

STUDIES ON LE CORBUSIER

Year LII, number 153, September-December 2017

Le Corbusier and the Drawings from the «Voyage d'Orient»

Bruno Reichlin

In the wake of the many studies dedicated to the research, the «educational voyages» and early projects of Ch.-E. Jeanneret, this essay proposes a contribution to understanding the formation of the architect's sensitivity, analytical prowess and spatial self-awareness. The claim is that It experienced, represented and described space in one of two ways: as an «interior» defined and articulated by the elements that bound it and as an «exterior», crossed by «sightlines» focused on emerging elements. This two-fold determination of space, which does not exclude others, was encountered by Jeanneret in a number of very early writings by A.E. Brinckmann, which he commented on and agreed with; he was undoubtedly aided here by the previous readings – more or less investigated by Sitte, Henrici, Theodor Fischer and others in relation to «concave» «internal» space, and by Auguste Choisy in relation to the «convex» spatiality of «sightlines». The Orient, Greece and Rome together with Pompei, were an occasion for exercising these methods of perceiving space, both static and in movement – again suggested by Brinckmann. Like the latter, Jeanneret made no distinction in principle between interior and exterior space, and his early projects offer evident proof of the numerous spatial registers and the intertextual depth acquired during his numerous travels.

«ENTRE DEUX»: Le Corbusier the «arch-painter»

Giuliano Gresleri

Architect or painter? One or the other, or both together? The discriminating is 1917, year with some hope for Europe and also for Jeanneret, who, just arrived in Paris, «does not know what to do». Yet it has already designed the house DOM-INO, the most «modern» of his architectural creations until the 1930s and that will remain in his design program a constant reference point to work on. Splitting in two his working day as a monk (morning-painting, afternoon-project) it is a decision taken that year, when he still works in the Rue de Belzunce studio before moving to rue Jacob. The choice had dramatic aspects between a vocation or another. Until 1910 he told he had been relentlessly pushed toward architecture, but the *Cahier de dessin* number 10 shows exactly the opposite. The present article speaks about this album, that has never been really studied until today.

E-1027 and the «drôle de guerre»

Tim Benton

The interventions of Le Corbusier in the villa designed by Eileen Gray and Jean Badovici have been much dis-

cussed, stimulated by a frequently reprinted article – *War on Architecture* or *Battle Lines* – written by Beatriz Colomina. This article was one of the bricks in the feminist movement intended to valorise the work of women in the arts. Strangely, Colomina's article deals hardly at all with Eileen Gray and her magnificent achievements. Instead, Colomina's aim is to demonstrate that Le Corbusier made an aggressive and personal attack on Gray and sought to dominate her work and hide her authorship. I do not try to excuse Le Corbusier's act of painting seven murals in E-1027 between 1938 and 1939. I interpret this as an egotistical act of a frustrated man at a very difficult moment in his career. Rather, I try to correct the various errors in Colomina's piece and question some of the assumptions she makes about Le Corbusier's personal relationship with Gray. I also question her argument about Le Corbusier's obsession with Algerian women and Delacroix's *Les Femmes d'Alger* which she assumes is at the basis of the monochrome mural painting *Three personalities*. This was based on a curious article by the Egyptian painter Samir Rafi which I analyse in some detail. My purpose in this piece is to appeal to the documentation in order to set some limits to what can and cannot be said, leaving much room for honest speculation.

Entretien (interview) with Salvatore Bertocchi

Caroline Maniaque

Triangulating the evidence of archival documents with oral testimony is a fundamental tool of the historian. Meeting the mason Salvatore Bertocchi in 1986 was a breakthrough in my research on Le Corbusier. This was a precious opportunity to understand not only how Le Corbusier interacted with his craftsmen on site but also to find out more about Le Corbusier's use of materials and systems of construction. This was a breakthrough for me in comprehending Le Corbusier's complex approach to craftsmanship and industrial production. Completing the process, however, required testing this oral testimony against the fantastically rich documentation available at the Fondation Le Corbusier. The interview took place at Salvatore Bertocchi's home. Bertocchi was 65 years old at the time.

Between Words and Objects: Corbu's Difficult Legacy

Fulvio Irace

In 1966 the Italian architect and critic Ernesto N. Rogers portrayed Corbusier as the last Renaissance man, emphasizing him as an example to be followed in order to avoid the danger of stagnating rationalism. For Rogers Le Corbusier was a character in full relief, able to resolve his own contradictions in a unitary vision aimed to ensure the passage from old to new regime. In Rogers' interpretation the Le Corbusier portrayed by historians fully corresponded to the one loved by architects, without blurs or dark zones of dissent. In 2015 – fifty years

after his death – the same question – «Que reste-t-il?» – has been put, but the answers have proved to be a test for checking the actualities of his heritage today. From being an hero he has been turned into a villain and his whole contribution to modernity has been sued for damages as an evidence of a crime against humanity. The anniversary celebrations became the set for a drama where different ways of producing history have been played. The essay analyses these positions, focusing on the contradictions between a sort of circled history for specialist and a popular Vulgate for ordinary people, while the problem of conservation of the body of his work highlights the paradox of relevant grey areas in the knowledge of its material consistency.

