



**FIG. 1**  
Le Corbusier with the President of the A. A., at the dinner of the A. A. given in his honour, after receiving the Golden RIBA Medal, April 1st, 1953 (A.A., May 1953, cover. FLC, T1-14-32).

# THE CORB LEGACY. A CONVERSATION WITH KENNETH FRAMPTON

Veronique Boone, Gregorio Carboni Maestri

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**Abstract:** This interview was made on September 6th, 2019, to Kenneth Frampton, *Ware Professor* at the Graduate school of architecture, planning, and preservation, Columbia University of New York. It is part of a series of interviews with prominent historians and architects marking the first generation of studies on the figure and work of Le Corbusier, with the support of the Foundation Le Corbusier. This filmed exchange questions the ground for Kenneth Frampton studying Corb and integrating the work of the architect in his studies on Modern Architecture. It touches issues surrounding Le Corbusier's architecture and buildings (such the Unité d'habitation, Roq and Rob villas and the Maison de weekend); the Modern Movement project and the influence of his ideas before and after the World Wars in Europe, London, Britain and in the American scene. Figures such as Atelier 5, Eisenman, Lluís Sert and institutions such the Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment and Harvard and deeper understanding of notions such the critical regionalism or the vernacular in Corbu's extraordinary work were also theme of conversation. Frampton recalls his relationship to Le Corbusier and talks about his writings, as technical editor at the *Architectural Design* magazine and later as a historian, with his newly re-edited *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*.

**Keywords:** C.A.S.E., Frampton, Eisenman, Modernity, vernacular.

**Résumé:** Cette interview a été réalisée le 6 septembre 2019 auprès de Kenneth Frampton, *Ware Professor* à la Graduate school of architecture, planning, and preservation, Columbia University of New York. Cette conversation fait partie d'une série d'entretiens avec d'éminents historiens et architectes marquant la première génération d'études sur la figure et l'œuvre de Le Corbusier, réalisés avec le soutien de la Fondation Le Corbusier. Cet échange filmé et retranscrit interroge le terrain sur lequel Kenneth Frampton a étudié Le Corbusier et a intégré l'œuvre de l'architecte dans ses recherches sur l'architecture moderne. Il aborde les questions relatives à l'architecture et aux bâtiments de Le Corbusier (tels que l'Unité d'habitation, les villas Roq et Rob et la Maison de week-end) ; le projet du Mouvement moderne et l'influence de ses idées avant et après les guerres mondiales en Europe, à Londres, en Grande-Bretagne et sur la scène américaine. Des figures telles que l'Atelier 5, Peter Eisenman, Lluís Sert et des institutions telles que la Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment et Harvard, ainsi qu'une compréhension plus approfondie de notions telles que le régionalisme critique ou le vernaculaire dans l'œuvre de Le Corbusier ont également été des thèmes de conversation. Frampton évoque sa relation avec Le Corbusier et parle de ses écrits, en tant que rédacteur technique du magazine *Architectural Design* et plus tard en tant qu'historien, avec l'édition de *Modern Architecture : A Critical History*.

**Mots-clé:** C.A.S.E., Frampton, Eisenman, Modernité, vernaculaire.

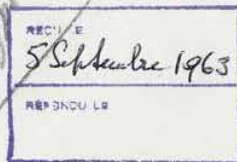
**Resumen:** Esta entrevista se realizó el 6 de septiembre de 2019 con Kenneth Frampton, *Ware Professor* a la Graduate school of architecture, planning, and preservation, Columbia University of New York. Esta conversación forma parte de una serie de entrevistas con destacados historiadores y arquitectos que marcan la primera generación de estudios sobre la figura y la obra de Le Corbusier, realizada con el apoyo de la Fundación Le Corbusier. Este intercambio filmado y transcrito cuestiona el terreno en el que Kenneth Frampton ha estudiado a Le Corbusier e integrado la obra del arquitecto en su investigación sobre la arquitectura moderna. Aborda cuestiones relacionadas con la arquitectura y los edificios de Le Corbusier (como la Unité d'habitation, las villas Roq y Rob y la Maison de week-end); el proyecto del Movimiento Moderno y la influencia de sus ideas antes y después de las guerras mundiales en Europa, Londres, Gran Bretaña y la escena americana. Figuras como el Atelier 5, Peter Eisenman, Lluís Sert e instituciones como la Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment y Harvard, así como una comprensión más profunda de nociones como el regionalismo crítico o lo vernáculo en la obra de Le Corbusier también han sido temas de conversación. Frampton evoca su relación con Le Corbusier y habla de sus escritos, como editor técnico de la revista *Architectural Design* y posteriormente como historiador, con la edición de *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*.

**Palabras clave:** C.A.S.E., Frampton, Eisenman, Modernidad, vernacular.

à l'adresse par L.C. à l'atelier le 6 Septembre 1963

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T 2 5



Hôtel St Louis  
Boulevard St Michel  
Paris.  
Sept 5m -63.

Chère maître,

I am an architect working in London.

I also have a part time position with the magazine 'Architectural Design', where I work as a technical editor.

In this capacity I have been given the task to prepare an issue of the magazine on industrialised building systems, with particular reference to light weight systems using metal.

In this respect I admire very much your 'Unité d'habitation' for Meaux, which was published in Zodiac, and if possible I would like to have the opportunity to publish further details of the project in this special issue.

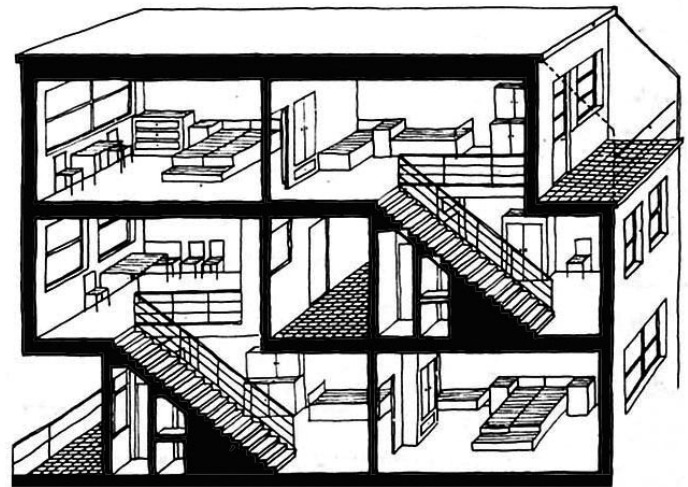
The editors of 'Architectural Design' have also expressed to me their wish to publish in detail your more recent works, and in this respect have asked me to visit your atelier. I understand that they will be writing to you in the near future.

I will visit 35 Rue de Sevres tomorrow morning in the hope that I may by chance have an opportunity of an interview with you.

In anycase I will write to you formally immediately on my return to London on Saturday. I hope that you will grant us permission to publish your work. I assure you that I will make every effort to see that it is presented to your satisfaction.

