



Le Corbusier. *Papier collé* for
Le Poème de l'angle droit.
Page 109. Wash and *papiers*
collés on paper, dated 1.1.48,
48,5x37 cm.

LE CORBUSIER IN ALESSANDRO FONTI'S "HISTORICAL PROJECT"

Maddalena Mameli

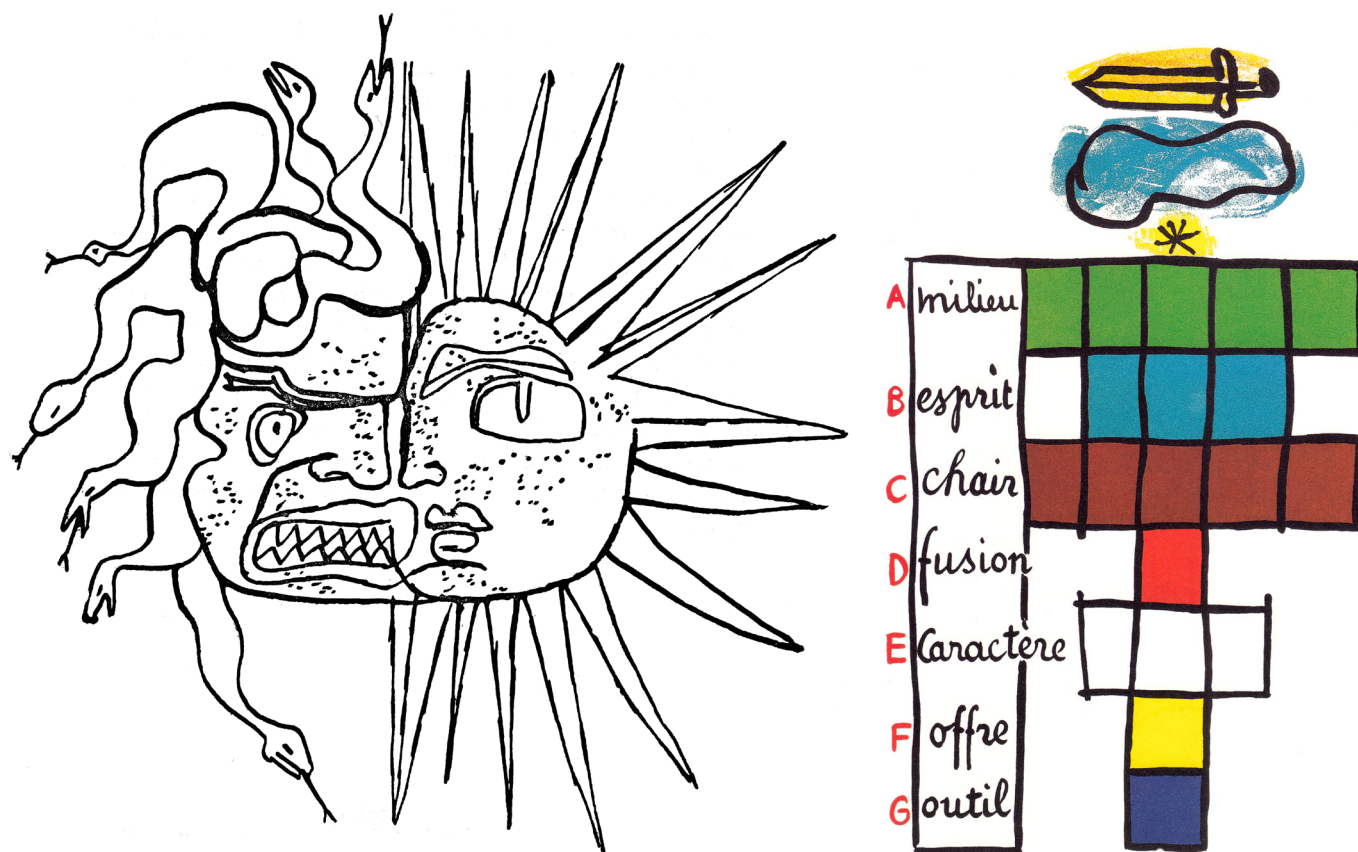
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An all-round intellectual, a scholar and professor in the history of Contemporary Architecture, Alessandro Fonti had been a teacher at the IUAV University of Venice since 1981 when, in 2003, he came to Alghero to found the new Faculty of Architecture. Developing the teachings of Manfredo Tafuri, of whom he had been a pupil, his research developed in breadth and depth together with his work as a lecturer, in which he delivered original and up-to-date lessons: Vienna and Otto Wagner, Barcelona and Gaudi, the new arts and modernisms, the artistic and architectural avant-garde, the English neo-avant-garde, American architecture, the Community of Adriano Olivetti, up to the present day. In Alghero, he directed the Workshop on the History of Metropolitan Architecture (LABSAM), which researched the history of architecture with regard to the concept of the metropolis, through the analysis of artefacts composing network systems, referable to the well-established categories of the history of Western architecture, as categories of objects referable to a common symbolic and functional matrix (*meter polis* = mother city). In the sense of Alberti's *QUID TUM* and against any "historical perspective", the workshop's approach to research was based on the radical assumption of the principle of non-objectivity, which defines history as a project to be built, a historical project. But the main subjects of his research were first Paul Klee and then Le Corbusier. Expanding an idea by Tafuri, he imagined for both the existence of a "discreet" historical avant-garde,

