Le Corbusier and the Parthenon as Rhetorical Form

This paper examines how Le Corbusier uses the Parthenon rhetorically in Vers Une Architecture (Toward an Architecture). This happens in three ways; first as rhetorical ekphrasis, in the literal and poetic description of the Parthenon; second, as a means of rhetorical validation positioning the Parthenon as an historical ideal; and third, as rhetorical image. This paper will argue that it is Le Corbusier's understanding of Plasticity that provides coherence to each of these rhetorical modes in Vers une architecture, setting each of these apart from their earlier articulations in articles published previously in Le Corbusier's journal L'Esprit Nouveau.

Keywords: *Le Corbusier, C-E Jeanneret, Parthenon, Voyage d'Orient*

Introduction

This paper examines how Le Corbusier uses the Parthenon rhetorically in *Vers une architecture* (Toward an Architecture).[1] This happens in three ways; first as the focus of an ekphrasis, second, as a means of rhetorical validation; and third, as a rhetorical image. This paper will argue that it is Le Corbusier's understanding of Plasticity that provides coherence to each of these rhetorical modes in *Vers une architecture*, setting each of these apart from their earlier articulations in articles published previously in Le Corbusier's journal *L'Esprit Nouveau.*[2] Plasticity as defined by Malabou and Derrida is the capacity to give and receive form.[3] This is consistent with Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's rhetorical presentation of the Parthenon. Le Corbusier's first experience of the Parthenon was in 1911 during his second major excursion outside of his native Switzerland during what he later termed his *Voyage d'Orient.* Later in his life he edited notes that he had written about his journey in 1911 publishing these in 1966. This provides a unique opportunity for scholars of Le Corbusier. What can one learn from Le Corbusier's presentation and re-presentation of the Parthenon in *Vers une architecture*? What did he mean by Plasticity and why did he use the Parthenon as a primary example of Plasticity? Why did he not make this the primary theme of his work? This paper will address these questions in several parts. Following an introduction of the primary theme is a brief review of the historiography of Jeanneret/Le Corbusier. After this, the paper will examine Le

[1]Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris, 1923); and *Toward an Architecture*, trans. John Goodman, introd. Jean-Louis Cohen (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2008); and *Towards a New Architecture by Le Corbusier; translated from the thirteenth French edition with an introduction by Frederick Etchells* (London: John Rodker, 1927)

[2]Amédée Ozenfant, Paul Dermée and Le Corbusier, *L'Esprit Nouveau* vols. 1 -28 (Paris: *Éditions de L' Esprit Nouveau,* 1920-25), and *L'Esprit Nouveau* vols. 1 -28 (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968-69), and the online searchable reprint of vols. 1 – 28 in the Architectural Periodicals Database at www.architecturalperiodicals.com.Physical, and vols. 1 – 28 are available at the Bibliotheque National Français at www.bnf.fr

[3]Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, Preface by Jacques Derrida, translated by Lisabeth During (London and New York: Routledge, 2005) 8

Corbusier's use of ekphrasis. The next section will examine his use of the Parthenon as a means of validation and as visual rhetorical material.

In 1911, on the day of his return to his home in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland following his *Voyage d'Orient,* Charles-Édouard Jeanneret penned a letter to his confidant William Ritter. He writes, "Dear Sir, The last day of a condemned man. I haven't read it, but I will live it tomorrow. I will go and revel in the Triumph of Death." He continues, "death is all around me." [4] He rejects Orcagna, the trecento artist who inspired him earlier. "The terror of Orcagna is grandiose and it strikes a chord in me." [5] He calls the history of art "fumier" and says that "all other art histories are rubbish." [6] Then he mocks his mentor and teacher L'Eplattenier. "L'Eplattenier is hiring a good mason tomorrow. We will make art."[7]

If this letter is any indication, Jeanneret was not well on November 1, 1911. Ritter immediately responds in a letter dated two days later. He dismisses Jeanneret's references to his own death. He advises Jeanneret that he has put his youth behind him and provides him with encouragement, "It's over, youth! – I received your funeral oration. Thanks! It is superb, it is brave! Well done! – Youth is over, but work is about to begin, My friend! Courage!"[8]

Woven into Jeanneret's shocking comments reflecting his state of mind are reflections on his recent travel experience. He writes, "I therefore obeyed my destiny, when I left everything, to go there at all costs."[9] Despite his despondence, in the same paragraph he writes something that indicates the direction that he would take in the following years in his development as an architect. "I am crazy about the white color, of the cube, of the sphere, of the cylinder and of the pyramid and of the all-united disk and of a great empty expanse."[10] His interest in cubes, spheres, cylinders, pyramids, and discs would reemerge later in the sketch associated with his commentary on Rome published in *L'Esprit Nouveau* and again republished in *Vers une architecture*. Jeanneret's interest in three dimensional spatial volume is evident from a very early age and is essential to his artistic development over the next decades. It is certainly evident in the sketches he produced during his visit to the Parthenon in 1911.

In a letter written to L'Eplattenier several days earlier on October 28, 1911, Jeanneret indicates that he would prefer to not lodge with his parents upon his return to La Chaux-de-Fonds. He then shows some of the despondence that he

[4]Dumont, Jean-Marie, *Le Corbusier Lettres a ses Maitres III: Le Corbusier William Ritter Correspondance Croisee 1910-1915* (Paris: Éditions Du Linteau, 2014) 144, 145. [*"Cher Monsieur, Le dernier jour d'un condamne. Je ne l'ai pas lu, mais je le vivrai demain. J'irai me repaitre du Triomphe de la Mort." "de la mort j'en ai plein tout moi."*]

[5]Ibid. [*"La terreur d'Orcagna est grandiose et elle touche en moi une corde sensible."]*

[6]Ibid., 147. [*"Tout les autres des histoires de l'art sont du fumier*."]

[7]Ibid. [*"L'Eplattenier embauche des demain un bon macon. Nous ferrons de l'art!"]*

[8]Ibid., 149. [*"ni-c'est fini, la jeunesse! – J'ai recu votre oraison funebre. Merci! Elle est superbe, elle est vaillante! Bravo! – C'est fini la jeunesse, mais c'est l'ourvre qui va commencer, "mon ami! Courage!"*]

[9]Ibid., 145. [*"J'obeissais donc a mon destin, quand je quittai tout, pour aller la-bas a tout prix."*]

[10]Ibid. [*"Je Suis fou le couleur blanche, de cube, de la sphere, du cylinder et de la pryramide et du disque tout uni et d'une grande etendue vide."*]

indicates in his letter to Ritter penned a few days later. “I had my hours of twilight and disillusionment. Italy makes me look at the Orient. Italy is still a myth.”[11] What he meant by myth is difficult to ascertain from this brief passage. The way he links Italy to the east is equally vague. What did he mean by myth and how is it that Italy makes him look to the east? Was he referencing Ancient Greece?