Yours very sincerely

Kenneth Frampton



This interview was made in New York on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019, at Columbia University. It is part of an interview series project by Véronique Boone, Marta Sequeira and Daniela Ortiz dos Santos with prominent historians and architects marking the first generation of studies on the figure and work of Le Corbusier, with the support of the Foundation Le Corbusier. Veronique Boone, who wrote a doctoral dissertation on the relations between Le Corbusier and cinema, made this interview in collaboration with Gregorio Carboni Maestri, who wrote a Ph.D. on *Oppositions* under the direction of Frampton and has conducted one of the first reorganisations and studies on Frampton's archives (2015-2017), with the Graham Foundation project "The Creation of the Kenneth Frampton Archives: Uncovering a New Narrative".

## What are your first memories of Le Corbusier?

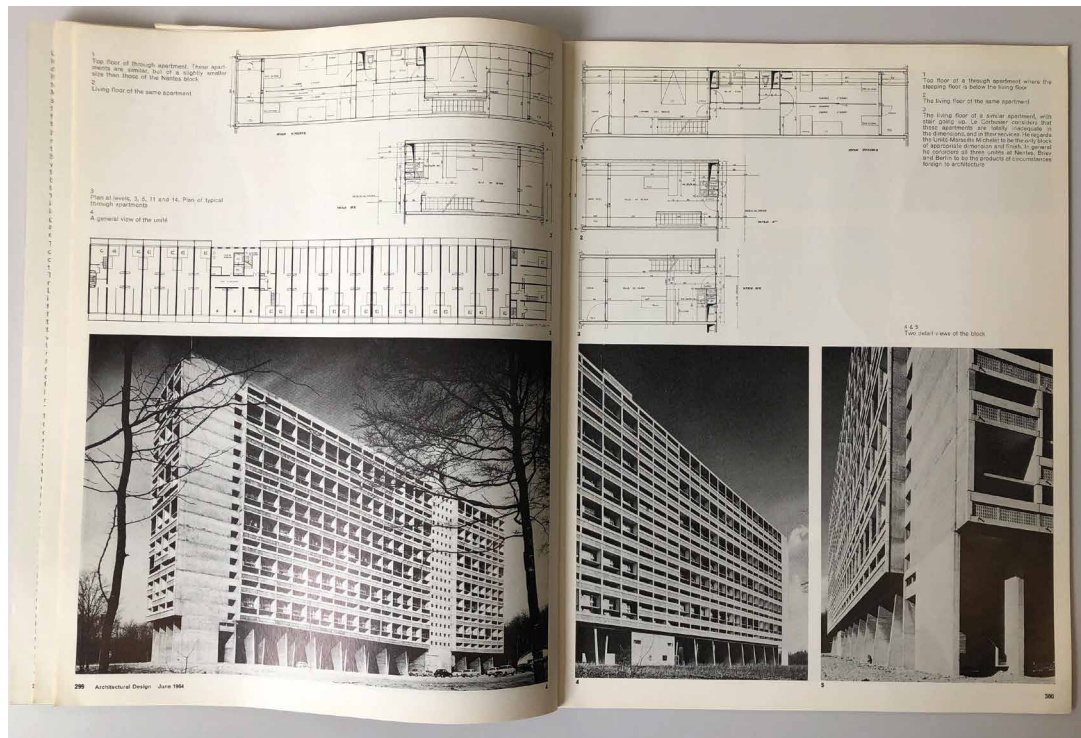
I met him twice. Once when I was third year student, when he got the RIBA Gold Medal (March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1953) and Sir John Summerson —who was rather prominent in the Royal Institute of British architects— organized a dinner with him and some students of the school of architecture, which involved John Miller, Alan Colquhoun, Neave Brown and others<sup>1</sup>. We had dinner with Corb, with none of us speaking French pretty well! Le Corbusier drew the whole time, Neave Brown confiscated all the drawings after the event, which we never saw again. I think his widow still has these sketches of Corb.

The second encounter was when I was a technical editor of the magazine *Architectural Design [AD]* from summer of 1962 to 1965. We published Briey-en-Forêt, the last image of the Unité d'Habitation<sup>2</sup>. I went there for that reason and to talk to him<sup>3</sup>. His reputation for being somewhat formidable was not borne out. I can remember him complaining about the Unité d'Habitation in Briey-en-Forêt, because the space standards were much reduced from the Unité of Marseille. And he made some crack about that it is like getting kids to wear clothes that they had when they were much younger. Afterwards he wrote a very nice letter. Anyway, it was a very pleasant event!

**FIG. 2**  
Letter from Kenneth Frampton to Le Corbusier, where he is asking to meet the architect, September, 5th, 1963 (FLC, T2-5-132).

**FIG. 3**  
Kenneth Frampton, Corringham apartment building, London, 1960-1962, in which the influence of the Unité d'Habitation is clearly present.

**FIG. 4**  
Ivanov and Lavinsky, interlocking units of duplex-apartments with central corridor as designed for the OSA-competition in 1927 (*Modern Architecture*, 1980).



## Do you consider yourself as being influenced by Le Corbusier?

When I think of the work at the AA School, between the autumn of 1952 and the summer of '55, of my colleagues and myself, I think the influence of Le Corbusier was present, but also kept it at arm's length in a way. There were some figures more directly influenced than others, and not me in a way. I think I was more influenced —it's a sort of indirectly Corbusier—, through Stamo Papadaki's first volume on Oscar Niemeyer (1956)<sup>4</sup>: the first book I ever bought on architecture. I found early Niemeyer —I still do— very impressive. I can't really claim that [during my studies in architecture] either myself or the year I was in was particularly focused on Le Corbusier. There was not in England, and probably not elsewhere either, that kind of following, which is represented, let's say, in Switzerland, by Atelier 5 in the early sixties, who do, I think, extraordinary work.

Which is clearly influenced by Le Corbusier, in a very direct, but also positive way is the building at Corringham, London, which I designed and worked on from 1960 to 1962. Although it's not an Unité d'Habitation, it's influenced by Le Corbusier in more ways than one. There's a certain influence of Russian constructivism, and the building is also influenced by Brutalism in some respect. The apartment units go through the block from back to front —like in the Unité in *Marseille*— but with a scissor staircase: they cross each other. It's a very complex concept.

In my opinion, the Unité d'habitation of Marseille is really the realization of a Russian Dom-Kommuna. The interlocking apartments which you can find in a very early competition within the OSA<sup>5</sup> in 1927, where you have the central street and the interlocking units: a project done by the architects Ivanov and Lavinsky but never built. I've never read this anywhere, but I always thought it was a kind of metaphor of the woven togetherness of a communal dwelling. Maybe the central street was a reflection of the Russian climate. But I think the locker over thing had some kind of metaphorical —maybe unconscious— aspect. It's amazing how the Unité d'Habitation of Marseille is like a perfection of the Russian idea of the Dom-Kommuna, with a bit of shopping street on the roof and all the rest of it. It's quite extraordinary.

I was able to apply the crossover units that I'd seen at the OSA-project to the building at Corringham, which is very crazy. You are in the central corridor, and you go in a down going unit: you go down half a level to the living and dining room and kitchen, you go further down half a level to the bathroom and down another half a level to the bedroom. In the upcoming unit it is reversed. Which brings me back to Summerson: in the book, *Georgian London*<sup>6</sup>, he comments on the fact that the French

**FIG. 5**  
Article on the Unité d'Habitation of Briey-en-Forêt published in *Architectural Design*, June 1964, pp.292-303. Even if Frampton interviewed Le Corbusier and decided to write on the building, the article does not mention any author.



live horizontally and the British live vertically, and in British townhouses you always have the staircase, in this case it's like within the tradition. [laughs] The amazing thing is that it is now "Grade 2 Historic Monument". Then I stopped, that's it. I came here [to the U.S.] and misspent the rest of my life [laughs].