"necessarily individual, with a post-classical language once again based on a universal mythology, human, like classical mythology, but individual and discreet as it is 'private', absolutely aware of the impossibility of any collective mythology other than as religious or ideological 'delirium' and of the associated inevitability of the compulsion to practice in a Freudian way 'private' mythologies (Oedipus, Jocasta, Electra ...) i.e. mythologies lacking the universal dimension and forced into the private, individual and psychological dimension, since 'the gods have become diseases' (Jung) and have been relegated to the individual unconscious or identified with Society, through a process defined by Roberto Calasso as 'religious pseudomorphosis of the social' which, by reaction, has given birth to the entire literature of the last two centuries, necessarily a-social and strictly absolute. Thus the historical avant-gardes in the visual and plastic arts would seem to be merely a delayed effect of the same need to invent languages capable of opening up again to the dimension of the Other. In this dynamic, Klee and Le Corbusier's works-lives share the common feature of being the authors' own private mythologies, the objects of visual and plastic representation, intertwining life and work, subject and object, in a single performance where the sum of the works corresponds to the narration of private mythology, the Work to the representation of the drama of life. Thus the Wagnerian ideal of *gesamtkunstwerk*, based on the possibility of inventing a collective mythology, is replaced by the 'natural' invention of a private mythology as the foundation of a new universality, a linguistic totality, perhaps according to the difference that Furio Jesi had outlined between 'technicalised myth' and 'genuine myth' as the only and opposite possibilities of experiencing myth in our times".¹

While Fonti defined and clarified the figure of Paul Klee in his book entitled *Paul Klee. Angels 1913-1940* published in 2005, his research on Le Corbusier has evolved constantly since the 1990s, fed by studies, writings, readings, discussions, research at the archives of the *Fondation Le Corbusier*, repeated visits and direct experiences of the architect's works, stays at the *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille, the *Bourse pour chercher senois* of the FLC and the residence at 24NC in Paris. The article on Le Corbusier and Ariadne is an important milestone, brimming with suggestions for further research, as it enables us to understand Le Corbusier's evolution towards its key post-war architecture. Starting with the *Unité* of Marseille, a synthesis of standards, industry, harmony, order, but also experimentation with *béton brut*, raw concrete; moving towards the architecture of the Ronchamp Chapel, "full of grace" and history, with the inexpressible forms of the acoustic space, the impluvium and the "sign of the bull"; to the geopolitical urban plan for Chandigarh, the founding city and new capital of Punjab and of the world's greatest democracy.