This paper examines one part of Le Corbusier’s early life experience, that of his encounter with the Parthenon. At this stage in his life, he was still known by his given name, Charles-Édouard Jeanneret. He would take on the moniker Le Corbusier in the early 1920s, a choice of identity indicative of the scope of his artistic and personal development. An important part of this development was how Jeanneret from a very age responded emotionally to buildings, places, sculpture, painting, landscapes, and complex spatial environments. Jeanneret/Le Corbusier not only described the Parthenon, he engaged with it. He emoted through it. In some ways it is almost unfair to use the pronoun “it” when writing about Jeanneret/Le Corbusier’s relationship to and with the Parthenon, as the building and its setting, the Acropolis, was like a living being for him. His description of the Parthenon’s placement on the Acropolis is visceral; “… the asymmetrical massing of the buildings creates an intense rhythm. The spectacle is massive, elastic, charged, devastating in its acuity, dominating.”[12] There is much to discuss here, but before moving forward to the three main sections of this paper, there are a few historiographical items that need to be clarified. These will provide important context and clarity for what is a very complex history.

Historiography

Le Corbusier wrote, drew, designed, and painted prolifically. His archive exists primarily at the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris. But much of his work exists in private collections and museums. The historiography of his written material referencing the Parthenon is characteristically complex. He visited the Parthenon during his *Voyage d’Orient.* This was the term he used in 1966 to describe his 1911 journey from Berlin through the Balkans, to Istanbul, on to Greece, then northward through Italy, and then home to Switzerland. In 1966 he published his reflections on his experience along with sketches from 1911 in a book titled *Le Voyage d’Orient.* This means that the *Voyage d’Orient* can refer to the 1911 journey itself and or the publication from 1966. As with many parts of Le Corbusier’s life there are multiple wrinkles to this history. The 1966 publication was based on Jeanneret’s notes of 1914 in which he recorded his impressions from three years earlier. To add further complexity, Jeanneret published a few travel synopses around the time of his return to Switzerland late in 1911. The 1914 notes were not published verbatim by Le Corbusier but edited by him in 1966. This means that the context for the publication *Voyage d’Orient*

[11]C-E Jeanneret Letter to L’Eplattenier, October 28, 1911. [*“Jai eu mes heures de crepuscule et de desillusion. L'Italie me fait regarder l'orient. L'italie est encore et aussi un mythe.”*]
[12]Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture,* Goodman translation, 2008, 115

was based to a great extent on Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's memories of his travel experience. Ivan Zaknic provides an English translation of Le Corbusier's text for *Voyage d'Orient.*[13] He also provides an important contribution by comparing the notes of 1914 with the material published in 1966. There is a recent article by Jacobé Huet that also analyses the 1966 text as compared to Jeanneret's earlier notes.[14]

Le Corbusier's impression of the Parthenon also comes to us through yet another source, his manifesto *Vers une architecture.* Le Corbusier published *Vers une architecture* in 1923. Most of the chapters were published previously in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, an arts and public affairs journal that Le Corbusier edited along with Amédée Ozenfant, and Paul Dermée.

In 1927 Frederick Etchells published an English language translation of *Vers une architecture.* This is known as the Etchells translation. The 1927 edition is credited with introducing Le Corbusier to the English-speaking world. Yet, the Etchells translation presents several issues. First, is that Etchells translated the title as "Towards a New Architecture." The word "new" does not exist in the original French title. Second, is that Etchells translated the French word "volume" as "mass" changing the emphasis of the original text from a study of architectural space to one of physical structure. The Etchells translation remained unchallenged until 2008 with the publication of a new translation by John Goodman with an introductory essay by the late Jean-Louis Cohen. Cohen's introduction identifies these and other translation issues that exist in the Etchells translation.[15]

An original French publication of *Vers Une Architecture* exists in the Bibliotheque Francais and is available in digital format. The full 28 volume collection is available online at the Architectural Periodicals Database; architecturalperiodicals.com. Physical copies referenced in this research of the 28 volume set exist in the Reyerson Burnham Library at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Letters written to and from Jeanneret/Le Corbusier provide further insights. These include letters to and from his parents, to and from his mentor Auguste Perret, to and from his personal confidant William Ritter, and letters written to his teacher and mentor Charles L'Eplattenier. Letters written from L'Eplattenier to Jeanneret/Le Corbusier are lost. The other letters mentioned here exist in the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris. They have also been published in three volumes by Marie-Jeanne Dumont.[16]

[13]Le Corbusier, *Journey to the East by Le Corbusier;* edited and annotated by Ivan Zaknic; translated by Ivan Zaknic with John Gery and Nicole Pertuiset (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007) originally published as *Le Voyage d'Orient* (Paris: Forces Vives, 1966)

[14]Jacobé Huet, "Prospective and Retrospective: Le Corbusier's Twofold *Voyage d'Orient*." *Muqarnas*, vol. 38, 2021, 291–330

[15]Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture,* Goodman translation, 2008, 48-49

[16] See Fondation Le Corbusier Archive and Jean-Marie Dumont, *Le Corbusier Lettres a Auguste Perret I* (Paris: Éditions Du Linteau, 2002), and *Le Corbusier Lettres a ses Maitres II: Lettres a Charles L'Eplattenier* (Paris: Éditions Du Linteau, 2006), and *Le Corbusier Lettres a ses Maitres III: Le Corbusier William Ritter Correspondance Croisee 1910-1915* (Paris: Éditions Du Linteau, 2014)

The archival material consisting of letters and drawings exist mostly in the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris in a digital format. The originals are not accessible as they are located in storage in locations around Paris and not readily made available to researchers. Many of Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's drawings and paintings are in private collections and not available to the public.

Le Corbusier's rhetorical form is addressed in M. Christine Boyer's *Le Corbusier: Homme de Lettres.* Boyer presents an analysis of Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's written work beginning with his early letters.[17] She makes several important observations about Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's rhetorical form. She distinguishes between the use of analogy and the use of metaphor emphasizing Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's use of analogy in his manifestos.[18] This is a very useful distinction, but Jeanneret uses both analogy and metaphor, particularly when he writes as Le Corbusier. "A house is a machine for living in" is a metaphor. Images of airplanes and grain silos are analogies. Tim Benton addresses Le Corbusier's rhetoric in his book *The Rhetoric of Modernism: Le Corbusier as a Lecturer.* Benton focuses on Le Corbusier's speaking engagements from the mid-nineteen twenties onward.[19]

A full review of the secondary literature on Jeanneret/Le Corbusier would take up the entirety of this article. But there are several texts that should be mentioned in general. These include H. Allen Brooks' book on Le Corbusier's formative years, Charles Jencks' *Le Corbusier and the Continual Revolution in Architecture*, and Geoffrey Baker's, *Le Corbusier: The Creative Search, the Formative Years of Charles- Édouard Jeanneret.*[20] Each of these include reference to his early development and his *Voyage d'Orient.* In addition to these sources is *Klip and Corb on the Road* which compares Jeanneret's sketches to those of his travel companion Klipstein.[21]