### **But Le Corbusier was a reference to most students?**

Yes, but not to the extent that they were doing near-Corbusean work. They were kind of avoiding doing near Corbusean work. And 1951 is of course the Festival of Britain in London. It took me time to realize that that was a direct re-working of the 1930 Stockholm exhibition. It was the socialist Labour Government at that time: the whole discourse on popular acceptance was somewhat negative about Le Corbusier. Nevertheless, there's this famous estate outside London, the Roehampton, built by the London County, where there are Chevron blocks that are very influenced by Le Corbusier<sup>7</sup>. The difference there is, given the British climate, that the accesses are exposed galleries. They use the Modulor and the proportional system and so on, so the image of the Unité d'Habitation is Corbusean, but not the deeper idea. The British did not assimilate the Corbusean ethos. I think it's interesting that before the second World War, if you look at British, international, modern architecture, you see clearly an influence of Le Corbusier, but no deeper understanding of the spatial ideas in Le Corbusier's [architecture]. It's the image, not really the full concept...

### **After you finished the AA School you end up as technical editor for AD. You wrote to Le Corbusier in September 1963, that you planned to do a thematic number of AD on light weight structures, in which you wanted to include the project of the Unité d'Habitation that you saw published in Zodiac<sup>9</sup>, and that you also wanted to discuss with him his more recent work. Did you do other work on Le Corbusier for the magazine?**

There was no other occasion than this one moment. Although Monica Pidgeon was the official editor, whoever was the technical editor basically called the shots. As I was the technical editor, and as I was interested at that moment in Europe, the magazine turns more towards Europe, more than previously: to Switzerland, Germany, Italy and France. There was a move on my part — in a way, the roots of critical regionalism are partly lying there — [because I was very interested in] some figures like

**FIG. 6**  
Archives of Kenneth Frampton, folders on Le Corbusier, which form the biggest amount of archival material (© Gregorio Carboni Maestri).



Oswald Mathias Ungers in Cologne, Ernst Gisel in Zurich and Gino Valle in Udine. I suddenly realized that there was a closer relationship between European potential cities and certain leading architects. It was impossible to find a parallel in the British situation between the provincial city and the architect. I was impressed by that.

**Peter Eisenman calls you in 1964 for the CASE10 discussions. As Corb 30 years earlier, you come to the U.S., and you were impressed by the power of this empire, this “huge coal machine”.<sup>11</sup>**

And Manhattan of course!

**Was there a difference with England in terms of reception of the work and ideas of Le Corbusier?**

There was a kind of influence: for example, the “Whites”, the New York Five. Certain figures of the Five were influenced by Le Corbusier. The early houses of Graves are influenced by Le Corbusier. They are timber frame constructions, there’s a maybe deeper, special understanding of the architecture of Le Corbusier that what was the case in, let’s say, Britain between the Wars. But it’s very painterly. Graves’ work was always a bit painterly, and then of course he soon abandons the whole thing and becomes very much a postmodern architect. Eisenman was not particularly interested in Le Corbusier; his ideal was Giuseppe Terragni. Of the other New York five, there was Richard Meier, who was always very near Corbusean, but again, you don’t have the same phenomena... In Meier’s office, there is a very beautiful model of the Villa Savoye, quite upscale. And it’s clear that it’s sort of there for fetishist reasons, and also as a kind of model. It sits amongst all the other models of Meier! But you can also realize that Meier’s work, again, is a kind of image of Le Corbusier’s, it is not a deeper understanding of neither the social project, nor the spatial or deeper poetic project. And then Charles Gwathmey also was influenced, but less consistently than Richard Meier. The one I haven’t mentioned yet was John Hejduk, who was not influenced by Le Corbusier at all. If anything, and for a brief period, he was more influenced by Mies and by Dutch neoplasticism.

**Is it correct to say that in the U.S., where the Modern Movement had a dissimilar evolution compared to other contexts, Le Corbusier was not important as much as he was in Europe?**

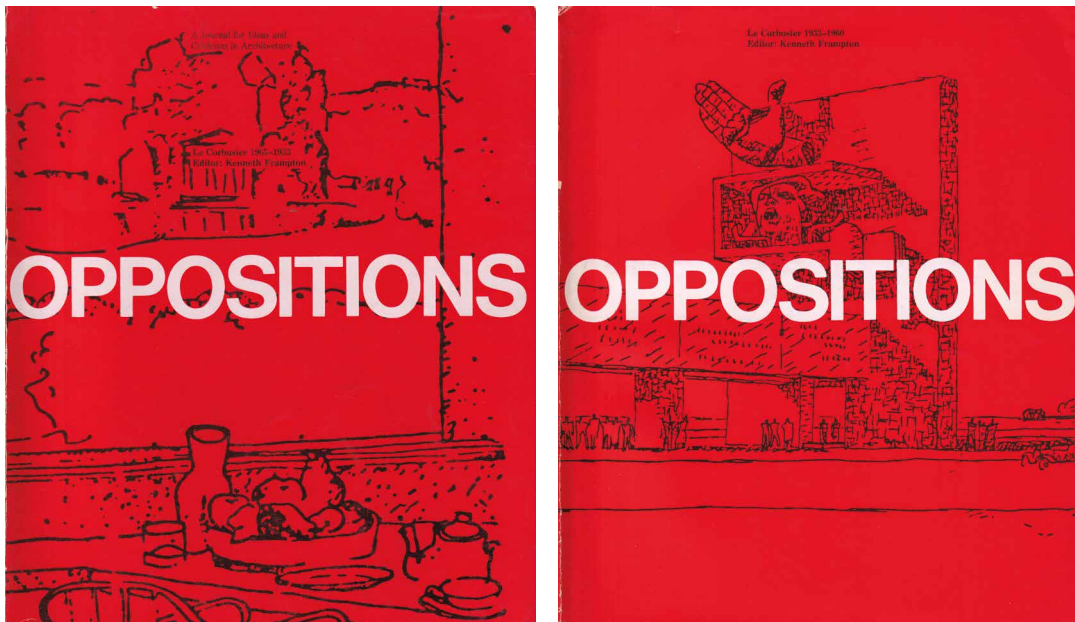
**FIG. 7**  
CASE members MIT  
© MIT

No. There is, of course, the enormous figure of Frank Lloyd Wright, who is, again, a really prodigious figure, although he's neglected, and no one talks about him anymore. The whole New York Five and the CASE-people, couldn't care less about Wright! He didn't exist, it's incredible! Richard Neutra was out: the whole West Coast, Southern California... no-one was interested in it, not a reference! Eisenman, very naïve, had this idea that there had been a Modern Movement in Europe but never in the U.S. in the same sense. It's Peter's preoccupation to create a Modern Movement in the East coast. Of course, it's a strange historical moment after the second World War. And this is the reason there wouldn't have been an Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies [IAUS] without Peter Eisenmann, and therefore no *Oppositions*. So whatever Peter has done with his life, as a theoretician, a writer, an architect, the real master work —in my opinion— is the IAUS. Nobody could have made it without Peter's obsession and desire. CASE never really took off: too many people. Even [...] this name, like CIAM...