A Circular Restoration: The Villa Savoye, 1970-1986

Susanna Caccia Gherardini

The first restoration works having been barely finished at the end of the 1970s, Villa Savoye took again its path towards being ruin. By then acknowledged as National Monument, after a long battle for its safeguard started at least twenty years earlier, the villa was entrusted to the «architect en chef» Ivan Gury. Successor of Jean Dubuisson, appointed for the «remise en état» that began in the mid-1960s, for over 15 years Gury confronted himself with a building paradoxically abandoned once again. The problems to be solved were always the same and have been dealt with several times by all the architects in charge, also by J. L. Veret, supervisor of the restoration after Gury. The protracted works are those aiming at resolving technological and construction defects that force the villa to be transformed into an everlasting work-site. What was being created is the scene where the increasingly numerous actors of the restoration of authorial architectures have to confront each other. Actors who are no longer just art and architecture historians or architects, as in the years of the first works by Dubuisson, but people exemplary of a progressive enrichment of knowledge, disciplines and specializations.

Density: A Criteria for Restoring Le Corbusier's Interior Spaces?

Roberta Grignolo

In recent decades, there have been remarkable developments in the history of modern interiors. More attention has consequently been paid to their conservation. The requirements to provide legibility of specific features of a 20th century interior space must be determined on a case-to-case basis. Nonetheless, can more general criteria be found to guide one in customising conservation strategies for specific cases? The concept of «density» is found in the work of the English curator Peter Thornton. The term is used to describe the physical arrangement of interior spaces, i.e. the amount of furniture, objectsù ecc., but it also refers to a broader dimension than simple bodily perception: that of «anthropologie culturelle», that also includes cultural conditioning. The purpose of the essay is to adopt the concept of «density» (and its multiple facets) as a tool to read some of the interiors designed by Le Corbusier, and

to evaluate its usefulness in describing the nature of the relationships that form between the constituent elements of spaces. Case-studies were selected as being representative of several different «types» of Le Corbusier interiors. They include: Maison Blanche, Maison La Roche, Double House at the Weissenhofsiedlung, The Maisons Jaoul and the Appartement-Atelier in Paris, currently under restoration. If the concept of «density» can be used to understand what builds up space, it can also be valuable both in planning conservation interventions as well as in defining long-term management strategies for modern interiors.

Models in Action. Techniques, Objects and Subjects in the Work of Le Corbusier

Miguel Ángel de la Cova

Le Corbusier would supervise more than two hundred models of his projects from the modelling of his first house in La Chaux-de-Fonds, to his collage of the Venice Hospital. This research material acquires still more intensity if it is analysed not only as an architectural representation, but also as the production of a plastic artist. The model, as opposed to the sketch, is a shared creation space. Le Corbusier saw it through the hands of others, craftsmen and collaborators, who would contribute values to the project, in undertakings similar to those made with Joseph Savina or Costantino Nivola. In the model, the architect-artist would find a mediator between the two dimensions and the volume, a lesson learnt from his teacher, Charles L'Eplattenier, and would undergo a metamorphosis as his plastic interests were modified: drawing and model go hand in hand. But beyond the geometry, the choice of materials, the method of accomplishment and the scale of the model, were decisions related to the action of constructing the object in itself, in which these plastic values were transferred to the architecture which they represented. Thus converged a double mastery of materials and forms, that of the architect and that of the craftsman.

A Time for a Building, a Time for an Author: Studying the Villa Savoye

Carlo Olmo

Looking back at a book one has written is both a difficult and rare exercise. This essay offers readers a reflection emphasised to some degree in the book *La villa Savoye. icona, rovina, restauro*: a reflection on the diverse periods of time afforded a work and its author by their historiographic, artistic and professional reception. This difference results in the overlapping of stories, that radicalises polysemies, that often separates collective memory and architectural historiography. While the villa moves along the itinerary of the parabola so dear to Paul Ricœur, the reflection on the author emphasises the document, philology taken to its extreme, drawing as the primary source of the history of architecture. This reflection brings into play in an increasingly more invasive manner the spaces of memory and restoration as a parabola that recounts a definition that reposes two essential themes in the history of the twentieth century: the search for an origin and reality, in the form of something material.