

IDEAS AND FORMS: A CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM J. R. CURTIS

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Discovering Le Corbusier: the *Oeuvre Complète* and Pavillon Suisse

AL: The first question with which I would like to open this conversation is why and how did you get interested in the work of Le Corbusier?

WJRC: Absolutely. Well, this actually goes back to age 15, 1963, when I was at Douai School, a Benedictine boarding establishment. There was a marvelous library, a huge room with great oak shelves all around, and long oak tables, and a view into a park. It had, for a secondary school, an extraordinary collection of books, including some on modern art. The reason for this, undoubtedly, was Father Hillary Palmer, one of the monks. After being in the Royal Air Force firebombing raid on Dresden during the war, and discovering what this had done to the civilian population, he had a spiritual crisis. He moved to Paris in the late 1940s where he led a bohemian existence and developed an interest in existentialism and modern art. On his return, he became a Benedictine monk and then a priest. But he loved modern French culture. And so, in the library, there were books of French Symbolist poetry (Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Verlaine) and there was Roland Penrose's biography of Picasso.

One day, when I was supposed to be doing Latin verbs or calculus, which were onerous tasks, I thought I can't stand this and went to look at the library where I came across these horizontal books with lovely textile covers and letters stamped on the front. I said, what's this? I thought, it looked like a topographical survey or something like that. And I pulled one of them out, and I opened it. It was the complete works of Le Corbusier. I was absolutely captivated and spent all my time for days going through all of the *Oeuvre Complète*.

AL: Was there anything in particular that captured your attention?

WJRC: Of course, I was initially captivated by the pictures of the 20s, the white villas, the cars, the spidery sketches, all the stuff that's there. The layout, I just thought was marvelous. And then I remember also being absolutely enchanted by the pictures of Chandigarh in construction with the Sikhs in turbans and the reinforcing bars sticking out of the concrete and the women carrying loads on their heads. In that period, I also came across *Towards a New Architecture* the English translation of *Vers une architecture*. I remember being fascinated by the illustrations, especially the photographs of airplanes, ocean liners, Greek temples and cars. Then there was this puzzling image of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris with proportional lines traced over it. And that enigmatic image of a pipe. Then the slogans such as 'Eyes Which Do Not See' and 'Architecture Pure Creation of the Mind'.

I thought, all this is a dream of some kind. This is it. I was drawn into the Le Corbusier universe. Now, we had, in my rather strange elite school, a teacher in history, Oliver J.G. Welch, who had written a somewhat boring history book that we all had to study. But he also organized a group called "The Thirteen," which was the elite of the elite, who read papers late at night after dinner. And we were respondents. We all took this very seriously. So at age 16, I put together a very detailed document on Dada and Surrealism. I was already interested in modern art. Actually, I was already painting. I had a huge painting exhibition in the school. My work was rather eclectic but was inspired by landscape, the sea and a sort of lyrical abstraction. In this group, there was William Olivier, who was the nephew of Sir Laurence Olivier, the actor.

FIG. 4

Le Corbusier, Pavillon Suisse, Cité Universitaire, Paris, 1930-31. View of the pilotis with their rich sculptural profiles in naked concrete supporting the superstructure of the students' rooms above and creating a highly charged space underneath: a demonstration of the principles of the Ville Radieuse in an individual work. Photo WJRC 2010.

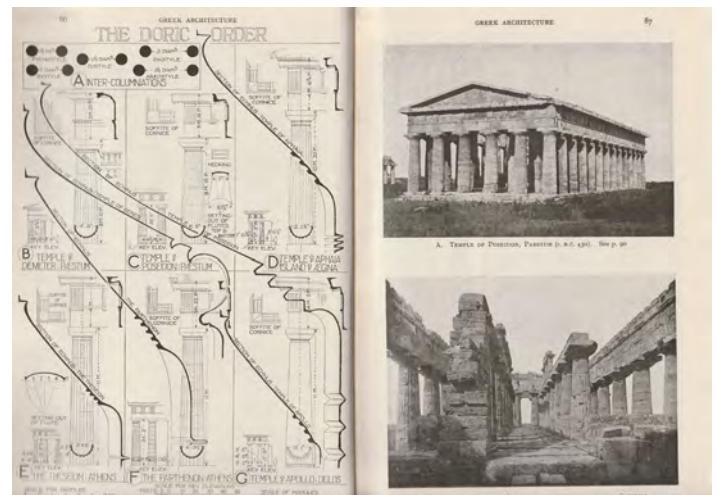
He read out a paper on Le Corbusier's Modulor. And I said, "William, I want to hitchhike to Ronchamp. You want to come?" So the Spring vacation arrived. We were joined by two other friends and the four of us took the ferry from Dover to Calais. But these two, who were less serious about it, immediately got a car to Paris. William Olivier and I got stuck. We got as far as Boulogne sur-Mer. It was freezing cold. Then outside Abbeville we spent the night in a wood in the pouring rain, in sleeping bags. And then gave up and took the train from Amiens to Paris.

So, the very first building I went to see was not Ronchamp (that was years later) but the Pavillon Suisse, in the Cité Universitaire. I went on my own, and I was bowled over by that building. I still am. It was unbelievable. And what was it about it? I remember fifteen years ago we had an event in Paris under the *pilotis* in the winter; François Chaslin was the interviewer and he asked me what was my initial reaction to this building. I said that coming under those muscular *pilotis* in naked concrete, with this superstructure of glass and steel floating above, was something almost mystical to me. I thought it was just wonderful to do that. The architecture moved me directly and without rational explanation.

During my childhood, I was fascinated by concrete. I should say that this is part of my early life, because my father was a concrete engineer. He built dams and airstrips and things. He died when I was very young. But concrete was something in my mentality from an early age. Including in our house. My parents had a house built in 1947-52 called 'Ingoldsby Court'. This was designed by Robert Paine, a skillful architect who straddled the end of the Arts and Crafts and the beginning of modernism in England. It was constructed from white-washed brick and had blue roof tiles between stepped Flemish gables. It was symmetrical, on a formal plan, and had side wings, an arrangement with some Palladian echoes. From the front wrought iron gate there was a processional approach along the main axis towards the front door.

There was a marvelous rear garden with level changes, a pergola and a rectangular pond on a cross axis, inspired by a garden design of Edwin Lutyens, the Little Deanery in Sonning-on-Thames where my parents met during the war. Leading up to one of the terraces and the pergola were cantilevered concrete steps composed in a rhythm: anticipating perhaps my later attraction to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater or Le Corbusier's Dom-ino skeleton! This tri-partite order of base, middle and crowning overhang, so fundamental to classical order, was part of my day-to-day physical experience as a child.





Aged seven, I discovered in a glass case the 14th edition of Banister Fletcher's *History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* with its incisive drawings of Greek temples and its comparative profiles of the Doric Order. I have a photograph of a concrete dam in Donegal, Ireland, which was the project my father was working on just before he died. It chimes somehow with Chandigarh, the shapes, the geometry, the material. I think this is important. Why do buildings resonate for you? It's because there's a lot of pre-existing matter waiting to be touched. And I think Le Corbusier touched that pre-existing matter in an unprecedented way, quite extraordinary. And then, *en plus*, to go and see the real thing at age 16, was a revolution in my whole way of looking at the world. So, it all started in a most direct fashion. I've always said, go see the thing itself, have your reflections. But in the end, the real subject of this is Le Corbusier's architecture. It's not what he says. It's not what he writes. It's not even what he paints. It's those buildings that, to me, are the center of the whole thing.

AL: In that trip in which, as an adolescent, you saw Pavillon Suisse for the first time, I presume you went to see other buildings, especially the Maison du Brésil which was barely ten years old and only one-minute away from the Swiss Pavilion.

WJRC: No. I had no idea that this Brazilian Pavilion was close at hand. Being so interested in painting I went to the Musée d'Art Moderne a lot. Picasso was very important to me at an early age and still is, especially the early Cubist works. During my teens, I was drawn to abstract painters such as Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky and Pierre Soulages. I was a very introverted, intense young man who discovered the role of art and the imagination in his own life very early on. And architecture was part of that great discovery. I was acutely sensitive to buildings of all periods.

Between seven and thirteen years of age I attended the Benedictine St Augustine's Abbey School in Ramsgate in buildings designed by the Gothic Revival architect August Welby Pugin, including his own home 'The Grange' which was a sort of manifesto. Among the pupils were the de Bournet brothers who, in early 1960, invited me to stay with them in the Ardèche in southern France. To get there we passed through Paris where we visited both the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame before taking the Mistral high speed train south. Those five weeks in the Château de Bournet marked me for life: the rural society, the haunting landscape of limestone gorges and streams, the visits to Ancient Roman buildings such as the Pont du Gard and the Arènes at Arles. I was captivated by the atmospheres of the *Midi*.

AL: To return to your secondary studies: did you go straight to university on leaving school in 1965?

WJRC: No I had two years working as a farm labourer then as a computer programmer. I also undertook several hitchhiking journeys to the Mediterranean world. In the Autumn of 1967, I began my studies in the history of art at the Courtauld Institute of Art without having much idea what they would entail. The Courtauld was primarily a research

FIG. 5
Robert Paine, Ingoldsby Court, Shakespeare Road, Birchington-on-Sea, 1947-51. Curtis's childhood residence from 1951 to 1957. Built by his parents George and Finola Curtis, the house was full of classical reminiscences while the garden combined axes and cross axes with a wooden pergola on brick piers accessed by stratified, cantilevered, concrete steps. This structure with its clear articulation of base, middle and top, has haunted Curtis ever since, as has the rectangular pool on axis with it. Photo WJRC 1975.

FIG. 6
Sir Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method*, 14th Edition, Batsford, London, 1948. Pages 86-87 on the Doric Order and its various profiles, with, on the right-hand page, photos of the 'primitive Doric' Temple of Poseidon, Paestum, c. 450 BC. Curtis discovered this book with its evocative analytical illustrations when he was seven years old.

establishment and they treated us undergraduates as grown-ups from day one. The formation was rigorous and pitched towards the close visual analysis of works of art and the interpretation of documentary evidence.

There were several exceptional teachers, among them Anthony Blunt who transmitted his love of French classicism, and John Golding, who shared his profound understanding of Cubism. John Shearman, the Raphael expert, insisted upon the reconstruction of the past context of works of art and the need to see them as solutions to problems.

I concentrated mostly upon Renaissance, painting, sculpture and architecture, while exploring aesthetic theories. Bit by bit I was founding my own method as a historian. I was particularly drawn to questions of meaning: how ideas are structured in form.

AL: In that period at the Courtauld, were you exposed to any formal teaching on modern architecture?

WJRC: No, but I was interested in it anyway. I was fascinated by the British modern movement of the 1930s, figures such as Berthold Lubetkin, architect of the Penguin Pool in London Zoo and High Point I flats Highgate, Wells Coates, who designed Lawn Road flats Hampstead, and Erich Mendelsohn who fled Naziism and designed Bexhill Pavilion with Serge Chermayeff. I visited key modern works all over England and photographed them. Towards the end of my time at the Courtauld, Reyner Banham was a strong force in London. I came across his *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (1960), which I thought was a wonderful book. I used to read it and re-read it. I particularly liked the way he could discuss quite complex theories in a lucid and readable style.

Banham came and gave three lectures at the Courtauld. The one on Le Corbusier and modernism in Europe wasn't that good, but he gave a great one on California and America, where he showed the Newport Beach House by Rudolph Schindler. When I did eventually go to the United States in Fall 1970, my first major trip was to California, Los Angeles in particular, where I was astounded by the works of Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra, Irving Gill, Greene and Greene, and of course Schindler, his own house of 1923 in particular, with its meditative sense of space.



FIG. 7

Photograph of a concrete dam in construction in Donegal, Republic of Ireland, brought home in late 1951 by the author's father, George William Curtis, one of engineers of the project.



Where modern architecture was concerned, I just taught myself. In my second year at the Courtauld (1968-9), we used to read out a paper and then have a critique from the professor and from fellow students. It was a seminar arrangement. I read out a paper about Mantegna, the *Madonna della Vittoria* (1496), which is a wonderful painting that was in a shrine and was carried through the streets. It was all to do with repelling the French invasion. The lecturer did not approve of this contextual approach and signaled his irritation. I was furious. So, after tea break, the rest of them went back and I refused to go.

Instead, I went up to Regent's Park to look at the Royal College of Physicians (1961), a building that had caught my imagination in my first year living in London. I was passionately attracted to that building with its white forms floating in light over lower areas of glass and shadow. Initially I had no idea who the architect was, but the architecture spoke to me on its own terms. So, after this unpleasant seminar, I went back to look at it again and I said that's what I'm about. I had learned that the building was designed by Denys Lasdun, probably one of the few British architects worthy of international attention at that time. His design for the National Theatre next to the Thames was in construction. So, I went to the nearest phone box and called Lasdun's office. After a brief conversation in which I said I was a student of the history of art and that I would like to put an exhibition together about Lasdun's architecture, he invited me for tea.

Lasdun's office was a big room in Queen Anne Street, and he had a huge table and then a small table where he discussed with clients and there was a photo mural on the wall from the Renaissance of the Ferrara school of painting of people on a scaffolding. It was a wonderful thing. I told him I was a student at the Courtauld Institute of Art just down the road and that I was inspired by the Royal College of Physicians. I proposed to make a little show in the Courtauld Student's Common Room with a text. When I told him I was studying the Renaissance he started talking about the Pazzi Chapel by Brunelleschi.

I had never heard anybody talk about architecture like this before. It was unbelievable. His insight into what Brunelleschi was doing. This man was a passionate contemporary architect talking about Brunelleschi as if he was his best friend. And then we talked about Alberti and we talked about this and that. Subsequently he talked about Le Corbusier who was a major inspiration to him, not least in the Royal College of Physicians. In its way the building was indebted to Pavillon Suisse which Lasdun visited in 1934. So, I put this show up and I composed a text very badly typed on trashy paper. I still have it. I also did a show on the Smithson's.

In my last year at the Courtauld, starting with the Autumn term in 1969, Howard Burns came to teach an innovative seminar on the Renaissance City. He had spent six years buried in archives in Italy and presented much new material with many fresh perspectives. I wrote three essays for the group. One about Alberti and his thought and life, another about literary preparations for the Renaissance, and the third one on three approaches to the Renaissance: Geoffrey Scott, Rudolf Wittkower, and Auguste Choisy.

FIG. 8

Rocks, water, reflections and refractions, River Labeaume, close to Château and Ferme de Bournet, Ardèche, 07, France. This haunting and hypnotic 'ancient landscape' was first experienced by Curtis as a child of eleven. Twenty-five years later, it became the setting of his home. Photo WJRC, 1996.

FIG. 9

Berthold Lubetkin and TECTON, engineer Ove Arup, Penguin Pool, London Zoo, 1933. Photo WJRC, 1970.

FIG. 10

Denys Lasdun, Royal College of Physicians, Regent's Park, London, 1961. Curtis first 'discovered' this building with its fusion of modern space and classical values in 1967 without knowing who the architect was. Lasdun subsequently became a friend and architectural mentor, as well as the subject of Curtis's book *Denys Lasdun: Architecture, City, Landscape* (1994). Photo WJRC, 1994.

While this seminar was going on, James Ackerman, the Harvard scholar of the Renaissance, was Slade Professor in Cambridge, which I became 35 years later, the greatest honour you can have as an art historian. But he was living in London, and he sat in on one of these sessions of the Renaissance city. He was impressed by the high level. He learned that I had applied to study in his department at Harvard. So, I met Jim Ackerman there and then. We talked and I expressed interest in writing a thesis about the life of villas and palaces: villa and palace as the expressions of a way of life. It's not just stylistic, but what they are as symbolic creations of a certain kind. Ackerman – you might say “Mr. Palladio himself” – found it a very interesting subject. To my astonishment, I was admitted to the Fine Arts Department at Harvard with a scholarship.



The American Adventure: Researching and Writing *Le Corbusier at Work*

So I went to America thinking to study the Renaissance, sort of stumbling around, not quite sure what was going on. And as I say in the essay "The History of History," (*Massilia* 13, 2014) the first afternoon in the USA I saw the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Le Corbusier's only building in North America, and was fascinated to see this concrete structure surrounded by red brick buildings covered in ivy. Since Eduard Sekler was giving his history sequence in the Carpenter, I would go twice or three times a week to his lectures there. I got to know that building pretty well and loved wandering up the ramp.

Sekler was that rare combination: a scholar who was also an architect, an engaged modernist with a deep knowledge of history. I wrote a mid-term paper on Berthold Lubetkin which interested him and he invited me to help sort out an exhibition on Soviet architecture of the 1920s 'USSR 1917-1932. Search for Total Construction' which was installed in the third level exhibition space of Carpenter Center in January 1971. Inevitably this involved reflection upon Le Corbusier's interactions with the Soviet Union: the Tzentrosoyuz Building in Moscow (1927-33) and the unbuilt Palace of the Soviets Project of (1928-31). I even wrote short texts for the catalogue, one on housing, including of course the Narkomfin Building by Moisei Ginzburg (1927) which would eventually influence Le Corbusier's concept for the Unité d'habitation.

Eduard Sekler liked the fact that I was from London. He studied there at the Warburg Institute with Rudolf Wittkower in the late 40s and wrote a book about Christopher Wren. Meanwhile, in my box there was a letter from Jerzy Soltan who had worked in the Le Corbusier Atelier in the late 1940s. He was the chair of the Graduate School of Design, who was over in Robinson Hall, an erudite building in Harvard Yard by McKim Mead and White. His letter said: "It's come to my attention that you are very knowledgeable about the modern architecture of England in the 1930s. I would like to offer you to give a talk in the official GSD lecture series on the 27th of January. Please confirm." That was only a couple of weeks away. I went to see him and said, well, that's very nice to offer to give a lecture, but I couldn't do it because I've never given a public lecture in my life. And he looked at me up and down (he was a tall ex Polish cavalry officer) and said, young man, *il faut agir*. (You must act.) I accepted.



FIG. 11
Le Corbusier, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Ma., USA, 1960-62. Front, west side, facing onto Quincy Street. The dynamics of architectural form and space. Photo WJRC 2010.

The event took place in the theatre in Hunt Hall, a fine Beaux Arts classical building, alas demolished in 1973, and to my astonishment, it went very well. Out of the back of the room came Eduard Sekler, who already knew who I was, because I was a student in his course. In front of everybody, he shook my hand and said, congratulations, that was a superb talk. He then invited me to see him at his office the next day to discuss something. I went to his office in Carpenter Center, and he said look, this is a dossier of letters between Le Corbusier and Josep Lluís Sert concerning the design of this building. I would like you to take these away for a week, look at them, and tell me if you think there's anything in this for a study about this building in which we are. That was the start of a great adventure.

AL: I see; I suspect this is the origin –or the genesis, to borrow from the subtitle of your own text— of *Le Corbusier at Work*.

WJRC: Well, yes. I took the letters back to my room. I couldn't believe it, they're wonderful, these letters, you know back and forth between Le Corbusier and Josep Lluís Sert who was executant architect and a long-standing friend of Le Corbusier. Letters expressing ideas about concrete and its correct treatment, definitions of architectural elements such as the *pilotis*, the *brise-soleil* and the *ondulatoires*: the grammar of Le Corbusier's architecture. A week later I went to see Professor Sekler and he asked me to consider writing a study about Carpenter Center, its design process and so forth. So, I agreed.

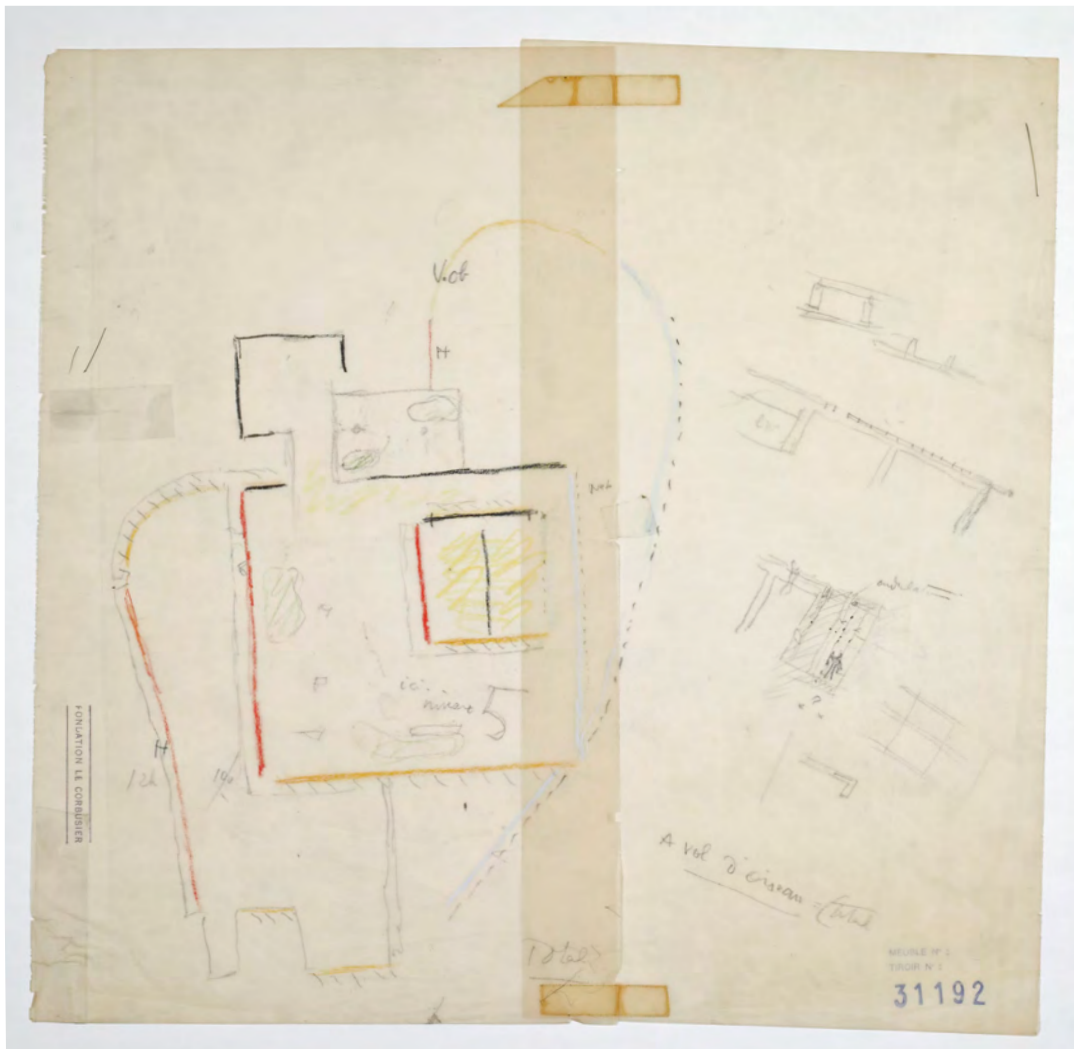
I saw slides of some of the Le Corbusier drawings and found them very interesting, but I decided I needed to see the original drawings of Carpenter Center in Paris. I started collecting materials; I had contact with the Sert's office and I interviewed Josep Lluís Sert at length. Meanwhile, Guillermo Jullian de la Fuente, Le Corbusier's collaborator on the Carpenter Center job, was a visitor at the GSD, so that was great too. I had many discussions with him about the design process and methods of work.

Thus, I could assemble lots of materials and was able to track down the engineers for the building, the office of William Le Messurier, and the assistants in Sert's office who worked on the building. I photographed Carpenter Center in great detail in the Spring, and then went back to Europe for the holidays. The Fondation Le Corbusier had only recently been founded and I arranged to visit and study the archives in August. I turned up at Maison LaRoche, was given the key to the house, and allowed access to the original drawings of Carpenter Center.



FIG.12

Carpenter Center, rear, east side facing onto Prescott Street., Since this photo was taken, the building has had to cope with the over-scaled Fogg Art Museum renovation by Renzo Piano. Photo WJRC, 1971

**FIG.13**

Le Corbusier referred to the project as VAC BOS, Visual Arts Center Boston. Plan of 5th level which is also an aerial view combining all the levels of the building. May 1st, 1960. 1:200. 39 x 38 cms, colored crayon on thin onion skin trace. Le Corbusier used colours to distinguish different exposures to the sun: red for full exposure, orange for partial exposure, black for wall, blue for unprotected glazing with dots suggesting onduloires. In the small pencil sketches to the right of the sheet the architect studies a structure with beams and a possible blade like system of brise-soleil. FLC.

AL: The original drawings were there? I always thought they were safely kept in a vault and were only accessible to a few designated members of the Fondation. In any case, you were able to work with the originals! That's wonderful.

WJRC: Yes! The drawings were there. I don't know where they kept them, but they were there. So, I had them spread out on several tables all around the house. Of course, the experience of the building itself was truly inspiring. I have recorded all this in detail as well as the writing of the book in 'The History of a History' published in *Massilia 13* in 2014. Having direct contact with all this drawn evidence, coloured crayon sketches on tracing paper, supplied a unique insight into Le Corbusier's creative process and the Atelier's methods of work. The drawings were like an archaeological site which had to be excavated carefully for what they revealed. It was also a question of learning the Atelier's graphic conventions and codes.