1. Extract from Alessandro Fonti, *L'avanguardia discreta*, unpublished.



At the same time, his research on the primitive Mediterranean mythology highlights as yet unexplored aspects of Le Corbusier's architectural language and ethical world, innovates the interpretation of the classicist/modernist character of the architect's work and corrects in a neo-humanistic sense the solipsist and self-referential readings of his post-war work. Le Corbusier's neo-humanism follows in the footsteps of the *Divine Proportion* in the Italian Renaissance by Leon Battista Alberti and of the Golden Section in classical Greece, but has its foundation in Crete, in the labyrinth of the Minotaur, Ariadne and Dionysus. Thus we can now decipher in his architecture, sculpture and painting the ineffability of Le Corbusier's post-war poetic language which, expressed in the harmonic dimension of the Modulor, finds a fresh synthesis between the rational and harmonic Apollonian spirit and the ecstatic and creative Dionysian spirit, both essential components of works of art: "and behold: Apollo could not live without Dionysus", wrote Nietzsche in his *Birth of the Tragedy*.

"Minoan-Cretan mythology permeates the entire 'plastic' work (painting, sculpture, architecture) of Le Corbusier consciously, if not explicitly, since the early 1950s, from the project of the exhibition of his own paintings renamed '*Taureaux*' at the Tate Gallery in London. In the famous filmed interview made by Jacques Barsac in 1987, Le Corbusier talked about the value of instinctive drawing, of the immediate graphic sketch as a knowledge that inhabits the hand before thought, 'a powerful force' that starting from the 1930s he depicted in many paintings and drawings in the form of a female angel with a goat's head, a Dionysian female figure with the *main ouverte*, published on the cover of the first edition of *Poésie sur Alger* in the background of a sketch for the plan *Obus*. This figure became in time for Le Corbusier an 'icon' of femininity, which he identified with his wife (Icons=Yvonne); *Iconostase* is the name of the index-graphic



To Alessandro Fonti,
Angel Droit and
Angelus Novus

FIG. 1
Le Corbusier. "Transcender le
raisonnable!",
La Maison des hommes (1942).

FIG. 2
Le Corbusier.
Le Poème de l'angle droit (1955).

FIG. 3
Paul Klee. Angelus Novus (1920).

form of *Le poème de l'angle* (angel) droit. We can now demonstrate that that figure represents Le Corbusier's 'spirit-guide' and synthesizes his entire private mythology, shaping his theory and work in the sign of Daedalus, Icarus, Theseus, Dionysian Ariadne and the 'Birth of the Minotaur', Le Corbusier's last and unfinished graphic project".²

Fonti's analysis confirms once again Le Corbusier's fundamental contribution to the history of 20th-century architecture. But what is even more fascinating and interesting is that, like in all Fonti's research, the investigation of history through the reading of Le Corbusier's Work offers us a key to understanding the "short century" and our History:

"In a historical sense, the widespread attention in the post-war period to pre-classical mythologies and archaeologies marks the need - after 'Auschwitz' - to find a collective mythology different from and preceding the classical one, which can offer a basis for the neo-humanism so essential for the new world order embodied by the ideal of the United Nations, since classical Greek-Roman mythology had allowed an anti-humanistic use of its contents, formal expressions and ideals by Nazi-Fascism".³

Author

Maddalena Mameli is an architect, phd in architecture and researcher in history of contemporary architecture. She carried out research and teaching in the architecture schools of the universities of Alghero and Cagliari, she has been fellow of the Fondation Le Corbusier and wrote the book *Le Corbusier and Constantino Nivola*. New York 1946-1953.

2. Extract from Alessandro Fonti, *Unpublished Writings*.

3. Extract from Alessandro Fonti, *Unpublished Writings*.