**Yesterday we met Eisenman, and he said he didn't care about making any interview on Le Corbusier. It is interesting because one of the reasons he invites you in the U.S. was you to bring this "Modernity" culture.**

Peter literally said to me, "I want you to be the Sigfried Giedon of the group", [laughs] that was his idea! It's just so naïve. I wouldn't play at the time at all. I just thought it was ridiculous. Look, if you look at his work, is it Le Corbusier? Hardly. It is Terragni. Peter has this kind of intellectual obsession. He had this intellectual ambition [...] in the name of Modernism... It always interested me, this term of Modernism, because I never heard the term before I came to the States. Then I realized it was used also in Europe, in literature in particular. In the name of Modernism, Peter wanted to make a discourse in architecture, which would have a kind of syntactic rigor: it would be like music. That's what interested him. It was a kind of obsession. I think it's part of his persona, he's not interested in the content or the context of the building. He's interested in this kind of abstract intellectual project. The syncopated discourse of Terragni, above all the Dantéum —probably more important than the Casa del Fascio or the Casa Giuliani Frigerio— *this* is Peter's obsession.

**Then arrives *Oppositions*, in 1973! Studying your archives, one could understand how much it was in a way your magazine. More than Eisenman, you were the one behind, holding the cultural project of what *Oppositions* became. You made entire numbers on Le Corbusier: two numbers 13 in a time lapse of 1 year! Probably one of the first times a U.S. magazine was entirely dedicated to Le Corbusier. Why?**



**FIG. 8**  
The two covers of *Oppositions* 15-16, Winter/spring 1979 and *Oppositions* 19-20, Winter/Spring 1980, dedicated on reflexions on Le Corbusier. Articles include authors in the network of Frampton, such as Mary McLeod, Stanislas Von Moos, Alexander Gorlin, Robert Slutzky, Eleanor Gregh, Brian Base Taylor, Kurt W. Foster,...



Well, because of the sheer prodigious richness of the lifework. You couldn't do that with, for example, Aalto, although I do find Aalto a very interesting architect. It is difficult to talk about it because Le Corbusier is so overwhelming. The *layering*,... he never stopped! It's both conscious and unconscious, these two processes simultaneously. The shift from Purism, which is also the cultural project in relation to industrialization —evident in *Après le Cubisme*, in his paintings and the whole discourse with Ozenfant etc.— and at some point, [he] moves away completely. Isn't that amazing? I think the *Objets à réaction poétique* is such a curious thing, partly influenced by Léger. That shift in the painting is also layered. Of course, he was completely expelled from the body of Parisian progressive art by Christian Zervos. He is more a kind of great architect than a great painter perhaps, but he's also an unbelievable painter. That made me just think of the culture of van de Velde, also extraordinary, unbelievable as a painter and also probably as a writer. It's a different background in a different formation to Le Corbusier, but it is very much *not* the British scene. Britain is an island nation, and it's not Europe: figures like Le Corbusier and van de Velde are fundamentally profoundly European, they couldn't be conceivable outside Europe: the talent and the capacity artistically, but also the intellectual complexity.

### Was it mostly to give a scene to academic research on Le Corbusier to the American public?

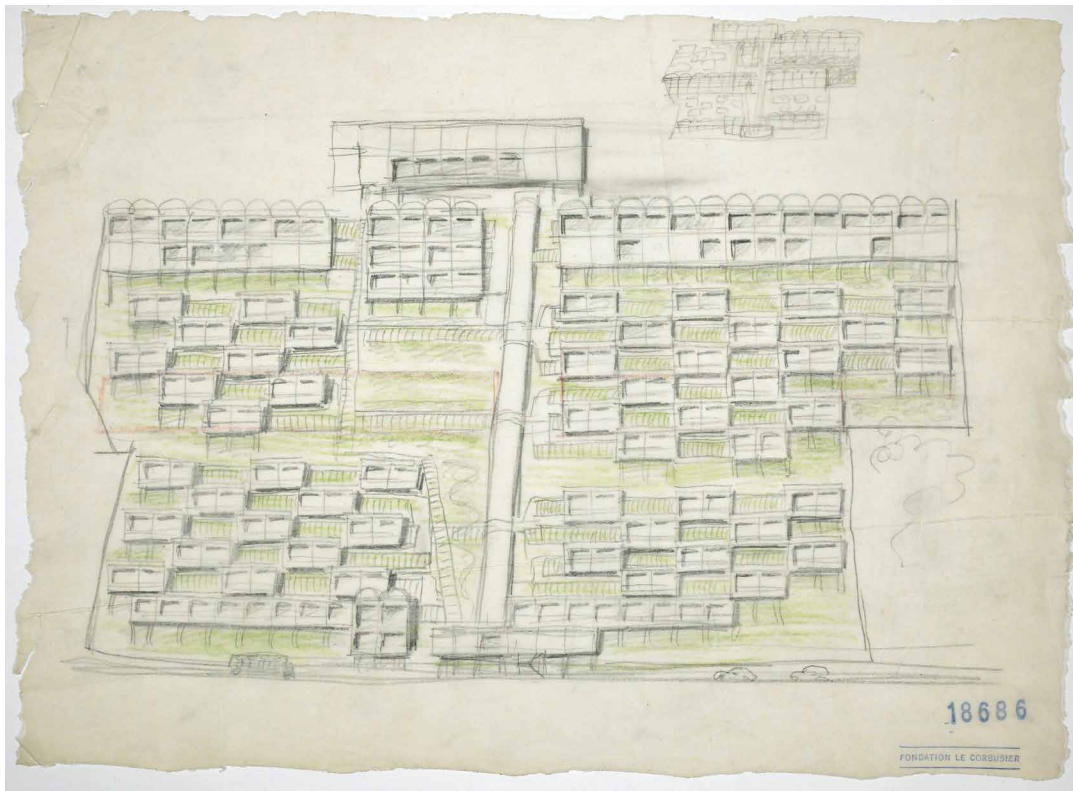
I suppose so, but in a way is more innocent than that: we made the works out of an enthusiasm. We didn't have idea that it would have a big impact, and maybe it didn't have too of an impact by the way. There were people like Mary McLeod<sup>14</sup>, Eleanor Gregh, and Stanislaus von Moos to begin the understanding and to produce studies on Le Corbusier. It was rising, not only in the States, but also in Italy for example, Gresleri who did the whole work on *Voyage d'Orient*<sup>15</sup>.

### Have the impression that, through CASE, your teaching at Princeton, IAUS and Oppositions, you and Eisenman “used” Le Corbusier to bring new notions in the U.S. debate.