AL: So, the first time that you saw Maison La Roche was when you were given the keys or you had been there before?

WJRC: Had I seen the outside before? I can't remember that to be honest with you. But I certainly got to know it very well during those long summer days with the light bathing the white forms and the shadows of the trees. I was virtually

FIG.14

William J. R. Curtis and
Eduard Sekler, Editor,
*Le Corbusier at Work: the
Genesis of the Carpenter
Center for the Visual Arts*,
Harvard University Press,
1978. Curtis still refers to
this study (his parts written
1971-72) as a foundation
stone.

FIG.15

The Parthenon, Athens,
447-432 BC, architects
Ictinus and Kallicrates. First
visited in 1966 as part of
wandering journey through
Greece and Turkey. This
photo was taken in late
1970s when the marble
was whiter than it is today
because it has since been
yellowed by pollution. Photo
WJRC, 1977.

living in it. My routine was agreeable; it was August, there was nobody around in Paris, and then I would go and work most of the day. I liked to break off to go and explore Paris on long walks: I was there when they were demolishing Balhard's *Les Halles*. After a light dinner, I would and go back to the Maison LaRoche at nine at night and stay there till three in the morning. I studied the drawings, and when I was tired, I stretched out on the *chaise-longue* there. I had little cigars with me and I had a recording device where I would listen to Bach, the Goldberg variations. And I even had a little flask of cognac.

But I also had a close-up lens on my camera for details, marks and scribbled notes and numbers. You see, all the drawings were dated, because in the late years of the Atelier, that was insisted upon by Le Corbusier. I very quickly realized which one was Le Corbusier and which was Jullian de la Fuente, his Chilean collaborator, and probably what order things were done in. And there were a few more letters I discovered over there. Anyway, I took all this back to England and moved into the old billiard room in a house at the top end of London in Barnet. I bought a little projector to project the slides onto a sheet and spent hours figuring out what was going on and taking notes. In effect I was deciphering the drawings and grasping the intentions by splicing together graphic and documentary evidence. Then I would move out to the garden shed under the apple trees where I did the actual writing. I wrote the first draft of this study there, by hand, in the hut. That's how it all started.

I had no idea about staying on at Harvard or anything. It wasn't really in my plans. So, I was doing this completely around the edge, if you see what I'm saying.

AL: In short, this now seminal work began almost by chance at Harvard, but it was not your original project when you went there one year before.

WJRC: Correct. When I went back to Harvard at the end of the summer, I rented a simple room on Kirkland Street. I built the furniture myself out of redwood planks, canvass and plywood, based on what I had seen in the Schindler House of 1923, and started the second draft of the text. But I had no contact with my department, my supervisor (officially James Ackerman), or anybody else. Just Professor Sekler from time to time to discuss. And his approach was to let me develop it the way I was developing it. The only stricture he had was that if I had a point, I do it with correct use of evidence. He always made a distinction between speculation and fact. It was very nice. He didn't try to impose an agenda about how to look at Le Corbusier or anything.

That's where all my history of undergraduate studies on the Renaissance, interest in interpreting documents, interest in symbolic form, interest in the context and intentions came into play. How do you go from a social context and a programme into a design? My tutor at the Courtauld, Howard Burns, was very good at talking about patronage and all that. But how one went from those conditions to the design of a building was missing. And here I was with this fund of material which was precisely about the processes of interpretation, translation and invention: clues to the genesis of a project by a major architect. I treated the matter as if I were studying a building in distant history, whereas, in fact, I was studying a building less than one decade old. It was very intense, very inward. I had no historiographical models to follow. I had to work out a method based on evidence and on first principles.

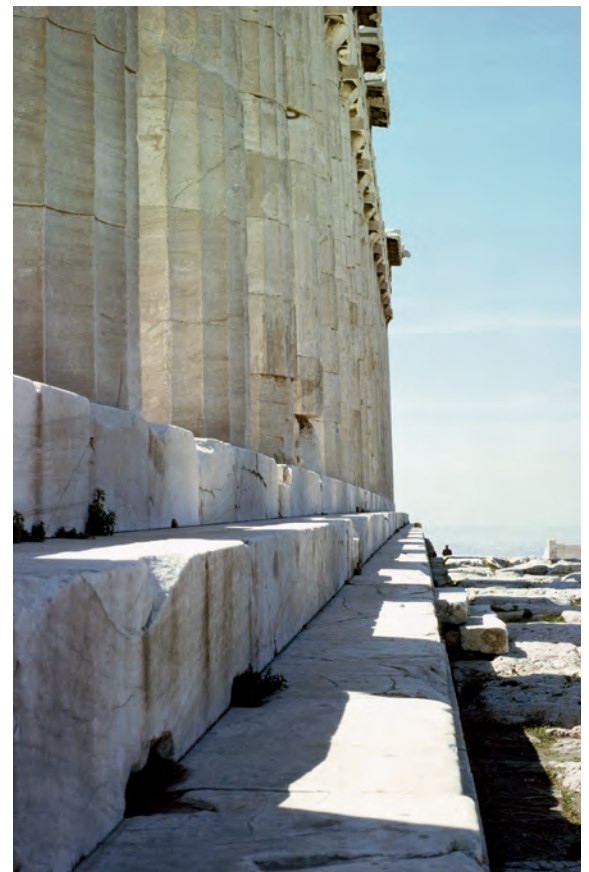
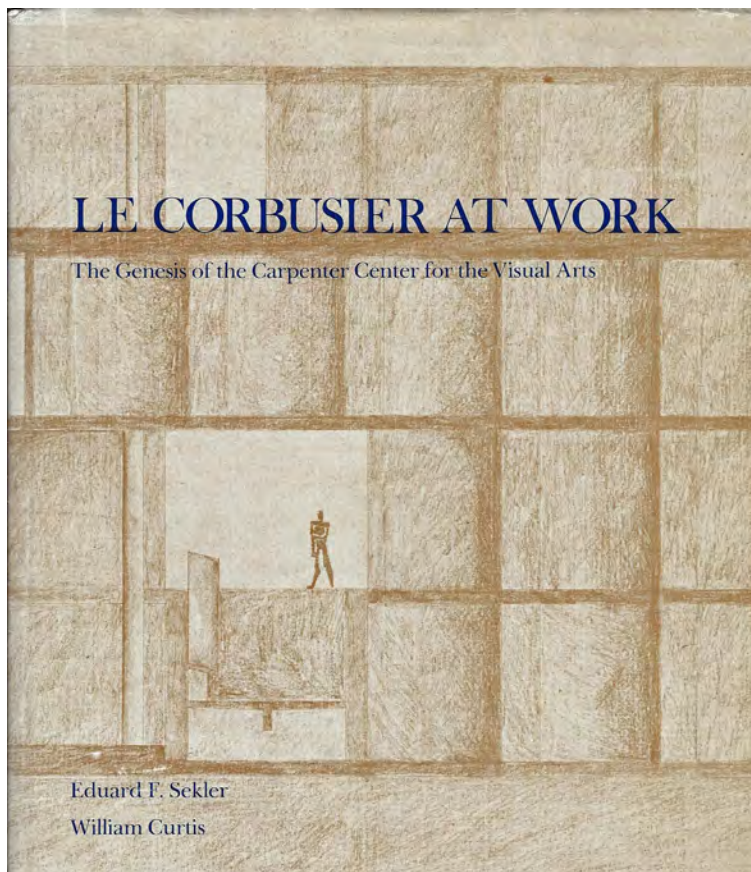
In December 1971 I returned to the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris to double check evidence and to assemble a *catalogue raisonné* of the drawings and models. I had valuable conversations with Roggio Andréini, one of the last remaining members of the Atelier, on the methods of work and on Le Corbusier's ideas about concrete. He also helped to decipher some of the drawings and Le Corbusier's use of colour codes in his plans. Unfortunately, this catalogue was not published in the eventual book. It appeared only as an annex to my Doctoral Thesis four years later in 1975. It was put together after close scrutiny of the drawings including all marks and doodles.

There were twelve categories in all. These were: 1 Date. 2 Author. 3 Subject. 4 Scale. 5 Size. 6 Material. 7 Media and colour crayon code. 8 Atelier stamp and original title given in Atelier. 9 Inscriptions. 10 Special comments. 11 Collection marks and location. 12 Illustration number (in this book) and information about publication elsewhere. In effect this was a scientific accompaniment to the text. Some of this detailed information did go into the book's captions, but not all. In my view these categories are indispensable for understanding Le Corbusier's design process drawings, but these drawings need in turn to be interpreted as part of the search for architectural solutions to problems. Each drawing was done for a reason and it is up to the historian to reconstruct the reason why.

From Book to Thesis: Negotiating Academia

In the Spring of 1972, I continued to develop the manuscript adding valuable new materials concerning Le Corbusier's visits to Harvard in 1959 and 1960. In the meantime, all sorts of panic buttons went off in my Department due to my absence and failure to consult with them. Officially I was a graduate student in Fine Arts with a graduate student fellowship from Harvard University, and within the structure of the department I was supposedly studying for a Doctorate. I was summoned by the Department chair, Professor John Rosenfield, an expert on Japanese art, who questioned me on what I was doing. He found my attitude unsupportable, so I just showed him the 360-page typescript that studied in depth Le Corbusier's building right next door and visible through the window. Meanwhile, I continued to fail my German exam, a language requirement which should have been dealt with during my very first weeks at Harvard. Eventually, my manuscript on the Carpenter Center was given to James Ackerman for the summer to be assessed and I was told to come back in the Fall to discuss what to do next. To be honest with you, I thought that that was the end of the road.

When it came time to return to Cambridge in September, I had nowhere to live, but with the help of Eduard I moved into the top of Hunt Hall where there was a long studio with astonishing views over the roof tops. I camped there incognito for three months. In September, I bumped into Professor Ackerman in Gund Hall, the new GSD building. I expected the worst. But he said he had read my manuscript and found it one of the most original and perceptive pieces of history writing he had read in recent years. He added: "As far as I'm concerned, you've got your doctorate right there." He also invited me for Thanksgiving with his family. Everything changed overnight.



The manuscript then went for commentary to John Coolidge, who was a grand old Yankee historian of architecture. I still have 11 pages of his densely written notes on yellow paper. Overall, he thought very well of my work, but I would have to correct this and do that and do the other. Eduard Sekler said, look, that will be your PhD Thesis committee: Ackerman, Coolidge and himself. But I had to deal with all the other requirements first: Generals, which are three exams with tricky questions that eventually went very well, and the German exam which at long last I passed in the Fall of 1973. I did everything upside down and the wrong way around!

The study on Carpenter Center was a book project before it was a thesis. It was written as a book not an academic treatise. Eduard Sekler wanted it to be a model monograph with a piece by Rudolf Arnheim. The idea was that Sert would write a preface and Eduard would write a conclusion. All of these things were put in eventually, but my section was almost good enough on its own. He could have said, you'll have to cut this by fifty percent, but he never did. When he invited Josep Lluís Sert in, I thought it changed the nature of the beast. But it's a very interesting preface that Sert writes in the book, dealing with Le Corbusier's ambivalent relationship to the United States and the background of the Carpenter Center commission. Eduard Sekler's Conclusion 'The Carpenter Center in Le Corbusier's Oeuvre. An Assessment', explored the architect's formal language on several levels, in both his architecture and his paintings.

My section of the book begins with a very detailed description of the building which I wrote in the Spring of 1973, evoking the experience of the architecture, the sequence of spaces, the materials, the architectural elements etc. So, it starts with an analysis of what one sees and then proceeds to the historical questions, to the design process and construction: eleven chapters in all. The final chapter, 'The Image and Idea of the Building', deals with the multiple levels of meaning, including the notion that Carpenter Center is a sort of urbanistic metaphor combining circulation, greenery and solar symbolism. In effect, this entire in-depth study on a single building was my 'apprentice piece' as a historian.

AL: Did Sert read your text before writing his piece?

WJRC: I honestly do not know. Sert was 74, younger than I am now. He let me have access to all of the archives in his office. Through that, I discovered, for example, two copies of a letter when the Harvard client was insisting on reducing the size of the building. This showed that Sert pretended to reduce the size of the building but didn't. Eduard loved that, because no one has spotted it before. He also liked the fact that I was passionate about the Renaissance, that I had a good European education, as you might say. He was frustrated he couldn't write with the fluidity he wanted in English. But, he said, you write beautifully.

AL: Indeed, your prose flows very naturally. Did you have any training in writing?

WJRC: I had a very good formation in language in all of my schools starting age five. And when I was a kid the teachers said, William loves words. It's true. And I could speak very clearly about things. I enjoyed debates and theatre activities. I read a lot. I had two or three marvelous teachers of English literature. In Douai School, we had an eccentric, great teacher, Billy Bell. He should have been a don in an Oxford college, really. He was very precious and very precise. He had a way of deciphering classic British poets. For half an hour, one line of Milton or Shakespeare. Why is this working so well as a line? And by the way, do you know that this is also an echo of Virgil, this passage here. This idea that great English literature could constantly be rooted in classical Antiquity. Ding! Went right in. You see, these things all hook up. These are key moments in one's life. You sort of realize afterwards, that these flashes of insight count so much.

And by the way, on the issue of Antiquity, my hitchhiking journeys as a teenager to the Mediterranean world were foundational. I had read an amazing book called *Mani: Travels in the Southern Peloponnese* by Patrick Leigh Fermor which I still possess. It is about the southern three fingers of Greece. It evokes the landscape and the peasant society, now completely disappeared. And I thought, I have to go and see that. I set out in the summer of 1966. I was eighteen years old. I went overland through Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia to northern Greece: Thessaloniki. That was the beginning of my life as a wanderer. Hitchhiking and sleeping outside on beaches, in barns or under olive trees. After Thessaloniki I had to choose whether I would go south down to Athens, or east to Istanbul.

The first car that came was going to the east and took me almost as far as the Turkish border. So, the first glimpses I had of that part of the world were Hagia Sophia and the mosques of Istanbul. And the whole atmosphere in Istanbul blew me away: the Golden Horn, the Bosphorus, the domes and minarets, the creaking wooden houses, the hooters of the ferry steamers, the calls to prayer of the muezzin. In the souqs I acquired my first oriental rug for five pounds, a small prayer mat which I stretched out next to my sleeping bag wherever I spent the night. Then after that I came

**FIG.16**

Fancy dress party at opening of the exhibition 'The Other Twenties', held in the 3rd level exhibition space of Carpenter Center, spring 1975. The exhibition was curated by Stanislaus von Moos, Swiss architectural historian, who is pictured here wearing a proletariat cap while talking to Werner Oechslin, also Swiss architectural historian, in the pin striped suit. My costume was intended to evoke the Art Deco skyscrapers of NY in the twenties and the film King Kong with its extraordinary scenes showing bi-planes attacking the gorilla. The author had three coloured plastic bi-planes attached to the back of a cardigan with strident sun ray motifs on the front. Photo Todd Stuart.

back through Greece and down to Athens, the Acropolis, the theatre at Epidaurus (the high point of my journey), the Peloponnese, Sparta, crossed over to Kalamata, then the ferry to Brindisi in southern Italy. Then back through Italy and France; always France, especially the *Midi*.

It was a revelation that one could do that, that one could be free in this way. These journeys to the south of Europe (Greece and Turkey again in 1967; Italy and Malta in 1968) were an essential part of my education. Back to theme of the direct experience of architecture; not just architecture, also landscapes, peoples and provincial towns. During these journeys to the south of Europe, I experienced rural societies, marginal people such as gypsies and the generosity of the poor. When I look at old black and white Italian neo realist films set in the *terrain vague* on the outskirts of Italian cities, such as Fellini's *La Strada*, they bring back memories of those treks.

AL: It almost sounds like your own *Voyage d'Orient*. Was it intentional or just happened like that?

WJRC: It just happened. I don't think I was going around thinking Le Corbusier did something. Not at all. I think later in life I thought, oh, I see. The spirit was the same, though. A vague feeling of returning to origins, to fundamentals. Going back to Mediterranean sources. Learning from direct experience and observation. But it is possible that these journeys helped me understand Le Corbusier's own.

AL: Let's go back to the book on the Carpenter Center. What about the publishing process?

WJRC: Well, it just dragged on. Eventually Sekler and Arnheim got their texts together, and the whole lot went over to MIT Press where there was a weird maneuver and Sekler decided to pull it out. That was in the Spring of 1974. Eventually Harvard agreed to it on condition that the Graham Foundation gave some funding, which they did. But it was a long process. It didn't come out until 1978, whereas, in fact, I'd really written most of mine by 1972. It was a real, you know, young person's book, a foundational text, but I couldn't have done all of that without Eduard Sekler who invited me in and guided the design and publication process.

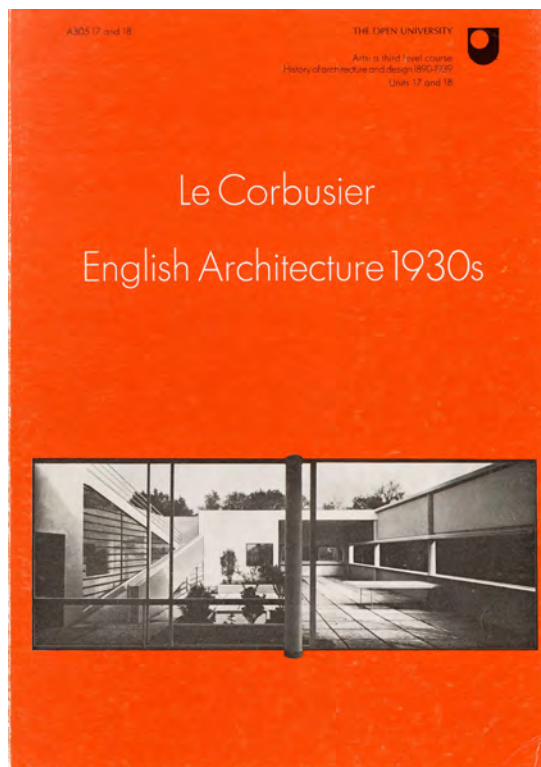
My work now had to be submitted as my doctoral thesis. For this purpose, I added the *catalogue raisonné* of the drawings and a Preface on method dealing with the design process as a subject of historical analysis. I sent it in, It was accepted as I knew it would be and then went to pick up my degree at the Commencement Ceremony in June 1975 in Harvard Yard. This was actually quite amusing and moving. We all stood up at the given moment and our group was announced as receiving doctorates in *Artes Elegantes*, a bizarre Latin rendition of 'Fine Arts'.

Harvard and Beyond: Teaching and Travels

I had no idea what I was going to do next. I was probably going to go back to Europe. I had a visa that ran out in mid-June but I was suddenly offered a teaching post at Boston University and I stayed in the US, continuing to live on Prescott Street just opposite the Carpenter Center. In fact, the building was like an extension of my home and I used to say to friends: 'Meet you on the ramp'. There is an exhibition space at the third level off the ramp and I have memories of congenial exhibition openings while wandering onto the adjacent roof terrace with a glass in hand. I liked to hang out on the top level with wonderful views across the tree tops and roofs of Harvard Yard, especially the magnificent red tiled roof of H.H. Richardson's Sever Hall (1878). I knew Le Corbusier's building inside out and from top to bottom. It was my place!

In the early 1970s I had been in discussion with Tim and Charlotte Benton in London who were founding the Course A 305 of the Open University on the History of Modern Architecture and Design. This educational initiative combined filmed analyses of buildings with accompanying texts and tutorials. They asked me to contribute two 'Units', one on Le Corbusier, the other on the modern architecture of the 1930s in England. These texts were written in the Spring of 1973 and published together in a paperback book in 1975: *Le Corbusier/ English Architecture 1930s*.

The Le Corbusier text was a close analysis of the Villa Savoye and its multiple levels of meaning: I characterized it as a 'Machine Age Temple' among other things: a rationalist use of structure elevated to a poetic order fusing modern post-Cubist space and classical essentials.. The different sections explored strands of the architect's research and the emergence of his architectural language. My text opened by comparing and contrasting different historians' interpretations of the Villa Savoye, including Henry Russell Hitchcock, Sigfried Giedion, Nikolaus Pevsner, Leonardo Benevolo and Edgar Kauffmann. In effect this unit and the one on English architecture of the 1930s, I explored the many levels of symbolic content in modern architecture but with Le Corbusier as a focus.



**FIG.17**

William Curtis in the salon of the Villa Savoye at Poissy, 'Les Heures Claires', 1928-30. Photo Jean-Brice Viaud, 2009.

FIG.18

William J. R. Curtis, *Le Corbusier/English Architecture 1930s*, Open University Press, Bletchley, 1975. This paperback volume contained two Units 17/18 accompanying Open University televised lectures in the Course A 305 History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939.

FIG.19

Theatre at Epidauros, Greece, c 4th C BC, architect Polykleitos the Younger. Much as Curtis admired the Parthenon, Epidauros, first experienced in 1966, has remained his benchmark of architectural excellence and unleashed a lifelong obsession with platforms sensitively sited in landscape. Photo WJRC, 1998.

The academic year 1975-76 I taught at both Boston University (BU) and Wellesley College, courses on the history of modern architecture and urbanism. At BU I also taught courses on painting and sculpture in the USA in the 20th century, and a seminar focused on abstraction. In retrospect I realize that this was quite important as it insisted on the role of abstraction in containing and expressing a complex content. This was in opposition to the formalist approach that treated abstraction as if it had no meaning. My lectures dealt with Jackson Pollock, Arshile Gorky, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, David Smith et al and explored their mythological dimension. Philip Guston was teaching in the Art Department at BU and I invited him over for a public discussion with the students. Similarly, my seminar on modern architecture probed into meaning and treated the neo-Corbusians then in vogue –the so-called New York Five, Meier, Gwathmey, Eisenman, Hejduk, Graves— as lightweight formalists involved in a surface revival of earlier modernism, but without an underlying social vision.

Then it turned out that Stanislaus Von Moos, who had been teaching at Carpenter Center, was leaving. I had an interview with the film maker Bob Gardner, who was the Director. He told me they would like me to teach, but not history. Eduard will explain it, he said. They needed courses as an introduction to visual thinking, so I invented a course called Towards an Integrated Theory of Design. It grew out of earlier methodology when, as a graduate student, I had taught undergraduates to analyze architecture or works of art through several conceptual lenses. It basically said, look, architecture and design are not just form. They're not just function; not just structure; not just meaning; not just material; not just style; not just ideology; not just typology. Rather they are all of the above. So, if you want to understand them, you need to have a series of lenses to focus on these different aspects.

One of the ways to do that was by means of very detailed descriptions. So, I would have the students choose a building, could be a very ordinary building, and analyze it inside out. The what, the why, the how. And then my lectures would go through these general ideas but illustrating them with historical examples. When I was talking about form, I had a whole 20 minutes about the Ancient Greek theatre at Epidauros, and how that coheres as an overlay of several geometries and rhythms in stone. Another lecture was called Experiencing Architecture and was partly about movement. So, I described

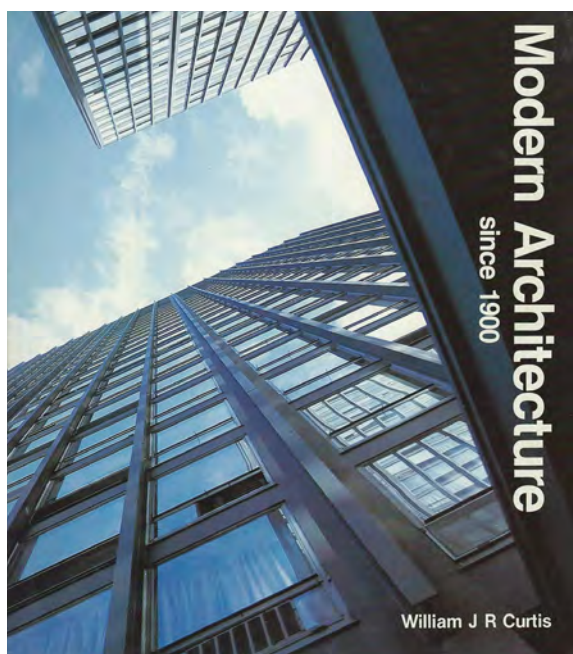


FIG.20
William J.R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture Since 1900*, 1st edition, Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1982. The cover image is Lake Shore Drive Apartments 1949-51 by Mies van der Rohe. Photo WJRC, 1971.

FIG.21
Villa Savoye, view up the ramp. Photo WJRC, 2009.

the procession over the Acropolis and the *promenade architecturale* through the Villa Savoye. I evoked themes which cut across history. You need to learn history, but there are some things which are maybe fundamental to the medium. It was a very interesting experiment.

These general courses were all about teaching the students to see and to understand what they were seeing. My examples extended from the scale of objects to that of the city and the landscape. I even talked about Viking ships, propellers, Aboriginal spear throwers and Thonet chairs as examples of design. I also taught a seminar on the skyscraper for GSD students. I traveled half a year because the terms of my Fulbright insisted that one return to one's home country for a period. It meant that I would teach half years only. The rest of the time I rented a cottage in Kent near my family home, wrote, lectured and travelled.