The historiography of Jeanneret/Le Corbusier presents us with many frames of reference for assessing his life and work including the *Voyage d'Orient.* Drawings and annotations produced by Jeanneret during his 1911 excursion are published as *Carnets: Voyage d'Orient.*[22] Discovered in the late 1980's the *Carnets,* or notebooks, include sketches and annotations from Jeanneret's travels in 1911. The sketches in the *Carnets* present several challenges. They put on full display Jeanneret's capacity of observation and emotional engagement with what

[17]M. Christine Boyer, *Le Corbusier, Hommes de Lettres* (New York, Princeton Architectural Press, 2011)

[18]Ibid., 37

[19]Tim Benton, *The Rhetoric of Modernism: Le Corbusier as a Lecturer.* (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag AG, 2009)

[20]H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997) and Charles Jencks, *Le Corbusier and the Continual Revolution in Architecture* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2000) and Geoffrey Baker, *Le Corbusier: The Creative Search, the Formative Years of Charles- Édouard Jeanneret* (London: E & F. N. Spon, 2006)

[21]Ivan Zaknic, Klip and Corb on the Road: The Dual Diaries and Legacies of August Klipstein and Le Corbusier on their Eastern Journey, 1911 (Zurich: Scheidegger and Speiss, 2019)

[22] Le Corbusier, *Voyage D' Orient: Carnets. Sketchbooks in English; transcription of carnets in French.* Limited edition of 500 copies (New York: Milano: Rizzoli; Electa, 1988) Reyerson and Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago copy no. 278 of 500

he is observing. His drawings include articulate gestural sketches of buildings, spaces, ornament, and sculpture (Figures 1 and 2). He provides plans and sections, sketched orthographically, often including dimensions and ratios. He provides small sketches that highlight the profiles of landscapes and buildings and their placement within a broadly perceived landscape setting. Yet, there are some sketches that are less than coherent, incomprehensible, and indicative of someone with limited optical vision. Jeanneret was known to have been severely short-sighted, medically not metaphorically in this case. He is said to have used a camera as a part of his working method at this point in his development raising the possibility that it is his limited vision that is a source of the variation in his drawing output.

In his introduction to the *Carnets,* Giuliano Gresleri compares the *Carnets* to a novel. He says of the *Carnets,* "An awareness of being the sole participant in a certain situation at a given moment, like the ancient travelers, as well as the sole protagonist of the narration accompanying him, shines through the disorderly notes of the carnets in wondered tones."[23] He relates the *Carnets* to his drawings from his 1907 excursion through Italy saying, "His capacity to grasp the essential note, which as early as his Italian trip in 1907 had indicated marvelous possibilities, was the great revelation of the trip …"[24] Later, Gresleri says that the *Carnets* "ceased being a 'diary' and became design. To know how and why architecture is made is to design it again. Even more than a chronicle of a vocation, the carnets are a grand, solitary design, a sort of refoundation of the discipline Jeanneret was dedicated to perfect. Ten years later, in *Vers une architecture,* he would complete the task."[25]

Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's Ekphrasis

Jeanneret's experience of the Parthenon in 1911 was the start of a twelve-year phase of creative conjecture. It was during this part of his life he designed the Maison Blanche for his parents in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland and the Dom-Ino diagram. He began his collaboration with Amédée Ozenfant that led to his early Purist paintings and his co-authorship of *L'Esprit Nouveau.* Each of these artistic developments contribute in some part to the creative breakthrough of the early 1920s seen in Le Corbusier's early Modernist villas, some of which he published in V*ers une architecture.*

The plasticity that Le Corbusier references in *Vers une architecture* is not a material plasticity. He is not talking about synthetic polymers. Plasticity as Jeanneret/Le Corbusier uses the term is about an emotional connection, in this case an emotional connection to the Parthenon. For him this is not a one-way emotional connection. For him the connection to the Parthenon was reciprocal. He observed the plasticity of the Parthenon, capturing this in his written observation and his sketches and thereby giving the building a voice that it may

[23]Le Corbusier, *Carnets*, introduction by Gresleri, 13
[24]Ibid., 15
[25]Ibid., 18

not have had previously. He imparted upon the Parthenon a new understanding. In this way he shaped the Parthenon as no one had before. Second, is that he was shaped by the Parthenon.

Le Corbusier writes in *Vers une architecture*, "the Acropolis on its rock, and its supporting walls is seen from afar, as one block. Its buildings are massed together through the incidence of their multiple planes."[26] Here Le Corbusier uses descriptive ekphrasis. But, he takes a different approach later when he writes of the Parthenon in his essay, "Pure Creation of the Mind." "We must get it through our heads that the Doric did not spring up in the fields with the asphodels, and that it is a pure creation of the mind. Its plastic system is so pure that one has the sensation or something natural. But careful, it is a complete work of man one that gives us full perception of a profound harmony."[27] This second example shows Le Corbusier employing poetic ekphrasis.

He also uses Plasticity in his poetic ekphrasis of the Propylaea. He writes, "Where does emotion come from? From a certain relationship of categorical elements: cylinders, polished floor, polished walls. From an accord with the things of the site. From a plastic system whose effects encompass every element of the composition. From a unity of idea extending from unity of materials to unity of contour modulation."[28]

In his text for his *Voyage d'Orient* Le Corbusier employs poetic ekphrasis, but he does not reference Plasticity. He writes, "Here the rectitude of the temples, their impeccable structure and the brutality of the site were confirmed. The strong spirit triumphs. Too lucidly the herald blows a brazen trumpet and proffers a jarring blast. The entablature of a cruel rigidity crushes and terrorizes. The feeling of a superhuman fatality seizes you. The Parthenon, a terrible machine, grinds and dominates; seen from as far as a four-hour walk and one hour by boat, alone it is a sovereign cube facing the sea.

After weeks of being crushed by this brutal site, I wished for a storm to come and drown in its floods and swirls the biting bronze of the temple.