Yes. And by the way I think that a very neglected figure is José Lluís Sert, who was the site architect for the Carpenter Centre in Harvard. There is of course a very direct link from Harvard to Le Corbusier. CASE ignored Harvard by the way. There was MIT,



**FIG. 9**  
Le Corbusier and Pierre  
Jeanneret,  
Maison de Weekend,  
La Celle-Saint-Cloud, 1935  
(FLC L1 (6) 146).



Cornell, Columbia, Princeton, UPenn, et cetera. But no one from Harvard! I never thought of it quite so dramatically as now, as a result of you asking me this question. It is clearly Eisenman: he was either terrified by Harvard, or he was contemptuous of Harvard, maybe both. When the CASE is created by Eisenman, in the mid-sixties, Gropius is no longer at the power at Harvard, the figure of power at that moment was Sert. And Sert — I never met him — had this very proud aristocratic, Catalan persona, not so approachable for an American, I would say. And therefore, it was a man apart.

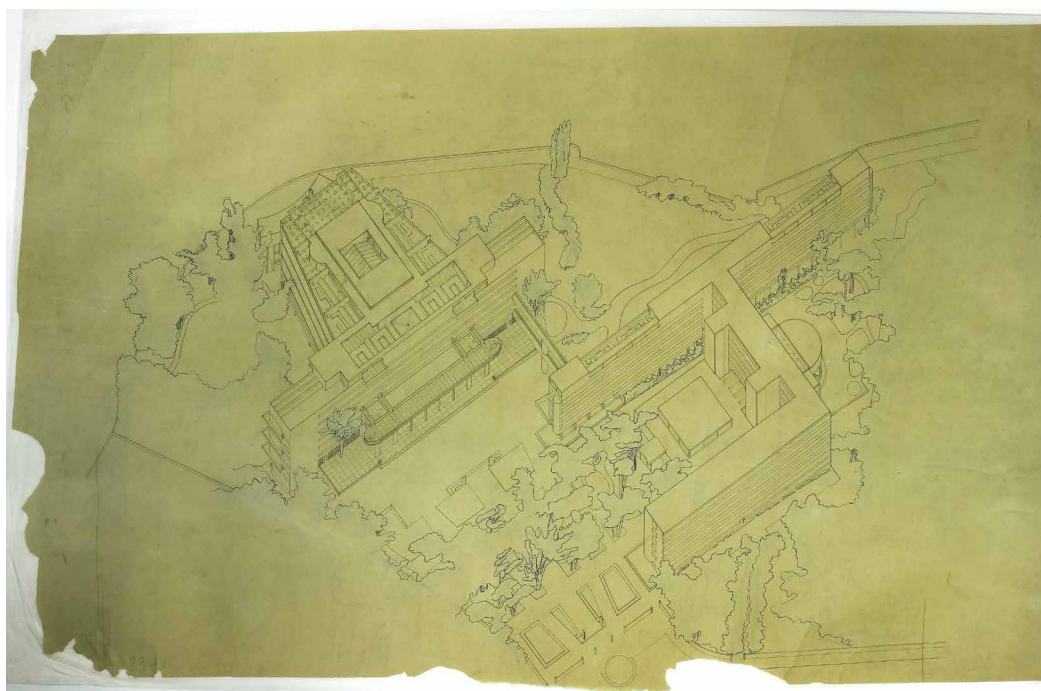
Despite there has been a certain recognition of Sert's contribution (he was a very good architect I think) — and by the way, in terms of my own snobbery, when I first saw Sert's work at Harvard, I wasn't that impressed —, but actually, when you come back to the Peabody Terrace Married Student Housing (1963-1964), I think he was really a very competent architect and a very interesting urban designer. In fact, he invented the urban design as an academic field [at Harvard]. I don't think there were in the whole United States programs on urban design before Sert. So Sert is a strange, neglected figure.

I answered already in terms of my student period, where a community has recognized Le Corbusier and people bought of course the *Oeuvre complète* almost without exception. But at the same time there was this feeling that one had to keep one's distance somehow. The discourse either, was not that sophisticated. If one's going to really understand Le Corbusier, you need to have a deeper culture than what was the provincial scene. I think the same thing would be repeated in the States basically, Sert being the one figure who had the culture to understand it, and the connection of course, to Le Corbusier and Europe.

### **You were appointed professor at Princeton in 1965. When, how and why did you start to give courses on Le Corbusier?**

Well, I think that Mary McLeod was very important, and Anthony Vidler was important<sup>16</sup>, so the scene of Princeton. Not so much Eisenman. We taught together, and we became step-by-step more interested in this figure. Of course, we had more knowledge, there was more scholarly material being produced, there was the beginning of a deeper understanding of the complexity of the figure. But I think even now you really have to develop a course which is sufficiently layered to be able to really talk about him. There's not one moment, it's just a sort of progressive development I would say. [It now comes to my

**FIG. 10**  
Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Sketches of the Roq and Rob housing project at Roquebrune Cap Martin, 1935 (FLC, 18686).

