

Gabriela Świtek

INSTITUTE OF ART HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

Built Around a Tree: Odysseus's *Thalamos* and Le Corbusier's Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau

Il y avoit dans ma cour un bel olivier de la grosseur d'une grosse colonne.

L'Odyssée d'Homer, translated by Madame
Dacier, 1708

Le trou rond du plafond n'est qu'un incident exceptionnel dû à l'obligation
de respecter les arbres.

Le Corbusier, a description of Pavillon de
L'Esprit Nouveau, *Almanach*
d'architecture moderne, 1925

Arbre, compagnon millénaire de l'homme!

Le Corbusier, *Quand les cathédrales étaient
blanches. Voyage au pays des timides*, 1937

Two historically distant works inspired my essay: one ancient work that still exists as a powerful poetic image and the other which was constructed, demolished and rebuilt in the twentieth century.¹ The former is a description of Odysseus's bed and his bedroom (*thalamos*) in the palace of Ithaca, as presented in Book 23 of Homer's *Odyssey*. The second is Le Corbusier's and Pierre Jeanneret's Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, which was built for the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes held in Paris in 1925. Le Corbusier's pavilion, which included a tree in its garden terrace, is perceived today as one of the most iconic designs of modern architecture (Fig. 1). Invented as a villa prototype that would then be inserted into large, multi-storey *immeubles-villas*, it is also considered "a monument

1 I would like to thank Renée Tobe for her close reading of my interpretations.



Fig. 1. Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, Paris, 1925 © FLC/ADAGP, 2015

to standardization”.² Odysseus’s *thalamos*, which conveys concepts of both a bed and a bridal chamber, is “rarely included in the ‘canon’ of ekphrasis [...], despite the fact that many scholars consider it an artwork” – argues Wiesław Juszczak in his collection of essays devoted to ancient descriptions of imaginary artworks.³ Unlike the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, the *thalamos* does not belong to the history of modern architecture; however, in the *Odyssey* it is described as a *daidalon* – a “cunningly crafted” object associated with the name of Daedalus, the first mythical architect.⁴

Both works imply a specific architectural situation. “Any other architect would probably have been discouraged by the fact that his site was occupied by a tree – as was the case with the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau” – notes Stanislaus von Moos in his monograph of Le Corbusier.⁵ Homer’s *Odyssey* confronts us with an equally problematic construction site that – against all

2 D. Imbert, *The Modernist Garden in France*, New Haven–London, 1993, p. 148.

3 W. Juszczak, *Ekfrazja poetycka w antycznej Grecji (Przykłady wybrane)* [Poetic Ekphrasis in Ancient Greece (Selected Examples)], Warsaw, 2012, p. 143.

4 See I. K. McEwen, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings*, Cambridge MA, 1993, p. 53.

5 S. von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis*, Cambridge MA–London, 1979, p. 366.

odds – did not discourage the classic hero from demonstrating his craft. As Odysseus narrates: “A bush of long-leaved olive was growing within the court, strong and vigorous, and in girth it was like a pillar. Round about this I built my chamber, till I had finished it, with close-set stones, and I roofed it over well, and added to it jointed doors, close-fitting”.⁶ In both cases a space within a house is designed around a growing tree. But whereas Le Corbusier kept the tree as a natural element that organised the space of the pavilion’s garden terrace, Odysseus built his and Penelope’s bedchamber around the tree, then cut off its top and made its stump into a bed-prop. My attempt is not to demonstrate Le Corbusier’s “direct” architectural embodiment of Homer’s ekphrasis of Odysseus’s bedroom; it is rather to follow – somehow in the spirit of Aby Warburg’s *Kulturwissenschaft*⁷ – the poetic image of building a shelter around a tree that wanders freely throughout the centuries as a *mythos*.

The *thalamos* and the history of architecture

There are at least three aspects of Odysseus’s *thalamos* that allow us to consider it a part of the history of architecture. The first aspect refers to the nature of *thalamos* as a *daidalon*. The second is the double meaning of the term *thalamos* – it denotes not only a carefully crafted piece of furniture, but also the space of the bedchamber that is built around the tree in the courtyard. The third aspect concerns the analogy that is suggested in Homer’s *Odyssey*, i.e. his comparison of the olive tree to a column or a pillar.

Wiesław Juszczak interprets Homer’s ekphrasis as a “description of the creative process”, when use of the word *daidalon* refers to an artistic craft.⁸ Odysseus’s *thalamos* – described by Homer as a *daidalon* – is an object (or a construction) that is “capable of inducing wonder” and is attributed to Daedalus, “the first architect in the Western tradition whose story has been preserved”.⁹ Given our modern and contemporary ideas regarding the scope of architecture, Odysseus hardly deserves the name of an architect, but his skills as a boat builder (the *tecton*¹⁰) should not be ignored. Reviewing ancient Greek usages of

6 Homer, *Odyssey*, II, Books 13–24, with an English translation by A. T. Murray, revised by G. E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA–London, 2004, p. 399 (23.190–194).

7 For Aby Warburg’s concept of *Kulturwissenschaft*, cf. e.g. G. Świtek, “Triumf uczoneści. Posłanie Aby Warburga według Jana Białostockiego” [The Triumph of Scholarship. Aby Warburg’s Message According to Białostocki], in: *Białostocki*, ed. M. Wróblewska, Warsaw, 2009, pp. 99–112; R. Kasperowicz, “Wstęp” [Introduction], in: A. Warburg, *Narodziny Wenus i inne szkice renesansowe* [The Birth of Venus and Other Renaissance Essays], translated by R. Kasperowicz, Gdańsk, 2010, pp. 5–31.