When the storm did come, I saw through the large drops of rain the hill becoming suddenly white and the temple sparkling like a diadem against the ink-black Hymettus and the Pentilicus ravaged by downpours!"[29]

This shows that Jeaneret in 1914 wrote about his experience of the Parthenon in 1911 using poetic ekphrasis. But he did not use the term "Plasticity" or "Plastic" until later in his artistic development in the essay "Pure Spirit of the Mind" published in *L'Esprit Nouveau 16* which was published again in *Vers une architecture.* Further, this shows that in 1966 Le Corbusier chose to not edit his 1914 notes to include Plasticity as he did in his essay published in *L'Esprit Nouveau 16* and *Vers une architecture.*

Plasticity

Catherine Malabou examines Plasticity in her book, *The Future of Hegel:*

[26]Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, Goodman translation, 2008, 121
[27]Ibid., 239
[28]Ibid., 235
[29]Le Corbusier, *Voyage d'Orient,* Zaknic translation, 2002, 207

Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic.[30] Malabou's doctoral thesis was supervised by Jacques Derrida who wrote the Preface to the edition of *The Future of Hegel* published by Routledge.[31] She argues that Plasticity for Hegel includes three categories. The three categories have dual meanings. She writes, "to form the concept of plasticity as it figures in Hegel's philosophy requires, first of all, that we uncover the way Hegel himself constructs this idea. When we take this further, we find that three areas of meaning are mutually implicated."[32] She goes on to say that these three areas are the "plastic arts" which she puts in quotes, "plastic individualities, and philosophical plasticity."[33] She says that in Hegel there are two parts to each of these broader categories; "plastic" understood as the "capacity to receive form," and "plastic" as the "capacity to produce form."[34] Looking at these categories more closely, she references Hegel's use of the words *plastisch* and *plastik* noting Hegel's focus on Greek sculpture as the ultimate attainment of the plastic arts. She immediately transitions to the second category of plasticity, that of "plastic individualities," or "plastic characters." She says, "in Hegel's account, 'plasticity' describes the nature of those Greek figures who represent an individuality he names 'exemplary' and 'substantial.'"[35] She quotes Hegel directly at this point; "Pericles…, Phidias, Plato, and above all Sophocles, as well as Thucydides, Xenophon, Socrates are 'plastic individuals': they are great and free, grown independently on the soil of their own inherently substantial personality, self-made, and developing into what they (essentially) were and wanted to be." She continues with another citation from Hegel, "Greece is not to be understood at its heart unless with bring with us as a key to our comprehension an insight into the ideals of sculpture and unless we consider from the point of view of their plasticity not only the heroic figures in epic and drama but also the actual statesmen and philosophers. After all, in the beautiful days of Greece, men of action like poets and thinkers, had this same plastic and universal yet individual character not inwardly and outwardly."[36] She then argues that plastic individualities "represent a middle term, a mediation between plasticity in its first signifying domain, that of sculpture, and its third, that of philosophical plasticity ". What then is philosophical plasticity? To explain this, she returns to the pairing she introduced previously, that of a capacity to receive form and the capacity to produce form. "The expression 'philosophical plasticity', she writes, "must be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, it characterized the philosophical attitude, the behavior specific to the philosopher. On the other hand, it applies to the philosophy itself, to its form and manner of being, that is to say to that rhythm in which the speculative content is unfolded and presented."[37] She quotes Hegel again as saying, "a

[30]Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, Preface by Jacques Derrida, translated by Lisabeth During (London and New York: Routledge, 2005)
[31]Ibid., xlviii
[32]Ibid., 9
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid.
[35]Ibid.
[36]Ibid., 9,10
[37]Ibid.

plastic discourse demands, too, a plastic sense of receptivity and understanding on the part of the listener."[38]

Malabou presents an etymology of plasticity relating its Greek origins to its usage in English, French, and German. She begins with what she calls "plasticity in its ordinary meanings" defining plasticity as that which "describes or designates the act of giving form," adding that the English Plasticity and the French *plasticité* and the German *plastizität* originated in the eighteenth century. The Greek *plassein* she defines as "to model," or "to mould," but she expands her analysis to the adjective form of plastic imparting a dual definition; "to be susceptible to changes of form, or malleable," and, "'having the power to bestow form, the power to mould, as in the expression 'plastic surgeon and the 'plastic arts.'"[39] The main point of her etymology is that *la Plastique* exists in both the active and passive voices, as an action and as the quality of being acted upon.

As concerns form-making, Malabou observes that "things that are plastic preserve their shape, as does the marble in a statue once given a configuration, it is unable to recover its initial form. In her words, "'Plastic' thus designates those things that blend themselves to being formed while resisting deformation."[40]

Yet, Plasticity for Malabou is as much about the destruction of form as it is about the creative process of making form. In introductory remarks preceding a published interview of Malabou by Benjamin Dalton he provides a definition of Malabou's Plasticity: "Malabou defines plasticity as the capacity to give, receive and obliterate form; thus, plasticity comprises both a constructive, formative capacity, as is seen in the plastic arts in which a sculpture takes and maintains a given form, and also a destructive capacity, as is implied in the French for exploding and bombing, plastiquer and plastiquage."[41] He grounds this in Malabou's reading of Hegel in which she in Dalton's words discovered, "plasticity's unruly creative-destructive logic at the heart of the Hegelian dialectic itself."[42]

The dynamic between creativity and destruction is present in Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's rhetoric. In *L'Esprit Nouveau* he published a commentary by Charles Lalo in response to Jeanneret's provocative question; "Must we burn down the Louvre?"[43] This is important background to his proposal that a part of the city of Paris would be demolished to make way for his Plan Voisin of 1925. What is often missed is that for Jeanneret/Le Corbusier the dynamic of creativity and destruction was a metaphor. Those who have taken Le Corbusier literally have in fact destroyed parts of cities in the name of Modernism to the socio-economic detriment of those left to live in the architectural aftermath. Jeanneret/ Le Corbusier was writing rhetorically about both the Louvre and the City of

[38]Ibid.
[39]Ibid., 8
[40]Ibid.
[41]Benjamin Dalton, "What Should We Do with Plasticity? An Interview with Catherine Malabou." *Edinburgh University Press Journals* Vol 42 Issue 2, (2019) 238-254 (np.)
[42]Ibid.
[43]Charles Lalo, *L'Esprit Nouveau,* Letter in response to "Faut-il Bruler le Louvre*",* Vol. 6 (1921)

Paris.

Jean-Louis Cohen describes Jeanneret as an "iconoclastic creator" in his essay on Nietzsche's influence on Jeanneret/Le Corbusier.[44] He focuses primarily on the development of Jeanneret's dual artistic and architectural identities and his discovery of a calling to which he responds with a passion. His main point is that there are Nietzschean metaphors that apply readily to Jeanneret/Le Corbusier. He notes one in particular; the descent of Zarathustra from the mountain observing that Jeanneret/Le Corbusier twice experienced a descent. First, was the descent from the Jura Mountains in Switzerland to Italy, Greece, and Paris, and then second, the descent from Ronchamp in Northern France to the Mediterranean Sea in which he drowned in 1965.[45]

Play

Closely related to the ides of Plasticity is Play. Jacques Derrida addresses "play "in his preface to Catherine Malabou's book on Plasticity. He writes, "language must be able to play, there must be within it the very display of its aptitude to play, the habit of conjugating, and of holding in itself and for itself, in the very body of its syntax and of its lexicon, the constant mark of this transformation, something like the permanent habitus we call an idiom or dialect, that its vocation be dialectical or, if one prefers, that its calling be essentially plastic. The idiom itself must be a subject capable of 'seeing what is coming.'"[46] Later he asks, "what can it possibly mean this 'coming,' this 'arriving,' and most of all, this 'to see (what is) coming' and thus also, 'being born,' 'appearing,' what can it possibly mean to 'take,' to 'conceive,' 'to take or give a form,' 'to arrive' and to 'arrive onto oneself?'"[47]