Thus, with Catherine in Spring 1977 we traveled to Copenhagen, and later through Greece, Turkey, Egypt - the trip of a lifetime. We were often in Paris, looking at Le Corbusier and doing other things. Throughout this period, I travelled extensively, to Morocco, the Middle East, eventually Australia and India. I was interested in the historical developments of modern architecture in diverse cultures, but was also drawn to diverse vernacular and monumental traditions much earlier in time. One of the fruits of these travels was the study 'Type and Variation: Berber Collective Dwellings of the North West Sahara' which was published in the review devoted to Islamic cultures *Muqarnas Vol 1*, in 1982.

I would be away for several months then back to Harvard to teach for one semester a year. That was the rhythm of life. I then invented another seminar called From Idea to Form about theories of form and meaning and the creative process. Some of this grew out of my teaching, and my analysis of Le Corbusier. For some theorists, theory comes from theory without reference to architectural objects or experiences. Mine came from reflections based upon deep analysis of works of art, buildings, photographs, films, objects, cities and landscapes, and the generic trans-historical issues that were involved in understanding them. I oscillated back and forth between experience and analysis of particular visual phenomena, and general reflections focusing on a wide range of texts. It was a very different approach, more inductive, you might say.

This does not mean that I was closed to philosophical reflection. On the contrary I explored fundamental concepts that cut across time. As mentioned earlier, I attempted to address the many forces which influence form in an integrated manner, posing questions that have often been posed throughout the centuries. My reading lists included a wide range from Vitruvius, to León Battista Alberti, Viollet le Duc, Charles Darwin, D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, Henri Focillon, Geoffrey Scott, Le Corbusier Amédée Ozenfant, Henri Matisse, Sergei Eisenstein, Erwin Panofsky, Earl Baldwin Smith, Ernst Gombrich, Suzanne Langer, George Kubler and Rudolf Arnheim. I took the view that students needed to link speculative texts to the close observation and interpretation of objects great and small.

Eventually Eduard asked me to teach a course on the Renaissance which was a pleasure as I could return to my beginnings as an art historian. I prepared for this by undertaking a three-week trip through Italy with Howard Burns and Lynda Fairbairn in the summer of 1977. One of the high points was a visit to the Vatican gardens to see and photograph Michelangelo's apses of St Peter's and Bramante's Palazzo Belvedere. Another was a tour of Palladio's villas and churches, subjects dear to both Howard and Jim Ackerman. Then a year later I at last had a chance to return to modern architecture when I received the request to prepare a course on this subject for the Fall semester of 1978. You read the outline of that course written that summer and you have 90% of my subsequent book on modern architecture, a subject on which I had had a long time to reflect. It was a wonderful course which brought forth fine papers from several students, and I was just handing in the grades in January of 1979 when I received a letter from Phaidon Press asking me to write a general history of modern architecture.

FIG.22a

Fragments of Invention: the Sketchbooks of Le Corbusier', exhibition held on third level of Carpenter Center in Fall of 1981. Researched and curated by Curtis, the installation was designed by Roger Brandenburg-Horn. The exhibition was accompanied by an elegant catalogue with the same title published by the supporter of the show, the Architectural History Foundation, NY, and by MIT Press. Photo WJRC, 1981.

FIG.22b

General view of installation with photo blow ups of sketchbook pages displayed along a floating oblong strip of pink panels. The exhibition included several original drawings and seven sketchbooks displayed in glass cases, all brought across from the Fondation Le Corbusier by Jean-Louis Vêret. The exquisite final presentation drawings executed in 1962 by Le Corbusier and Guillermo Jullian della Fuente, were also borrowed from the Harvard Archives. Photo WJRC, 1981.



Modern Architecture Since 1900 and Fragments of Invention: the Sketchbooks of Le Corbusier

AL: This means that *Modern Architecture since 1900* was written by invitation. It was not your personal initiative?

WJRC: Not at all. It was an invitation. This is the best way to do a book, because otherwise you spend so much time pushing and pulling with publishers. So this is the way that project got going. They initially suggested a book of 80,000 words. The book eventually was 160,000 or more. They asked for a trial chapter and a synopsis. The trial chapter was based very much on the chapter on the 1920s work of Le Corbusier I had written for the Open University publication, which is very clear about the critical role of Maison Cook, and by the way, the title is about the formation of the architectural language and its demonstration in the Villa Savoye. It's a step-by-step progression written in 1973, so in 1979 it was no problem to write a very lucid chapter on the villas of Le Corbusier and the early works.

In the outline, I expressed my intention of writing a balanced and readable book for specialist or general reader; a synthesis in good English, investigating works on multiple wavelengths, sometimes zooming in on a work, sometimes a movement or a country, deliberately extending the frontiers to deal with the developing world, which was lacking, and taking a long view of the history of modern architecture and its variable cultures around the world. I also made a point of avoiding transient fashions and concentrating on matters of substance and long-term value. I explained that I would work back and forth between buildings of high intensity and general themes.

These were the sort of issues I spelled out in my proposal and Phaidon was very positive about it and a contract was signed in Autumn 1979. *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was written between the beginning of 1980 and Spring of 1982, a period in which I travelled a great deal. Some chapters were written in a cottage in Kent, others in Beirut while the Civil War was raging, others in Australia during two trips in Spring 1980 and Spring 1981, others in an assortment of libraries. The book came out in the Autumn of 1982.

Interestingly, *Modern Architecture Since 1900* was not co-published, but co-circulated by Prentice Hall, the biggest textbook company in the USA. They set up a whole network. And you know, they had 300 agents around the USA going in, talking to professors. It was an operation, and we conquered America with that book for several years. Meanwhile it was rapidly translated into Spanish, German and Japanese. A quarter of a century later I spoke openly about several of the driving ideas behind the book when launching the third edition. In 2007 on the occasion of the Presentation of the Spanish translation of the third edition of the book in Madrid, Barcelona and Mexico City, I read out a text of which the English version was 'A Historian's Perspective on Modern Architecture': 'La perspectiva de un historiador sobre la arquitectura moderna', *Conversa al voltant de llibre La arquitectura moderna desde 1900*, William J. R. Curtis, (Ed. Cooperativa, COAC, Barcelona, 2007).

In 1980 I travelled to Australia to give lectures there, and on the way back, visited India for the first time. This was an exciting voyage of discovery. In New Delhi the Tomb of Humayun and the Jantar Mantar particularly impressed me. In Agra of course I visited the Taj Mahal and nearby Fatehpur Sikri. Chandigarh in general, was an inspiring experience, especially the Capitol which I had been studying for years. Soon it was very clear at the back of my mind that I wanted to do a book on Le Corbusier. You see, in the late 70s, I gave major lecture series on Le Corbusier, first at University College in 1978, and six lectures in the same year at University of East Anglia, where I was teaching, and then nine lectures at the Architectural Association in 1979, all recorded. The time was ripe.

In 1979 I had revisited the Fondation Le Corbusier and requested to see the drawings of the Pavillon Suisse. I was referred to dim black and white microfiche images on a screen which were a terrible let down compared to the original drawings of Carpenter Center nearly a decade earlier. But it was thrilling to be once again reconstructing a context and a design process through its various stages. Luckily, I was able to track down two people who had worked on the project in 1930, Gordon Stephenson who lived in Australia, and a certain Miss West who lived in rural Tennessee. She supplied valuable memories including the fact that Le Corbusier had traced the 'dog bone' shape of the *pilotis* with his finger in the soot of a window next to his cubicle in the monastic corridor of the Atelier at 35, rue de Sèvres in order better to understand the form. My article 'Ideas of Structure and the Structure of Ideas' was published in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* in 1981 and received the Founder's Award. It was another key step in my own '*recherche patiente*' as a historian, and a further foundation stone for the book *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* five years later.

FIG.23

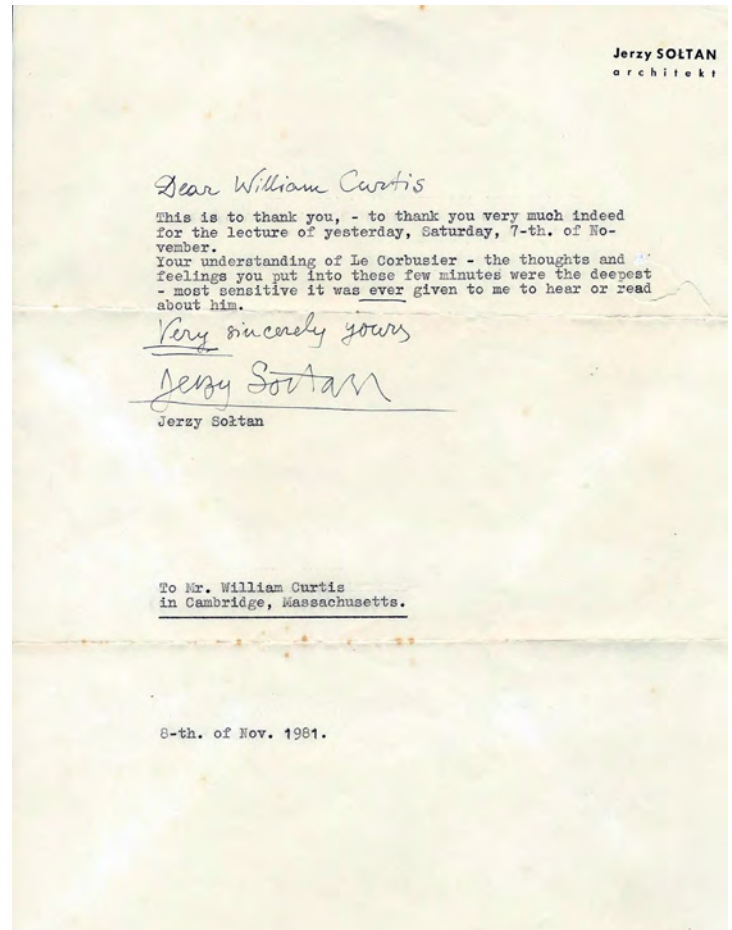
Le Corbusier, Capitol, Chandigarh, 1951-65. View across the Capitol from the terrace of the High Court towards the Assembly or Parliament Building. This epic space with its various symbols has been characterised by the author as a cosmic and political landscape. Photo WJR Curtis 1984.

FIG.24

Jerzy Soltan, letter to the author, November 8th, 1981 in reaction to my lecture 'Abstraction in the Architecture of Le Corbusier' delivered in Congress at MIT the day before.

The Carpenter Center has an exhibition space at the third level off the ramp and exhibitions played a central role in our pedagogical mission. In September 1980 I received a visit from Victoria Newhouse, Director of the Architectural History Foundation. They were publishing Le Corbusier's sketchbooks in four carefully researched and handsomely designed volumes. She wished to know if I could organize an exhibition in Carpenter Center to accompany the publication. I got the green light from the faculty and in the following months went frequently to New York where I studied the entire contents in photographic reproductions. This was an eye-opening process which brought one closer to the mind of the architect. With the help of the exhibition designer Rodger Brandenburg-Horn, we devised a display making a montage of photo blow ups of sketchbook pages around themes.

It was possible to borrow several original drawings from the Fondation and seven original sketchbooks which were displayed in glass cases. Presentation drawings of Carpenter Center were borrowed from the Harvard archives and we produced a beautiful catalogue under the same title as the show: "Fragments of Invention: the Sketchbooks of Le Corbusier". I wrote the main text and the different sections focusing on the diverse roles of the sketchbooks. These sections were: Early Sketches and Seminal Ideas; Travels and Urban Schemes: Rio de Janeiro and Algiers; Notes on the Genesis of Architectural Form: the Chapel at Ronchamp; Carpenter Center and Other Late Works; a Diary of Impressions; Abstractions and Analogies; and Fragments of Invention: the Imagery of Chandigarh. When I look back, I realize that this was a key operation in my understanding of Le Corbusier, his way of seeing and thinking about the world. Central of course was the importance of drawing as a way of apprehending and transforming experience.



The exhibition opened in the Autumn of 1981 and I must say that it looked superb in that building. Roger laid the photo blow ups out on a continuous pink strip and cases were juxtaposed on diagonals which responded to the geometry of the *brise-soleil* of the building. So as one wandered around there were varying juxtapositions of images, of foregrounds and backgrounds, of sketches and buildings. In a penetrating review Rebecca Nemser said that it was like stepping into the mind and the imagination of the architect. To accompany the show, I organized with MIT a symposium which took place in November. My own intervention was entitled 'Abstraction in the Architecture of Le Corbusier' and was very much focused upon the design process of the Assembly Building in Chandigarh. A couple of days afterwards I received a profoundly touching note from Jerzy Soltan who told me that this was the most moving and insightful talk that he had ever heard about Le Corbusier; this letter is one of the gems in my collection.



FIG.25

Adalaj Stepped Well, near Ahmedabad, India, constructed under patronage of Queen Rudabai, 1499. The trabeated stone structure creating a series of well-ventilated and shaded voids is typical of the architecture in this part of Gujarat in 15th and 16th centuries. The stepped wells supplied access to water below ground and refreshing places where travelers or residents could rest on stepped platforms and escape the extreme heat in the cool and the shade. The wells were also used for ceremonial purposes. Photo WJRC, 1984.



FIG.26
Le Corbusier, Millowner's Association Building, Ahmedabad, India, 1951-54, view across the River Sabarmati to the east façade with its grille of brise-soleil. This view was taken over forty years ago when the river bed was still used for drying dyed textiles and there were oxen and people wandering along its gravel banks. Today the river has become a dead lake, and a concrete walk way cuts off the building from the water. Photo WJRC, 1984.

India Ancient and Modern: Le Corbusier in Chandigarh and Ahmedabad

In 1982 I left Harvard and accepted the invitation of Dean Michaelides to teach at Washington University in St Louis, a flexible relationship which extended on and off over several years until 1988. I used these visits well to explore many parts of the United States and to revisit the work of Frank Lloyd Wright on several occasions. Ever since that first contact with India in Spring 1980, I had dreamed of spending time in the Indian sub-continent and southeast Asia in order to investigate the architectural cultures of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam as manifest in the great monuments of the region. At the end of 1982, Catherine and I settled in Bangkok. With that as a base we would push off, exploring upcountry Thailand (the Khmer temple at Phimai (12th century AD) and the sacred complex at Sukothai (14th century AD) made the most powerful impression), then eventually India and parts of Indonesia. For the next five years we were in and out of India and southeast Asia on numerous occasions.

When I look back at his period in the first half of 1983 and think that in the first few months, we managed to include a wide geographical range from the ancient Buddhist stupa at Sanchi (3rd century BC) in central India to the Stupa at Borobudur (8th century AD) in central Java; and a wide temporal range which ran from ancient caves through Jain Hindu and Islamic masterpieces up to the great intemporal works of Le Corbusier and Kahn, I am reminded what a mind stretching series of journeys this was. It was more like a quest. The time had come to get to know non-Western architecture and its main traditions, types and symbols. It was like learning new languages of form and meaning. Again, direct observation and sketching were crucial, but also periods of reading and study on a variety of verandas. Dreary academia faded into the past.

From Thailand we flew to Bombay in February 1983 and went to the Elephanta Caves (5th century AD), and to the Buddhist caves at Karla (c. 2nd century AD), and then down into the centre of India to Aihole (5th century AD) and the beginnings of the Hindu temple. One amazing thing after another. The cave temples at Ajanta, Ellora, Badami. We travelled light with small shoulder bags, a disciplined supply of film, and sketchbooks. I had done some sketches during our trips to ancient Greece but from now on sketching became more and more important as a way of apprehending and recording buildings. Henceforth, sketchbooks became central to my method as a historian but also laid foundations for my methods as an artist.

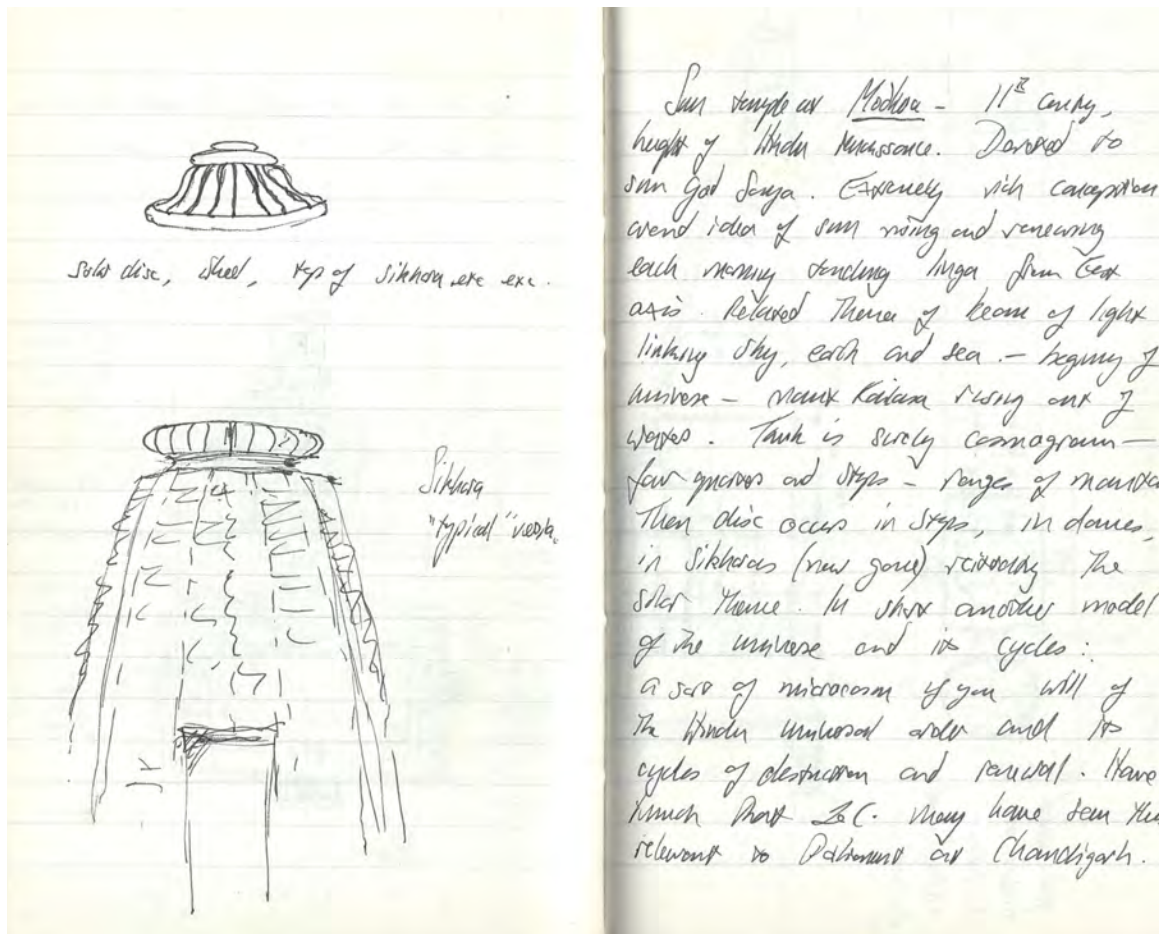
After about a month of this trekking and staying in rudimentary dak bungalows we took a 12-hour bus ride to Ahmedabad. I had met Balkrishna Doshi once, in Cambridge, Ma. for lunch, in 1980, when Peter Serenyi (a dear friend who contributed greatly to Le Corbusier scholarship) introduced us. Doshi said that he hoped we would not hesitate to phone him if we came to India. So we did, and he invited us for tea. A driver came and we drove out to Sangath, his studio and landscape enclave designed in 1980. He insisted we stay in a nice little apartment at the back of Sangath and every evening we got together with the Doshis. This was the beginning of a thirty-five-year dialogue and of course Doshi had a great deal to recall about this time in the Atelier in Paris in the early 1950S.

One day he said that it'd be really nice if I could give a talk to everybody on the grassy steps of Sangath. I had packed a few slides of Chandigarh and Dhaka Parliaments, and *la crème de la crème* of Ahmedabad's architecture came to the talk, including Anant Raje, a very good architect, who'd worked closely with Louis Kahn. This was the beginning of our great Indian adventure, and of several incredible friendships. We felt very at home in Ahmedabad and used to just go and hang out in Le Corbusier's Millowners Association building, or go to meet Raje, whose office was in Kahn's Indian Institute of Management, yet another masterpiece and now under threat. From time to time, I interacted informally with Doshi's students in the School of Architecture which was housed in the fine building that he designed in the mid-1960s with its fluid section and humble materials in brick and concrete.

Ahmedabad possesses a rich architectural heritage of outstanding Islamic buildings and must be considered a mecca of modern architecture: with buildings by Le Corbusier, Kahn, Doshi, Correa, Kanvinde, Raje among others. Of course, we visited the mosques and stepped wells of the Sultanate period (14th and 15th centuries), the tank and tomb at Sarkhej, (15th century) as well as the ruined but sublime Hindu temple of Soraya the Sun deity at Modhera (11th century AD) which I sketched and described in some detail. In the following year, 1984, I took my exhibition "Fragments of Invention" there to the CEPT School of Architecture. With Doshi's help, we installed it in the Hutheesing Centre which was a simple building he had designed. There were memorable social events including a dinner with Manorama Sarabhai. The low vaulted Sarabhai House was yet another masterwork of Le Corbusier. Before going to Ahmedabad Catherine and I travelled from Jodhpur to Jaisalmer, the Thar desert and the extraordinary Jain temple at Ranakpur (15th century AD) surely one of the high points of Indian architecture.

After Ahmedabad we accompanied Victoria Newhouse for a tour of southern Indian Hindu temples such as Madhurai (10th century AD) and Mahabalipuram Shore Temple (7th century AD). Then we hopped over to Sri Lanka just before the outbreak of the civil war, where we visited more great sites such as Anuradhapura (2nd century BC) and Polonnaruwa (11th century AD). Through sequences of sketches, we gradually grasped the primary themes and languages of these great Asian buildings. The types, the profiles, the sculptures and the transformations within traditions. At the end we went back to Chandigarh where I spent several days photographing the buildings in colour and in black and white. By this time, I had got to know P. L. Varma, the former chief engineer of Chandigarh who had been Le Corbusier's principal client and we became the greatest of friends. Le Corbusier was on my mind in India, very much so. Half of the images in the book are from this photo campaign. Both Doshi and Varma were living links to Le Corbusier, and Doshi referred to him as his 'guru'. When in 1987-8 I wrote the book *Balkrishna Doshi: an Architecture for India*, it was a way of bridging a gap between Le Corbusier's influence and a profound reinterpretation of Indian tradition.

FIG.27
William J. R. Curtis,
sketches and text
analysing the Surya Sun
Temple at Modhera north
of Ahmedabad, a Hindu
masterpiece created under
the Solanki Dynasty in the
11th century, subsequently
partly destroyed during the
Moslem invasions. We first
visited the site in early 1983
and the sketch on the left
explores some of the basic
architectural elements of
the *sikhara* spires, while the
text on the right speculates
on the cosmic significance
of the stepped tank and
vertical temple rising above
it, aligned so that the sun
on the equinox penetrates
to the heart of the temple.
In effect this is a Hindu
creation myth embodied
in architecture - a sacred
mountain rising out of the
primeval waters when light
penetrated darkness- and
at the bottom of my text I
suggest possible relevance
to solar and planetary
themes in Le Corbusier's
Assembly Building in
Chandigarh.

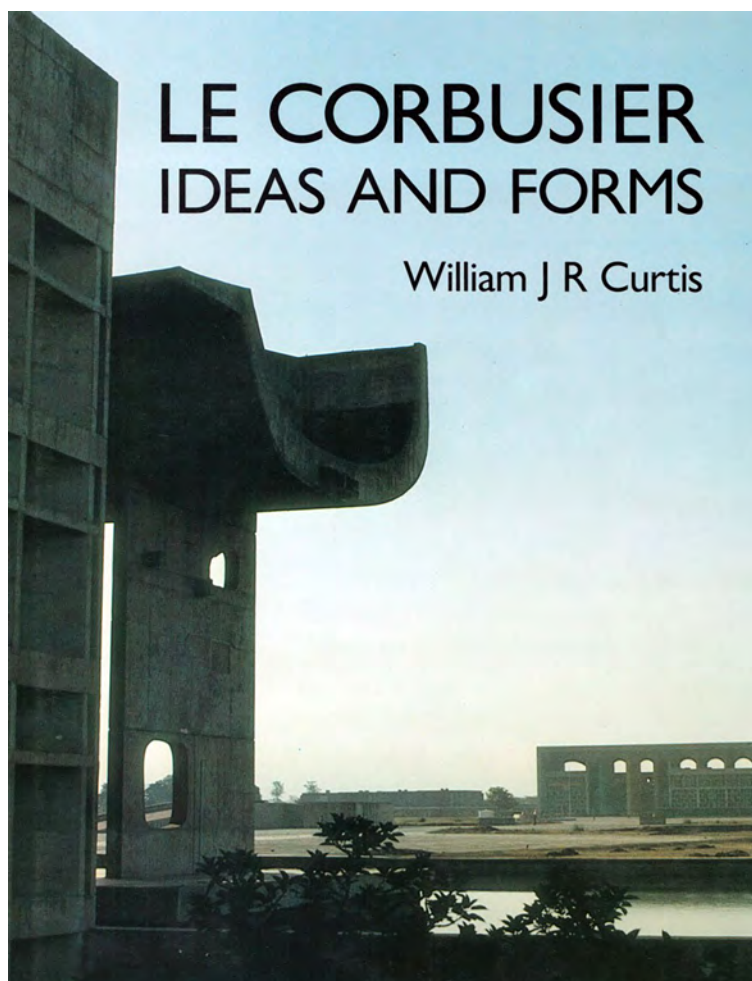


Maintaining the Long View: Le Corbusier Ideas and Forms

We came back to Europe in 1984 and we weren't quite sure where we would live. That is when we recontacted the de Bournet family who agreed to rent us their ancestral farm, an astonishing building dating back centuries with powerful forms, ancient echoes, a courtyard with gates and a pigeonier tower. To the west one could see the steep slopes of the Massif du Tanargue. Close by were the tumbling river Chassezac and the Gorges of the river Ardèche with the natural stone bridge the Pont d'Arc. It was the perfect place to write my book on Le Corbusier: the ancient Mediterranean world, detached from the Parisian versions of Le Corbusier, the neo-modernist versions, the techno versions. I liked the ancient Corbusier. The one who looked back as well as forward. And that was very much the direction that the text took. I listened when Le Corbusier said that the past was his only real master. Appropriately, the first chapter I wrote was on Chandigarh.