8 Juszczak, op. cit., p. 143.

9 Cf. A. Pérez-Gómez, *Built upon Love: Architectural Longing after Ethics and Aesthetics*, Cambridge MA, 2006, p. 7.

10 Cf. McEwen, op. cit., p. 49.

the word *daidalon* – usually translated as a “cunningly crafted” and “curiously wrought” object – Indra Kagis McEwen notes that in the *Odyssey* the notion “comes to apply more and more frequently to textiles. [...] Textiles that are *daidala* are so qualified when they are tightly woven – [...] like a ship’s joints – and have a luminous sheen. Like the metal plates of a warrior’s armor, they shimmer with dancing light [...]”.¹¹ What is important in our revealing Odysseus’s architectural skills is that in the ancient Greek usage the notion *daidalon* refers not only to textiles, but also to metalwork and carpentry. While building his boat, Odysseus had to cut down twenty trees, trim them with an axe and fit all the pieces together by using a method of joining the planks by “means of mortises and tenons”.¹² In Homer’s ekphrasis of Odysseus’s *thalamos* we recognise not only a process that is similar to that of boat building (carpentry), but also to that of working with metals and textiles:

[...] I cut away the leafy branches of the long-leaved olive, and, trimming the trunk from the root up, I smoothed it round about with the adze well and cunningly, and trued it to the line, thus fashioning the bedpost; and I bored it all with the auger. Beginning with this, I made smooth the timbers of my bed, until I had it done, inlaying it with gold and silver and ivory, and I stretched on it a thong of oxhide, bright with purple.¹³

A comparison between the process of building a ship and that of making the *thalamos* can be found in Alexander Pope’s commentary to his translation of the *Odyssey*, in which he acknowledges the French translation that was done by a distinguished classicist, Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (1647–1720). Pope refers to Dacier’s work:

[...] how is it possible (says she) that this bed and whole apartment should be built by the single hand of Ulysses, without being seen by any person while he builds it? [...] Dacier objects that this apartment could not possibly be erected without being known to other persons; but we have seen Ulysses built a ship in a solitary island, without the assistant of any man, in the fifth *Odyssey*; and why may he not then be allowed to do the same, with respect to this nuptial bower?¹⁴

11 Ibid., p. 53. Note that in McEwen’s excellent exploration of architectural beginnings, Odysseus’s *thalamos* is not discussed as an example of *daidalon*. See also Juszczak’s argument about Homer’s forgotten ekphrasis of *thalamos*: Juszczak, op. cit., p. 143.

12 McEwen, op. cit., pp. 49–50. “Twenty trees in all did he fell, and trimmed them with the axe; then he cunningly smoothed them all and trued to the line. Meanwhile Calypso, the beautiful goddess, brought him augers; and he bored all the pieces and fitted them to one another, and with pegs and morticings did he hammer it together”. See Homer, *Odyssey*, I, Books 1–12, with an English translation by A. T. Murray, revised by G. E. Dimock, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA–London, 1998, p. 201 (5.244–248).

13 Homer, op. cit., II, Books 13–24, p. 399 (23.195–201).

14 *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by A. Pope, Esq, A new edition with additional notes, critical and illustrative, by G. Wakefield, B. A. Volume IV, London, 1806, pp. 248–249.

As a work that encompasses three different crafts, i.e. carpentry, metalwork and weaving, Odysseus's *thalamos* truly deserves the epithet of a *daidalon*.¹⁵ This is not to say that Odysseus can fully compete with Daedalus in what concerns the latter's attributed architectural works and machines, such as the labyrinth and the *choros* in Knossos, or the flying machine and the wooden replica of a cow that was made for Pasiphae. But, just like the mythical architect Daedalus, the ancient wanderer Odysseus reached mastery in carpentry and in "all sorts of crafts" that Pallas Athene and Hephaestus had taught him.¹⁶ It is not accidental that Daedalus's wooden cow is interpreted as an equivalent of the wooden horse built by Odysseus in order to conquer Troy: "It is at once alive and dead, a wooden object, fashioned as an animal, pregnant with human brood. As objects both cow and horse are marvelous on the outside, deceptive on the inside".¹⁷

Let us now discuss the second architectural aspect of the Homeric *thalamos*, i.e. a bedchamber. There have been many attempts to reconstruct the spatial arrangement of Odysseus's palace at Ithaca, based on the assumption that Homer presents a consistent picture of its architecture throughout the *Odyssey*:

When Odysseus grew to manhood he required a separate thalamos, perhaps like that of Telemachus, which was in the courtyard [...]. On his marriage with Penelope we are told that he built a chamber for himself and his bride [...]. The poet gives no hint of the location of this marriage chamber, save that it was within the walls enclosing the palace [...]. The most natural place for it would be in the courtyard: the apartments of Priam's twelve daughters and their husbands were thus situated [...].¹⁸

Even if the *Odyssey*'s commentators have proposed various plans of the palace, it is the olive tree which is a hint that allows us to locate Odysseus's *thalamos* in the courtyard. It is also assumed that Penelope occupied the marriage bedchamber until the arrival of the suitors.¹⁹ Later she moved to one of the upper rooms; in the scenes of Odysseus's revealing his identity to his son, his servants and his wife we read that "the old woman went up to the upper chamber, laughing aloud, to tell her mistress that her dear husband was in the house".²⁰ Moreover, Odysseus's *thalamos* must have been left unused for some years, as is suggested in the scene of recognition.²¹ Penelope, who wants to test Odysseus, gives an order to her servant: "Yet come, Eurycleia, spread for him the stout bedstead outside the well-built bridal chamber which he made

15 For the Greek notion, cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, II, Books 13–24, p. 398 (23.200).

16 Homer, op. cit., II, Books 13–24, p. 397 (23.160–161).

17 M. C. J. Putnam, "Daedalus, Virgil and the End of Art", *The American Journal of Philology*, 1987, vol. 108, no. 2 (Summer), p. 185.

18 S. E. Bassett, "The Palace of Odysseus", *American Journal of Archaeology*, 1919, vol. 23, no. 3.

19 Ibid., p. 292.

20 Homer, op. cit., II, Books 13–24, p. 385 (23.1–3).

21 Bassett, op. cit., p. 292.

himself. There bring for him the stout bedstead, and throw upon it bedding, fleeces and cloaks and bright coverlets".²² My aim is not to challenge any archaeological reconstruction of the Homeric palace but rather to emphasise the paradigmatic meaning of the *thalamos* (the bedchamber); together with the *megaron* (the great hall) they constitute two principal types of spaces within the Homeric *oikos*.²³ The dichotomy between the *megaron* and the *thalamos* seems to be important for the distribution of living spaces in the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau. Its two-storeyed living room has been compared to the "megaron form of the Maison Citrohan".²⁴ If we accept the argument that the modern living room resembles – in its form and function – the *megaron*, we could also attempt to search for a modern equivalent of the ancient *thalamos*. But Odysseus's *thalamos* is not a typical bedchamber. The very idea that it was built around an olive tree allows us to find an analogy with the garden terrace of the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau rather than with any of its bedrooms situated upstairs. Le Corbusier's garden terrace is not a bedroom, but it can be seen as a modern interpretation of an architectural space typical of the Mediterranean region, including the Greek islands. "Je suis un Méditerranéen très fortement" – announced Le Corbusier.²⁵ In this region one can easily find today a garden terrace (of a villa, a tavern, etc.) that is organised around an olive tree or a plane-tree, thus providing a shadowed shelter during sweltering days (Fig. 2).

