Lecture 8

Charles Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) (1887-1965), The International Style, and the Rise of CIAM

Auguste Perret, 25 bis Rue Franklin Apartment House, Paris, 1905

Apartment house detail
F. Hennebique, a French constructor, started to build reinforced concrete houses in 1870; he applied for patents as regards the Hennebique concrete system in France, Belgium, Italy, South America and other countries, and he established a franchising empire involving many countries. Hennebique promoted reinforced concrete trough conferences and the development of standards of construction, but it was A. Perret who contributed to its dissemination as an architectural material.

Maison Domino 1914 “domus” (house) and “domino” (suggesting serial production). Maison Domino’s serially reproducible units introduce greater horizontal spatial freedom (the free plan) achieved via pilotis (thin structural columns) and non-load-bearing walls freely arranged as spatial dividers.
Le Corbusier, 'Maison Citrohan II'
France. Designed and made 1922. Plaster model

(Following excerpts from the Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition and website on "Modernism," 2006). In 1922 Le Corbusier exhibited the Citrohan House and a plan for a Contemporary City. The two ideas were developed in tandem and provided a blueprint for a new way of urban living. Whereas the Contemporary City would have required massive state intervention, the Citrohan House was intended to evolve directly from industrial production and market forces. The Citrohan House (the name evoking Citroën cars) embodied the ideas enunciated in Vers une architecture (1923). In that book Corbusier had argued for a house to be mass-produced, to work as efficiently as a motor car, and to function effectively as a machine for living in. The Citrohan concept was intended to provide standardized models to meet the demand for affordable housing. Le Corbusier designed two versions of the Citrohan House, both of which were intended to be prefabricated in order to provide cheap, rapidly constructed but permanent, high-quality accommodation. Both versions had flat roofs and roof terraces with a double-height main living area, in which a double-height window, made from industrial glass, occupied one wall, flooding the interior with light. The second version was raised above the ground on cylindrical posts, or piloti, providing parking, garage and boiler-room space at ground level. There was also a large balcony, which wrapped around the front and sides of the building on the first-floor level, with an external staircase. Kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms and a maid's room were located to the rear, with some sleeping accommodation provided on the gallery of the living room, accessed via an internal spiral staircase. The Citrohan Houses were intended, like automobiles, to revolutionize the housing market, not to provide minimum dwellings for those on the lowest incomes.
Le Corbusier, 1934, with sofa, chair, and coffee table, designed 1929 for the Salon d’Automne

Le Corbusier, Still Life with Stacked Plates, oil on canvas, 1920

Le Corbusier, Maison Ozenfant, 1923, exterior view, with “regulating lines” on main façade elevation. Purism and the “rappel à l’ordre,” or “call to order.”
Le Corbusier, Maison Ozenfant, 1923, interior view of studio

Le Corbusier, Towards a New Architecture, 1923

"Eyes Which Do Not See"
Comparison of Paestum (600-350 BCE) and Parthenon (447-434 BCE) to the Humber automobile (1907) and the Delage Grand Sport (1921) to illustrate the evolution of types within a tradition of making.
Sarah and Michael Stein (brother to Gertrude Stein) were wealthy Americans living in Paris with a taste for modern art (notably Matisse) and a surprisingly bohemian lifestyle. They commissioned Le Corbusier to design a house, to be shared with the estranged wife of the government minister Anatole de Monzie in the rural suburb of Vaucresson, to the west of Paris. Drawings like this in coloured chalk are fairly rare in Le Corbusier’s work, since he only used them in the presentation of projects to clients at a moment when decisions had to be made. They were the speciality of Le Corbusier’s cousin and associate, Pierre Jeanneret.

The site was a typical suburban plot, 27 metres across and 186 metres deep. After experimenting with different plans, Le Corbusier settled on placing the house as a single block across the plot, at the end of a long drive. This elevation is for an unexecuted variant of the project, designed around 13 November 1926. The basic arrangement of the house, with the service entrance on the left and the main entrance on the right, has already been resolved. A strong geometric rhythm (ABABA), consisting of 5-metre and 2.5-metre bays, articulates the elevation and helps to organize the plan. In this variant, the entrance facade is shown with an extension on the left, at first-floor level, which extended the space of the kitchen.
Villa Savoye (perspective view, section axon perspective, and cutaway plan perspective, and plans) Poissy, France. Le Corbusier. 1928-29.
Objets-types: objects that “tend towards a type which is determined by the evolution of forms between the ideal of maximum utility, and the necessities of economic manufacture.”
Rooftop view toward solarium.

Le Corbusier, with Charlotte Perriand, chaise longue, 1929.
Le Corbusier, City for Three Million Inhabitants, 1922.

Central railway station topped by airport – a quasi-Futurist vision that glorifies the promise of technology (and perhaps ignores the effect of noise...).
Le Corbusier’s Contemporary City (Ville Contemporaine), exhibited at the Salon d’Automne of 1922, presented his vision of an ideal urban environment with every modern facility. His plan sought to remedy all the problems of contemporary cities (lack of light, space and greenery) and to incorporate new modes of transportation, abolish congestion, improve circulation and increase population density. In this, he was building on a tradition established by French urbanists such as Eugène Hénard, whose Études sur les transformations de Paris (Studies on the Transformations of Paris, 1903–9) had advocated the separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic and the use of long, set-back apartment blocks (immeubles) flanking wide avenues.

At the centre of his city, Le Corbusier placed the hub of his transport network, on seven levels, with a railway station below and an aircraft runway on the top. The Italian Futurist Antonio Sant’Elia had already imagined something similar in his Città Nuova. The centre of Le Corbusier’s city was encircled by 24 large and widely spaced office blocks, each 60 storeys high and capable of accommodating between 10,000 and 50,000 workers. Public buildings were located to the west of this central area and all industry to the city’s eastern outskirts.

A total of 60,000 inhabitants (the elite, including businessmen and professionals) were housed in 12-storey apartment blocks with set-backs, which surrounded the city centre. Further out were the 12-storey Immeubles Villas (Apartment Villas), which were organized around central courtyards, full of trees and plants. These villas provided inhabitants with communal facilities (laundries, restaurants, childcare), while ensuring individual privacy in duplex apartments with a double-height studio overlooking a terrace garden.
Plan Voisin for Paris, 1925, Le Corbusier. The vision of the zoned modernist city built with standardized industrial construction, surrounded by parks and green spaces.

Broadacre City, 1934-58, Frank Lloyd Wright. The deurbanised city based upon electricity, automobiles, and ‘organic’ architecture. Urban sprawl is an example or result of this ‘utopian’ dream.
Le Corbusier’s Unité de Habitation as a fragment of the Radiant City realized in Marseilles, 1956.

Section and plans of typical apartments in the Unité building.
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