We did not stay four months as originally intended, but eleven years coming and going. And that is how we really realized that we wanted to be somehow in rural France. Eventually that led us here in the Lot. Meanwhile, other things were coming up. In 1985 the Festival of India organized two shows on architecture. One for the USA and one for France. And the one for France was organized by Raj Rewal. I was invited in by him and Jean-Louis V  ret. I wrote a piece, "L'ancien dans le moderne" about Le Corbusier's works in India for the French catalogue *Architectures en Inde* (1985).

FIG.28
William J. R. Curtis,
*Le Corbusier: Ideas and
Forms*, Phaidon Press,
Oxford, 1986, cover image
based on a photo taken by
Curtis in 1984.



Then through the Aga Khan Award for Architecture, I went to Bangladesh in late 1985, and saw Khan's great masterpiece the Assembly complex and gave a speech "Towards an Authentic Regionalism" (*Mimar*, 1986) in which I said, you know, this is a building that's got a lot of resonance with the local past (centralized tombs, even mandala plans) and it's the beginning of the future for your region. It's a great, timeless work. And you shouldn't see it as a Western imposition, on the contrary. Anyway, that really stirred up a lot of debate and particularly appealed to Mazruhal Islam and his Chetana group who were nurturing a local architectural culture without losing sight of international aspirations and universal qualities.

This was a period when *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* was written, and these were some of the issues in the air, especially questions of modernity and tradition. As for my approach, I drew on all my previous years of researches into drawings, intentions, architectural ideas, texts, symbolism and of course the buildings themselves. In addition, there was the solid foundation of years of lectures, book reviews and published texts. Where there were debts to others, these were clearly indicated. The book established a clear overall structure with three main parts, one on the formative years, one on the period of crystallization, and one on the late works followed by a conclusion on principles and transformations. It was essential to balance overall narrative with focus in depth on a selection of works. The book was illustrated with a large number of my own black and white photographs and a selection of coloured ones as a

central folio. I had the advantage of an excellent editor at Phaidon Press, Bernard Dod, who had also steered *Modern Architecture Since 1900* through editing and production.

Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms was written quickly, because it was ready. In October 1985 I needed to come up for air so we made a trip to Rome, the Villa Adriana and Pompei to give life to those sections of the book dealing with classical Antiquity and the *Voyage d'Orient*. I was again fully absorbed in sketching ruins. Living where we lived, in the Ardèche, we could stop off at La Tourette and capture the spirit of that place from time to time. Being in Switzerland with relatives meant we could go and look at the Clarté Apartments and the Petite Maison au bord du lac, and back and forth to Paris where one would go out to Villa Savoye, the Pavillon Suisse or all the rest. Ronchamp was feast for my photographs in both colour and black and white. The Unité d'habitation in Marseilles I got to know well, especially the magical roof terrace which is like a resonance chamber responding to the sky, the mountains and the sea. I managed to capture the mood of the building in warm evening autumnal light in a series of photographs. It's a great work of architecture, and an urban theorem that is still relevant.

My book came out in 1986 and I am happy to say was well received with good reviews. It distilled two decades of experience, research and reflection. So, we got to 1987, and the various centenary exhibitions of *l'Année de Le Corbusier*, especially the one in London and the one in France at the Centre Pompidou. The one in London I was involved to the extent of writing the introduction to the catalogue with the title 'Le Corbusier: Nature and Tradition'. Tim Benton also collaborated with it. The *Encyclopédie* was a different beast. It's a useful reference work, and for that I wrote a long entry "Maturité: Le Moderne et l'archaïque ou les dernières oeuvres". The Paris show suffered by its lack of coverage of India. It was the vision of a certain kind of French modernism of the 70s and 80s looking back at Le Corbusier. I tried to offset that bias by lending the exhibition strong black and white photographs of Chandigarh. There were other centenary manifestations of quality. In Marseille, there was an exhibition on Le Corbusier and the Mediterranean and a symposium organized by Gérard Monnier, where I spoke on Le Corbusier and Antique ruins.

AL: Yes, 1987 is a memorable year because of the many manifestations that celebrated the centennial of Le Corbusier's birth. At a personal level, it was also memorable because I was a post-graduate student at Washington University in St. Louis and you came to teach a monographic course on Le Corbusier with a very different approach from what had been my education at the Universidad de Buenos Aires.

WJRC: As mentioned, I went to St. Louis for the first time in 1982 and taught a seminar on the skyscraper, and then in 1983 I did a full semester on Le Corbusier, which was very useful for turning the soil prior to writing the book. That was an important step, because that was an entire semester, for me, too, to reflect week by week on Le Corbusier's architecture and thought. The course which you attended four years later, was another version of the course, enriched by the intervening researches and by the synthesis of the book.

AL: I still remember the impact of your lectures. Your emphasis on principles and foundations and about bringing to the surface things that are embedded into a work but not necessarily visible at a surface level was very important. And I still remember your comment about my paper on the Curutchet House, which as you said had good ideas and intentions, but I had missed the connection to earlier works, especially Maison Cook (1926). So, the first thing I did when I got to Paris for the first time was to go to Maison Cook.

WJRC: Yes, it's an exquisite little building on the outside and a compact demonstration of what Le Corbusier would eventually call the 'Five Points of a New Architecture': the *pilotis*, the free plan, the free façade, the strip window and the roof terrace. But I wouldn't want to live in it. It's very small, very tight, but as a concept, it's superb.

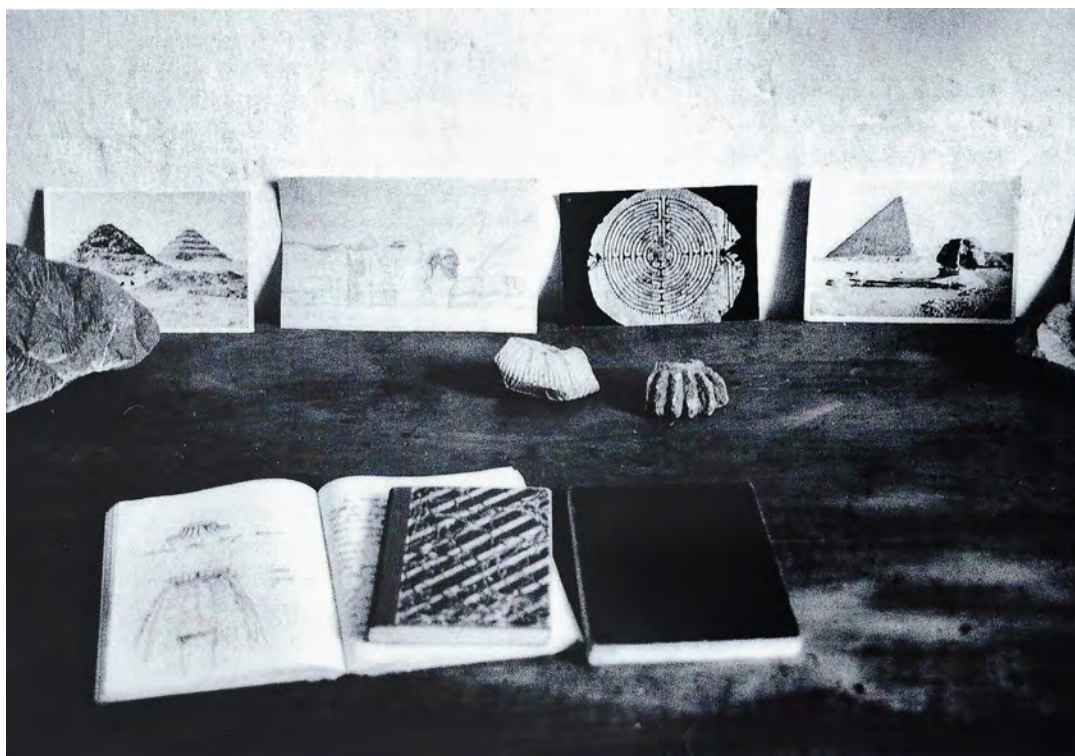
Modern Architecture since 1900, had positive reviews, but so did the book on Le Corbusier. Reviewers grasped that I was not genuflecting to the trendy notions then in vogue in academia, of post-modernism in architecture and in theories. Here I was unhesitatingly focusing on the works of a great architect with major universal and long-term significance. I was concerned with issues of depth and authenticity that were not in vogue, but the book cut through the fashionable nonsense and established itself as an essential reference, even being referred to as a classic. The thing about interesting books is they get read for years far and wide for generations. They remain forever fresh, especially if they are well written. I continue to receive incredible letters about that book even from students who say that it taught them about not just Le Corbusier but architecture itself.

I take a great interest in the issue of translation, just as I take a great interest in book design. *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* was translated into Spanish by Jorge Sainz, who also translated *Modern Architecture Since 1900*; and into German, by Antje Pehnt, who had earlier translated my book on modern architecture as well. In Japan, Fumihiko Maki read the book in English and loved it, and recommended it go into Japanese. The excellent translation by Kenishi Nakamura was published in 1992 by Kajima with a thoughtful Preface by Maki, a person with whom I have had a rich dialogue over the years. In translation I value a Tuscan-Doric style, strict, direct, unadorned, without pointless literary decoration. This is hard to achieve and when the third edition of my book on modern architecture was translated into Italian in 1997, I had to veto the translation several times until it was purged of imprecisions and irrelevant flourishes.

AL: Yes, there's a particular voice and tone in your writing that sets your work apart from other authors working on similar subjects. As you wrote and said elsewhere, it stands up to the criticism of fellow scholars while being accessible to a curious and intelligent 17-year-old who's never studied architecture

WJRC: Yes, that's right. It's a very particular tonality. When the first edition came out of *Modern Architecture*, Bruno Zevi wrote me a fabulous letter of congratulation and said, 'I'll do everything I can to have this put into Italian. It was really generous. As it was, the Italian translation had to wait until the third edition of the book in 1997. All this was managed by Phaidon, and around 2012 they agreed to do a second edition of *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* which was published eventually in 2015. We decided to print in colour and to make extensive use of drawings with the agreement of the Fondation Le Corbusier. So it is gorgeous visually and I worked closely with the French editor Valérie Buffet on the selection, sequence and rhythm of images. For me a book design has to be like a piece of music with primary and secondary visual themes, a hierarchy of images, a coherent montage which conveys the meaning almost without the necessity of a text. The design was carried out by Isambard Thomas, a very talented designer who lived in London in those days. He did a superb job on my book on Lasdun (1994) and on the third edition of *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (1996). So I insisted that he be re-enlisted to undertake the challenge of the second edition of *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*.

FIG.29
Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms was written in the Ferme de Bournet, Grospièrres, Ardèche, a monumental farm of a fortified aspect, with courtyard, barns, tiled roofs and a pigeonier tower: a seigneurial medieval structure of great presence. In my study I had a table (or maybe an altar?) dedicated to metamorphoses and transformations, juxtaposing fossils, architectural fragments, sketches and photos of Ancient Egypt. The interweaving of history and nature, a fundamental theme. Photo WJRC 1995.



**FIG.30**

The Small Baths, (Piccoli Terme), Hadrian's Villa (Villa Adriana), Tivoli, 120 AD. James Ackerman claimed that 'Every artist finds his own version of Antiquity'. During his Voyage d'orient the young Charles Eduard Jeanneret was obsessed with Roman ruins, their naked structures under light. This photograph was taken in October 1985 by the author during a break from the writing of *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*.

FIG.31

William J. R. Curtis, sketch of Piccoli Terme, Villa Adriana, October 1985. During the same trip the author did many drawings of the houses in Pompei.

Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms; the fully revised 2nd edition.; 'Principles and Transformations'

AL: Let's talk about this second edition, which is marvelous in every respect, including as you just said, the quality and abundance of images, many more –and bigger–than in the first edition. But I also would like you to talk about this edition because somehow, it's a different book. It has everything of the first edition, but several additions, a revised design and a long new section –part IV– which could have been a different book. I mean, it's a synthesis of everything that is distributed along the chapters of the first edition.

WJRC: Well, and everything I have been doing all of my life. And do not forget that I introduced innovations in almost every chapter and that I recast the centre of the book so that the Villa Savoye has a detailed chapter all of its own. The new part IV constitutes a transversal reading of Le Corbusier's creative universe and principles, but in a way it consolidates my general approach to architecture.

AL: Yes, that's what I was going to get to. It has your, let's say, your themes. In a way, it is you, your unique approach to architecture and architectural history, through the work of Le Corbusier. This last section, which you titled "Principles and Transformations," deals with your recurrent insistence on the structure of architectural ideas, the general and the particular, the genesis of forms, the role of nature and tradition, which are essential aspects of your personal perspective on Le Corbusier, but also ever-present themes in your work about other architects such as your monographs on Lasdun and Doshi, also relevant in the chapter 20 "On Transforming Le Corbusier."

WJRC: Well, that chapter is a book in itself. It's a fantastic chapter. It's like the beginning of a whole other story. Yes, this was a way of pulling in a lot of reflections since the 1980s into the book. Actually, it doesn't conclude. It opens the door to investigation. It goes back to my intervention in Japan in 1997 'Le Corbusier as a mirror and a lens,' and to several reflections in the early 1990s on the idea of a modern tradition. As it happens, I published a text 'On Transforming

Palladio' back in 1985, but this only ever existed in Swedish as 'Om Att Transformera Palladio'. But it explored multiple re-readings of Palladio's prototypes across a wide geographical and historical range. This is further evidence of the reciprocal relationship between my studies on the Renaissance, and those on modern architecture.

In the early 1990s I was connected for a time to the SciArch program at Vico Morcote in Ticino, the Italian speaking region of southern Switzerland. They have a villa there. I was invited to do a course on Le Corbusier, which was a bit like what we did with you at the Versailles program, but this one was three weeks long. We had intense visits all the way around looking at Le Corbusier's work. And a few weeks later, as a finale, I organized a weekend congress at Vico-Morcote called "On Transforming Le Corbusier" where I invited four or five different people to come and talk about how they perceived Le Corbusier and what he meant to them as an inspiration or the opposite.

These contrasting interventions were fascinating; one of them was by Thomas Schumacher, the other by Enric Miralles. It was unforgettable to have Schumacher in the morning talking about how Terragni had perceived Garches, the plan, with the columns, the proportions, the more or less Colin Rowe vision of a mathematical villa. And later, in the afternoon there was Enric who wasn't interested at all in the grid and the 'classical order', but in the curves of the free plan of Garches, especially the double curve of the parapet at the top of the stairs. The same building but two entirely different readings. So this event took place, and this basic idea of transformations was explored.

FIG.32

William J. R. Curtis,
Le Corbusier : Ideas and Forms, 2nd fully revised and redesigned edition, Phaidon Press, London, 2015. The red cover image of Villa Savoye is based on a photograph taken by Curtis in 1984.

FIG.33

Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms, facing pages 284-5, with Ronchamp (photo WJRC, 1986) on the left, and a montage including a Le Corbusier drawing of boat and shell (Sketchbook, 1931), drawings of roof and sluice of the Chapel (Sketchbook, 1951), and drawings of Serapeum, Hadrian's Villa, based upon architect's original sketch of 2011. Resonances and suggestive analogies. The book design was carried out by Isambard Thomas based upon layout suggestions by the author, the intention being to have images tell the story almost on their own. The book contains over 130 of Curtis's own photographs.

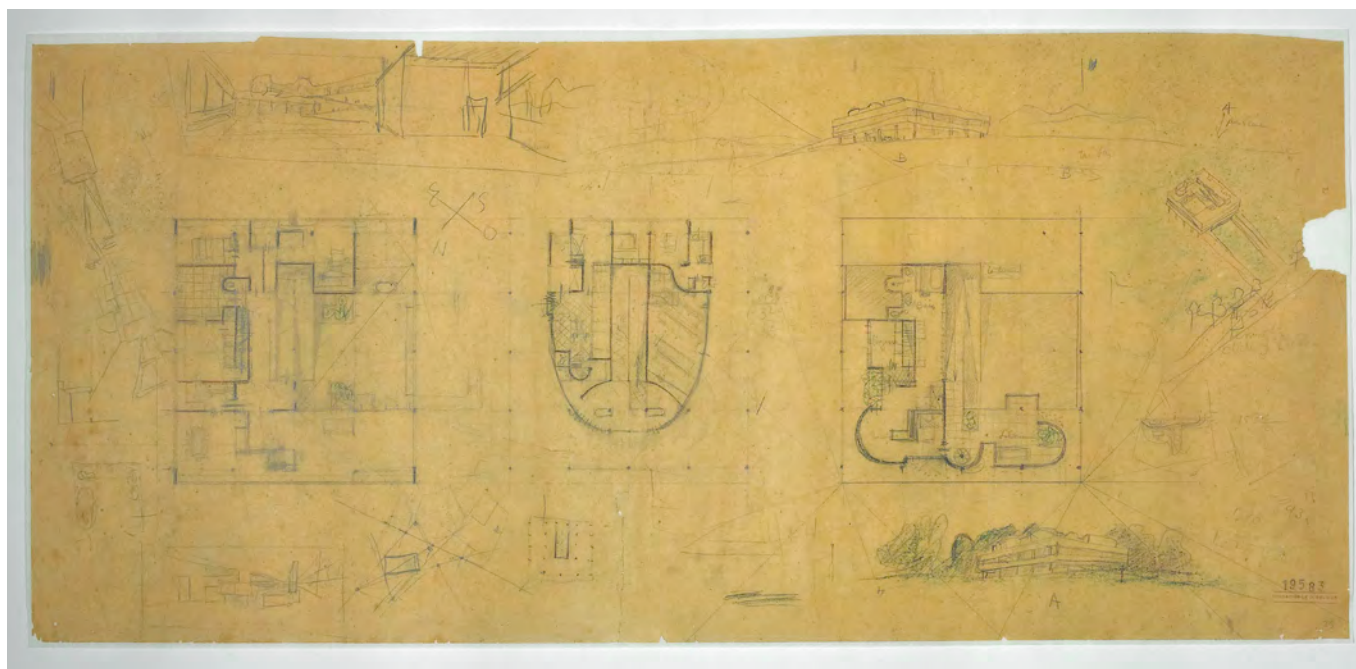




I had written back in 1977 a very general paper about invention, and I was fascinated in drawings in general way. This paper was supposed to be published by the University of Pennsylvania journal but eventually remained unpublished. It was a general speculation on graphic representation and even included an ancient Egyptian inscription on a tile fragment investigating alternatives for a temple plan. So more than 30 years later I blended it in as a reflection on drawings and invention in the chapter 18 on "The Genesis of Forms". It was a way of thinking more about drawings and how they functioned for Le Corbusier, which brought me back to the exhibit "Fragments of Invention" and of course to *Le Corbusier at Work*: the issue of technique, different kinds of drawings for different problems and different intentions.

The first chapter, 17, in the section "Principles and Transformations" is called "The Realm of Architectural Ideas". It takes position against naive theoreticians who imagine that written theories can generate architecture. It suggests that architecture is its own kind of thinking and it's not like theory. It's not mathematics. It's not literature. It's something else in the realm of spatial imagination and Le Corbusier was a master of this kind of thinking and you can't get to that by just quoting pieces out of *Vers une architecture*. You have to understand the buildings and what's behind them. That's why Le Corbusier's drawings are important. They may bring us a little closer to the architect's mind at work.

The design process was another key thing. Le Corbusier always works back and forth from general to particular and particular to general when solving problems. Take the onduloires at La Tourette for example. These resolved issues for this particular building but they were also a further development of the generic concept of the free façade, a problem of language posed by the architect himself. The thing I adore about Le Corbusier is the different levels of ideas operating in any choice, in any detail. There are all these levels of thinking in it and yet it is what it is: a row of concrete struts. But these concrete struts become miraculous objects, a sort of visual and tactile music. How can that be? That's the beauty of Le Corbusier.



AL: It's the architectural thinking, or thinking architecturally. It's the most difficult thing to teach or convey in design studios. When I take students to see buildings by Le Corbusier or show them in course lectures, I ask to imagine why the architect thought about this. It is an architect thinking architecturally and that is finding architectural devices and architectural decisions for the problems or the situations encountered.

WJRC: Yes, absolutely. And of course, this takes me back to Carpenter Center. That's what I discovered I was doing by looking at those drawings and figuring what they meant for the design process but actually they were also part of a mythology, of a world vision. I gradually stumbled on this mythical dimension step by step, like discovering that ramp 'S' shape was probably a cosmic symbol representing the rise and fall of the sun. Some of these things are now common knowledge but they were not at all at that time. In fact, people didn't talk about Le Corbusier that way at all. No one I can think of actually. So I did that in a very fresh way at the time. And I come back to the ramp in that chapter on 'The Genesis of Forms'. There are multiple meanings to this element. It's a response to circulation, to the difficulty of the tight site, it's a way of seeing inside and outside, it's an educational building, it's a way of hooking up with the Harvard yard, but it's also a metaphor for the sun, for urbanism, etc. All these levels are operating in a single element.

Ideas on Architecture and Architectural Ideas

FIG.34
Le Corbusier, Villa Savoye at Poissy, several sketches on a single sheet, September 1928. The architect explores generating ideas for the project combining plans, perspectives and aerial views. Architectural thinking in action. FLC.

AL: At one point in these conversations that we are having I will have a few questions related to what you just said, but since we are talking about the last part of the 2nd edition of *Le Corbusier, Ideas and Forms*, I have selected a few quotes on certain themes of which, if you don't mind, I would like that you expand or develop a little bit more. One of them is related to your reaction against the 'theoretization' of architecture and the importance that 'theory' (or certain theoretical approaches) has in architectural schools. In the section entitled "The realm of architectural ideas" that opens the 4th part of that book you write: "Sometimes theories preceded forms and sometimes forms preceded theories but they did not generate each other." Could you elaborate a little bit more on this, especially about the relationship between theories and forms.

WJRC: The relationship is complex. First of all, especially with Le Corbusier, what we mean by theory. He has texts of all kinds, but I don't know if they are necessarily theories; some of them are and some of them are not. He has of course a fantastic ability to sum up in polemical statements things that are important to him like in *Vers une architecture* or *Precisions*. Theories may have some minor role to play but his buildings emerge from the realm of architectural ideas which runs parallel to other kinds of thinking, so I would say that you have to handle with velvet gloves the writings of Le Corbusier. It is best not to think of his buildings as demonstrations of theories. He is at times polemical, showing off principles, as at Maison Cook, which demonstrates the Five Points, but at the same time they are poetic and unique solutions to a site, a place, a client, and so forth.



FIG. 35
Le Corbusier, Maison Cook,
Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1926,
detail of façade. Photo
WJRC 2009.

FIG.36

Le Corbusier, Assembly or Parliament Building, Chandigarh, 1951-65, roof scape with funnel over Assembly chamber, and pyramidal volume over the Senate. Photo WJRC.

FIG.37

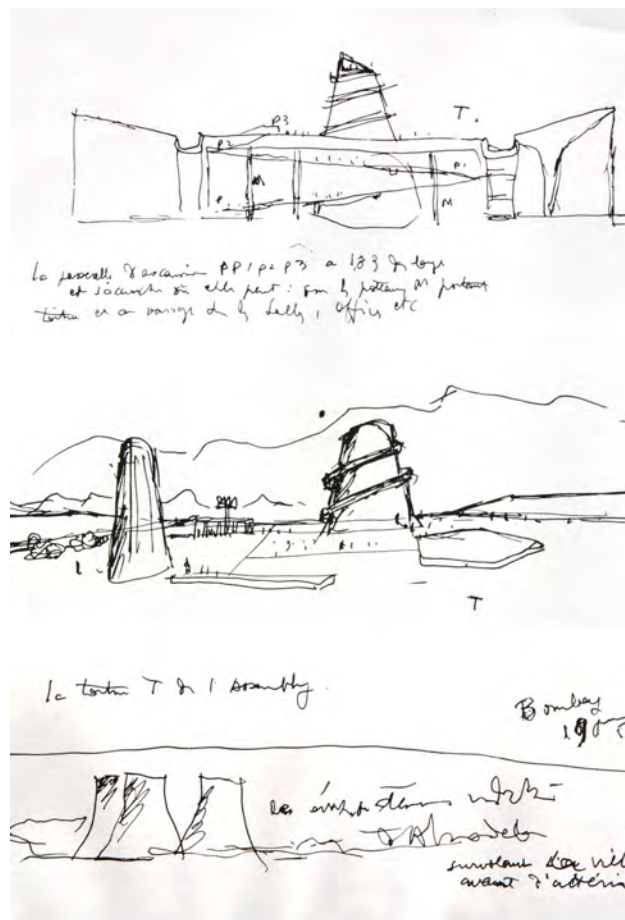
Le Corbusier, Sketches of project for Chandigarh Assembly in Album Nivola, 1953, showing main chamber protruding through the roof as a tower surrounded by a spiralling ramp. The architect also drew analogies with the cooling towers of modern power stations. Le Corbusier was interested in the hyperbolic paraboloid structure of Calder Hall power station in England.