While Derrida was not writing specifically about Jeanneret/Le Corbusier, a strong corollary may be made between Jeanneret/Le Corbusier and "play." His early annotated drawings from Tuscany, his spatial studies undertaken during his collaboration with Ozenfant, and his manifesto on architecture V*ers une architecture* each are playful and are like a play. His rhetoric presents episodes that unfold for the reader. He writes in the 1920's that "architecture is the masterful, correct, and magnificent play of volumes brought together in light."[48] He writes that in the Parthenon "fractions of a millimeter are in play."[49] He uses the term "drama" in the "The Lesson of Rome" as if talking about a play writing that "passion can create drama out of inert stone."[50] Seeing what is to come is another part of his rhetoric. The title of one of Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's chapters,

[44]Jean-Louis Cohen, "Le Corbusier's Nietzschean Metaphors," *Nietzsche and 'An Architecture of Our Minds.* Eds. Alexandre Kostka and Irving Wohlfarth (Getty Research Institute: Ideas and Debates, 1999) 311-332
[45]Malabou, 330
[46]Ibid., xiii
[47]Ibid., xiv
[48]Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture,* Goodman translation, 2008, 102
[49]Ibid., 243
[50]Ibid., 194

"eyes which do not see" takes on a different meaning in the context of Derrida. Conventionally, this references seeing something that already exists, as if one is looking at the wrong things and all one needs is to be redirected to a different object. In Derrida's sense of seeing the eyes which do not see are not focused on the incorrect objects, but rather they are focused in the wrong direction and need to be redirected to a future that is not entirely formed yet.

The Plastic Argument

Le Corbusier includes four references to Plasticity in his opening paragraphs to *Vers une architecture;* plastic emotion, plastic facts, the plastic artist, and "architecture as a plastic thing." The mechanical emotions that Ozenfant and Jeanneret introduced previously in *Après le cubisme* become plastic emotions in *Vers une architecture*. In *Après le cubisme* Ozenfant and Jeanneret invoke the "mechanism of emotion." They write, "what must be rendered material is not the object itself, not the raw sensation of beauty, but the emotion that it provokes.[51] Later they continue, "in sum, our plastic senses behave like batteries of resonators, each of which is attuned to circumscribed waves, and their numbers increases to the extent that discoveries bring new views to bear on matter (nature)."[52] In *Vers une architecture* Le Corbusier writes, "the architect through the ordonnance of forms, realizes an order that is the pure creation of his mind; through forms, he affects our senses intensely, provoking plastic emotions."[53]

Plastic facts, the second use of "plastic" in his manifesto, are what he says engineers produce. "Under strict obligation to an imperative program, engineers use the directing vectors and accentuators of forms. They create limpid and impressive plastic facts."[54] Le Corbusier's third use of "Plastic" is in the prefatory remarks from the "Lesson of Rome" where he says that "Architecture is a Plastic thing."[55] The full text reads, "architecture is the use of raw materials to establish stirring relationships. Architecture goes beyond utilitarian things, Architecture is a plastic thing. Spirit of Order, unity of intention, the sense of relationships; organizes and quantities, Passion can make drama out of inert stone."[56] The fourth use of "Plastic" occurs in the thesis statements for the section" Pure Creation of the Mind." Here he refers to the plastic artist, creating a parallel with the plastic facts of the engineer. He writes, "contour modulation

[51]Amédée Ozenfant and Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, *Après le cubisme* (Torino: Bottega D'Erasmo, 1975) reprint of *Après le cubisme* (Paris, Edition des Commentaries, 1918), and *Après le cubisme* (Lanham, MDS, Altamira, 1999), and John Goodman's English translation in Carol S. Eliel, *L'Esprit Nouveau: Purism in Paris, 1918-1925* (Los Angeles: Museum Associates, Los Angeles Museum of Art, and Harry Abrahms, 2001). Subsequent footnotes referencing *Après le cubism* translated into English reference the Goodman translation., 153
[52]Ibid., 154
[53]Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture,* Goodman translation, 2008, 92
[54]Ibid., 86
[55]Ibid., 87
[56]Ibid.

is a pure creation of the mind: it calls for the plastic artist."[57] Taken as a whole and out of context these read like platitudes at their worst, aphorisms at their best. Within the context of the entire manifesto this section has a more positive effect. It is seductive, it creates suspense, and along with the final words of the manifesto, "architecture or revolution" it is ambiguous.[58]

Reyner Banham questions whether Le Corbusier presents any argument at all in *Vers une architecture.* He states, "*Vers une architecture* has no argument in any normal sense of the word. It has, instead, a series of rhetorical or rhapsodical essays on a limited number of themes, assembled side by side in such a way as to give the impression that these themes have some necessary connection."[59] He continues, "it is the rediscovery of the old in the new, this justification of the revolutionary by the familiar, that ensured the book its enormous readership. And an influence, inevitably superficial, beyond that of any other architectural work published in this century to date."[60] What Banham does not consider is that the "necessary connection" holding together themes and parallels Le Corbusier presents in *Vers une architecture* is Plasticity.

Le Corbusier states in "Aesthetic of the Engineer, Architecture," "…so there is reason to pose the problem of the house, the street, and the city and to compare the engineer and the architect."[61] Here he defines his scope addressing multiple scales of design placing the reader on notice that his intentions are now of a large order of magnitude. He says that he is comparing the engineer to the architect, letting the reader know something of the rhetorical structure he intends to use, that of comparison. He does not equate the two. He makes a comparison. He then proceeds with statements underscored in Italics and words written in all capital letters. He says, "For the architect, we wrote "THREE REMINDERS":[62] Significant here is his use of the plural, "we." Le Corbusier published *Vers une architecture* as a sole author, yet he references "Three Reminders" in the plural. He would have been referring to the essay "Trois Rappels" published in *L'Esprit Nouveau 1.*[63] The essay was attributed to Le Corbusier-Saugnier indicating co-authorship with Ozenfant according to Cohen.[64] Material co-authored with Ozenfant was often indicated with the name "Saugnier," Ozenfant's mother's surname.[65] From here he moves on to the substance of his argument. "For the architect, we wrote "THREE REMINDERS": "VOLUME, which is the element through which our senses perceive and measure and are fully affected. SURFACE, which is the envelope of the volume and which can annihilate

[57]Ibid., 88
[58]Ibid., 89
[59]Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (London: Architectural Press, 1960) 222-223
[60]Ibid., 246
[61]Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, Goodman translation, 2008, 96
[62]Ibid.
[63]Le Corbusier-Saugnier, *L'Esprit Nouveau 1*, "Trois Rappels MM. Les Architects," 91-95
[64]Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, Goodman translation, 2008, 1
[65]Ibid.

sensation or amplify it. PLAN, which is the generator of volume and surface and which irrevocably determines everything."[66]

Taking these one at a time, "Volume," was translated as "Mass" in the Etchells 1927 English language edition. Goodman translates "volume" as "volume" in the 2008 translation for which Cohen provides an introductory essay. About the Etchells 1927 translation Cohen says, "Etchells compounded his mere modifications and improprieties with outright mutilations."[67] The Volume/Mass translation, or mutilation, is particularly egregious given the centrality of this to Le Corbusier's argument. Translating "volume" as "mass" eviscerates the logic of Le Corbusier's argument for a new way of seeing based in Plasticity.