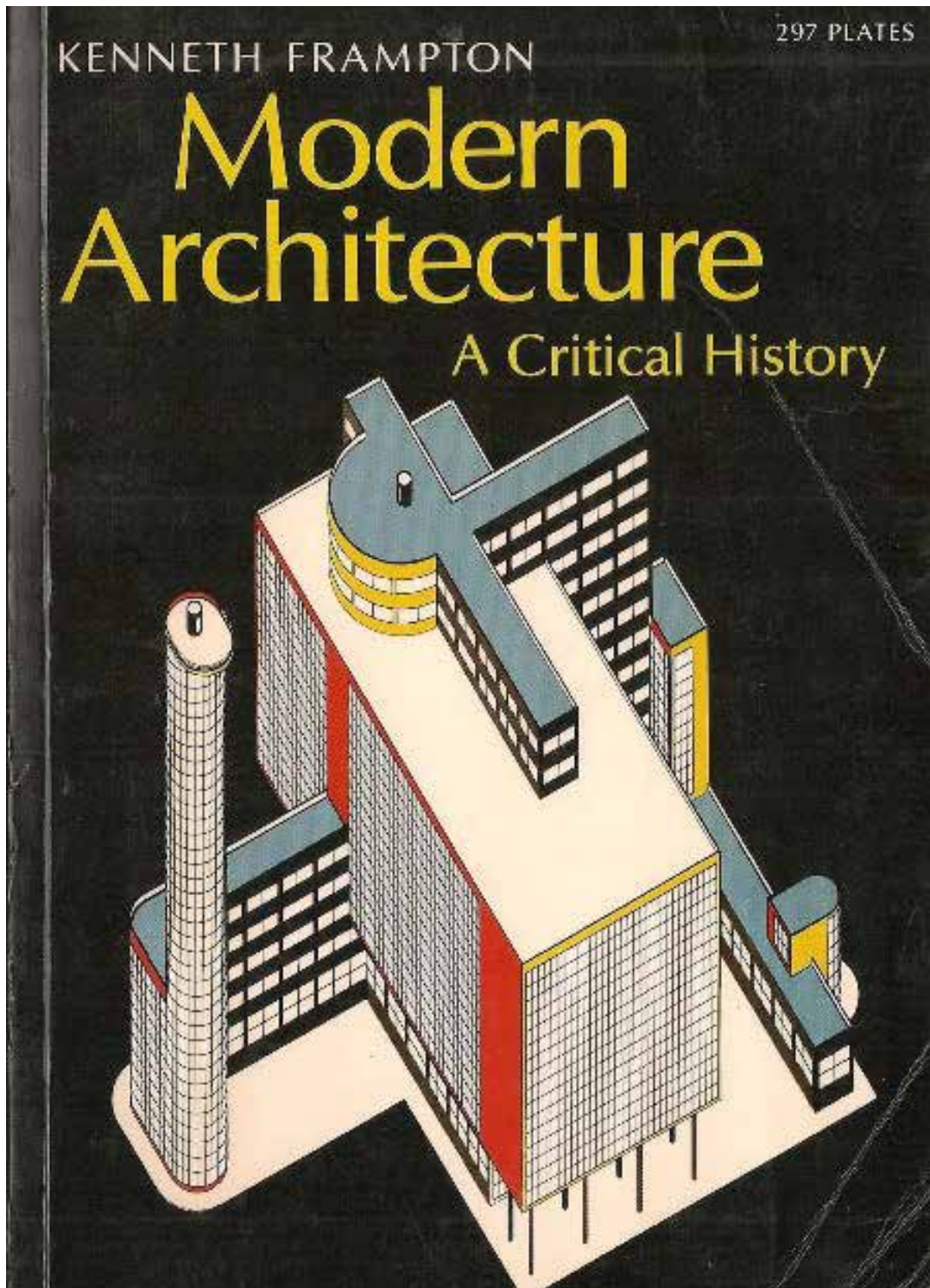


mind that] Tim Benton organized this Arts Council exhibition on Le Corbusier in 1987, “Le Corbusier, architect of the Century”, and I wrote a piece called “The Other Le Corbusier: Primitive Form and the linear City, 1929-1952” for them<sup>17</sup>, that is all about the Maisons Murondins (1940), the *Four Routes* (1941)<sup>18</sup> and the *Three Human Establishments* (1945)<sup>19</sup>. . . . A fascinating moment in his work and in a way not a moment we associate with the form qua form. No one else has made this claim: there’s this location theory by Walter Christaller (1933)<sup>20</sup>: he argues that the pattern of villages in Germany are more or less a triangular network. It seems to me that Le Corbusier, with *Four Routes* and *Three Human Establishments*, was directly influenced on the one hand by the Russians and by Christaller. What I think is fascinating, is the realism with which he put the view right the earth on one side basically and is trying to come to terms with what is the kind of extended/extent reality in Europe towards the end and after the end of the second World War. It’s incredible, the units of agricultural exploitation and the linear industrial city, and the radio concentric city of exchange: it’s 19th century in a way, but it’s also, picking up on / and in a way recognizing that aspect of the radiant city, which was extremely idealistic. [...] Let’s just say for that matter, the 1948 Rog and Rob (villas) sketches, which then Atelier 5 turn into the Siedlung Halen (1957-1960) ... In that sense you see he’s such an extraordinary pertinent figure. Because no one else of his generation has a mind that works like that and has all these connections. It’s absolutely astonishing, I’ll never get over it. I think one of those beautiful buildings, which no longer exists, is the Maison de weekend at La Celle-Saint-Cloud (1934), where there’s this synthesis of shelled concrete roofs, rough stonework, earth, steel frame, plate glass windows, industrial tiles, rough brick work, and plywood ceiling. This pallet! Which is both a spatial pallet and a pallet of technique. And the way in which the vernacular is a sort of unsentimentally present, in 1935. And of course, in the Villa “Le Sextant” in Les Mathes (1935) it is also very similar, but not the extraordinary beauty of the weekend house in La Celle-Saint-Cloud. And the complexity is right there, 1935!

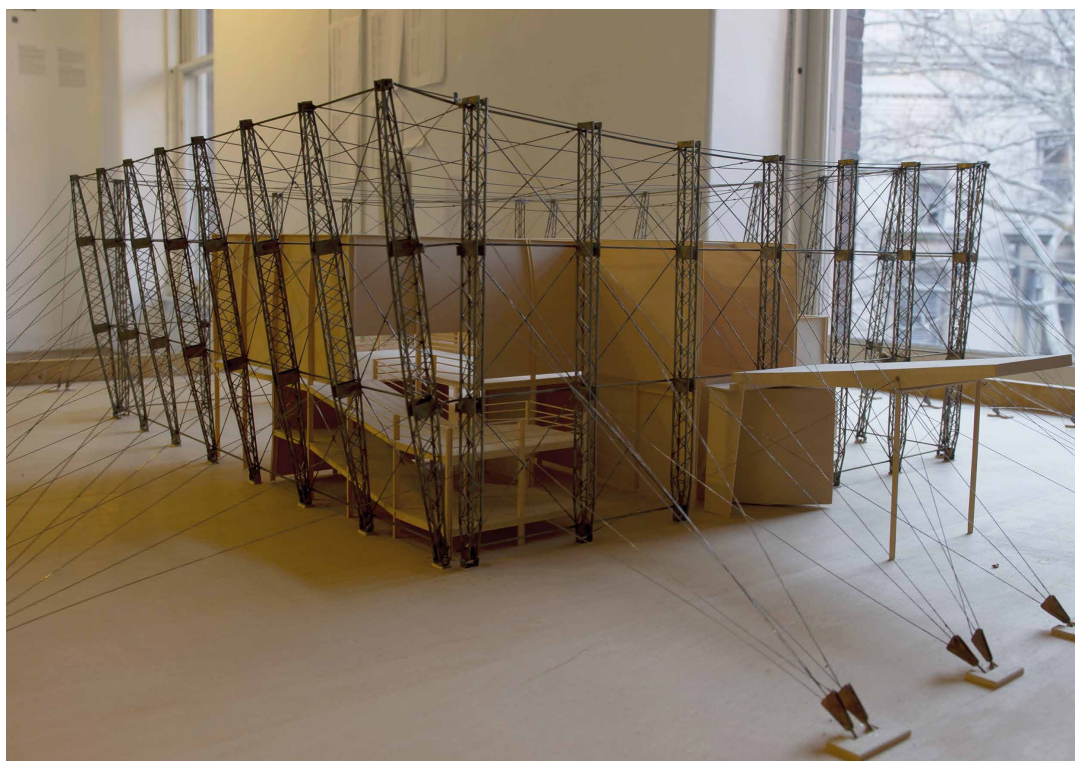
**Speaking about the vernacular, in your book *Modern Architecture (1980)*, there is one of the chapters that you wrote on the vernacular. Can we see there also a kind of writing on Le Corbusier with the vernacular, and linked with the Critical Regionalism as an opposition of only the appreciations of the aesthetic form of his architecture?**

**FIG. 11**  
Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret, Axonometric of the competition project for the League of Nations at Geneva, 1927 (FLC 23185a).

Yes. I think it’s called “The Monumentalization of the Vernacular”<sup>21</sup>. I haven’t lectured in London for almost my entire life since the sixties, [and] in my London lecture for the Soane Medal 2019<sup>22</sup> I will try to put together the idea of the tectonic and the space of appearance, two principles of extreme importance that sort of remain,



**FIG. 12**  
Cover of the first edition of  
Frampton's (1980).



within the body of what is the legacy of Modern architecture. And *vis-à-vis* the vernacular— which is also implied or even explicitly stated in *The Critical Regionalism* — it involves this attempt to create a synthesis between modern conditions, modern technology and archaic ways of making. I think of course the Maison de weekend at La Celle-Saint-Cloud is such a perfect statement about that. So is the Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux of 1937 where the tent is based on the reconstruction of the Hebrew temple in the wilderness. It is extraordinary, also technologically speaking: where is an earlier, however naïve, attempt as a cable suspended structure? It's an extraordinary work. And it's basically the same period. I think this idea of anchoring the modality back into a complex of tradition is a very strong characteristic in his architecture.