So the sparks that generate projects come from several sources. For example, when I did the deep analysis of Carpenter Center, I began to realize that the building came partly out of memories of America, his own complicated feelings towards the USA, his belief in visual education. There were layers and layers of issues that constitute, broadly speaking, intentions. But they are not necessarily fully conscious intentions and if you were to sit down with Le Corbusier he would refuse to discuss it.

Things come partly from a pre-conscious or unconscious level in art, and theories don't touch that. They don't get near it. You need a sort of poetics to approach that. And that's why I'm interested in annotation, mapping, all the things we do with the students because there's very few people who can really convey in writing what a building is about. You have to have historical insight, you have to have poetic powers of description, you have to read the building. It's very rare to be able to do that. So, what I wanted to be wary of was an atmosphere that was very strong in the 1990's where everybody was talking about 'theory' (and often the most pretentious versions of it!) as a justification for architecture and I said it doesn't need a justification especially not a theoretical one.

AL: If my memory is not wrong, I think you mentioned in a lecture (I can't remember which one) that the *Oeuvre Complète* does not just show projects and buildings but is also in a sense a treatise on architecture.

WJRC: Yes, it's a series of demonstrations through very carefully framed photographs of general principles. The demonstration of the *ilotis* of the Pavillon Suisse with the people sitting underneath was intended to show how the modern city could be created by lifting buildings up into space, letting landscape and circulation pass underneath, as





proposed in the Ville Radieuse at the same time. He uses photographs to demonstrate a lot with very skillful *mise-en-page* as with the Petite Maison de Weekend (1935) with its carefully arranged juxtapositions of industrial and handicraft objects. But the writings I take with a pinch of salt I say that they are part of the universe surrounding Le Corbusier, but you have to know how to deal with them. They do not lead directly to his architectural concepts or the meanings of his buildings.

On the other hand there are you could say generic theorems like the Ville Radieuse or the *Domino* skeleton in reinforced concrete which are not writings but demonstrations through form, through space, through arrangement, which take on a generic character. They're not just individual buildings, they're general proposals for the city or for this or that. They're theorems, but they're also in a way three dimensional theories. Werner Oeschlin thinks that the Five Points of New Architecture can be described as a theory of architecture. I'm not so sure about that, but it's an interesting thought.

AL: I always interpreted the Five Points as perhaps the more prescriptive, almost "recipe-like" set of principles ever enunciated by Le Corbusier.

WJRC: Yes, but he did not get to this 'recipe' directly in one go. The historical process was more circumspect and piecemeal in reality. By the time he baptized that system with a title, it already existed in bits and pieces. Maison Cook was designed in 1925-26, and the Weissenhof-Siedlung houses in 1926-27. These projects were in a way demonstrations and were already existing when he canonized the Five Points. Villa La Roche already included most of the elements a few years earlier but in a less obvious form. In this case, as in so many others, Le Corbusier's architectural ideas preceded his ideas on architecture.

FIG. 38
Jai Singh, Jantar Mantar Observatory, Jaipur, Rajasthan, early 18th century. Le Corbusier saw the Jantar Mantar in New Delhi during his first trip to India and was clearly impressed with its cosmic significance and evocative sculptural forms. The version in Jaipur established a separate zone of the city linked to the heavens. The overall urban layout with sectors in a grid, was decided on the basis of a revival of ancient Hindu texts. Photo WJRC, 1984.

FIG.39

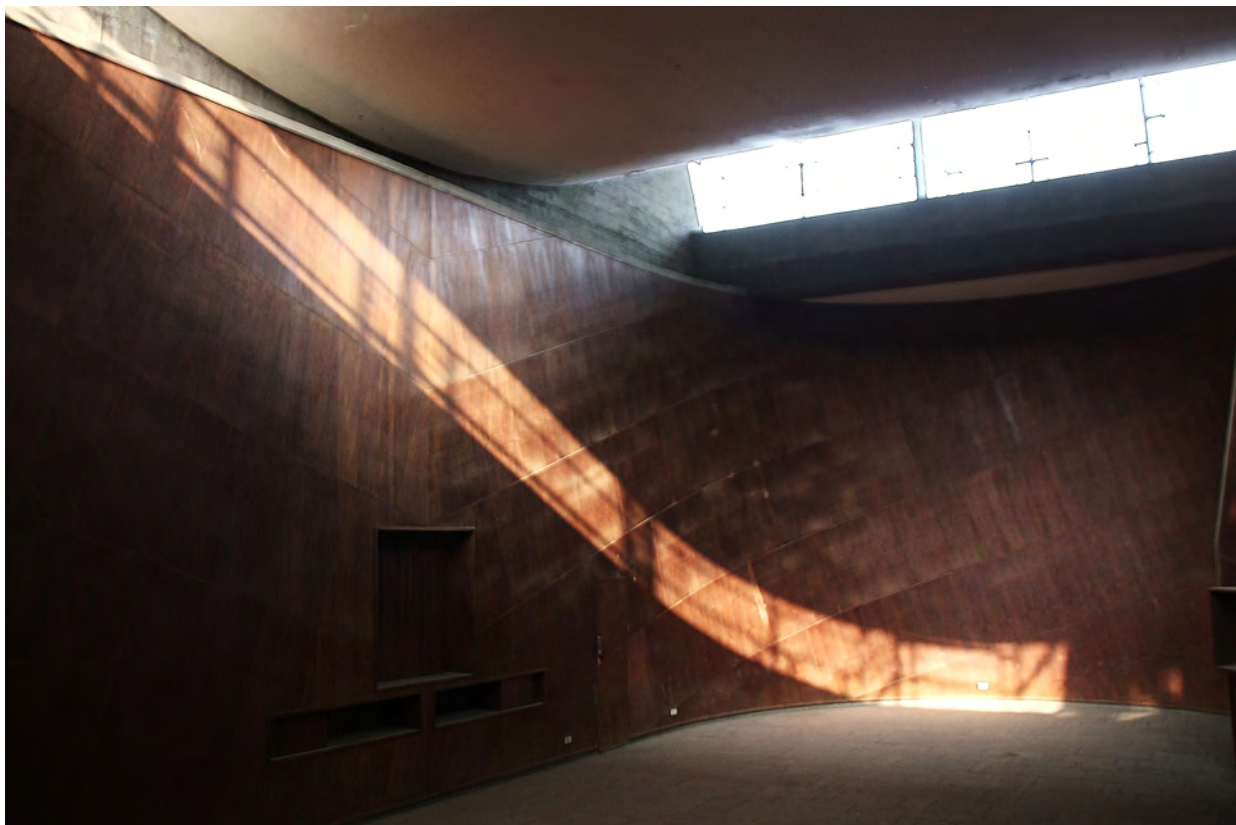
Le Corbusier, Millowner's Association Building, Ahmedabad, 1951-54, dramatically curved council chamber at the top of the building: the culminating space of the promenade architecturale which begins with the ramp then ascends floor by floor as a processional route. Photo WJRC, 2014.

Transformation and Invention: Multiple Levels of Meaning

AL: Continuing with quotes extracted from part IV of the second edition of *Ideas and Forms*, there are a few that are related to themes that are recurrent in your texts and have always interested me such as the symbolic content and hermetic languages in Le Corbusier's buildings. I selected two specific quotes from chapter 18, "The Genesis of Forms." The first one reads "...solutions were often haunted by preferred images, sources, and historical analogies but these would insinuate their way into a project at different stages and with varying degrees of visibility." Later, in the same section you write "works are like dense poetic texts combining many levels of meaning over a hermetic core." And, I would add that this hermetic core to which you refer remains hermetic in your text too.

WJRC: Well, you know, Le Corbusier said somewhere, the architect should never tell all, that a work of architecture is full of hidden implications. In his works, you can peel away all kinds of analogies and possible sources, like La Tourette in relation to the various monastic prototypes that one knows. And you can point out how he reinvented them. You could do all of that. But in the end, these are not explanations for the building. The building has its own life. It has sort of broken away from any influence to be its own being, if you will. He very rarely relies on images to convey the meaning of a building. If he does, it's through other media, like the stained glass in Ronchamp, or the existing statuette of the Virgin Mary. Or in Chandigarh, the solar door, daytime and nighttime. These are explicit images, which are deliberately easy to read, almost like poster images.

But at Chandigarh, for example, the obsession with the solar aspect of life and the planets comes out in a more abstract form and in many, many levels in the Assembly or Parliament building, including the roofscape. As he says,





it's like a laboratory or an astronomical observatory. It has something solar and lunar about it. It suggests the bottom of a trajectory of the sun. It has some feeling for the horns of a bull. And these are all deeply interrelated mythological subjects, including the bull. When he comes to India, and he's obsessed with cattle and does all these lovely drawings of oxen in villages. But of course, he's got the *Taureaux* in his head from long before. There's a kind of weaving together of the new experience and the old stuff. Furthermore, these images work on several levels at once without being fully declared. The top of the unbuilt Governor's Palace: again, it's this motif the of the parasol as an upturned crescent, the motif of Chandigarh, this thing silhouetted against the sky. Once again, it's carrying the planets.

When I worked on his sketchbooks, I discovered that he stopped off in Egypt on his way to India and that he went to visit the museum in Cairo. And he was fascinated by representations of the goddess Hathor who carries the solar disk on a horn-like head dress. He recorded her image in a sketch in his sketchbook which he was carrying with him. And that's in the same process of exploration as he is flying back and forth from Chandigarh. As I discovered when I researched the sketchbooks over forty years ago, they provided Le Corbusier with a record of travels and things seen, but they also constituted a portable and intimate laboratory of invention.

That is another reason I find the sketchbooks so interesting, because they register inner states of consciousness, where he's connecting things up for himself. So this image on top of the Governor's Palace is a lot of things at once. It's a planetary emblem. It's an open-air theater. It's an inverted *chattri* in Indian architecture: a dome on posts, a shading device, but turned upside down. At Fatehpur Sikri, you have the Diwan I Khas, which is the private audience hall with these *chattris* and a place to sit on top. In the Governor's Palace Le Corbusier reinvented this type in a subtle transformation. All of those things are turning around somewhere inside this form. And yet it's none of them. It's all of them and none of them. And it's the motif of shade, which is the *parasol*, which is fundamental to all his Indian buildings.

FIG. 40

Le Corbusier, Unité d'habitation, Marseilles, 1947-52, the roof terrace, a resonance chamber linked to sky and surrounding landscape of mountains and sea. A microcosm of Le Corbusier's urbanistic ideals and his Mediterranean myth. Photo WJRC, 1998.

FIG.41

La Tourette, circular skylights over the Crypt. Photo WJRC 2011.

FIG.42

Villa Savoye, view from the terrace through long horizontal opening onto the landscape. Photo WJRC, 2009.

The Governor's Palace had to be a representational building with an honorific presence and a strong silhouette. The project synthesized several disparate sources and images in its resonant forms. That is why I referred in my Conclusion to Freud's book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) where he talks about the complex content of dream images which draw together analogous forms and images which are attracted to each other through a process of similarity permitting a complex content. It is a useful way of understanding the multiple layers of Le Corbusier's thoughts and images, and the way in which these are expressed and embodied in forms.

But as in a dream, these apparent resolutions cover up a buried content. As Freud might say, you may establish the network of association, but does that mean you get to the core of the unresolved emotional issues whatever these are? And the answer is no. It's the code but it is still outside the buried hermetic meaning. And similarly with Le Corbusier, there's always this inner core of the presence of a building, of its formal structure, of its 'aura', let's use that word, which you cannot quite pin down.

In Le Corbusier's architecture there are probable connections and associations, but the building as an object, as form, as material, has a sort of independent life. In the Parliament in Chandigarh he reinvents the notion of a portico but in a new form with an inverted scoop shape which lends dynamism to the façade. It doesn't look like a classical portico, but it does some of the things that traditional porticos do. But he also has a way of taking other conventions and inverting them, including the section of the house, for example, in some of the Parisian houses the functions are upside down. So, you have bedrooms low down, the salon higher up, the roof terrace on top. They're all about this progression up into the light.

Well, this is what he's interested in. And as a kind of central myth, the *promenade architecturale* ascends from the ground level to the sky through all the things that happen on the way up. It's everywhere. The Millowners Association building does this to perfection. What's that about? It is meaning of a certain kind, but it's not in any easy category of meaning. It's about freedom. It's about relation to nature. It's about the physical experience of being earthbound and gradually floating, moving up towards light and sky. It has to do with the framing and perception of nature.

Again, at the Millowners Association, which we agree, is an absolute masterwork, you have that Western façade of diagonal brise-soleil, which is very like a secret society. What is this place? Yet there's this ramp inviting you up, which takes the ground plane, literally, and tilts it up. So off you go, and it's all very clear what you do. There's a seat, there's a railing, there's a groove at the top, there's a *trou-de-mystère*, a shadowy rectangle which draws you up. But you get there and you can't go any further. You have to turn right and then you see through the building to the city on the opposite bank of the river. So you're drawn to that end: the brise-soleil which are now orthogonal, read as a tracery of lines framing the view. And before the River Sabarmati was dammed and turned into a dead lake you would have seen oxen and people drying textiles on the bed of the river below. That's all a scenario about the Millowners in relation to their river, their city and the source of their wealth.

You turn back, but you are now on a shifted parallel axis. The only way to go is back to the outdoor stair with the red door. So you are shifted across, and you go up and you come into the uppermost floor with its increase in height. And there you find yourself on a diagonal relationship with this extraordinary curved meeting room. And you move into it, and its curves take off in all dimensions, including the top which bears down like a suspended tent. Then if you want to go further, you have the stairs going up to the roof, a bit like the Panch Mahal in Fatehpur Sikri. And you emerge on the very top, where, again, you have the view of the river. So Le Corbusier has made a ritual out of a program, which is rich in meaning. It's not overt. You can't quite say what it all is.

AL: Are you saying or indicating that the meaning cannot be explained? It's meaningful, but not necessarily describable or explainable with words.

WJRC: Yes, it's not overt. It's not an iconography in any obvious sense at all, but it has these resonances with all kinds of things in the history of architecture, or with palaces, with ships, or with whatever. I mean, that kind of mythological, or perhaps mythical, content is often at work beneath the surface.

For example, at the Unité d'Habitation. It's a housing scheme. It's a brilliant suggestion for how to put these things together, how to make a community, have a middle street, lift the whole thing up, have a shared platform on top, and

all that. But what makes it different from so many other housing schemes is the control of form and this other level of myth, this utopian vision of harmony, this love of the Mediterranean, this feeling for boats, and ships, and decks, and the healthy body, the running arena on the roof, the resonances with Antiquity in Marseille. The experience of the horizon is a central part of it, on the terrace you go up the steps, and suddenly you see the sea, you go down again, and you can't see it. And these are all very orchestrated devices, very simple, stairs, levels, objects resonating in relation to each other.

Modestly, if I may say so, our garden here in Cajarc works with similar devices, a borrowed landscape pulling in the surroundings, limits and releases, platforms and levels. In the Unité, there are many subjacent allusions, for example to the stacks of an ocean liner or the stone mountains and islands in the distance. It makes it into a drama of a certain kind, and that I find absolutely magnificent with Le Corbusier. So those are the kinds of issues I was referring to. But we never get to the bottom of it. You can't think: okay, A plus B plus C plus D, we're finished, we've got the meaning. No.



The Presence of the Past: Le Corbusier's Metamorphoses

AL: I see; speaking of borrowing images or concepts from various sources, as you know, “visual or formal quotations” are not unusual as a design strategy; many architects have used them with a varying degree of literality. You were just talking of the Millowners Association building and I think of Laurent Beaudouin who very consciously borrowed the Millowner's west-facing *brise-soleil* and the ramp in the design of the main façade of his public library in Poitiers. Do you think that in the case of Le Corbusier this is a conscious process –for instance forms as symbols in his buildings in India, or the ever-present Acropolis—or, is this something that in his case happened at the level of the subconscious?

WJRC: Well, I would say it's hard to say globally. You need to investigate every case. For example, at La Tourette, he does that nice little sketch where he's remembering Mount Athos. But it's not the sketch that matters, it's the memory. And you know, in his description in the *Voyage d'orient*, he recalls coming to a monastery with a big wall, coming into a courtyard with lots of chapels, and then going to his cell. Then he realizes he's in the sky, very high up. He opens the shutters and sees the distant horizon of the sea. Now that whole experience is reinvented in La Tourette. But it's an experience, it's something, an aura, a poetic presence in his mind. And it's only one of several, you know?

So, he does have these connections floating in his mind, but it doesn't mean that he sat down and did a monastery, saying to himself now I will do an Athos. He's working at it on all kinds of levels. And when you look at the early drawings, they're rather banal. There's this attempt at having all these ramps going up, and you know, it's a mess. That's the first version of it. But then it begins to kind of cohere around this idea of a cloister and a view, not a cloister, but a court. And maybe it's that point that the memories come in, not at the beginning, it's quite possible, see?

I think that with the roof scape on top of the Chandigarh Assembly, it's obvious that he's looked at the Jantar Mantar the observatory in Delhi, designed by Jai Singh in the eighteenth century. But did he incorporate it at the beginning of the design process: was this the key generating image? No, it was as he was working along that he developed the idea for a tower. Then for a time he introduced a spiraling walkway around the tower which referred simultaneously to the cooling tower of a power station and the Modulor. But then he turned it on an axis, to make it coincide with the line of the sun at the Equinox, and began thinking about planetary rhythms.

The top had to cap the building while extending the narrative of the Capitol which is spelt out in the Governor's Palace with its upturned crescent. So maybe at that point, he sneaked a look at the Jantar Mantar for guidance. In his very first trip, in his notebooks, as I discovered, he was astonished when he saw the Jantar Mantar in Delhi. That is when he made the declaration that Vignola is dead, that the architecture of the future will be about light, air, and so on. He stated that this structure, the Jantar Mantar, *ça tue* (kills) Vignola. But the fact is that the Jantar Mantar's relevance to the design only became evident somewhere well into the process and not at the beginning.

AL: Over the years in which you taught at the Versailles program we shared lots of hours in bus-rides in which we talked about myriad things, so, I must say that often times what you write does not fully surprise me. However, towards the end of the book (always the second edition of *Ideas and Forms*), there is a line that reads: “... to translate the realms of imagination and thought into the outer spaces and materials of the real world; to transform the givens of nature, history, and culture into *un monde imaginaire* touching the inhabitant or the observer on many levels.” It caught my attention because while it may not be something new in your arsenal of ideas, concepts, and observations, it is beautifully articulated in a way that intrigues me. Would you mind speaking a little more about this? Are you pointing to the transhistorical dimension of Le Corbusier's work?

WJRC: Yes, that is Le Corbusier: as you say, transhistorical. There are numerous examples of what you are describing. In the Villa Savoye, which we visited so many times, the processional route by car, the ascending ramp and the superstructure lifted on columns suggest a machine age temple as well as a villa. The roof terrace is an extraordinary space, with this big transparent window giving onto the salon and this great strip window providing the view of the landscape. This outdoor room is open to the sky and floods the interiors with light.

You see those wonderful pictures in the *Oeuvre Complète* of the gloves on the ledge, the golf club, the fish on the table, you get the feeling that beings have just left the building, have gone off in their Hispano-Suiza (or perhaps their Voisin!).

Le Corbusier has taken very ordinary things in the kitchen and the glass on the windows, but has sublimated them into something else, as a part of a myth. It is, of course, his utopia, his machine age myth. So what we experience is the material expressions of these underlying myths and driving ideas of the building, but not just of the building, of his vision in general. Maybe that's why Pavillon Suisse is so strong, because it's like a slice of the Ville Radieuse, it's utopia. This thing lifted up, the people in their cells, looking south, all of that.

Louis Kahn went to Chandigarh when it was in construction, but the Assembly was largely finished. On his return he said: who else can freeze the dream in this way? Who else can do it except Le Corbusier? Doing the most preposterous things, taking things, turning them upside down, who else can materialize the dream the way Corbusier does? It's beautiful. It was Kahn who himself realized dreams in another form and in "the thoughtful making of spaces." And I think that is the level in Le Corbusier which touches me so much. You feel you are being put in touch with another realm through the power of these forms, which is maybe the role of great art in general.



FIG. 43
William J.R. Curtis, sketch of
Sphinx, Giza, Egypt, 1989.

FIG. 44
Students of the Study
Abroad Program in
Versailles of the Illinois
School of Architecture
sketching in open air chapel
at Ronchamp, while Curtis
gives an informal on site
talk, 2012.

Le Corbusier can create the noble with the very humble. He can create the sacred with something almost banal. And that's what makes him profoundly modern. Like Picasso. Picasso is Le Corbusier's master. You know that he said somewhere in 1929, my only master is the past. It's true. But when it comes to who really astounded him, Picasso was number one. For good reason. Picasso reinvented the world by fragmenting it and turning it upside down. Profoundly modern, he raided past civilizations in the service of his own vision and myth. He was a sort of magician inspiring metamorphoses in objects and creatures. Le Corbusier has something of this and let us not forget the role of painting in establishing those images, forms and resonant visual analogies.



FIG.45
Ronchamp, lateral view past
open air Chapel towards the
distant landscape. Photo
WJRC, 2011.

The Ever Present Le Corbusier: Drawing Lessons from his Projects

AL: Even though I began studying architecture in 1978, more than a decade after Le Corbusier's death, his work was still very present –almost dominant—through all my studies, from Architectural Design to History and Theory, and almost every aspect of architectural teaching. This was little less than fifty years ago. The situation today is quite different for young generations who see Le Corbusier as a *very historical figure*, someone whose work is already deeply rooted in some distant past. Why do you think the work of Le Corbusier still matters?

WJRC: Because it speaks to people. It's as simple as that. You just take one of those young people and put them on the ramp of the Millowners Association Building and if they're not moved by it, they should go and do something else, not architecture.

AL: Can you elaborate a little more? For example, do you think it is related to the timeless values and timelessness of his work, something that I would say is one of "your themes."

WJRC: You don't even have to get into that kind of very heavy discussion. It could be, wow, look at that. Isn't that beautiful? Or isn't that very interesting the way that's solved? Or look at that geometry or whatever. And, you know, let's take it back to your students and the field trips we used to do. Some of them were seeing Le Corbusier for the first time, apart from lectures by me or other people. And that's my method, is to liberate people from ideology, from half-baked received knowledge, to look at things and say, well, wait a minute, "this is extraordinary," or "I don't like it." Go and experience it. And annotate. I think it's important. Drawing as a way of looking more closely and maybe recording. This is one of the basic ways in which you learn architecture.

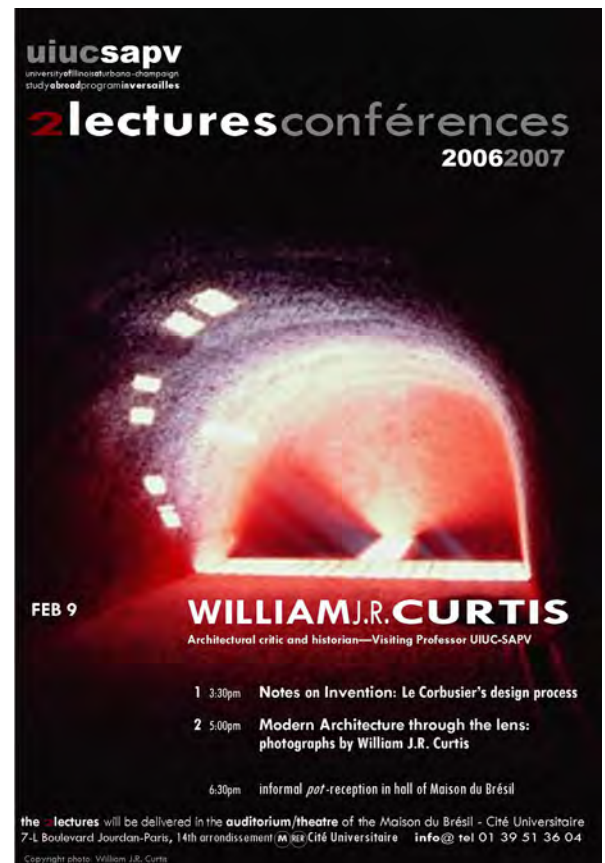
I think that there' are so many interesting agendas in Le Corbusier's architecture that are not complete. He's an open-ended book. I'm the last who's dogmatic about Le Corbusier. You know that. I don't believe in Neo-Corb at all. I find those formalist academies with their bags of tricks quite tedious. And in fact, I'm willing to criticize some of Le Corbusier's buildings, some are better than others, for sure. But I think that he'll go on affecting people as long as the buildings are communicating. And they seem to go on doing that.