The third aspect of Odysseus's *thalamos* that allows us to consider it a part of architectural history concerns Homer's comparison of the olive tree to a column, or a pillar. This metaphor has been preserved in the French translation of the *Odyssey* by Anne Le Fèvre Dacier: "Il y avoit dans ma cour un bel olivier de la grosseur d'une grosse colonne".²⁶ In his English translation of the *Odyssey*, which contains some references to Dacier's work, Alexander Pope maintained a similar metaphor: "an olive spread full in the court its ever

22 Homer, op. cit., II, Books 13–24, p. 397 (23.177–180).

23 See: B. A. Ault, *Les maisons homérique: Vocabulaire architectural et sémantique du bâti*, by Sylvie Rougier-Blanc [Book Review], *American Journal of Archaeology*, 2008, vol. 112, no. 2, p. 360; S. Rougier-Blanc, *Les maisons homérique: Vocabulaire architectural et sémantique du bâti*, Paris, 2005. On the meaning of *thalamos* as a nuptial bedchamber, cf. also: eadem, "Le vocabulaire architectural dans les Hymnes homériques", *Gaia: revue interdisciplinaire sur la Grèce Archaique*, 2005, no. 9, p. 35.

24 See: *Found project: Pavillon de l'Esprit nouveau (reconstruction)*, http://www.kuvio.helsinki.fi/en/reply01b_rela.php?id_kohde=1006 [accessed: 8 June 2015]. The Pavillon is described as "a prototypical two-storey high-rise dwelling-unit, created by combining the megaron form of the Maison Citrohan with the characteristic two-storey L-shaped monk's cell and garden of the standard Carthusian monastery. Lit by a light-well to the rear of the court, the duplex was built around an inset 'hanging garden' rather than being equipped with a balcony in the conventional sense".

25 Quoted in J. Jenger, *Le Corbusier: Un autre regard*, Paris, 1990, p. 35.

26 *L'Odyssée d'Homer*, traduit par Madame Dacier avec le texte en regard, Tome second, Paris, 1818, p. 401.



Fig. 2. A tavern in Argostoli, Cephalonia, Ionian Islands, photo by Gabriela Świtek, 2015

verdant head, vast as some mighty column's bulk".²⁷ In Herbert Bates's translation, the olive tree is "long-leaved and thriving, strong of growth, thick as a pillar".²⁸ In Augustus Taber Murray's version, "in girth it was like a pillar".²⁹ The analogy between a tree and a column has always played a fundamental role in the search for the origins of architecture. Not only the origins of Greek architecture were traced back to the idea of a wooden primitive hut, e.g. as in Marc-Antoine Laugier's *Essai sur l'architecture* (1753), which is a modern intermingling of Vitruvian and Rousseauian concepts. This analogy was given a literal illustration that was published in Philibert de L'Orme's *L'Architecture* (1648), where the trunk of a column looks like the trunk of a tree.³⁰ In Le Corbusier's projects, especially in his early drawings executed at La Chaux-de-Fonds, trees appear both as architectural elements and as motifs for applied decoration. On the one hand, he "considered the tree form for its direct analogies to architectural elements, roots forming the bases of the framing elements of windows, trunks serving as *piloti*, masses of foliage defining the shapes of openings, branch patterns forming mullions and bars".³¹ On the other hand, in

27 *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by A. Pope, p. 250.

28 *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated into English verse by H. Bates, New York-London, 1929, p. 362.

29 Homer, op. cit., II, Books 13–24, p. 399 (23.191).

30 P. de L'Orme, *L'Architecture*, Rouen, 1648, p. 213 v. Cf. also: J. Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History*, Cambridge MA-London, 1993, p. 98.

31 M. P. M. Sekler, "Le Corbusier, Ruskin, the Tree and the Open Hand", in: *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, ed. R. Walden, Cambridge MA-London, 1977, p. 45.



Fig. 3. An olive tree and a column, marble quarries, 6th century B.C. – 6th century A.D., Alikí, Thassos, photo by Gabriela Świtek, 2015

his account of the Parthenon Le Corbusier was reluctant to accept the analogy between a column and a tree: “Certain writers have declared that the Doric column was inspired by a tree springing from the earth, without a base, etc., a proof that every noble form of art derives from nature. It is most false, since the tree with straight trunk is unknown in Greece, where only stunted pines and twisted olives grow” (Fig. 3).³²

The pavilion as a modern *paradeigma*

Built for the 1925 Exposition, Le Corbusier’s and Pierre Jeanneret’s pavilion was demolished in 1926 and rebuilt as a replica of the original structure in Bologna in 1977.³³ At the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes it stood – together with the Soviet Union’s pavilion designed by Konstantin Melnikov, the Austrian pavilion (in which Frederick Kiesler presented his installation *La Cité dans L’Espace*), and with the Information

³² Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. F. Etchells, New York, 1986, p. 208.

³³ For Le Corbusier’s descriptions of the pavilion, cf. Le Corbusier, *Almanach d’architecture moderne*, Paris, 1925, pp. 129–166; idem, *Oeuvre complète, 1910–1929*, eds. W. Boesiger, O. Stonorov, Zürich, 1948, pp. 98–108. For more articles on the Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau, cf. D. Brady, *Le Corbusier: An Annotated Bibliography*, New York–London, 1985. On the pavilion’s reconstruction by José Oubriere and Giuliano Gresleri, cf. e.g. “Le Corbusier Rebuilt: L’Esprit Nouveau à Bologne: rappel à l’ordre”, *Domus*, 1978, vol. 579, pp. 10–13.