**Bringing into writings and academic work your position in the discourse on reading together the vernacular and the modernity, instead of focusing on the aesthetics of the building, is important too!**

Yes. And if one uses the assertions in that sense, one very quickly arrives at the seduction of the image and the domination of the image, because we are saturated with images. We live in this mediatic society. There's a lot of architecture which doesn't interest me at all because I think it's a total blast misunderstanding, you know what I mean? Basically, Rem Koolhaas just simply doesn't interest me at all. All right: there's a certain influence of Le Corbusier but it's very schematic! It's a very intelligent guy, but not a very sensitive architect! Of course, extremely successful, but there's nothing: it's completely uninteresting, it doesn't have cultural significance, I think, and there are many figures like this, after all.

**FIG. 13**

One of the analysis of the Maison Cook, as published in *Comparative Analysis of the Built Form* (2015) and taught by Frampton from the early 1970s.  
© Kenneth Frampton.

**Could you, through your writings on the work of Le Corbusier or even in a more general sense, see a continuity or an evolution on your thoughts on Le Corbusier?**

I think there is. It always transcends Le Corbusier, that's why I use this term "ontology of building", because of the making of the environment, of the building... It's a very interesting issue: the question of architecture and building. In the essay "Labour, Work and Architecture"<sup>23</sup>, which is from 1968, there is a whole elaboration about the difference



**FIG. 14**  
Kenneth Frampton at his  
office during the interview  
at Avery Hall (Columbia  
University, New York, 2019).

between architecture and building. I don't know what the French dictionary does, but the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives two definitions [of the word architecture]. One is "the erection of edifices for human use", and the second is "the action of process of building". Building is this gerent, [...] it's a noun-verb. This has the idea of processual, unfinished continuity building. If you take the first definition, "edifice for human use", there is an ambiguity between edifice and use. Because if you look up "edifice", you get a large and stately building, such as a church, a palace and a fortress, and the etymology of even edifice is connected to the verb "to edify" and "to educate, strength". Hence the reason for *Labour, Work and Architecture*, was coming from this book of Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*<sup>24</sup>, where she describes work as the state of effort in which that which is produced is not consumed. It's meant to resist the passage of time and sustain memory and society against the erosions of time and climate. Architecture in that sense has that function. [For the Soane Medal.] I am using this essay with the 1983's "Towards a Critical Regionalism"<sup>25</sup>, and "The Case for the Tectonic"<sup>26</sup> from 1990. I'm trying to argue that both the tectonic aspect and the public space are two kinds of important values within the whole tradition that should be sustained. In this last one, "The Case for the Tectonic", that comes to Semper and *The Four Elements of Architecture* (1851) and the roof work - earth work. And then, Vittorio Gregotti remarks in *The Territory of Architecture* (1966)<sup>27</sup> that architecture does not begin with the primitive hut, but with the marking of ground: in order to establish order, admit chaos, nature being seen by primordial man as a total dangerous monster that you can benefit from, but also can kill you. This idea is related to Friedrich Ratzel's anthropogeographic concept, that human creature has really created the environment. Totally! [...] The idea that the earth work can be extended. It isn't, of course, the foundations of the building, but it has a potential to go beyond this. Therefore, the role to be played by landscape in relation to architecture is fundamental. Now more than ever, because since we can't build cities anymore, we can only intervene in what is a total megalopolis, going on forever, a stratagem that could be employed. In the introduction to *Studies in Tectonic Culture*<sup>28</sup> [there] is the 1948 Säynätsalo building by Aalto, and there of course you do have an earthwork, and a roof work: it's like the pieces are right there. And it is a public building. The little Maison de weekend is also a roof work - earth work because the barrel vaults are a key part. What lies behind these essays is the realization that the Modern Movement in Europe between 1918 and 1939 was an incredible manifestation [...]. We also know that after 1945 the end of the Second World War the modern project is not the same. Perhaps one of the reasons was also Hiroshima. Somehow human beings in general, whether consciously or unconsciously, recognize that Hiroshima was a fundamental, apocalyptic breaking away. The Modern movement was in a way feeling on the 19th century idea of progress. Arnold Gehlen, who wrote "The secularization of progress"<sup>29</sup> makes the argument that Progress had a kind of Judaic Christian redemption idea behind it. He says that "when a technological invention becomes routine [...] then the idea of progress is just emptied out". We know that the implement of total destruction is just sitting there [...]. This ambiguity and complexity about the relationship between architecture and building is a fascinating thing in itself. And here the vernacular comes back into the story because the vernacular is as the term indicates, basically related to agriculture, to building in relation to agriculture, agrarian really, and it's that part of human culture, which sort of remains a very fragile, faint, remains of it. But you can see that, for the Roq et Rob project (1948), which is the same date as Aalto's Säynätsalo, Le Corbusier is taking the barrel vaults, vernacular of the Mediterranean and proposing it for low rise high density, with Roq et Rob, in Cap Martin. Not built, but it will be built by the Atelier 5 in Bern... It's clear that it is a vernacular idea and also related, after all, to the Maison de weekend. And that's the fascinating thing: the cultural complexity and referential aspect of Le Corbusier. The whole thing is layered and it's constantly fluidly, —it's all alive! One project is already a hybrid of other projects.

### **When I hear you talking about the work of Le Corbusier and what we also see in your writings on the architect is that you are looking at a deeper comprehension of his work through the built work or the projects more than by his writings.**

Yes, that's true. But the writings —if you look carefully enough— also have a different order, they cannot be entirely separated out from the projects and buildings. It would be an interesting task, really, to try to articulate that. What is the relationship between the discourse in certain writings and the discourse of the work as projects or buildings? I'm not quite sure how I would be doing, but I think it's an interesting challenge. I mean, if you're in a studio with students, you realize that just to get any kind of idea or concept is already a struggle. When history and theory is completely detached from the studio teaching -which more or less always is- the potential of the culture, which would be the historical theoretical culture of the discipline you know, to enrich the work, the work that someone's engaged in right now, in designing something it's an enormous potential. And this question of the expressivity of exactly the way you do something, you know, I mean, so that a lot of energy gets spent in trying to demonstrate some kind of a spectacular originality, but the challenge is really lying within maybe something much simpler, but exactly how at this moment of history, do you do this, how do you make this window, not only from, and then the

question not only of the function of the window and what is the material, but what is the window referring to, in terms of the past, or in terms of some otherness not necessarily completely passed? It's difficult to have this kind of discussion with students, I think, but it is of course/even more difficult if there isn't an adequate cultural ground to have the discussion.