When we were in Ahmedabad last time, I took several people to look at the Millowners. We walked up the ramp, and eventually arrived at that fantastic curved room which could almost be an abstract sculpture by Richard Serra. There were two Japanese sketching; it was SANAA (Kazuo Sejima and Ryue Nishizawa). They were worshipping that building, studying the free plan, which is what they've tried to work with all along, including their temporary insertion in the Barcelona Pavilion by Mies van der Rohe and of course in their Louvre Museum at Lens. The latter has these glass free plan curved elements interacting across space.

So that's an example of an organizational principle being rethought and continuing to influence architects 70 years later. There are many levels on which this continuity may occur. In a way, it's back to 'On Transforming Le Corbusier', and to the fact that the experience of architecture is not neutral. You project even as you observe. These are such rich buildings, rich concepts, that you'd have to be a real dummy not to extract something from them. I suspect that young architects will go on drawing lessons from Le Corbusier for a long time to come as they approach his works with fresh perceptions and new questions.

AL: I am glad you brought up the experience we shared in those years with the students of the Illinois' overseas program in Versailles because it opens up another aspect that falls under this large umbrella of Le Corbusier's legacy: teaching. You know that I primarily teach architectural design courses, so for me, there are two different dimensions about teaching about Le Corbusier and his work. One of the dimensions is to teach it from the historical perspective, that is, the historical relevance of his work. The other, which as a teacher of architectural design interests me more, is to focus on the work to teach architecture. Both can be segregated or differentiated, but I think you do both at the same time.

WJRC: Surely this is the whole ambiguity about the history of architecture. We discuss things that happened then, but we experience them now. This ambiguity is right at the center of my teaching method which is about history, but about architectural thinking too. I am always talking about the process of thinking, of creation, the problem-solving aspect of



Le Corbusier, his architectural language. You also bring up the question of learning about Le Corbusier's architecture by directly experiencing it, by sketching, by discussion, by putting together discourses in the form of lectures, but then discussions on site. In all of this, observation is central. It has always been my approach to teaching not just in history, but also in what we could call visual thinking: to train people to see and understand what they're looking at. The: what , why, and how of architecture, but with a highly focused lens trained on Le Corbusier.

This is where we come to the medium of architecture and its specificity. You can go into a museum and look at paintings and analyze them, you can go and look at sculptures and walk around them, and all this is true, but architecture, as we know, is on a site, it's in a situation, and you experience it spaces over time, you experience them inside and out in changing light, in changing weather conditions. To grasp these realities, you need to sketch a building from different angles, and realize that it is something which is very dynamic, even though it's standing still. The underlying form of the building is unchanging, yet the experience is changing all the time. This aspect is central to studying Le Corbusier, because he was a master at orchestrating precisely these central realities of the medium of architecture.

The precondition of the courses we did with a base in Versailles was to be able to see the buildings firsthand. Their titles were 'The Anatomy of Intentions' and 'The Structure of Ideas'. The format was very deliberately constructed where in the morning there were two lectures on architecture, on Le Corbusier for example followed by an afternoon at Villa Savoye, but also on Alvar Aalto followed by a visit to the Maison Carré. But let's stick to Le Corbusier since he was very central in this process of thinking and looking, looking and thinking. We went to see the Villa Savoye for three hours and the students pulled out their sketchbooks, you'd see them all looking at different things. It is always that amusing story about what is the elephant? On person says it's the tail, another that it's the trunk, another that it's the tusks, no it's all of the above.

They all brought different experiences to the task. I can remember very well the range of these sketches; one student, for example, was absolutely fascinated by the row of pilotis underneath the building and the way they meet the smooth slab and the exterior wall separated by a groove. Let's not call it a wall, it's a skin really. And he did sketch after sketch looking at that condition. Perhaps he grasped Le Corbusier's assertion that 'there are no details in a good building' because everything contributes to the whole? These were extremely enjoyable sessions, they were quite exacting, asking them to see what you see. I always said to students, please do not photograph it first, look at it first, then draw it, and then if you like, photograph it, in that order.

Then, at La Tourette they had the extra experience of staying overnight, exploring it from within, of grasping the landscape, the changing spaces, the framed views, the light and shade, and the atmosphere. I encouraged them to sense that there is an intangible level to architecture, especially in the work of Le Corbusier, and especially in a work like La Tourette. And how do you draw that? It isn't simple. How do you evoke it? I used to tell them that they had to write a letter to their aunt in Argentina, and in eight sketches convey La Tourette. I said it could be an overall drawing like a picture, or it could be an abstraction of levels with your eye looking to the horizon, or it could be a detail of the concrete. But how do you distill a building?

Now, here we come to the central point of this methodology. In English, you have the word description, but you also have the word prescription. Prescription implies making a project, description that you are drawing or describing. If an architectural example is captured and internalized, it helps the architect to formulate ideas later on. Elsewhere I wrote about Palladio's drawings reconstructing the ancient Roman baths, and the sections of his churches, and how they are indistinguishable. So his prescriptions and description closely resembled each other, Sketching is not just passive, it's also projective. And what is it projecting? It is images in the mind. Then there is the importance of hand-eye-mind coordination as training, which I believe is always important in later life, especially when generating core concepts for buildings

Now, going back to our shared experience of years ago. We visited several communal buildings, like Ronchamp, La Tourette, the roof terrace and cells of the Unité at Marseille, and also the Maison du Brésil. I have wonderful memories of giving informal talks to the students in the open-air chapel at Ronchamp, on the steps on top of the Unité with the blue sky above or in the lobby and auditorium of the Maison du Brésil. The fact that we used that building for a whole day session was memorable. The public areas are very inviting. There's what I call the beach – the lagoon like lobby - with its curved ceiling, unfolding, rising and falling, a wink to Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa. As a place for us as a group to flow in and out, it was convivial. I wonder if the students stopped to think: we are in this amazing lobby continuing to become a theatre, with tilted ceilings and floors, colours, textures, compressed and expanding spaces? The floor is made from polished black stone and establishes a sloping social plane with a slightly theatrical quality. Maison du Brésil is a lesson in making an inviting social space: a living lesson in architecture.

FIG. 46

Villa Savoye, view under pilotis along approach drive : pure forms in light, the lucidity of Le Corbusier's Machine Age dream. Photo WJRC, 2009.

FIG. 47

Poster announcing two public lectures delivered by Curtis as part of the Study Abroad Program in Versailles (Illinois School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), February 9, 2007. Using image of red chapel at Ronchamp. Photo WJRC, 1986.

FIG.48

Luis Barragan, Equestrian Centre of Los Clubes, Cuadra San Cristobal, Mexico, 1962. Outdoor rooms, water bodies and coloured planar walls achieving a metaphysical space. In this photograph Mexican architect Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon contemplates the scenography. Photo WJRC, 1997.

A Mirror and a Lens: On Transforming Le Corbusier

AL: Well, we have covered a lot but there is lot more that can be discussed. As we draw towards a conclusion, would like to go back to the second edition of *Ideas and Forms* and specifically to the final chapter 'On Transforming Le Corbusier' which, as you already said, it could be a book in itself. And I know that this is one subject on which you have also lectured and written extensively. In fact, much of your work on other architects is closely related to this. I think of your monographs on Denys Lasdun, Balkrishna Doshi, Teodoro González de León, and your many essays on architects who, in one way or another, are indebted to the legacy of Le Corbusier's work.

WJRC: I formulated the notion of Le Corbusier as 'a mirror and a lens' in a lecture given in Tokyo in 1997 in a fascinating event on 'Le Corbusier and Japan'. I meant by this, that later architects find their identity by reflecting off his examples, while also perceiving his type solutions as guides for dealing with generic problems. I gave the example of multiple and contrasting re-readings and transformations of the vaulted Petite Maison de Weekend of 1935, including Aldo Van Eyck's Amsterdam Orphanage (1960), Balkrishna Doshi's 'Sangath' in Ahmedabad (1981) and Rogelio Salmona's Official Guest House of the President in Cartagena de Indias '1981' (both discussed below). As it happens, none of these architects ever saw the real building, they knew it only through the carefully staged photographs of the *Oeuvre complete*. Perhaps at the back of my mind was George Kubler's remarkable book *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (1962) which discussed the role of new paradigms in opening the way to fresh discoveries, what he called prime objects and replications. In turn this idea fitted with my overall interest in the modern tradition as an unfolding development, a delta combining many streams.





Some of the people who are most profoundly influenced by Le Corbusier do not look like Le Corbusier. Take Jorn Utzon: his architecture does not look like that of Le Corbusier except for possibly the Parliament in Kuwait which echoes some features of the Assembly in Chandigarh. But he was profoundly indebted to Le Corbusier on many levels. Probably it has to do with light, and the power of forms and spaces to move us. Barragán had that sort of relationship with Le Corbusier but also with Mies van der Rohe. And Alvaro Siza, who is a magpie, picking up things from here and there. His church at San Marco de Canaveses, is inconceivable without Le Corbusier, without La Tourette and Ronchamp. I interviewed him for *El Croquis* 25 years ago; the text was called 'Notes on Invention.' I had been in Lisbon and then drove up on a Sunday afternoon to San Marco de Canaveses. The mass had finished. No people. But the afternoon light was coming in, and there was that long, amazing window. When you sit down, you see the landscape. And I thought, this is the most brilliant reinterpretation of La Tourette. Because Siza uses his eyes and his memory.

That window relates you to the landscape without seeing the rather messy little town. You see the hills in the distance. And in the interview, he said he had consulted the great modern prototypes, by which he meant of course Le Corbusier's, Ronchamp and La Tourette, but also Barragan's Convent for the Capuchinas (1960). He said he struggled with how to do a crucifix without it looking corny or banal or whatever: He went and stayed in La Tourette for three days, studying that incredible steel cross, which vibrates with the whole space. Of course, he was interested in the altar and all these other things, because when he first talked to the parish and the priest, they said they wanted a building like a social centre. And Siza said, no, no, we're doing a church, you have to have a crucifix, you have to have an altar and a Baptismal font. You have to have the traditional features of a church.

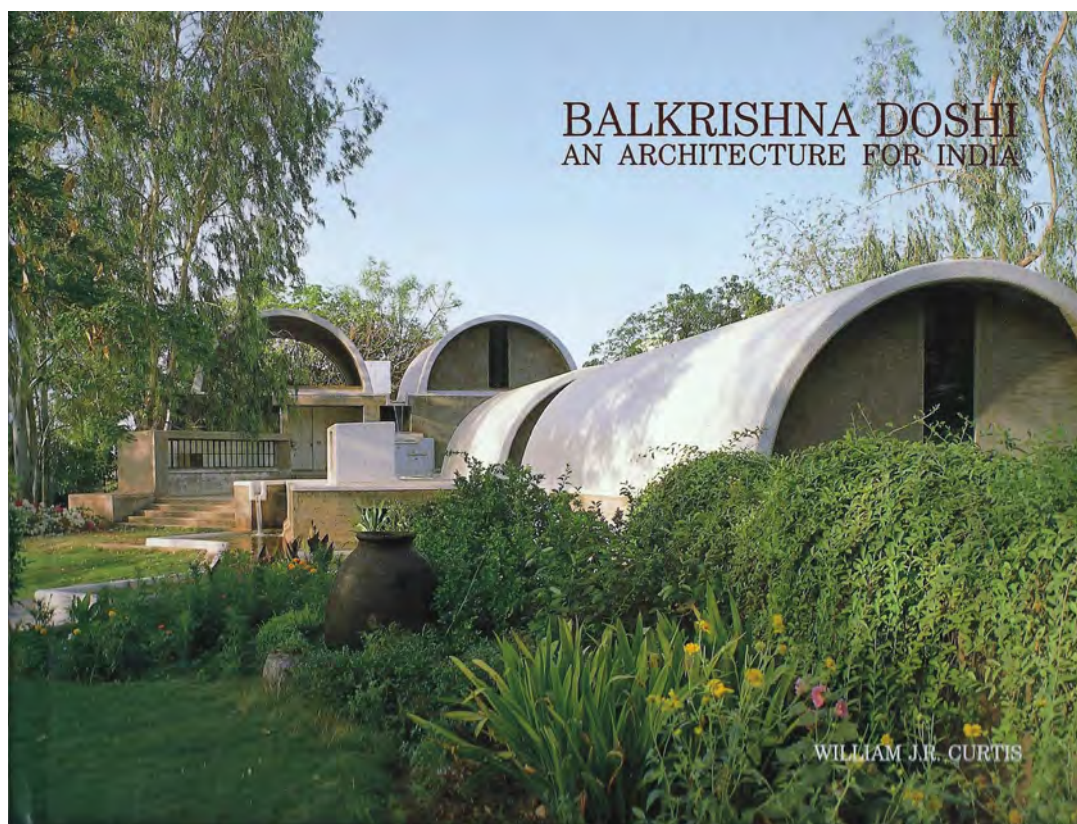
FIG.49

Teodoro Gonzalez de Leon, Palacio de Justicia Federal, Mexico City, 1988-93. A grand portico and a hypostyle interior street under a pergola announce the strength and openness of a Republican institution defending the Law. The architect transforms lessons from the Capitol in Chandigarh but in a language full of Mexican echoes. Photographer unknown.

FIG.50

William J. R. Curtis,
*Balkrishna Doshi, An
 Architecture for India*,
 Mapin and Rizzoli, 1988.

Based upon years of research and reflection, this book explored the Indian post-colonial search for identity and Doshi's fusion of Corbusian principles with lessons drawn from both monumental and vernacular Indian tradition. The cover image shows the architect's studio 'Sangath', Ahmedabad, with its protective vaults and water channels running across a green enclave. Doshi transformed lessons from Le Corbusier's vaulted solutions to fit his own myth.



This desire for some of the traditional symbols came from the architect not the client. Siza reread these familiar liturgical features in a new way, putting them in a coherent relationship, including light at the back, these two vertical striations of light behind the altar going down to the funerary chapel down below. It's a very striking way of creating an apse without an apse. The continuity between the upper level and the lower level is like a *mihrab*, in a mosque. An upper window bathes the nave in light which plays over the curved surface in a way recalling Ronchamp. And then you have those doors, which are ten meters high, and which add a note of ritual. So Siza is an example of someone who bounced off Le Corbusier in his search for a solution. Another case of a mirror and a lens.

Le Corbusier's vast influence on several generations in Latin America. Take the example of Mexico. I'm mainly interested in the ruins, especially the Mayan ones, but am also fascinated by this modern society with ancient roots, which reminded me of India in a way, so different from the USA. And I was always fascinated by Octavio Paz and all the things he would say about the past reappearing in the present. Barragan has a lot of Le Corbusier in him, especially in his own house of 1947 which is haunted by Le Corbusier's Beistegui apartment (1930): the interior steps up to the library, the surreal roof terrace. But in his works, one senses the echoes of the open-air rooms of Pre-Columbian ruins and the bold coloured forms of rural buildings. These influences are distilled through abstraction.

Le Corbusier had a huge impact on Mario Pani as well in the big housing schemes for Mexico City in the 1950s. The Ciudad Universitaria of UNAM by Pani, Enrique del Moral and others would have been inconceivable without the model of the Ville Radieuse. On another scale, the presence of Le Corbusier was already registered as early as 1930 in O'Gorman's house studios for Frieda Kahlo and Diego Rivera in San Angel which achieved a fusion of Le Corbusier's studio houses (such as the Maison Ozenfant in Paris of 1922) and the colourful Mexican vernacular. This calls to mind an observation of the Mexican painter Rufino Tamayo: 'Art is universal; the accent is local.'

Le Corbusier the universal, resonant artist who hit the nerve ends in Mexico, also hit the nerve ends in India, and of course in Japan. He released new ways of transforming local traditions. I was really fascinated by this effect on other societies and came back often to Mexico. In 1988, Teodoro González de León and I traveled together to look at his work in Villahermosa and in Yucatan. I saw Chichen Itza through his eyes, which was very important to him when he was young, even before he went to Europe and worked in Le Corbusier's Atelier in the late 1940s. Eventually I wrote the text on Teodoro in the first edition of the book on him, and then we did a much bigger edition reprinted several times: *Teodoro González de León: Obra Reunida* (2017). He defined a modern language attuned to Mexican realities. His Palacio de Justicia Federal (1990) in Mexico City reinterprets the monumental porticos of Chandigarh in a Mexican idiom abstracting values from the Pre-Columbian ruins such as those at Tajin.

Then in 1990, I was invited to Venezuela to lecture and of course explored the work of Carlos Raul Villanueva, especially the Ciudad Universitaria (early 1950s) in Caracas. The Plaza Cubierta, makes a major addition to the stock of great spatial inventions with its curved concrete roof, the crack of light, the curved ramp and the immediate juxtaposition with the Aula Magna, a space brought alive by the curved sound boards designed by Alexander Calder like abstract clouds. These two great spaces in the history of modern architecture promote an optimistic vision of an enlightened society and synthesize modern painting and sculpture in an effective public art. They embody a brilliant reinterpretation of Le Corbusier but without imitation. Caracas is tropical. Villanueva's structures are perforated by grilles and are about air moving and people moving through tropical vegetation. I showed pictures of the covered plaza and the cantilevered curved walkways to Enric Miralles who immediately grasped what they were about.

In 1997, I was invited to Colombia where I met Rogelio Salmona. His Torres del Parque (1967) are beautifully related to the Plaza de Toros, and to the topography of Bogotá. They transform principles of the Unité into a cluster of elegant red brick towers with balconies. Naturally, we talked about Le Corbusier, and then we flew together to Cartagena de Indias. It's an evocative Caribbean city where magical realism must have been born. Anyway, it's extraordinary, with these Creole people, the tropical atmosphere, the old monasteries and forts, the haunting memories of Spanish galleons loaded with silver and gold and English 'corsarios' such as Sir Francis Drake.

Of course, we went together to see his Casa de los Huéspedes Oficiales del Presidente (the Official Guest House of the President of Colombia, 1981) on a peninsular opposite the old city visible across the water, this haunting building with its the shaded patios, stone cloisters and brick vaults designed by him. There are local memories of monasteries and fortifications, but also Pan-American echoes of Uxmal (8th century AD) in Yucatan. I realized that I was in the presence of a masterpiece and told him so, adding that he could not have done this without Le Corbusier's Maisons Jaoul's and other vaulted projects produced in the Atelier when Salmona was there during the early 1950s. He replied: 'bien sûr William, le maître derrière moi.'

AL: That's interesting, because I had the understanding that in his time with Le Corbusier, especially working in the plan de Bogotá, he was not necessarily happy.

WJRC: Correct. He had a complicated relationship with the Atelier and with Le Corbusier. Salmona had ups and downs and was in and out of the Atelier over an eight-year period, with occasional collisions. But of course, he was studying all the time the Catalan tiled vaults, especially in the Maison Sarabhai (1951-54) in Ahmedabad and the Maisons Jaoul's (1951-54) in Neuilly. He was very young. But when it came to this, he learned his lessons. And again, he loved France, sort of second nature to him. I carried away such a strong impression of Salmona's Casa de los Huéspedes Oficiales del Presidente that when I wrote the text "Le Corbusier, a Mirror and a Lens," I explored the vaulted idea and showed how Doshi took it one direction at Sangath, and Salmona took it in another in Cartagena in the same years, 1979 to 1981.

In the former case the vaulted type was implicated in an agenda exploring Indian identity and fusing the vaulted type with a variety of Indian sources from underground temples to ancient Buddhist chaitya halls; in the latter, it was embedded in a deep reading of the place and in broader Latin American memories. In the long run there were echoes in both projects of the strategies of the unbuilt Cherrhell project of 1942 (with its vaulted structures, irrigated courts, and fusion of Mediterranean vernacular traditions) and the Petite Maison de Weekend of 1935 which existed on the knife edge between machinism and primitivism. In a sense these two architects extended a research into a type that Le Corbusier had defined long before, even as early as the Monol vaulted housing of 1919.

AL: As we were talking about I this I was thinking that there are many great and very influential architects in the 20th century, but perhaps there is no architect that has such a ramified influence on architects from such diverse origins. I think of Wright's influence, for example.

WJRC: Yes. there's no equivalent to Le Corbusier's impact. Why is that? I discuss possible reasons in the chapter 'On Transforming Corbusier'; it is partly because he produced generic solutions that touched on things that people were trying to do and gave them very powerful examples. But this generic side, the typical, is only part of the power. On the other side there is the sheer presence and expressive force of his individual buildings. They are not one liner of statements or merely beautiful buildings. They are constructed ideas full of resonances and polarities. That's the other thing I discuss: the way that his examples may support contrasting readings.

Take the case of Ronchamp, a work embracing many polarities and contradictions. When you look at a building, you carry a lot of baggage. And Le Corbusier gives answers because his works respond to a need of some kind in the observer. Or is it just a straightforward matter of inspiration? Suddenly another world opens up. When I interviewed Tadao Ando at the end of the 1990s, we discussed his interest in the Japanese past but also his experiences of Western architecture. He talked about the parallel in his mind between the Greek islands and the Inland Sea of Japan. He said,



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Poster design Michael Clifford History of Art Design studio.

I have two great inspirations in European architecture: the Pantheon and Ronchamp. So I asked him what was it about Ronchamp, and what was it about the Pantheon? And he said: for me, Ronchamp is about a sublime light and a space of meditation; and on the Pantheon, it's the ray of light in a void, which he called an abstraction of nature.

Several years earlier I met Frank Gehry in Bilbao at the moment he was unveiling the Guggenheim Museum with its explosive curved surfaces and interactive voids. We began to talk about things that had inspired him in his earlier years. He explained that for a year he had worked in Paris, often taking trips to visit great buildings. He said that in fact two of his main inspirations were in France. It was no surprise when he mentioned Ronchamp, in fact he declared that without Ronchamp there would be no Gehry. His other great inspiration was the Cathedral at Chartres. When I asked him to explain, he said that in the case of Ronchamp it was the extraordinary combination of convex and concave spaces and the dynamic relation to the surroundings. In the case of Chartres, it was the sublime lofty space. Listening to these two testimonies was evidence of the way that entirely contrasting readings may be made of the same work.

The absorption of Corbusian principles by Brazilian architects is a rich story with several chapters. Oscar Niemeyer absorbed much from the master but broke away in his manner. Several years ago, I was invited to deliver a keynote in a symposium on Brazilian architecture in Pampulha close to Belo Horizonte, the place where Niemeyer constructed four key breakthrough buildings around the lake in the early 1940s: the Yacht Club, the Dance Pergola, the Casino and the Chapel of San Francisco. The meetings took place in the Casino inside the circular ballroom with the glass floor. Access was by means of zig zag ramps slicing past columns coated in reflecting materials and parapets of exquisite stone. These images of the high life were wrought on the basis of a brilliant reinvention of the Corbusian free plan. In fact Niemeyer succeeded in extracting more spatial drama from this principle than Le Corbusier himself.

We also met in Niemeyer's Chapel of San Francisco (1942) with its vaulted parabolic roof, frescoes and small bell tower, all features echoing the small country churches of Brazil. From there I went to Ouro Preto to see great the Baroque churches there. In these historic examples I kept finding Niemeyer everywhere: the dynamic curves, the focalization of spaces towards the altar, the light, the geometry. I flew to Brasilia where I was a guest of the School of Architecture, which is an un-Niemeyeresque structure, repetitive and linear, like a factory, airy voids and tropical greenery suspended from cross beams. I realized that there are many sides to Niemeyer. He created beautiful poetic pieces with sensual curves, but he was also skilled at handling large repetitive programs of offices with elegance and finesse. At the head of Lucio Costa's panoramic central axis of Brasilia, Niemeyer created the Parliament with its abstract towers and dish like chambers, a vision of a new society, almost from another planet.

All this gets us to another issue: we are talking about talented individuals as if they were just artists. But these Latin American masters also touched upon collective attitudes towards modernity and tradition in the *imaginaires* of their various societies. After its Revolution, the Republic of Mexico tried to integrate pre-Columbian civilization in its cultures of modernity. And it happened first via artists such as Diego Rivera. But it is part of the collective subconscious of Mexico. And architecture can touch on that quality in the collective memory, which Teodoro González de León managed to do in his monumental buildings. And I think that that is part of the key. For all of them Le Corbusier provided a focusing mechanism to read these deeper narratives. I was always fascinated by the contrast between Mexican perceptions of history and those of the USA, which suffer from amnesia, a recurrent theme in the writings of Octavio Paz.