Tower by Robert Mallet-Stevens – like a “Utopian fragment alongside the sophisticated but shallow expressions of middle-class commercialized taste, exotically drenched in the new possibilities of expression revealed by Art Deco”.³⁴ Although essential to contemporary accounts of the history of modern architecture, Le Corbusier’s pavilion was neither the centre of attention nor in the centre of the exhibition grounds. The invitation for its inauguration announced: “Le Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau est situé dans le jardin entre les deux ailes du Grand Palais [...]. Ce Pavillon est le plus caché de l’Exposition”.³⁵ The reception of Le Corbusier’s design was unenthusiastic; only some critics, e.g. those grouped around the journal *L’Amour de l’art*, appreciated the modern tendencies as opposed to the “false luxury” of Art Deco.³⁶ According to Le Corbusier’s report, “Le Grand Jury International voulut nous décerner le diplôme d’honneur de l’Exposition. Mais le Président du Jury (un grand Français) s’y opposa: ‘Il n’y a là pas d’architecture!’ déclarait-il”.³⁷ Despite its peripheral location, the pavilion was intended to attract *L’Esprit Nouveau*’s visitors and readers and, last but not least, the architect’s potential clients. In a way, this project was a culmination of Le Corbusier’s involvement with the publication of *L’Esprit Nouveau* from 1920 to 1925.³⁸

For the 1925 Exposition Le Corbusier was asked to “build an ‘architect’s house’” but he objected: “Why an architect’s house? My house is everyone’s, anyone’s house; it is the house of a gentleman living in our times”.³⁹ Indeed, the pavilion was not designed exclusively as an architect’s house but as a cell-unit (*une cellule d’habitation*)⁴⁰, i.e. a 1:1 model of a villa consisting of two adjoining parts. One contained the two-storeyed apartment. It opened onto the covered terrace garden with the tree, which was allowed to grow through the circular opening in the ceiling. The other part, the side-wing of the villa, was a curved diorama of 100 m² presenting Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin proposal for Paris, facing another diorama of the Ville Contemporaine, a city for three million inhabitants (the project had previously been exhibited at the 1922 Salon d’Automne).

34 W. Curtis, Jr., *Modern Architecture since 1900*, London–New York, 1996, p. 207.

35 Le Corbusier, *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui* (1925), Paris, 1958, p. X; idem, *Almanach d’architecture moderne*, p. 129.

36 For the reception of the International Exhibition in the French press, see, for example: A. Wierzbicka, “Międzynarodowa wystawa 1925 roku w świetle prasy francuskiej”, in: *Wystawa paryska 1925*, ed. J. Sosnowska, Warsaw, 2007, pp. 43–45.

37 Le Corbusier, *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*, p. IX.

38 For the advertisement aspect of the pavilion, see B. Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, Cambridge MA–London, 2000, pp. 192–194; R. Gabetti, C. Olmo, *Le Corbusier e “L’Esprit Nouveau”*, Torino, 1975, pp. 6 and 12; J. Rykwert, *The Judicious Eye: Architecture Against the Other Arts*, Chicago–London, 2008, p. 347.

39 *Les arts décoratifs modernes*, special issue of *Vient de paraître* (1925), p. 108. Quoted in Von Moos, op. cit., p. 53.

40 Le Corbusier, *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*, p. VIII.

The two adjoining parts of the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau – the villa and the two dioramas – point to a fundamental analogy in Le Corbusier's projects of the 1920s, i.e. to the analogy between a single house and high-density block systems that would define the social conditions of urban dwelling. The architect describes his interest in the micro- and macro-scale as the interdependence between domestic equipment (*le mobilier*), architecture (*l'habitation, le logis*) and urbanism (*conditions de vie d'une société*).⁴¹ Even if Le Corbusier clearly expressed this analogy in his descriptions of the pavilion as published in 1925, one has to recall that in the mid-twenties he had not yet executed any projects concerning large parts of urban development. In the early 1920s, before the construction of the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, Le Corbusier had built only single houses, such as Villa Besnus (1922) or the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret (1923–1925).⁴² In 1922 he also presented a design for the Maison Citrohan – a cuboid with two load-bearing walls entered through an outside staircase – which later became a kind of modern *paradeigma*⁴³, a standardised living unit, subject to modifications and inserted into a larger block system. Only in 1925 did Le Corbusier begin the construction of a larger urban project, i.e. the estate in Pessac (Quartiers Modernes Frugès, completed in 1926).⁴⁴ In *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* the architect mentioned one of his direct inspirations for the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau; in 1907 and 1910 he had visited the Carthusian monastery of Galluzzo near Florence.⁴⁵ Inspired by a monastic cell, the pavilion was, however, “adjusted to family scale”.⁴⁶ The two-storey living space, L-shaped in plan, consisted of a split-level

41 Ibid.

42 See MB [M. Besser] “Le Corbusier”, in: *Encyclopaedia of 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. V. M. Lampugnani, London, 1989, p. 195; “Repères biographiques”, in *Le Corbusier ou la Synthèse des arts*, ed. C. Menz, Genève, 2006, p. 262.

43 I allude here to an argument put forward by Daniel Sherer; that of “the lost classicism of the era of modernity”, which is not entirely lost in modern times but rather acts as a sort of *memoire involontaire*. Sherer draws an analogy between the Greek notion of *paradeigma* (“an ancient standardization technique consisting of a specimen or model which [...] regulated the relations of parts to the whole in accordance with a predetermined proportional system”) with Le Corbusier's emphasis on the technological possibilities of modern standardisation. See: D. Sherer, “Le Corbusier's Discovery of Palladio in 1922 and the Modernist Transformation of the Classical Code”, *Perspecta*, 2004, vol. 35 (Building Codes), p. 24. While appreciating this analogy between the ancient and modern principles of standardisation, one has to remember that in ancient Greek architecture the *paradeigma* was mostly understood as a scale model of architectural elements, such as triglyphs or capitals. See: A. C. Smith, *Architectural Models as Machine: A New View of Models from Antiquity to the Present Days*, Amsterdam, 2004, p. 10.

44 See B. B. Taylor, “Le Corbusier at Pessac: Professional and Client Responsibilities”, in: *The Open Hand: Essays on Le Corbusier*, pp. 162–185.

45 Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, p. VIII; “Repères biographiques”, in: *Le Corbusier ou la Synthèse des arts*, p. 261; H. A. Brooks, *Le Corbusier's Formative Years: Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds*, Chicago–London, 1997, pp. 301–302.