### **Is that the reason to install courses “Comparative Analysis of the Built Form”, in the early 1970s, to make that link between the theory and practice -and which also includes the buildings of Le Corbusier- to have a better understanding of Le Corbusier<sup>30</sup>?**

I make this comparison of the Aalto pavilion of 1937 and the Le Corbusier pavilion of 1937, and what these buildings are referring to. The deeper you go into his work, the more you realize it's endless, layered, complex and rich. He's an extraordinary person, it's obvious he's outstanding of the 20th century. I wrote this little book on Le Corbusier, it's published by Thames and Hudson, but it was published first in French by Hazan<sup>31</sup>. I was invited by Hazan to write this short thing on Corb. You could say that's an interesting thing about Le Corbusier. He had a profound sense of the tragic. And what other modern architect has such a profound sense of the tragic? That is his greatness.

### **...What he brought to the public with the Poème Electronique in the Philips Pavilion, in 1958 in Brussels, which shows the atomic bomb, the war etc.**

Profound sense of the tragic! I realized that issue of the tragic is very distinct in Le Corbusier, like he's many things at once...

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#### Authors

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**Kenneth Brian Frampton** is a British-American architect, critic and historian born in 1930 in Woking, England. Trained as an architect at the Guildford School and later at the AA, he worked in Israel (1961–1964) and then continued his professional experience in London where he designed the Corringham Building (London) and served as editor of the magazine *Architectural Design*. He has taught at several institutions, including the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio, Royal College of Art, ETH, EPFL and Berlage. He is Ware Professor of Architecture at GSAPP, Columbia University and was awarded the Golden Lion in 2018 during the Biennale di Architettura di Venezia. He is the author of *Modern Architecture and the Critical Present* (1980), *Studies in Tectonic Culture* (1995), *American Masterworks* (1995), *Le Corbusier* (2001), *Labour, Work and Architecture* (2005), *A Genealogy of Modern Architecture* (2015) and an updated edition of *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (2021).



## Notes

- 1 It was Neave Brown, speaking French, who invited Le Corbusier to have dinner with about ten students. The dinner took place the day after the Gold Medal ceremony, April 1st. (FLC, correspondence of Le Corbusier and Neave Brown, T1-14-36>39, March 1st, 1953, >March 25th, 1953)
- 2 Le Corbusier, 'Cité Radieuse, Briey-En-Forêt, France', *Architectural Design*, June 1964.
- 3 Frampton was received by Le Corbusier on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1963
- 4 Stamo Papadaki, *Oscar Niemeyer: Works in Progress* (New York: Reinhold, 1956).
- 5 Ivanov and Lavinsky, duplex apartments, OSA competition, 1927 in K. FRAMPTON, *Modern Architecture. A Critical History*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., London, Thames & Hudson, 2021, p. 200
- 6 John Summerson, *Georgian London. With Forty-Eight Plates and Thirty-Seven Figures* (London: Penguin Books, 1945). Kenneth Frampton probably was familiar with the first edition, as the second only was published in 1965.
- 7 Roehampton Alton estate (1958 — 1959) for about 13000 people. London County Council's first ambitious post-war social housing developments.
- 8 Letter from Kenneth Frampton to Le Corbusier, September 5th, 1963 (FLC, T2-5-132)
- 9 Jean Petit, 'Des Unités d'habitation 1960 En Séries...', *Zodiac*, 1960.
- 10 In 1964 Peter Eisenman organized the Conference of Architects for the Study of the Environment (CASE). Held at several U.S. universities, these meetings involved Colin Rowe, Hank Millon, John Hejduk, Kenneth Frampton, Michael Graves, Richard Meier, Stanford Anderson, among others. The debates concerned matters such as architectural education, research, culture, practice and interdisciplinarity.
- 11 Frampton often evokes the impressions of his first arrival in the U.S. The vision of a territorial expanse of highways, polluting cities and unrestrained energy consumption. One could see a parallel with Le Corbusier's first trip, impressed in admiration but somehow disappointed. In Frampton's career, this trip probably remained as a struggling memory, contributing to his pedagogical battle towards this unfettered development.
- 12 Anthony Vidler, Kenneth Frampton, Mario Gandelsonas and Peter Eisenman raised *Oppositions* in 1973. There were 26 issues until 1984.
- 13 *Oppositions* 15-16, Winter/Spring 1979 and *Oppositions* 19-20, Winter/Spring 1980
- 14 Mary McLeod started her research on Le Corbusier at the end of the 1970s under the supervision of Anthony Vidler (Mary McLeod, 'Urbanism and Utopia. Le Corbusier from Regional Syndicalism to Vichy' (PhD Philosophy, Princeton University, School of Architecture, 1985), FLC C341.)
- 15 Giuliano Gresleri (1938-2021) met Le Corbusier in 1965. He made in 1977 a 1:1 model of the Esprit Nouveau pavilion of 1925. Gresleri initiated in 1974 the translation of the *Voyage d'Orient* (1966) and published the first study on the Orient trip in 1984 : Giuliano Gresleri, *Le Corbusier: Viaggio in Oriente: Gli Ined. Di Charles Edouard Jeanneret Fotografo e Scrittore*, 2ème édition (Venezia: Marsilio & Fondation Le Corbusier, 1985).
- 16 Anthony Vidler (1941) taught at Princeton from 1965 to 1993. Emil Kaufmann's 1933 *Von Ledoux bis Le Corbusier* had an enormous importance for the historian, later developed in 2008 *Histories of the Immediate Present*. The attention of Vidler was mostly directed to Boullée and Ledoux, analyzed with a Marxist point of view and Le Corbusier was mostly analyzed in that post-Tafurian light.
- 17 Kenneth Frampton, 'The Other Le Corbusier: Primitive Form and the Linear City 1929-52', in *Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century*, ed. Susan Ferleger Brades et al. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1987).
- 18 Le Corbusier, *Sur Les Quatre Routes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941).
- 19 Bézard et al., *Les Trois Établissements Humains*, vol. 7e vol. (Paris: Denoël, 1945).
- 20 Walter Christaller, *Die Zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland* (Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer, 1933).
- 21 Kenneth Frampton, 'Le Corbusier and the Monumentalization of the Vernacular 1930-1960', in *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, 1st ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), 224–30.
- 22 Kenneth Frampton, *The Unfinished Modern Project at the End of Modernity: Tectonic Form and the Space of Public Appearance*. Delivered on the occasion of the presentation of the third Soane Medal at the Sheikh Zayed Theatre in the New Academic Building of the LSE (2019-11-19)
- 23 Kenneth Frampton, 'The Status of Man and the Status of His Objects', in *Labour, Work and Architecture. Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (New York: Phaidon, 2002), 24–43; Melvyn A. Hill, *Hannah Arendt and Recovery of the Public World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).
- 24 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).
- 25 Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in *Labour, Work and Architecture. Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (New York: Phaidon, 2002), 76–89.
- 26 Kenneth Frampton, 'Rappel à l'ordre: The Case for the Tectonic', in *Labour, Work and Architecture. Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (New York: Phaidon, 2002), 90–103.
- 27 Vittorio Gregotti, *Il Territorio Dell'Architettura* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1966).
- 28 Kenneth Frampton and John Cava, *Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass. London: MIT Press, 1995).
- 29 Forsthoff, E. (1967). Säkularisation und Utopie: Ebracher Studien; Ernst Forsthoff zum 65. Geburtstag.
- 30 Kenneth Frampton, *A Genealogy of Modern Architecture*, ed. Ashley Simone (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2015).
- 31 Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier* (Paris: Hazan, 1997); Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier*, World of Art (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2001).