Le Corbusier revealed epic dramas of modernization. The Ville Radieuse is an immense myth, but it went everywhere. Everybody was doing versions of the Ville Radieuse. Why? It's actually illogical in all kinds of ways, but it's very potent. Those transparent tall buildings, the plans harmonizing industrialism and nature. Those looking for images of modernity, found them ready-made with Le Corbusier. And the most intelligent ones transformed them, as did the Brazilians, or Villanueva with the Ciudad Universitaria in Caracas, or the architects of the UNAM campus south of Mexico City. I went back to visit it the last time I was in Mexico. It is a huge plateau for learning with long grassy platforms and steps providing a foreground to Juan O'Gorman's Library with its mosaics of Pre-Columbian themes. Those vast spaces, are at one and the same time Corbusian and Meso-American. The underlying landscape theme which suggests both Enlightenment and a return to origins.

AL: It's the never-ending and ever-present theme which you talk about all the time; the juxtaposition of modern traditions with old traditions.

FIG.51

Oscar Niemeyer and Lucio Costa, Brasilia, the main central axis terminating in the Parliament designed by Niemeyer alone, 1960. Here a vision of the future State is embodied in the composed skyscrapers and domical shapes of the Chambers, an almost planetary vision of the new space of the Nation. Inconceivable without the example of Le Corbusier's urban visions fusing modern architecture and nature, Brasilia achieves an order and an expression of its own attuned to Brazilian realities. Phoo WJRC, 2006.

FIG.52

Poster announcing William J. R. Curtis, Slade Lectures, University of Cambridge, Michaelmas Term, 2003, on the subject of 'Modern Architecture and Monumentality'. The poster image of the Capitol in Chandigarh is based upon a photograph taken by the author in 1984

WJRC: Well, part of my argument when it comes to Latin America is that Le Corbusier supplied a universalizing lens for them to read their traditions within an international modernity. Before that, people were so local in their idea of tradition. You know, the Neo-Mexican architecture of the 20s is very provincial. But modernism brought another way of looking expansively at the great traditions and reinventing them spatially and in geometry via abstraction. Le Corbusier had some function in that, so did Mies van der Rohe. At the same time there was a vision of the future, a utopia linked to the sumptuous nature of Brazil. They looked forward while they looked back.

Next I arrived in Rio de Janeiro, which was a really fantastic experience. Le Corbusier caught the drama of the site in his sketches of the turbulent landscapes and the sea. The Ministry of Education (1936) by Lucio Costa, Le Corbusier, Niemeyer and Burle Marx, lends great nobility to the skyscraper which takes on an honorific character in part due to Costa's underlying classicism. It's a vision of a new society, the utopian aspect of Le Corbusier. Then the response to local climate as registered by the *brise-soleil* and to nature as epitomized in the symbolic landscape of Burle Marx.

Finally to Niemeyer's house at Canoas (1951). I saw it from the top of the site. You descend the curved path. There's the pool. There's this bronze sculpture of a nude woman. There's the boulder partly embedded in the transparent frame of the house. There are the swooping curves. There are the spaces inside and out interacting with the natural site. It is a sort of dream, a vision of the good life. Talk about the ever-present Mies, but it's also the ever-present Le Corbusier and the ever-present Alvar Aalto. Niemeyer could not have done that without some pictures or plans that he must have seen of Aalto's Villa Mairea. The pool and the biomorphic abstraction: the hymn to nature.

But back to Le Corbusier. And I think that chapter 'On Transforming Le Corbusier' captures this universalising dimension in his vision and his example, including his vision of the city and how that was taken on board. As I say, he gave images of the future, but he also gave perspectives on the past. That's the way he was, and that's what he gave to the world.

That's what he gave to all these architects. Visions of the future, perspectives on the past.

A Historian with 'Eyes that See'

AL: Let's draw this to a close with a theme/question that combines both your work and your knowledge with the legacy or future of Le Corbusier's work from a research perspective. You have studied his work profoundly. You published several books that are like landmarks in your career and dozens of articles. You know the built work, his projects and sketchbooks inside out. You have written *Ideas and Forms*, which in the first edition is organized in a somewhat chronological sequence, but in the second edition, published nearly 30 years later, you inserted several new chapters in which you revisited the work in a more transversal, thematically oriented, fashion. Above all, you have a vast knowledge of everything that has been written about Le Corbusier.

This journal, *LC Revue de recherches sur Le Corbusier*, is read by hundreds of scholars interested in the work of Le Corbusier and I wonder if with your knowledge, you think that there is something –an idea, a theme, a topic– in the work of Le Corbusier that has not yet been sufficiently explored.

WJRC: There are, no doubt, many avenues to be explored in Corbusian studies. The field is vast and evolving. Other historians will discover their own versions of Le Corbusier. Emerging younger scholars and architects will pose fresh questions and have new observations while suggesting unexpected interpretations. This is only normal, as the writing of history is based upon overt hypotheses and undeclared prejudices and these keep evolving over time. Le Corbusier is a multi-faceted creature whose creative universe is full of polarities: his oeuvre invites multiple perspectives and interpretations.

But there is some risk of a mismatch between the volume of production and the texts that really lead to greater understanding. The fact that there are so many archives is a gift, but research cannot be reduced to just reproducing seductive drawings without real analysis of their meaning, and to burying Le Corbusier in pointless information. At this stage, a proper '*catalogue raisonné*' of all the project drawings and models is in order, and this can only be achieved

**FIG.53**

Le Corbusier, Millowners' Association Building, Ahmedabad, 1951-54, ramp penetrating the main, west façade, with its angled brise-soleil. Picture of the author taken by Catherine Curtis, 2014.

by scholars with an in-depth knowledge of all relevant sources for each project. I produced such a catalogue for the drawings of the Carpenter Center way back in 1971, but this could only make sense in the context of the entire study on that building's genesis. Each and every drawing is done for a reason and the historian has to discover the reason and the intention and place it in the context of an overall search, a process of problem solving and invention.

As for Le Corbusier's buildings themselves, we are all aware of their vulnerability, even their fragility. Over the years I have been engaged with problems related to the preservation and correct restoration of his works. I recall discovering in 2012 that the ondulatoires in the west façade of La Tourette had been clumsily 'restored' with flat bands of aluminium which completely destroyed the spatial ambiguity and multiple musical rhythms of Le Corbusier's and Xenakis's fenestration. It was as if someone had changed the thickness in the lines of a Mondrian painting. Referring to a letter that Alberti wrote in 1450 in defense of the proportions of the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini, I fired off a letter insisting upon the maintenance of 'Tutta Quella Musica' ('All That Music'). Fortunately, the ondulatoires in the lower walkways were left intact, but the west façade remains seventeen years later to be restored correctly.

Then there was the saga of Renzo Piano's Convent for les Clarisses at Ronchamp which we first saw as a project roughly eighteen years ago and quickly realized was too close to Le Corbusier's masterpiece as well as being too high. Even after the public uproar in 2008 and slight withdrawal of the project, it was still an ill-judged intervention which cut the pedestrian circulation with a clumsy electric gate for cars and installed ugly concrete blades leading up to the over-

scaled reception centre. These banal efforts at abstract sculpture are experienced as muzac disturbing the celestial music of Le Corbusier's masterpiece on the hill above and behind. I stated my objections succinctly in an article in the *Architectural Review* in 2012 'Undermining Ronchamp (French version 'Ronchamp défiguré, *D'Architectures*, 2012). In effect, the Piano project has destroyed the spirit of the place as a center of pilgrimage.

It was during a visit to Ahmedabad in 2014 that I realized that the architectural patrimony of the city – one of my spiritual homes – was under threat from rabid economic and real estate developments. Some years earlier there had been talk of tearing down Le Corbusier's Millowner's Association building and replacing it with a block of flats. When the River Sabarmati was dammed, the water became a dead lake and the Millowner's was cut off from the river by a concrete walkway. I realized that other key modern works such as Le Corbusier's City Museum and Louis Kahn's Indian Institute of Management were also vulnerable and published a broadside in the *Architectural Review* in 2014: 'Nothing is Sacred: Threats to Modern Masterpieces in India'. This was followed by a longer reflection in *A+D* on the need to protect modern architectural patrimony in India by, among other things, modifying Indian Heritage Laws so that they would apply to buildings less than one hundred years old.

Thankfully Chandigarh is now well protected as it is one of the sites selected by UNESCO World Heritage among the seventeen Le Corbusier works with the title: 'Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement'. In 2015 there was a splendid evening event on the Capitol to celebrate this status as universal patrimony of humanity and I was honoured to deliver the keynote address (later published in *Le Corbusier Rediscovered: Chandigarh and Beyond* (2017). I of course remembered my first visits to Chandigarh thirty years earlier and my promise to P.L. Varma, Le Corbusier's main patron, that I would do all I could to protect both Chandigarh and the philosophy behind it. As part of the festivities on stage, copies of the second edition of *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* were presented to the Governor of Punjab and to other notables such as my dear friend the remarkable Indian architect, Raj Rewal. As the moon rose above the cosmic roofscape of the Parliament Building I thought: what an extraordinary thing that my destiny has once again overlapped with India and with this great architect.

My Corbusian trajectory which began under the piloti of Pavillon Suisse all those years ago has taken on the character of a quest, a search for knowledge and an investigation of principles. Behind it all, is a sense of wonder in response to magical forms and spaces of ideas. As is clear from this conversation, I look back now over sixty years of engagement with this extraordinary visionary architect who has taught me so much and inspired me in numerous ways, including artistically, especially in the realm of observation, travel sketches and visual transformations. For me Le Corbusier is a subject for historical analysis but also a source of revelation as he has been for so many others. Le Corbusier changed the ground rules of architecture while returning to certain fundamentals of the discipline but he also created a mythical universe. That said: as a historian with a critical edge, I feel that it is crucial to balance attraction and detachment: I am certainly not interested in turning Le Corbusier into a cult.

It is clear from my Bibliography and this record of interactions that I have used many lenses to examine the architect's work, indeed his world. I have moved back and forth in time and crossed numerous frontiers in this quest. In some cases, I have attempted to penetrate to what I call in chapter 17 of the second edition of *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*, the "Realm of Architectural Ideas". Way back in the Introduction to my thesis in 1975 I stressed the necessity of describing the inside and outside of events, and of reconstructing the probable processes of thought and imagination involved in Le Corbusier's creations. This does not mean that I avoid other issues such as the political frameworks or the critical reception of works, but it does mean that I hold Le Corbusier's buildings at the centre of my analyses and reflections. In my view, nothing can replace the in-depth close reading of his projects and buildings.

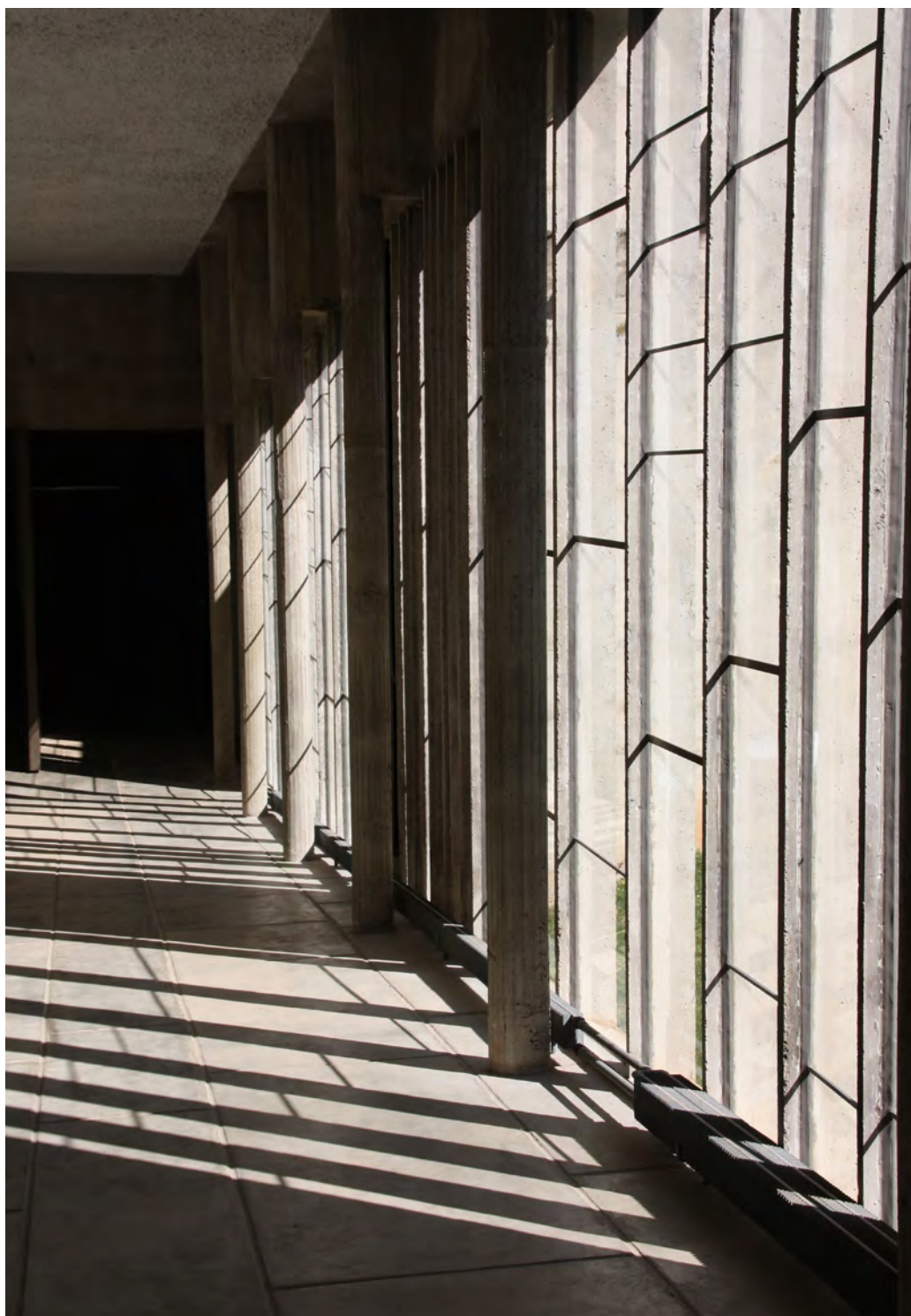
Then there is the art, science and craft of history writing: an activity combining research, insight, visual intelligence and literary skill. Here there has to be scrupulous respect for evidence and a distinction between fact and opinion. Interpretation of both written and graphic evidence is itself a science and an art. In the discipline of history writing there are some books that retain validity even when new researches reveal errors or omissions. This is partly due to their intellectual depth, their power of synthesis and their value as literature. In all my books I have attempted to achieve a clear structure and a coherent overall unity. The images and design are organized to reinforce the guiding themes. George Orwell suggested that good prose is like a windowpane, transparent. You are not aware that you are reading it. You get straight to the sense. In my work I have done my best to live up to this high expectation.



FIG.54
Le Corbusier, Millowners' Rochamp, view of rear side with water spout and basin with pyramidal elements to collect and splash water off the roof. The secret and enigmatic life of forms covering layers of hermetic meaning. Photo WJRC, 1986.

FIG.55

La Tourette, ondulatoires in the lower walkways brought alive in light and shadow. Multiple rhythms and spatial ambiguities are achieved by varying intervals between vertical struts and by supplying dark horizontal bars in metal and rubber to fix the different sized panes. Happily these were preserved against the disruption of the same elements in the 'restoration' of the west façade where 'Tutta Quella Musica' was destroyed. Photo WJRC 1995.



WILLIAM J. R. CURTIS' WRITING ON LE CORBUSIER: AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

William J. R. Curtis is one of the most prolific contemporary authors in topics related to architectural history, criticism, and myriad other themes. With several books published in English and translated into many languages, and dozens of essays and articles, his contribution to the scholarship on Le Corbusier's work is recognized worldwide and is regarded as one of the most profound, insightful, and penetrating studies of the Swiss-French master. A quick look at such production would identify several landmark titles: *Le Corbusier, English Architecture 1930s* (book, 1975); *Le Corbusier at Work, the Genesis of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts* (book, 1978); *Fragments of Invention: The Sketchbooks of Le Corbusier* (exhibition catalog, 1981); 'Ideas of Structure and the Structure of Ideas: Le Corbusier's Pavillon Suisse, 1930-31' (essay, 1981); *Modern Architecture Since 1900* (book, 1982); *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* (book, 1986); and, ; *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*, 2nd expanded edition (2015).

A complete and partially annotated list of texts published by William J. R. Curtis organized by type of publication (book, essay, article) and in chronological order follows.

Books

Le Corbusier, English Architecture 1930s, Open University Press, Bletchley, 1975. Curtis' first major contribution to Le Corbusier's work, it contains units 17/18 of the Open University Course A305 on Modern Architecture and Design: 'The Formation of Le Corbusier's Architectural Language and Its Crystallization in the Villa Savoye at Poissy'; and 'Reflections on the Political Content and Associations of the International Style'. Among other things, a probe into levels of meaning in modern architecture, Le Corbusier in particular.

The History and Design of Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, A Thesis presented by William J. R. Curtis to the Fine Arts Department in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Subject of Fine Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Ma. 1975. This is Curtis' doctoral dissertation. It also contains an Introduction on the design process as a subject of historical enquiry, and a detailed catalogue raisonné of all drawings and models.

Le Corbusier at Work, the Genesis of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1978, editor E. F. Sekler). Whereas it is under Eduard Sekler's name because he was the book's editor, the greater part of the book written by Curtis. This book is one of the foundation stones of the author's work: a hugely detailed reconstruction of the design process and construction of a key late work; a penetration via sketches, drawings, letters, documents and recollections of Le Corbusier's processes of architectural thought. Highly praised by critics, it became a model for many scholars who undertook detailed studies of single buildings. Tim Benton wrote: "The book reflects a level of scientific scholarship necessary to record and chart a masterpiece of modern architecture. Curtis sets a standard for Corbusian studies which may be difficult to follow..." (Journal of Society of Architectural Historians, March 1980), while Le Corbusier's former collaborator, Jane Drew, pointed out that "This book is quite different from all the other many books I have read by or about Le Corbusier and his work. It explains fully the whole structure of his ideology, his almost religiously held architectural beliefs... scrupulously honest, written in good English, (it) is the best book I have come across to instruct and illumine Le Corbusier's work" R.I.B.A. Journal, March 1979).

Fragments of Invention: The Sketchbooks of Le Corbusier (Architectural History Foundation and MIT, 1981), functioned initially as a catalogue to the exhibition bearing same name curated by Curtis at Carpenter Center, Harvard University, Fall 1981; the exhibition later travelled to New York (1982), Ahmedabad, India (1984), and Chandigarh, India (1985). What the sketchbooks reveal of Le Corbusier's prodigious powers of observation, transformation and invention.

Modern Architecture Since 1900. Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1982. This book is a global, yet penetrating history of modern architecture. It includes several chapters exclusively dedicated to Le Corbusier's work. Subsequently expanded through in later editions, it has been translated into Spanish, German, Japanese, Italian, French, Portuguese, and Chinese. The first edition was awarded the Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion, Society of Architectural Historians of

Great Britain (1984) and was also selected in 1985 by Comité International des Critiques d'Architecture (CICA) as one of five most significant books on architecture in the period 1982-85. Renowned Harvard's Professor of Fine Arts, James Ackerman wrote "(...) it is not only immeasurably the finest work covering this field in existence, but may very well be the best survey of any field in the history of architecture written since the prime of Nikolaus Pevsner and Sigfried Giedion," while Stanislaus von Moos signaled "(...) the scope of the book is breath-taking, and so is the author's versatility in the field of twentieth century architecture. With apparent ease, Curtis succeeds in translating an overwhelming bulk of knowledge into a fluent and never overloaded text. Given the quantity of precise information he handles, one is amazed by the competence with which he controls his subject and by the brilliance with which he puts facts and arguments into interesting critical perspectives. Some of these chapters will set new standards in the historiography of modern architecture." (Art Journal, 1983).

Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms (first edition, Phaidon Press, Oxford, 1986; USA edition: Rizzoli, NY, 1987). Published one year ahead of "*l'année Le Corbusier*" that commemorated the centennial of Le Corbusier's birth, this Curtis' first major work encompassing the architect's lifelong production. This first edition was translated into Spanish, German, and Japanese, and once again, it was highly praised by critics. William H. Jordy: "(...) the most lucid and complete chronicle yet available of Le Corbusier's achievement and (in the words of his title) the 'ideas and forms' which successively and cumulatively account for its significance. It is, then, as incisive narrative illuminated by penetrating critical commentary that this book excels (...)" (Times Literary Supplement, 1987), and Paul Gapp commented: "*William J.R. Curtis is the best architectural historian writing in the English language, and that alone makes this book something of an event. Unsurprisingly, Curtis has turned out what is probably the most comprehensive, well balanced and interesting narrative yet produced about one of the giants of 20th century architect.*" Paul Gapp (Chicago Tribune, 1987).

Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms (second edition, Phaidon Press, Oxford, 2015). This Curtis' revised and expanded edition of his 1986 highly praised monograph. The scale of expansion is such (a larger format, lots of new images, some revisions, and the addition of a 93-pages new section) that it merits being listed as a separate book. The added section –part IV: Principles and Transformations— includes four new chapters and a conclusion that could have very well been published as a separate volume. The new edition was again received with complimenting reviews: "...A much expanded version of an earlier monograph... Definitive, chronological, sumptuously illustrated... Curtis is [...] balanced and inclusive, offering excellent discussions of all the Indian work, of many unexecuted projects, and of the vast influence Corbusier has exercised... I think there is no better introduction to the man and his work." (Joseph Rykwert, *Architects Journal*). "Just as Le Corbusier is a 'classic' of modern architecture, Curtis's monograph is a 'classic' of the Corbusian bibliography. And with this new edition - substantially enlarged, both in text and illustrations - the book will become indeed the main reference for understanding Le Corbusier's contribution to universal architecture." (Jorge Sainz, *Arquitectura Viva*, Spain) "In the new, revised and updated edition of the classic *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*, Curtis goes beyond just documenting to delve deeper and deeper into the creative underpinnings of Le Corbusier's masterpieces... Many new photographs have been added, including some of Chandigarh taken by Curtis, who himself is an excellent photographer... What Le Corbusier did for the 20th century in shaping the world's built form, William J.R. Curtis does for Le Corbusier become his master interpreter." (Rajnish Wattas, *Architecture plus Design*, India).

Whereas not dedicated to Le Corbusier's work per-se, Curtis also wrote several monographs on architects whose work is deeply indebted to him. Three of them stand out: *Balkrishna Doshi: an Architecture for India* (Mapin Press, Ahmedabad and Rizzoli, NY, 1988), *Denys Lasdun: Architecture, City, Landscape*. (Phaidon, London, 1994), and *Teodoro González de León, Obra Completa*, ed. Miquel Adria, Arquine Mexico, 2004; re-published as *Teodoro González de León, Obra Reunida*, Arquine, Mexico, 2017. All of them received highly positive comments by international critics.

Texts in Journals, Catalogues and Books

'Der Wolkenkrzer – Realität und Utopie', *Die Zwanziger Jahre Kontraste eines Jahrzehnts*, Ed. Stanislaus von Moos, (Zurich, 1973).

'Berthold Lubekin: 'Socialist' Architecture in the Diaspora', *Archithèse 12* (Zurich, Niggli, 1974). Republished messily in *Architectural Association Journal Quarterly*, (London, Summer 1978).

'L'Université, la ville et l'habitat collectif, Réflexions sur un thème de l'architecture moderne', *Archithèse 14*, (Niederteufen, 1975).

'Le Corbusier, Manhattan et le Rêve de la Ville Radieuse', *Archithèse 17*, (Niederteufen, 1976).

Russell Walden, ed., *The Open Hand. Essays on Le Corbusier*, Cambridge, Ma. and London, MIT Press, 1972, December 1978, Vol XXXVII, Number 4. Extensive book review situating Le Corbusier studies.

'Boston: Forty Years of Modern Architecture', *Boston: Forty Years of Modern Architecture*, ICA, Boston, 1980, accompanying an exhibition of the same title which included original drawings and model of Le Corbusier's Carpenter Center.

'Ideas of Structure and the Structure of Ideas: Le Corbusier's Pavillon Suisse, 1930-31', *Journal of Society of Architectural Historians*, December 1981. This text on the Pavillon Suisse, one of Curtis' favorite buildings designed by Le Corbusier, followed the method of close scrutiny of original drawings and documents developed in his earlier work on the Carpenter Center but it took the form of a much shorter essay. It was selected for the 'Founders Award' of the Society of Architectural Historians, USA, in 1982, for the 'best article by a young scholar'.

'Authenticity, Abstraction and the Ancient Sense: Le Corbusier's and Louis Kahn's Ideas of Parliament', *Perspecta 20*, Yale University Department of Architecture, Student Journal (New Haven, Yale, 1983). (Finnish version 'Autenttisuus, Abstraktio Ja Muinaisuuden Henki', *Arkkitehtuuri in Totta*, Helsinki, 1991, ed. Riitta Nikula.)

'Modern Architecture, Monumentality and the Meaning of Institutions: Reflections on Authenticity', *Monumentality and the City*, *Harvard Architecture Review*, IV, Spring 1984, Harvard Graduate School of Design, Spring 1984.

H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier, Archives*, Garland Press, New York, 1983). Review in *Design Book Review*, San Francisco, Summer, 1984. Above all on the subject of drawings and the need for a proper *catalogue raisonné*.