46 Von Moos, op. cit., p. 148.

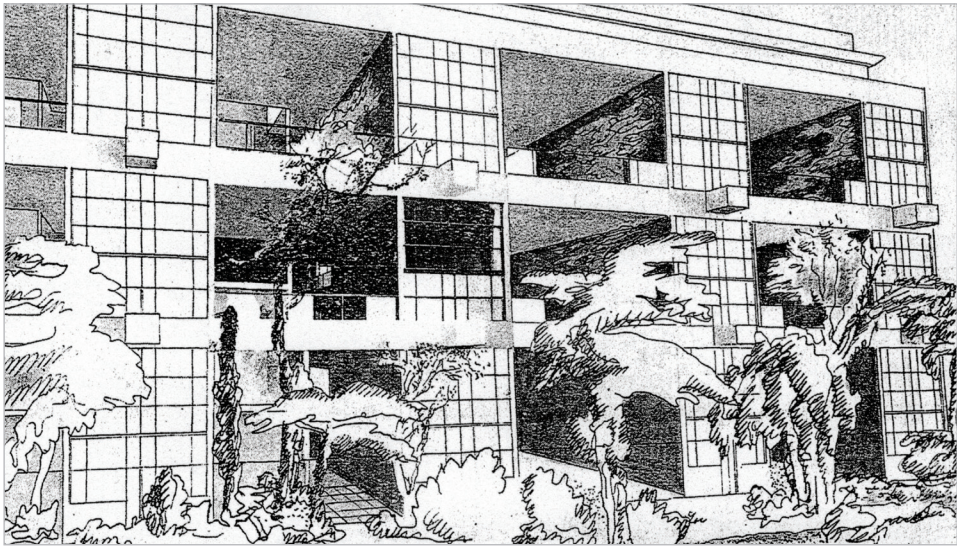


Fig. 4. Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, Paris, 1925, p. 149, The Library of the Warsaw University of Technology

living room (as in the Maison Citrohan) and a sleeping gallery with dressing rooms opened toward the two-storey window at the front, the kitchen and the maids' rooms situated downstairs at the rear part, including the bathroom and another bedroom upstairs, and a covered garden terrace with the tree.

The Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau looked like a free-standing villa, but Le Corbusier recommended that visitors picture it as "a cell in a block of houses constructed as if it were 15 meters above ground".⁴⁷ This idea of a unit for villa apartment blocks is clearly conveyed in an illustration published in *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* and described as: "Ici, le Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau entre dans la composition d'une Unité d'Habitation".⁴⁸ The box-like living units, stacked up on five double floors, include "hanging" garden terraces (*jardins suspendus*) that are open to the front. In *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, the same concept is represented in a more explicit way; the actual photograph of the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau is inserted – in a collage manner – in the façade of the *immeubles-villas* project (Fig. 4).⁴⁹ Le Corbusier's concept of *immeubles-villas*, a new form of dwelling in the city, is a key to understanding the 1925 pavilion as

47 A. M. Vogt, *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archaeology of Modernism*, trans. R. Donnell, Cambridge, 1998, p. 19. "Le pavillon sera donc une «cellule» d'immeubles-villas construite entièrement comme si elle se trouvait à 15 m au-dessus du sol". Cf. Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète, 1910–1929*, p. 98.

48 Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, p. XIII.

49 "Ici, l'on voit au milieu de l'image, la photographie du Pavillon [...]. Le Pavillon reprend ainsi sa place de cellule dans un projet d'immeuble régi par les réglementations parisiennes actuelles". Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, p. 149.

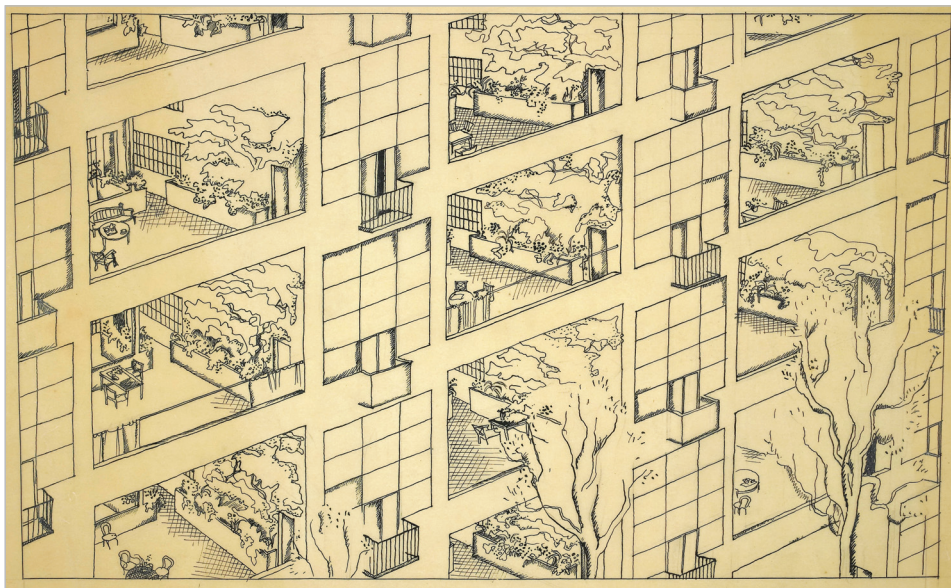


Fig. 5. Le Corbusier, *Immeubles-villas*, 1922 © FLC/ADAGP, 2015

a modern *paradeigma*.⁵⁰ According to this concept – presented in the 1922 Salon d'Automne as a part of Le Corbusier's vision of a modern city – each apartment within a block system was conceived as a small villa with a garden terrace (Fig. 5). Moreover, a garden terrace within a living module is the theme that Le Corbusier develops in the project of Cité Universitaire (Paris, 1925). Every student was to live in his or her own *cellule* which would include a *jardin sur le toit*.⁵¹

The tree in the pavilion: *objet à réaction poétique*

The Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau – consisting of two adjoining parts: the two-storeyed apartment and the side-wing with two dioramas – was placed among large trees surrounding the construction site.⁵² Le Corbusier felt obliged to “respect the trees”, including the one that was growing in the middle of the pavilion's location; hence the circular opening in the ceiling of the

⁵⁰ For a monograph of this project, cf. S. Nivet, *Le Corbusier et l'immeuble-villas. Stratégies, dispositifs, figures*, Paris, 2011.

⁵¹ Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète, 1910–1929*, p. 73.

⁵² “L'emplacement des grands arbres cantonnant le pavillon (et même l'occupant en son milieu) nous empêcha de séparer nettement en les réunissant toufois par un portique, l'aile des dioramas de celle de l'immeuble-villas”. Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'architecture moderne*, p. 149.

garden terrace.⁵³ As Adolf Max Vogt argues, Le Corbusier used the tree as “proof that modernism does not destroy but cultivates nature, nurses it alongside the building and on top of their roofs”.⁵⁴ Le Corbusier’s emphasis on respecting trees does not only result from the problematic construction site of the Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau; it should also be read in the context of his views on modern town planning, which were contemporary of the 1925 Exposition. In *Urbanisme* (1925) – the volume mentioned as a theoretical background for the pavilion’s construction⁵⁵ – an image of a tree epitomising nature is juxtaposed with the idea of a town. Le Corbusier defines a town as “an assault by man upon nature. It is a human action against nature, a human organism designed for shelter and work. It is a creation”.⁵⁶ Having sketched the idea of the modern age as ruled by geometry and the machine, the architect returns to the question of nature within a city:

A Turkish proverb: Where you build, there you plant trees. In our case we cut them down. And what about motor cars? [...] The city of speed is the city of success. [...] On 9 May 1925 half the chestnut trees along the Avenue des Champs-Élysées had black leaves; the buds could not unfold; the tiny, crippled leaves curled up like the bent fingers of a hand ... It is assumed that the third generation to live in a big city will be sterile.⁵⁷

What is intriguing in this paragraph is that Le Corbusier places the issue of respecting trees side by side with that of motorised traffic in the city. The Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau with its key feature, a garden terrace, was designed at a time of ardent debates on the reorganisation of Paris; Le Corbusier sought financial support for the pavilion from automobile companies, such as Peugeot, Citroën, and Voisin.⁵⁸

As the Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau stood for the whole block of *immeubles-villas*, so the tree stood for its gardens. In this sense, the tree in the pavilion’s

53 “Le trou rond du plafond n’est qu’un incident exceptionnel dû à l’obligation de respecter les arbres”. Le Corbusier, *Almanach d’architecture moderne*, p. 152. In a way, the strategy of preserving the trees is characteristic of some of the designs of exhibition pavilions. Sverre Fehn’s Pavilion of the Nordic Nations (1962), built around large trees growing in the Giardini of the Venice Biennale, is a case in point. See J. Hill, *Immaterial Architecture*, London–New York, 2006, pp. 159–160.

54 Vogt, op. cit., p. 19.

55 Cf. e.g. Le Corbusier, *Almanach d’architecture moderne*, pp. 111 and 150.

56 Le Corbusier, “Guiding Principles of Town Planning” (*Urbanisme*, 1925), in: *Programs and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. U. Conrads, translated by M. Bullock, Cambridge MA, 1970, p. 89.

57 Ibid., p. 93.

58 See von Moos, op. cit., pp. 189–190. “Gabriel Voisin nous ayant donné 25.000 francs et Henri Frugès de Bordeaux, les 25.000 autres francs qui firent les 50.000 francs avec lesquels fut mis debout, sur 300 m² et deux étages, en béton armé, le pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau”. Le Corbusier, *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*, pp. VIII–IX. Not only were the advertisements of Voisin cars and aeroplanes published in *L’Esprit Nouveau*, but Le Corbusier also owned the Voisin C14 car. See T. Benton, “Dreams of Machines: Futurism and l’Esprit Nouveau”, *Journal of Design History*, 1990, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 19–34.

garden terrace functions as a synecdoche, i.e. a figure of speech in which a term denoting a part of a thing refers to its whole (*pars pro toto*). This fragment of nature is not only preserved in the construction site, but also included in the residential building. As Vogt notes, Le Corbusier “wants to incorporate into the dwelling a maximum of outer space, which is implanted into the building as a cube of air. The Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau [...] represents exactly this kind of unity of interior living space and internalized outside space (which thus becomes ‘privatized’). [...] Nature is wooed and also alienated, into a roof garden and as hanging garden over the apartments underneath”.⁵⁹

Not only did the pavilion’s tree epitomise the hanging garden terraces in the proposal for an *immeuble-villa* unit. It seemed to be a part of the collection of objects furnishing the villa’s interiors. Unlike Odysseus’s *thalamos*, it was not a marvellous natural curiosity shaped with human hands but, similarly to the *thalamos*, it could not be moved. The tree was not the only “fixed” element of the interior: Le Corbusier designed fixed furniture, i.e. modular storage units (*casiers standards*).⁶⁰ Kenneth Frampton notes that the pavilion “was a condensation of the Purist sensibility [...], it was furnished in accordance with the Purist canon of *objets-types*, that is with English club armchairs, Thonet bentwood furniture and standard Parisian cast-iron park pieces, with *objets-tableaux* of Purist origin, with oriental rugs and South American pottery”.⁶¹ Alan Colquhoun finds in the Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau a strategy of “a montage of found *objets-type* lacking any fixed formal relation to each other” which contrasted with the stylistic unity of Art Deco’s interiors presented at the 1925 Exposition.⁶² Tag Gronberg reveals the museum-like nature of the pavilion’s interiors, pointing to Le Corbusier’s inspirations as drawn from his 1911 formative *Voyage d’Orient* and mentioned in the final chapter of *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*.⁶³ One of the inspirations was the museum at Pompeii, which included “the most banal objects of everyday use”.⁶⁴ Was the tree in the garden terrace an example of an interiorised – in a museum-like manner – fragment of nature? As an isolated exhibit it became a part of an architectural composition which owed much to the pictorial compositions of Purism. What is characteristic of the latter is the “visual dramatization of the ‘objets’ [...] often presented in isolation on a neutral surface” – a strategy that was typical of 1920s advertisements published in *L’Esprit Nouveau*.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Vogt, op. cit., p. 19.

⁶⁰ Cf. e.g. Le Corbusier, *Almanach d’architecture moderne*, p. 112.

⁶¹ K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, London, 2004, pp. 156–157.

⁶² A. Colquhoun, *Modern Architecture*, Oxford, 2002, p. 142.

⁶³ T. Gronberg, “Speaking Volumes: The Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau”, *Oxford Art Journal*, 1992, vol. 15, no. 2, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 58. See also a photograph of *Musée de Pompéi* in Le Corbusier, *L’Art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*, p. 21.

⁶⁵ Von Moos, op. cit., p. 286.

As Stanislaus von Moos concludes: "Nature versus geometry is a predominant formal theme in Le Corbusier's great projects of the twenties [...]. And at the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, the inclusion of nature as the dialectical counterpart of architecture is pushed to the extreme: the tree becomes the 'objet à réaction poétique' within the building itself".⁶⁶ Was then the tree an *objet à réaction poétique* ("object evoking a poetic reaction") rather than an *objet-type*? Dagmar Motycka Weston aptly describes the difference between these two types of objects, both in painterly and architectural compositions:

Where previously the purists had focused on standardised machine-made objects selected for their constancy, the *objets à réaction poétique* were varied and often idiosyncratic [...]. They were mostly organic fragments, admired by their collectors for their diversity of plastic qualities as well as for the powerful natural forces (such as rupture or erosion) which over time had helped to bring them into existence. In this way, in contrast to the rather more static character of the purist *objets-type*, the *objets à réaction poétique* manifested a powerful temporality – such as characterises the effects of cosmic conditions on things and on human life.⁶⁷

According to Le Corbusier, objects evoking a poetic reaction can be found in everyday life; their natural forms, dimensions and materiality could enter our domestic space. In the late 1920s and 1930s the iconography of Le Corbusier's paintings included stones and pebbles "rolled by the ocean", shells "smoothed" like china, buds and fruits, bones and fossils, as well as the roots of trees.⁶⁸ This kind of objects – alluding to the Surrealists' sensibility and their collage strategy which was evident e.g. in Max Ernst's *Histoire naturelle* (1925) – were also arranged on the furniture at the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau.⁶⁹

Built around a tree: a "paradigmatic" situation

In "Confessions", the final chapter of *L'Art décorative d'aujourd'hui* (1925), Le Corbusier pays tribute to Charles L'Eplattenier, his teacher at the Ecole d'Art in La Chaux-de-Fonds: "Mon maître, un excellent pédagogue, véritable homme des bois, nous fit hommes des bois. [...] je compris comment pousse un arbre

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 308.