Le Corbusier's method for how one's senses perceive, measure, and are affected emotionally is largely dependent upon his rhetorical use of Plasticity throughout the text. Without the relationship between Volume, Surface, and Plan Plasticity is rendered inoperable. Why is this? Because Mass implies something observed from a disengaged, and distanced point of view. Volume, in Le Corbusier's usage, implies the experience of being in an architectural space and perceiving the sensate effects of a space from within a space. Why then does he not show an example of a spatial volume in the chapter on volume? This is a part of his rhetorical form.

Le Corbusier is careful to define the rhetorical contours of *Vers une architecture* in his essay "Aesthetics of the Engineer, Architecture." He writes, "Architecture, which is a thing of plastic emotion, should, in its domain, ALSO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING, AND USE ELEMENTS CAPABLE OF STRIKING OUR SENSES, OF SATISFYING OUR VISUAL DESIRES, and arrange them in such a way THAT 'THE SIGHT' OF THEM CLEARLY AFFECTS US through finesse or brutality, tumult or serenity, indifference or interest, These elements are plastic elements, forms that our eyes see clearly, that our minds measure. These forms, which are primary or subtle, supple or brutal, act on our senses physiologically (sphere, cone, cylinder, horizontal, vertical, oblique, etc.) and shake them up."[68] The quotation here includes Le Corbusier's capitalization and parentheses. He sets up the rhetorical contours for the reader in parings. Then he relates these back to the sphere, cone, etc. that he presents in his section on "Eyes Which Do Not See," in the essay about Rome. In doing so he brings the reader back into a spatial domain, in fact he uses the word domain at the start of this paragraph, "Architecture, which is a thing of plastic emotion, should, in its domain…" etc..[69] "The spatial volumes were originally articulated as universals that he and Ozenfant identify in "Sur la Plastique" in *L'Esprit Nouveau* Number 1 and again in *L'Esprit Nouveau* 14.[70]

Yet, taking a broader brushstroke to the analysis, the rhetorical contours speak to other tendencies that wind their way through Le Corbusier's rhetoric;

[66]Ibid.
[67]Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture,* 2008 translation, Cohen introduction, 49
[68]Le Corbusier, *Ibid.,* 95-96
[69]Ibid.
[70]Jeanneret-Saugnier, *L'Esprit Nouveau* 1 and 14

emotion and technology, metaphor and literalness, Ancient and Modern, rationality and emotion, and image and word. The movement between these, their contour, is essential to understanding Plasticity and its place within Le Corbusier's thesis.

Validation and Visual Rhetoric

A theme throughout Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's life is the need for validation. His early letters to his parents and to his teacher L'Eplattenier show a young man seeking the support of others as he began his journey in the world. His tendency to find the right people at the right time who would be willing to provide validation, then dispense with them, often harshly, is evident in his relationship with his mentor L'Eplattener, his confidant William Ritter, and his artistic collaborator Ozenfant. But at a rhetorical level Le Corbusier uses the Parthenon to validate the artistic progress he argues for in his work. He does this by comparing the proportions and ratios of the Parthenon to those of the Temple of Hera I at Paestum (Figure 3). He then associates the Paestum temple with an early design of an automobile and by associating the Parthenon with another automobile design that for Le Corbusier represented the proper evolution and perfection of design.[71] The plastic evolution of line to curve as a metaphor for progress is a consistent theme in *Vers une architecture*. The first and last images also validate historical progress by moving from line to curve. The first image is of a promenade of a ship. The final image shows a smoking pipe. (Figures 4 and 5). The contrast is simple but striking; that the image of the ship does not include any curved lines, but the image of the pipe, the image that he leaves his readers with does not include any straight lines. The promenade image invites the reader along for a journey, but also a stroll along the promenade, concluding with a smoking pipe as a way to invite the reader to relax with him at the conclusion of the journey or stroll. Le Corbusier's rhetoric is seductive even as he makes the case for a new kind of modernity based in the machine aesthetic.

As visual rhetoric, Le Corbusier locates the Parthenon within the *Vers Une Architecture* text in a way that anchors the reader to image and word. This is in a chapter titled, "Pure Creation of the Mind." Le Corbusier published "Pure Creation of the Mind" previously in *L'Epirit Nouveau 16* one of many other essays on a variety of subjects. But in its new home in *Vers Une Architecture* it serves as a rhetorical climax.

In *L'Esprit Nouveau* Jeanneret positioned his essay about the Parthenon among other essays, news items, advertisements, with words and images competing for the attention of the reader. In *Vers une architecture* Le Corbusier positions the essay in a new role, making it the penultimate focus of his argument. The ultimate focus of his argument was his own work which he claimed was a direct outcome of the theories that had not yet been articulated prior to the publication of *Vers une architecture.*

[71]Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture,* Goodman translation, Cohen introduction, 2008, 180-181

What he could have done was to make an argument for the plastic emotions in his work showing how his buildings respond to light conditions and evoke an emotional connection to architecture. But instead his manifesto is subsumed by his argument for the machine aesthetic in the concluding chapters following "Pure Creation of the Mind." This is his editorial imprint, but it also points to the inconsistencies that one finds in the critical reception of his work that represent two sides to his work that seem incompatible: that of the machine and that of the emotional connection to architecture.

These were choices on his part, editorial choices having to do with the rhetorical form of his manifesto in a traditional sense. But also having to do with rhetorical form of his manifesto as articulated through image, and the form of the book as an object itself. For Jeanneret/Le Corbusier the Parthenon was plastic. Its appearance changed as its architecture was activated by the movement of light across its surfaces. For Le Corbusier, this was only one part of the experience of the building. For him the building also gave form. It formed an emotional response. But to what was he giving form, what was he shaping; yes, the history of architecture, but for Le Corbusier, his primary concern was the shaping of a new epoch.

This paper examined a well-known area of art and architectural history. It finds within these histories a promising area of inquiry, that of Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's shifts in rhetorical form. Central to this study is Jeanneret/Le Corbusier's use of Plasticity. The introduction of Plasticity into his rhetoric occurred in the 1920s and figured prominently in his manifesto on architecture, *Vers une architecture,* in which he describes the Parthenon as a plastic work of architecture. He later published his *Voyage d'Orient* in 1966 in which he published his edited notes from a half century earlier. He chose not to include Plasticity in his updated notes. Nor did he reference the idea of Plasticity which played a essential role in his rhetorical form in his 1923 manifesto, creating another wrinkle in the complex history of Jeanneret/Le Corbusier.

