothèques*' and on folio 37 he notes '*Télé[phoner] Sarmiento*' and '*aller Esnault*'. The letter of 30 March to Esnault confirms the visit on the previous day and specifies that Sarmiento would visit the bank '*mardi prochain à 3h30 avec un achat en vue*'.⁴⁹ Esnault in his letter of reply on 31 March says he will be away until the 9th April and, sure enough, Le Corbusier makes a note after 8 April, '*Télé Esnault terrain villa Montmorency Alb[ert]*'⁵⁰. A second meeting with Esnault for 5.00 pm on Thursday 12 April is noted on folio 42r, and this is also confirmed by a letter next day⁵¹. In this case the diary fills in the gaps consistently with the paper trail. The fact that there are no mentions of Mr Esnault or any of the other possible clients for the Jasmin site in the 1922 diaries supports my view that the project illustrated in the first volume of the *Oeuvre complète* was probably done for the first meeting with Esnault, on 29 March 1923⁵².

We can assume that the notes proceed chronologically from the first page. So it is usually enough to fix three or four pages at different points to construct a chronological map of the diary which may limit possible choices. This is not always easy. For example, on folio 7v of F3(3)1, Le Corbusier writes '*Écrire parents p vacances B*'. 'B' may stand for the picturesque hamlet of Chables-sur-Blonay in Switzerland where the Jeanneret family

47. This is a letter concerning Le Corbusier's refurbishment of FLC E1(13)3.

48. Confusingly, Le Corbusier's secretary at this time was also called Esnault.

49. H1(2)51.

50. Esnault to Le Corbusier 30/3/1923 (FLC H1(2)51 and *agenda* F3(3)6 39v.

51. H1(2)53 and *agenda* F3(3)6 fol. 42r.

52. Tim Benton. *Le Corbusier conférencier*. (Paris: Le Moniteur, 2007), 47.

often rented a chalet for their vacation. In a letter to the lawyer Tell Perrin on 21 June 1920 he said he would be joining his parents in Châbles-sur-Blonay in 18 days⁵³. Other documents attest to the fact that Le Corbusier was staying with his parents in Châbles in August⁵⁴. We are helped by a note on folio 5v that reads: 'URGENT cheque Praportchetovitch'. In a letter to Praportchetovitch of 19 June 1920, he confirms his order and includes a cheque for 1,800 frs⁵⁵. There is also a reference, on folio 8v to planning a trip to Bordeaux and a letter of 12 June refers to planning a meeting in Bordeaux⁵⁶. Putting all this together, we can deduce that these notes were made between 12 and 19 June and refer to events that would take place subsequently. It is impossible to be more precise than this. *Agenda* F3(3)1 is particularly difficult because, as has been stated, there are no 'weeks' to divide up the pages of notes. With only one date in the whole diary, in the end-matter, on folio 88v, recording a payment to his brother Albert of 100 francs on 6 August 1920, there is great variation possible in the dating, particularly since the next *agenda* only begins on 1 February 1922.

The system of 'weeks' begins tentatively with F3(3)4 (July-November 1922) with three 'weeks' indicated but by F3(3)5 there are ten 'weeks', covering each week from 20 November 1922 to 26 January 1923. Most of the subsequent *agendas* for the 1920s and 1930s have a reasonable array of 'weeks' once the weeks for vacations and extended travel are discounted. There are some omissions. There are no diaries between September 1920 and February 1922, from April to June 1923, from January to July 1924 and from November 1926 to January 1928 (with the exception of some fragments of the *agenda* F3(4)5). The *agenda* for September 1929 to July 1930 is missing, so that we have no notes of the long lecture tour in South America but we do have an *agenda* for the 1935 lecture tour of the United States.

53. G1(2)232.

54. Letter from Fabrique de Fenêtres Kiefer in Zurich to Le Corbusier, 24 August 1920, addressed to Charles s/Blonay. (FLC U2(9)1).