⁶⁷ D. Motycka Weston, "Le Corbusier and the Restorative Fragment at the Swiss Pavilion", in: *Tracing Modernity: Manifestations of the Modern in Architecture and the City*, eds. M. Hvatum, C. Hermansen, London–New York, 2004, pp. 175–176.

⁶⁸ Le Corbusier, "Les «Objets à réaction poétique»", in: *Le Corbusier ou la Synthèse des arts*, p. 97.

⁶⁹ On analogies between Le Corbusier's *objets à réaction poétique* and Ernst's *frottages* from the series *Histoire naturelle*, cf. Von Moos, op. cit., p. 286; Motycka Weston, op. cit., pp. 186–188.

et pourquoi il se tient en équilibre au milieu même de l'orage".⁷⁰ What did it mean for Le Corbusier to be "a man of the woods" in his architectural practice? Many examples have been found of his interest in trees. His early drawings include an analysis of trees' growth patterns and root structures. His early buildings, such as the Villa Fallet in La Chaux-de-Fonds (1906–1907), are considered responses to L'Eplattenier's concept of a vernacular style of architecture, as inspired by the Swiss Alpine landscape.⁷¹ What has to be considered as crucial for Le Corbusier's involvement with trees are not only his designs executed in the La Chaux-de-Fonds period, but also the concept manifested in the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, i.e. building around a tree, which seems to find continuation in his other designs.

The Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau is not Le Corbusier's only project that seems to be built around a tree or that respects the trees growing on site; for example, the Villas Lipchitz-Miestchaninoff, i.e. two houses for two sculptors (1923), were designed around a small courtyard with trees.⁷² Other examples include the Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret (1923–1925), where the ancient trees needed to be preserved on the construction site; that is why, as Le Corbusier explained, the plan of these two houses "seems to be restless" (Fig. 6).⁷³ There is a pine tree in the centre of the design of Maison Ternesien (1926); it divides the house into two parts (Fig. 7).⁷⁴ In a drawing of Villa Joseph et Hanau (1926), there is a tree in the centre of a small courtyard surrounded by three aisles of the building (Fig. 8). Growing in the courtyard of Villa Church (1928/1929), the tree looks as if it were imprisoned by beams and *pilotis*.⁷⁵ The most spectacular house built around a tree is that of Dr. Currutchet at La Plata in Argentina, which was completed in 1949. The large tree in the middle of the house is represented in every plan and section (Fig. 9). It is also visible from all levels of the house's interiors as an element of *promenade architecturale*: "One rises up through the building in an interesting and amusing way which opens up various perspectives".⁷⁶

"Thème: UNE maison: UN arbre" is an inscription on a plan of *lotissement* in Barcelona (1933), part of Le Corbusier's and Pierre Jeanneret's project

70 Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, p. 198. As Vogt argues, the title of the final chapter of *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui* is not accidental: "For French ears, and especially for the ears of French-speaking Swiss, the choice of the word 'confession' is a clear reference to Rousseau's soul-baring autobiography *Les confessions*, with which, as documented historically, the Jeanneret family in La Chaux-de-Fonds was thoroughly familiar". Vogt, op. cit., p. 183.

71 See Brooks, op. cit., pp. 71–85, 364–365; Sekler, op. cit., pp. 44–55.

72 Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète, 1910–1929*, pp. 70–71.

73 Ibid., p. 64.

74 Ibid., p. 122.

75 Ibid., p. 202.

76 Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète 1946–1952*, publiée par W. Boesiger, Zurich 1953, p. 62. For a juxtaposition of Maison Currutchet and Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau see also J. Jenger, *Le Corbusier: Un autre regard*, p. 68.



Fig. 6. Le Corbusier, Maisons La Roche-Jeanneret, Paris, 1923–1925, photo by Olivier Martin-Gambier © FLC/ADAGP, 2015

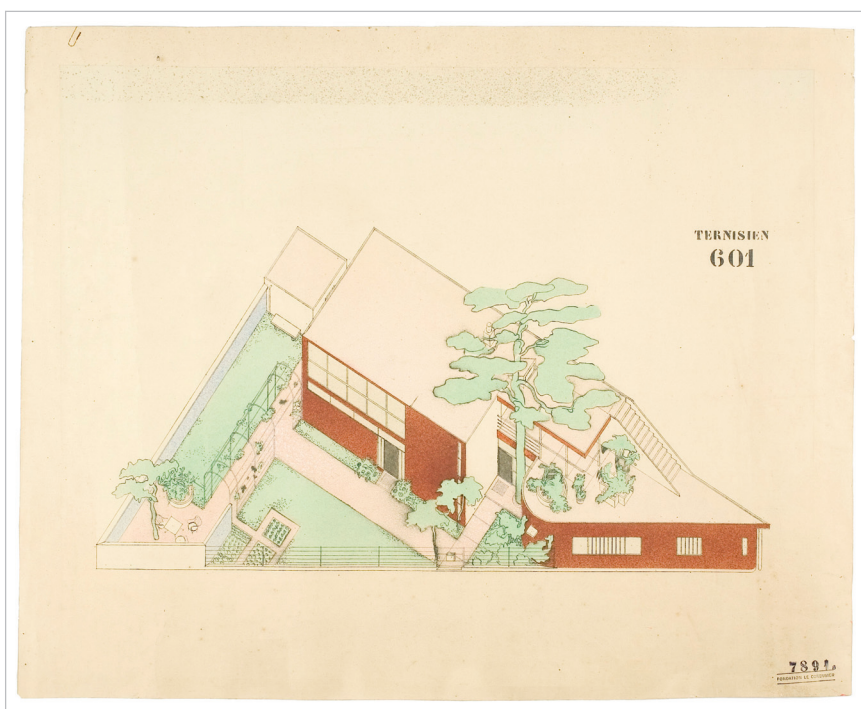


Fig. 7. Le Corbusier, Maison Ternisien, Boulogne-sur-Seine, 1926 © FLC/ADAGP, 2015