Figure 1. *C-E Jeanneret. Sketch of the Propylaea from the Parthenon. 1911. (FLC)*

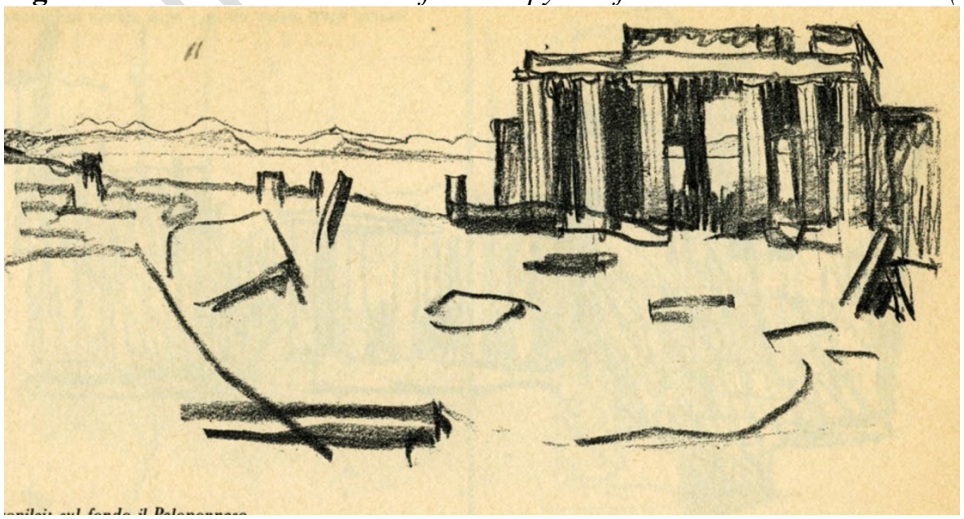


Figure 2. *C-E Jeanneret. Sketch of the Parthenon from the Propylaea, 1911 (FLC)*