55. FLC G1(2)208.

56. Le Corbusier to Rodriguez 12 June 1920, planning a meeting with Simonot in Bordeaux (FLC G1(2)212).

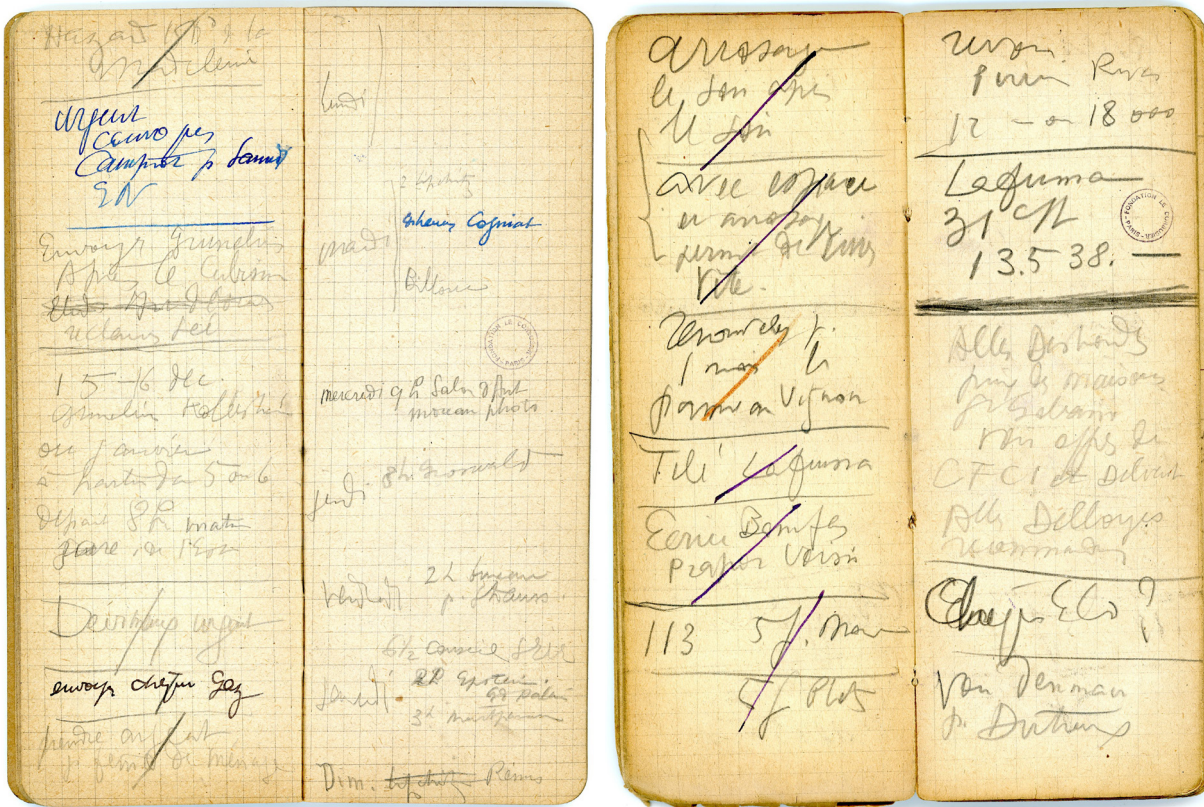


FIG. 9
Le Corbusier, Diary of November 1922 to January 1923, folios 9v and 10r, 5 December 1922. .FLC F3(3)5.

FIG. 10
Le Corbusier, Diary covering June to September 1920, folios 39v and 40r. FLC F3-3-1.

What is the point of this labour-intensive research into the dating of the *agendas*? The diaries give an insight into a whole field of otherwise undocumented activity. For example, Le Corbusier's meetings with his doctors or his sessions at the gym playing basketball are often indicated. Much of Le Corbusier's work was done on the telephone or in face to face meetings. Although we cannot usually know what happened in these conversations, their frequency and timing alone are of great value in understanding the sequence of events. The diaries are also helpful in establishing the dates of trips and vacations. We often find lists of train times before a trip. Although he was usually so busy on his visits abroad for lectures or conferences that the system of 'weeks' does not survive, an indication of notes taken while away from Paris is often betrayed by the word 'Retour', indicating something that has to be done when he returns.

The *agendas* provide an astonishingly rich, if tantalising glimpse not only into Le Corbusier's professional and private life but also to that of many busy architects in the inter-war period. I hope that this work will help open up this rich resource to researchers.

Author _____

Tim Benton est Professeur en Histoire de l'Art (Emeritus) (Open University, Angleterre). Son livre *Les villas de Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret : 1920-1930* (1984) a été réédité en français, allemand, anglais et italien (2007). Son ouvrage *Le Corbusier conférencier*, (2007, éditions anglais et français) a reçu le Grand Prix du livre de l'Académie de l'Architecture. *Le livre LC Foto Le Corbusier photographer* (Lars Muller 2013) et son livre *Le Corbusier peintre a Cap Martin*. (Editions du Patrimoine 2015) (Prix de la Méditerranée) développent ses recherches. L'exposition et catalogue *Le Corbusier: mes années sauvages* (Le Piquey, 2015 et Roquebrune 2016) ont été un point de départ pour le film *Les vacances de Le Corbusier*, 2015. Une autre exposition - *E-1027 Restauration de la villa en bord de mer* - a aussi été associé avec un catalogue du même nom, en 2016. Une troisième exposition et catalogue ont été inaugurés à Roquebrune-Cap-Martin : Benton, Tim, Elisabetta Gaspard Emina, Maria Salerno, and Magda Rebutato, *Ici règne l'amitié, Rencontres en bord de mer: E-1027, L'Étoile de mer, Le Cabanon à Roquebrune-Cap-Martin*. (Paris 2019). Il vient de publier le guide du site : *Cap Moderne; Eileen Gray et Le Corbusier, la modernité au bord de mer* (Paris) (Editions du patrimoine, 2020). Son article «E-1027 and the Drôle de Guerre.» *AA files* (2017) 74:123-154) examine les relations entre Eileen Gray, Jean Badovici et Le Corbusier. Il a collaboré avec l'Association Cap Moderne dans la restauration et gestion du site à Roquebrune-Cap-Martin.

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