'Om att transformera Palladio' ('On Transforming Palladio'), in *Palladio Idag* ('Palladio Today') book accompanying Scandinavian exhibition of Palladio, (Liber Forlag, Stockholm, 1985, Ed. Christer Ekelund).

'L'ancien dans le moderne,' (on Le Corbusier's works in India), in *Architectures en Inde* (Electa Moniteur, Paris, 1985); English version in *Architecture in India*, Moniteur, 1985. Originally catalogue of exhibition on Indian Architecture, Festival of India, Paris, 1985.

'Le Corbusier: Nature and Tradition', Introduction to *Le Corbusier: Architect of the Century*, Arts Council, London, 1987, on occasion of Hayward Gallery, London, retrospective. Still a valuable reference work.

'Maturité: Le moderne et l'archaïque, ou les dernières oeuvres' and 'Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts: un memento Corbusien', in *Le Corbusier, une Encyclopedie*, Centre de Culture Industrielle, Centre Pompidou and ed. Moniteur, Paris 1987, editor Jacques Lucan; this tome functioned initially as the catalogue for a major retrospective exhibition on Le Corbusier at Centre Pompidou, Paris, Fall 1987. Curtis's black and white photographs of Chandigarh were integrated in the exhibition.

'Le Corbusier: Tipos para la nueva ciudad industrial', *Arquitectura y Vivienda*, (Madrid, 1987).

'Le Corbusier: le révolutionnaire qui retourna aux sources', *Connaissance des Arts*, (Paris, Nov. 1987). With portfolio of Curtis photos.

'Modernism and the Search for Indian Identity', *Architectural Review*, (London, August, 1987).

'Machines d'état: les Grands Projets Parisiens', *Techniques et Architecture*, Paris, 1989.

'Le Corbusier, La modernité et le culte des ruines', Synopsis of lecture, in *La Méditerranée de Le Corbusier*, (Université de Provence, Aix, Marseille, 1991).

'Le Corbusier et l'architecture moderne' and English version, 'Le Corbusier and modern architecture in India', both in *Passeurs d'Orient, Encounters between India and France*. (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères/Direction générale des Relations culturelles scientifiques et techniques, Paris, 1991, Ed., Catherine Coustols).

'The Idea of a Modern Tradition', *Functionalism – Utopia or the Way Forward?*, *5th Alvar Aalto Symposium*, Jyväskylä, 1992.

'Pertinence de Le Corbusier', *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, Paris, December 1995.

'Le Corbusier, objectif et miroir', *Le Corbusier, voyages, rayonnement international*, Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris, 1997. Proceedings of meeting at UNESCO, Paris, June 1997.

'Chandigarh 50 Years Later: A Planned City at a Crossroads', *Architectural Record*, N.Y., April 1999.

'Le Corbusier's Capitol in Chandigarh as a Cosmic and Political Landscape', *A + U*, Tokyo, May 1999.

'On Transforming Le Corbusier', *Le Corbusier et le Japon* (also in Japanese), Kajima, Tokyo, 1999. Proceedings of meeting on 'Le Corbusier and Japan' held in Tokyo in February 1997.

'Modern Architecture, Mythical Landscapes and Ancient Ruins', *The Annual Soane Lecture 1997*, Soane Museum, London, 1997.

'Le Corbusier: Transformations', *Crossing the Parallel, Le Corbusier Mori Collection*, Mori Museum Project Office, Tokyo, 1999.

'Impact: Le Corbusier's Capitol in Chandigarh and Democratic Monumentality'; 'Values and Symbolism: the Horizontal Plane'; and 'What We Have Learnt...to avoid! Or the Three "D's"—Densification, Developers, Dollars', in *Celebrating Chandigarh, Proceedings of Celebrating Chandigarh: 50 Years of the Idea, Chandigarh, India, 9-11 January 1999*, New Delhi, 2001, Ed. Jaspreet Takhar.

'The Ever Elusive Le Corbusier', *Architectural Record*, N.Y., February 2002. Review of Kenneth Frampton, *Le Corbusier*, N.Y., Thames and Hudson, 2001 and Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the Continual Revolution in Architecture*, N.Y., Monacelli Press, 2000.

'Is it Possible to Keep the Soul of an Architectural Idea Alive in Such Conditions? Project Le Corbusier, Realization José Oubrière: the Church of St Pierre, Firminy.' *Architect's Journal*, *Buildings*, London, April 2006.

'Le Corbusier: Transformation and Invention, On Re-reading Modern Architecture', *Architectural Review*, London, 2007.

'The Shadows of Time', Introduction to *Structures of Light: Photographs of William J.R. Curtis*, book initially published to accompany exhibition of Curtis photographs in Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä, 2007. Alvar Aalto Academy, 2007.

'Le Corbusier, The Life of Forms', *Architectural Review*, London, October 2008.

'Toward an Architecture, Lost in Translation', *Times Literary Supplement* March, 2008. Review of *Le Corbusier: Toward an Architecture*, Introduction, Jean-Louis Cohen, translation John Goodman, Getty Trust, 2007.

'Abstractions et Représentations: Le Capitol de Chandigarh, paysage des symboles', *Le Corbusier, L'Atelier intérieur, Les Cahiers de la Recherche, architectural et urbaine*, 22-23, Paris, 2008. Trans. from English, Guillemette Morel-Journel. Curtis's photo of red chapel at Ronchamp used as cover image.

'Intersections: On Re-reading Le Corbusier', *AA Files 58*, Architectural Association, London 2009.

'The classical Ideals of Le Corbusier', *Architectural Review*, London 2011.

'Ronchamp Undermined', *Architectural Review*, London, August 2012.

'Ronchamp défiguré', *D'Architectures*, Paris, 2012.

'Honouring and Dishonouring Le Corbusier', *Architectural Review*, 2013.

'Outrage: More Vandalism and Neglect at Ronchamp', *Architectural Review*, London, January 2014.

'Nothing is Sacred: Threats to Modern Architecture in India', *Architectural Review*, London, April 2014.

'Protecting Modern Masterpieces in India: a Conversation Between Noted Architectural Historian William J. R. Curtis and an Unknown Indian', *Architecture + Design, An Indian Journal of Architecture*, September 2014.

'The History of a History: Le Corbusier at Work the Genesis of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University', *Massilia 13, Le Corbusier Ultimes pensées/ Derniers projets*, Editions Imbernon, Marseille, 2014.

'The Absurdity of Calling Le Corbusier a Fascist', *Tribune, India*, 2015

'W. Curtis: Hablar de Le Corbusier como un fascista es "totalmente estúpido", Interview with Concha Tejedor, *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona, 2015.

'Abstraction and Light' with a section on the light of Le Corbusier, *ORIS, 101*, Zagreb, 2016. Selection of black and white and coloured photos, paintings and sketches by Curtis.

'Como Picasso, Le Corbusier nos inspira', Interview with Llatzer Moix, *La Vanguardia*, Barcelona, 2016. Including photos by Curtis.

'The Continuing Relevance of Le Corbusier and his Impact on Alvar Aalto', Interview with Jormo Mukala, Editor of ARK, Finnish Architectural Journal, 2016 (on the publication of the second edition of *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*.)

'India, Ancient and Modern: a Conversation with William Curtis', Interview with Apurva Bose Dutta on occasion of celebrations in Chandigarh marking 50 years since death of Le Corbusier and UNESCO recognition of its Capitol as World Heritage *Design Detail*, New Delhi, 2016.

'Keynote', and 'The Capitol as a Cosmic and Political Landscape' in *Le Corbusier Rediscovered: Chandigarh and Beyond*, Eds. Rajnish Wattas and Deepika Gandhi, New Delhi, 2017. With extensive use of Curtis photographs including cover image.

'Snaga Le Corbusiera/ The Power of Le Corbusier ', interview with Ale Vodopivec, *ORIS 106*, Zagreb, 2017.

'Ideas on Architecture and Architectural Ideas.' Published as 'Idées sur l'architecture et idées architecturales', (trans Olivier Gahinet) *Bulletin no. 56 Société Française des Architectes*, 'L'enseignement du projet en danger', May 2020, a total of 32 articles on different aspects of architectural teaching.

'The Anatomy of Intentions. Meditations on the Memorial Complex, *Kampor*, on the Island of Rab, by Edvard Ravnikar (1953)', *Kampor*, Ljubljana and Zagreb, 2022. Book recording student analyses and sketches in on site workshop/ seminar with William J. R. Curtis, Rab, Croatia, Autumn 2017.

'Preserving Modern Architectural Heritage in India: Le Corbusier's Sanskar Kendra Museum of the City of Ahmedabad, 1955', *World Architectural Festival Newsletter*, January 2024. This in turn led to a petition, and to mention in 'Editor's Letter', *Architectural Record*, NY, February 2024.

'Le Corbusier, The Nature of Light', *Le Corbusier, Synthesis of the Arts 1930-1965*, Echelle-1 and Panasonic Shiodome Museum of Art, Tokyo, 2025. Bilingual edition Japanese, English.

FIG.56

Le Corbusier, Sketch of primary solids and ruins of Ancient Rome, *Vers une architecture*, (1923).

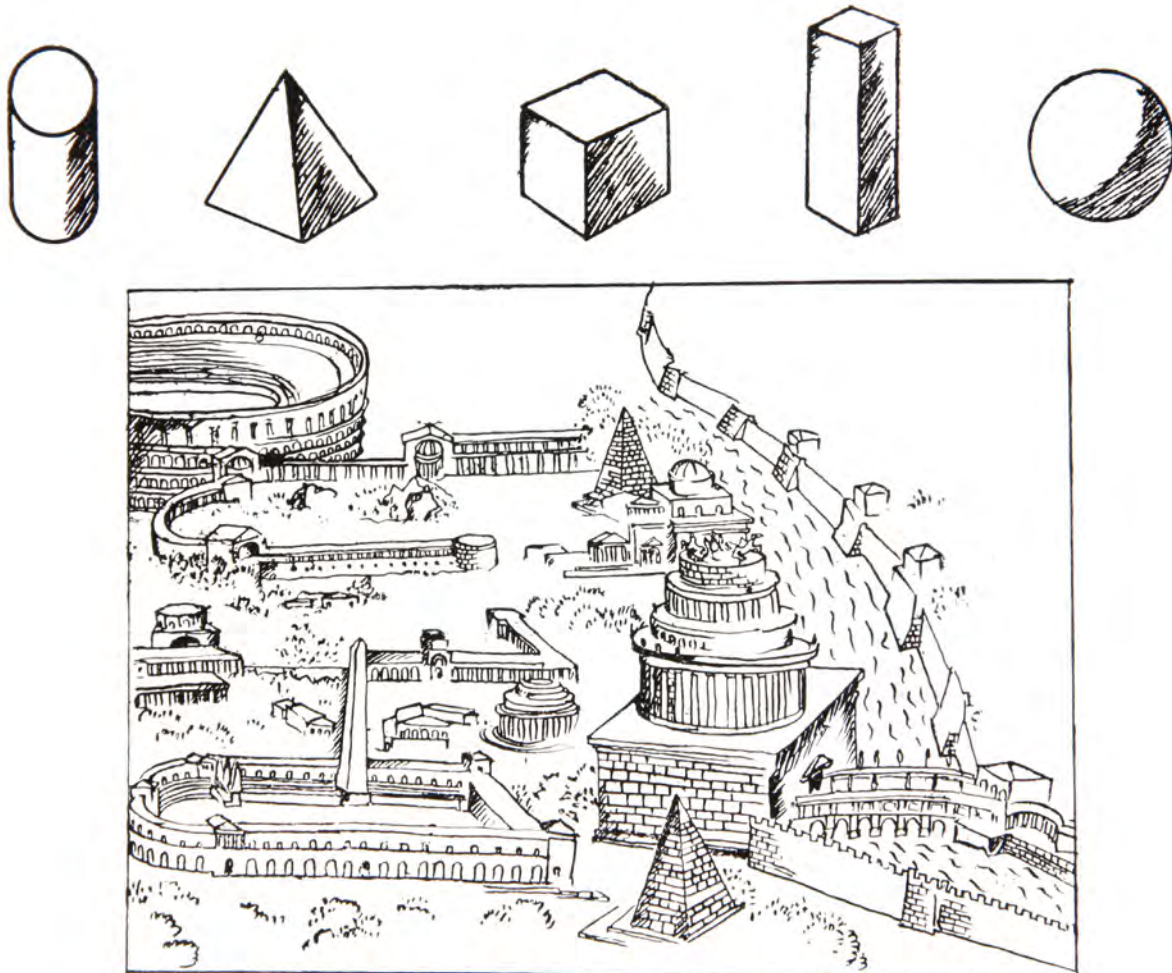




FIG.1
William J. R. Curtis
preparing a slide
lecture on the table
of Le Corbusier's
apartment, Rue
Nungesser et Coli.,
Paris.

WILLIAM J. R. CURTIS

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

William J. R. Curtis is an internationally recognized historian, critic, artist and photographer. He was educated at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London (BA First class Honours 1970) and Harvard University (PhD 1975). A renowned author, he has written monographic books and over sixty articles and exhibition catalogues focused on the work of Le Corbusier (see previous section entitled "William J. R. Curtis' writing on Le Corbusier: an annotated bibliography"). In his writings he has charted the complexity of the modern architectural tradition which he characterizes as a delta with many streams. He has shown how Le Corbusier has functioned as both a mirror and a lens to later architects.

Curtis has also written seminal texts on Louis Kahn, Alvar Aalto, Frank Lloyd Wright, Mies van der Rohe, Alvaro Siza, Jorn Utzon, Alejandro de la Sota, Luis Barragán, Enrique del Moral, Mazrahu Islam, Denys Lasdun, James Stirling, and Edvard Ravnikar as well as essays on many contemporary architects such as Tadao Ando, Frank Gehry, Miralles & Pinós, RCR (Aranda, Pigem, Vilalta), Rafael Moneo, Judith Chaffee, Herzog & de Meuron, Juan Navarro Baldeweg, Raj Rewal and many others. These articles and essays have been published in the world's most important scholarly and architectural journals such as, the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, *Perspecta* (Yale Architectural Journal), *Harvard Architectural Review*, *Architectural Review*, *A + U Japan*, *A + D India*, *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, *Arquitectura Viva*, and *El Croquis*, to name only a small selection,

He is one of the few architectural historians to have dealt with non-western and post-colonial cultures. He takes a special interest in the architectures modern and ancient of the Pre-Columbian Americas and the Indian sub-continent. In addition, he has published historical, critical and theoretical texts on subjects as varied as Leon Battista Alberti, Andrea Palladio, Australian Aboriginal spear-throwers, ancient Indian architecture, the importance of ruins, mud buildings of the Sahara, architectural education, historiography, abstraction in painting, and the meaning of photographs. In all cases, Curtis attempts to dig down to underlying principles.

FIG.2
William J.R. Curtis,
Structures of Light
(Alvar Aalto Academy,
Helsinki, 2007). The
catalogue of an
exhibition of the
author's photographs
in the Alvar Aalto
Museum, Jyväskylä,
Finland, October
2007. The book
contains a text
by the author on
his conception of
photography: 'The
Shadows of Time'.

For over half a century, Curtis has offered a unique perspective in architectural history and criticism. He returns to documents and primary sources and from these, constructs plausible historical narratives. But he also insists upon the importance of direct experience of architecture, and upon sketching, analysis and transformation. For him, the building itself is the primary document, and it requires an in depth 'reading'. Furthermore, Curtis maintains a long historical perspective when interpreting key works of 'modern masters' including of course Le Corbusier. He explores the interactions between modernity and tradition and works in the *longue durée*. For him, the past is ever present.

FIG.3
Abstraction and
light: atmospheres
of the Alhambra.
Reflections in water
in the Patio de los
Arraynes, Court
of the Myrtles,
Nasrid Palaces of
the Alhambra, 14th
century. Photo WJRC,
2012.

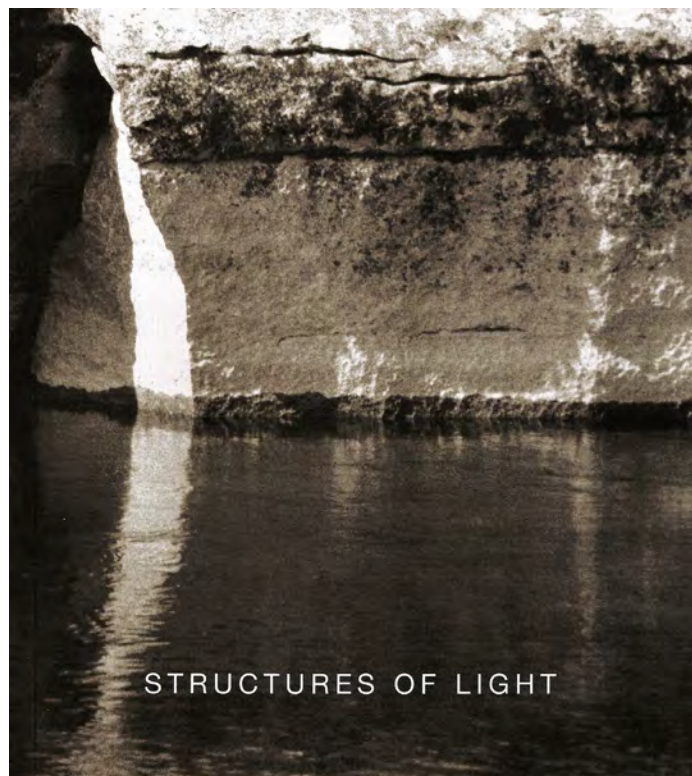




FIG.4
William J. R. Curtis,
miniature 'Storm over
La Gomera', ink on
card, 14.7 x 10.5 cms,
2001.



FIG.5
William J. R. Curtis,
'Mental Landscape',
'Autumn Wind in
Kyoto', wood stain,
pen and ink on thick
paper, 29.5 x
42.0 cms, 2009.



FIG.6
William J. R. Curtis,
'Strata and Clouds',
oil paint on thick
card, 80 x 60 cms,
2007.

In addition to his prolific writing activity Curtis has organized key exhibitions relevant to Le Corbusier such as *Fragments of Invention: the Sketchbooks of Le Corbusier* (1981) or *Structures of Light: Photographs by William J. R. Curtis* (2007). Curtis explores Le Corbusier's architecture through texts but also through his photographs which have been widely published and exhibited. Those of Le Corbusier's Indian works were displayed at the Centre Georges Pompidou Paris in 1987 in the exhibition marking the Centenary 'L'Aventure Le Corbusier'. In 2004 the exhibition 'Architectures du Monde : les photographies de William J. R. Curtis' took place in the

FIG. 6
William J. R. Curtis,
Mental Landscapes/
Paisajes Mentales,
(Círculo de Bellas
Artes, Madrid, 2002).
The catalogue of an
exhibition of the
author's paintings
and drawings in the
Círculo de Bellas
Artes, Madrid, July
2002. The publication
includes the text
'Notas sobre la
abstracción'/'Notes
on Abstraction',
and a poem also by
Curtis: 'Mental
Landscape'.

FIG. 7
The installation
of the exhibition
'Abstracción y
Luz/ Abstraction
and Light' in the
polygonal chapel
of the Palace of
Carlos V of the
Alhambra, September-
November 2015. Some
pieces were affixed
vertically without
frames, floating at a
distance of several
centimetres from
the wall surfaces;
others were shown in
horizontal vitrines
in a windmill
arrangement. Montage
projections of
Curtis's photos
and drawings were
shown in a darkened
chamber to one side
The installation
was designed and
installed by Juan
Domingo Santos.

Centre Méridionale de l'Architecture et de la Ville' Toulouse and in 2005 in 'Le Forum de l'urbanisme' in Nice. In 2007, 'Structures of Light: Photographs of William J. R. Curtis' was shown in the Alvar Aalto Museum, Jyväskylä, Finland, accompanied by a book of the same title introduced by an essay 'The Shadows of Time'

Curtis is also an artist and his paintings and drawings known as 'Mental Landscapes' have been exhibited and published internationally, notably in the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Helsinki (2000), the Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid (2002), the Dessa Gallery, Ljubljana (2001), and the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University (2004). In 2015 a retrospective of his artistic work was held in the Palace of Carlos V of the Alhambra, Granada with the title 'Abstracción y Luz/ Abstraction and Light: Paintings, Drawings, Photographs by William J.R. Curtis' accompanied by a book with a Preface written by Alvaro Siza. In effect this charted Curtis's creative universe in diverse media including his travel sketches and abstract miniatures, as well as paintings, coloured photographs of architecture through the ages (including the Alhambra), and black and white ones of natural phenomena referred to as 'Cosmologies'. For Curtis, abstraction is a means for distilling multiple levels of association and meaning and he refers to his paintings as 'Mental Landscapes'. He is interested in both the visible aspects of the natural world and the invisible forces and presences which underly them.

A superb teacher who has a profound didactic and pedagogic teaching style, he has taught the history of architecture, theories of design and architectural



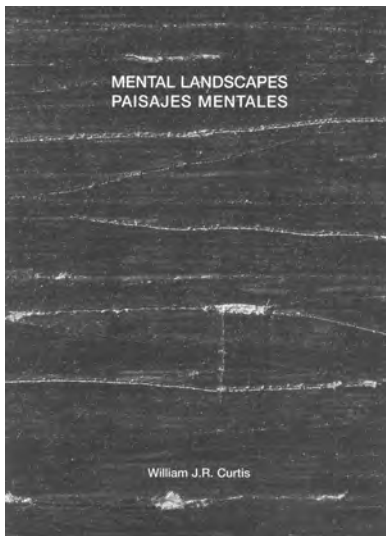
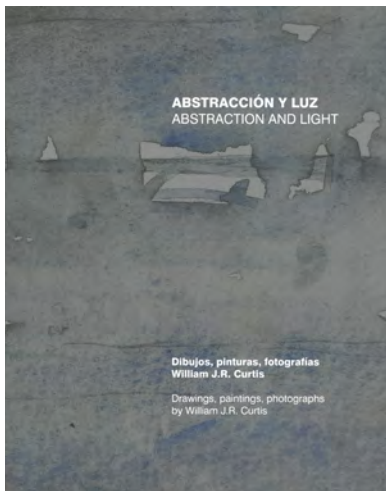


FIG.8
William J. R. Curtis,
Abstracción y Luz/
Abstraction and
Light: Paintings,
Drawings, Photographs
by William J.R.
Curtis, Alhambra and
Generalife, 2015.
Book accompanying
major retrospective
of Curtis's creative
work in several
media in the Palace
of Carlos V, the
Alhambra, Granada,
September-November
2015. The book
includes texts by
Curtis on his ideas
on abstraction,
photography, drawing
etc and by other
authors reflecting on
his work including
Juhani Pallasmaa,
Eduard Sekler, Juan
Navarro Baldeweg and
Juan Domingo Santos.
The Preface was
written by Alvaro
Siza and the book was
designed by Carmen
Moreno Alvarez.

FIG.9
William and
Catherine Curtis,
garden in Cajarc: a
poetic landscape for
meditation composed
of platforms, hedges,
cypress trees and
rough masonry walls,
distilling memories
of faraway ruins
yet embedded in its
place.

studios at many universities around the world including Harvard University (Dept of Visual and Environmental Studies and Graduate School of Design), the Architectural Association and the University of Cambridge where he was Slade Professor of Fine Art. Curtis has lectured far and wide in Europe, the Americas, Australia, India and the Far East.

He is committed to visual education in a broad sense and insists upon architecture itself as a mode of thought in the realm of spaces and symbolic forms. He engages with visual thinking, spatial imagination and architectural ideas. In his historical writing he employs an integrated approach which takes into account the many forces which influence the shape of buildings: formal, functional, symbolic, stylistic, typological, social, geographical, political etc. He has always been interested in the processes of creation, the anatomy of intentions and complex layers of meaning.

FIG.10
Catherine and William
Curtis straddling
the equator line
in Ecuador, Autumn
2022. A partnership
now fifty years long.



Curtis has received several international awards over the years, including the Founder's Award of the Society of Architects (USA) for his seminal article 'Ideas of Structure and the Structure of Ideas: Le Corbusier's, Pavillon Suisse 1930 -31', *JSAH*, 1981; the Critic's Award of the CICA (Comité International des Critiques d'Architecture), 1985 for his critique of post-modernism 'Principle versus Pastiche: Perspectives on Some Recent Classicisms' (*Architectural Review*, 1984); the Book Award of the CICA, 1985 (for *Modern Architecture Since 1900*); the 1999 Gold Medal of the Tau Sigma Delta Honor Society in Architecture and Allied Arts (USA); a 50 year Commemoration Medal from the Museum of Finnish Architecture in 2006; the Golden Award for Global Contribution to Architecture (India) in 2016 in part for his defense of modern architectural patrimony in India, including the works of Le Corbusier. In 2017 the 2nd revised edition of Curtis's book *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms* received a Citation for Excellence from the Bruno Zevi Book Award of the CICA. In September 2022 Curtis was awarded the 2022 *Médaille de l'académie d'architecture*, France, for his contributions to the understanding and dissemination of architecture.

Curtis has lived in France for decades. He visits and revisits Le Corbusier's buildings constantly and regards them almost as 'old friends'. He has also spent long periods in India where he has passionately defended Le Corbusier's works in Chandigarh and Ahmedabad against vandalism.