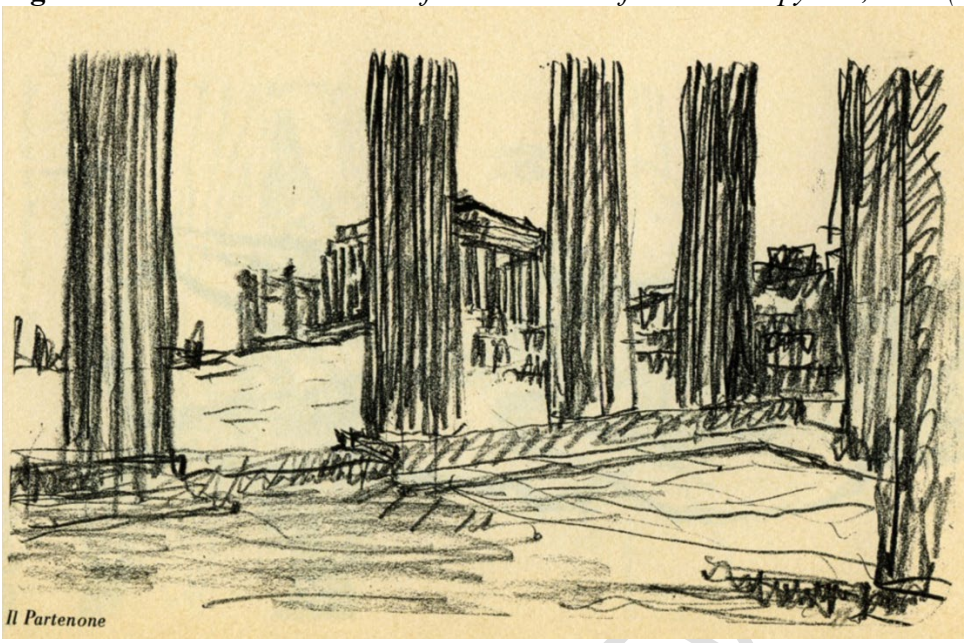


Figure 3. *Vers une architecture,* Le Corbusier, 1923

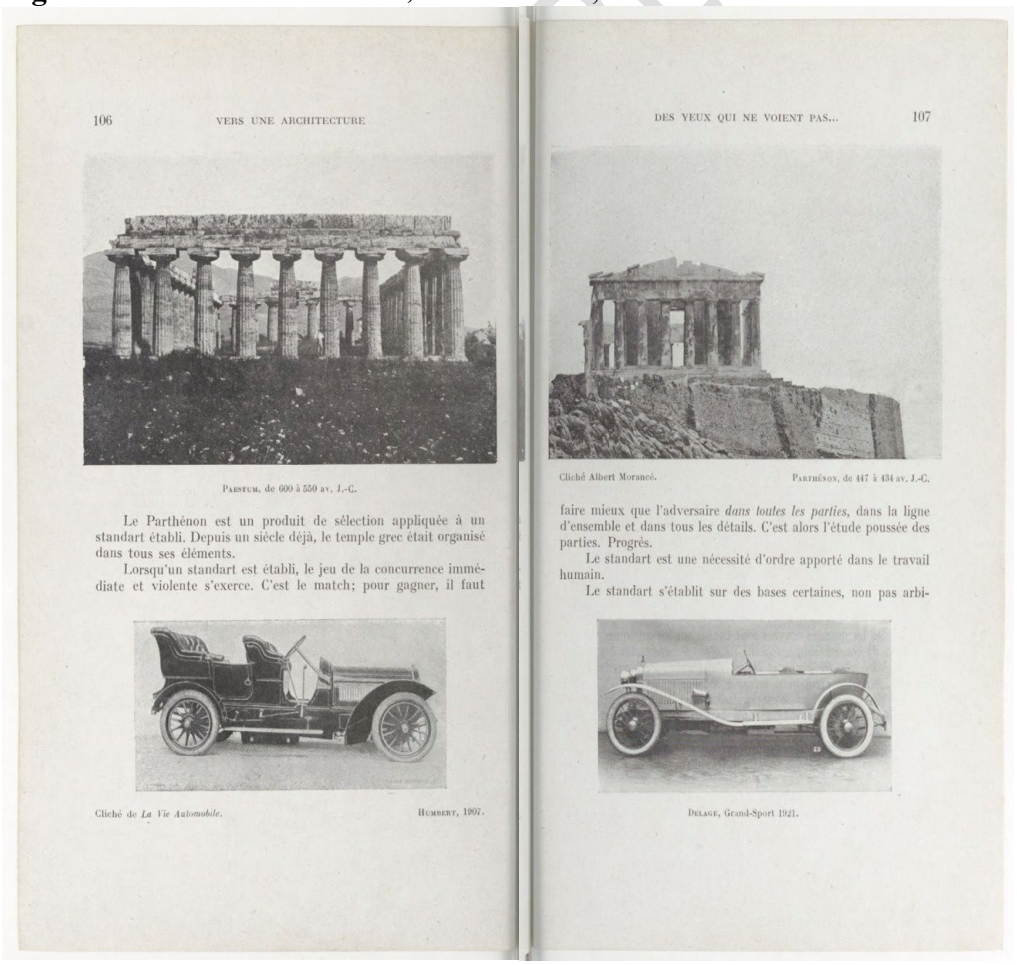


Figure 4. *Vers une architecture, Le Corbusier, 1923*

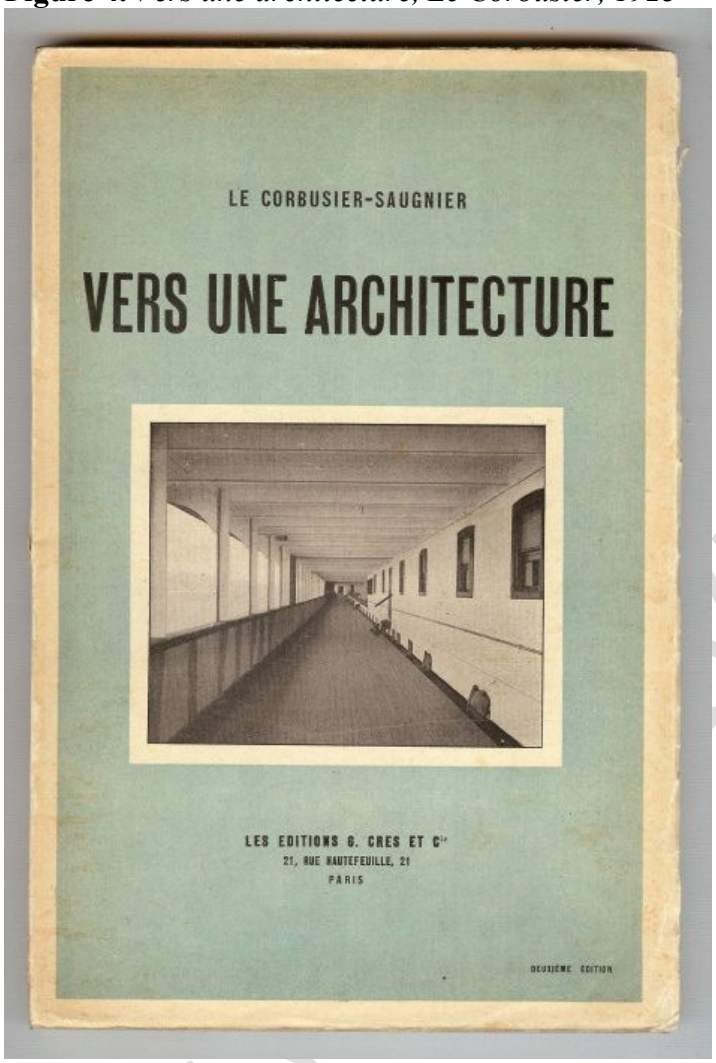
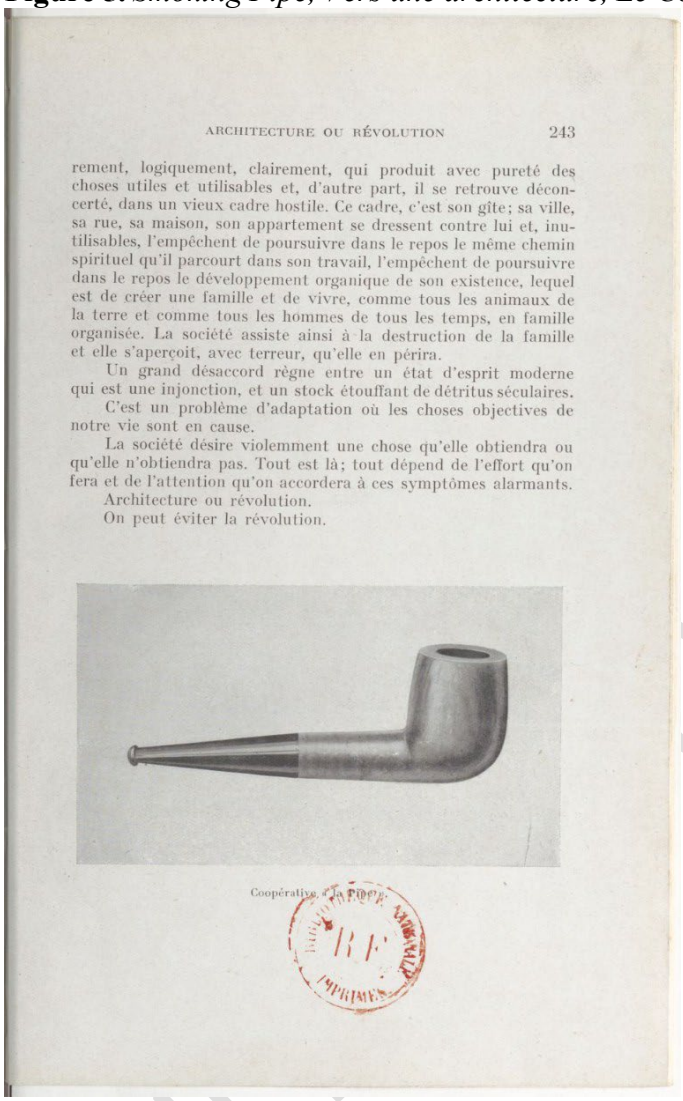


Figure 5. *Smoking Pipe, Vers une architecture, Le Corbusier, 1923*



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rement, logiquement, clairement, qui produit avec pureté des choses utiles et utilisables et, d'autre part, il se retrouve déconcerté, dans un vieux cadre hostile. Ce cadre, c'est son gîte; sa ville, sa rue, sa maison, son appartement se dressent contre lui et, inutilisables, l'empêchent de poursuivre dans le repos le même chemin spirituel qu'il parcourt dans son travail, l'empêchent de poursuivre dans le repos le développement organique de son existence, lequel est de créer une famille et de vivre, comme tous les animaux de la terre et comme tous les hommes de tous les temps, en famille organisée. La société assiste ainsi à la destruction de la famille et elle s'aperçoit, avec terreur, qu'elle en périra.

Un grand désaccord règne entre un état d'esprit moderne qui est une injonction, et un stock étouffant de détritus séculaires.

C'est un problème d'adaptation où les choses objectives de notre vie sont en cause.

La société désire violemment une chose qu'elle obtiendra ou qu'elle n'obtiendra pas. Tout est là; tout dépend de l'effort qu'on fera et de l'attention qu'on accordera à ces symptômes alarmants.

Architecture ou révolution.

On peut éviter la révolution.