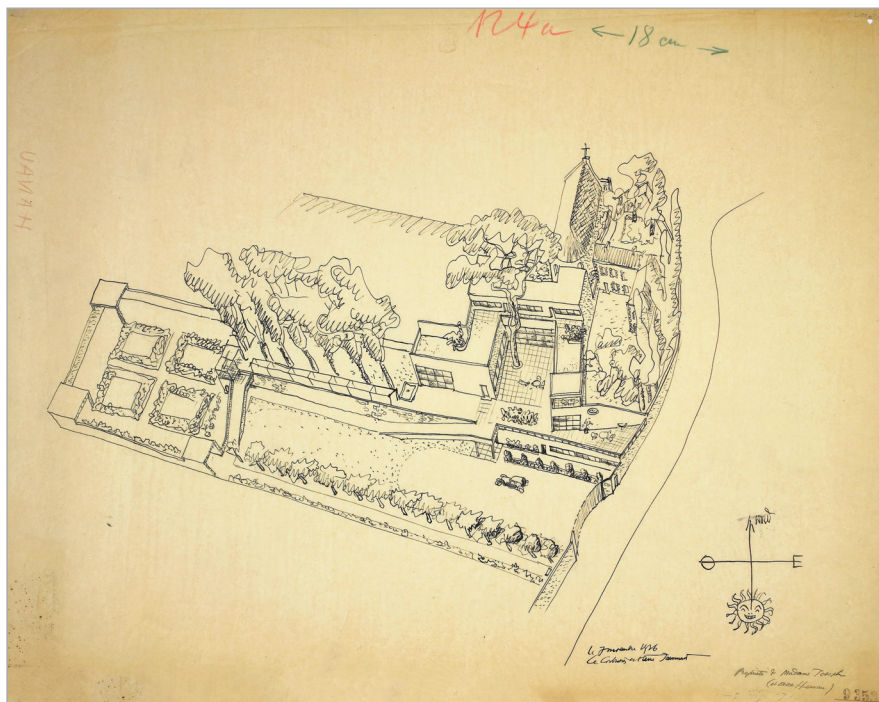


Fig. 8. Le Corbusier, Villa Joseph et Hanau, Vaucresson, 1926 © FLC/ADAGP, 2015



Fig. 9. Le Corbusier, Maison Currutchet, La Plata, Argentina, 1949, photo by Olivier Martin-Gambier © FLC/ADAGP, 2015

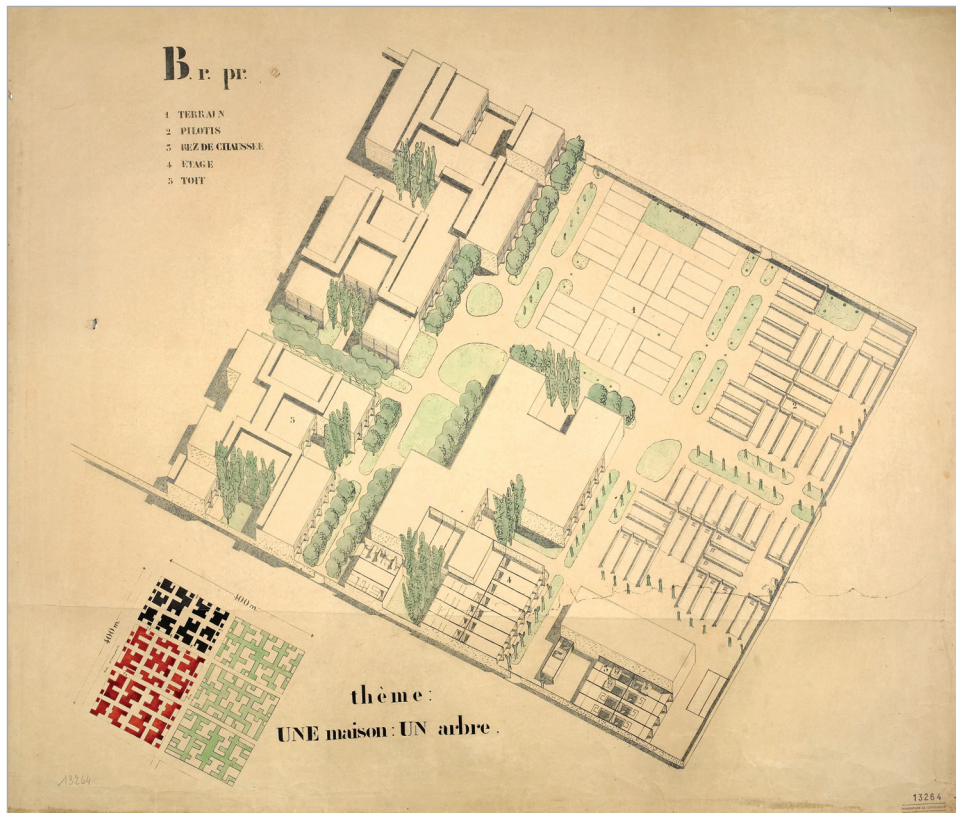


Fig. 10. Le Corbusier, Pierre Jeanneret, *Lotissement* in Barcelona, 1933 © FLC/ADAGP, 2015

of city extension: “chaque fenêtre de maison est en face d’une arbre que l’on plantera” (Fig. 10).⁷⁷ A similar idea, even if not so explicitly expressed in words, is represented in the drawings for the *Lotissement Peugeot* (Audincourt, 1925); there is a tree in front of every façade, growing in a row along the main street.⁷⁸ A variation on the theme of “one house: one tree” can also be found in the 1953 project of *Maison type La Rochelle*; Le Corbusier’s drawings present trees which grow in small allotments situated in front of each segment of the villa-block (Fig. 11). Also in the 1950s, Le Corbusier elaborated the project of *l’arborisation* of Chandigarh, a detailed systematisation of the elements of landscaping, such as the position of trees: in single rows, in double rows, in multiple rows, trees isolated or placed in homogeneous and heterogeneous clusters, and forests.⁷⁹

77 Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète, 1929–1934*, publiée par W. Boesiger, Zurich, 1947, p. 196.

78 Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète, 1910–1929*, p. 72.

79 Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète 1952–1957*, publiée par W. Boesiger, Zurich, 1957, pp. 108–113.

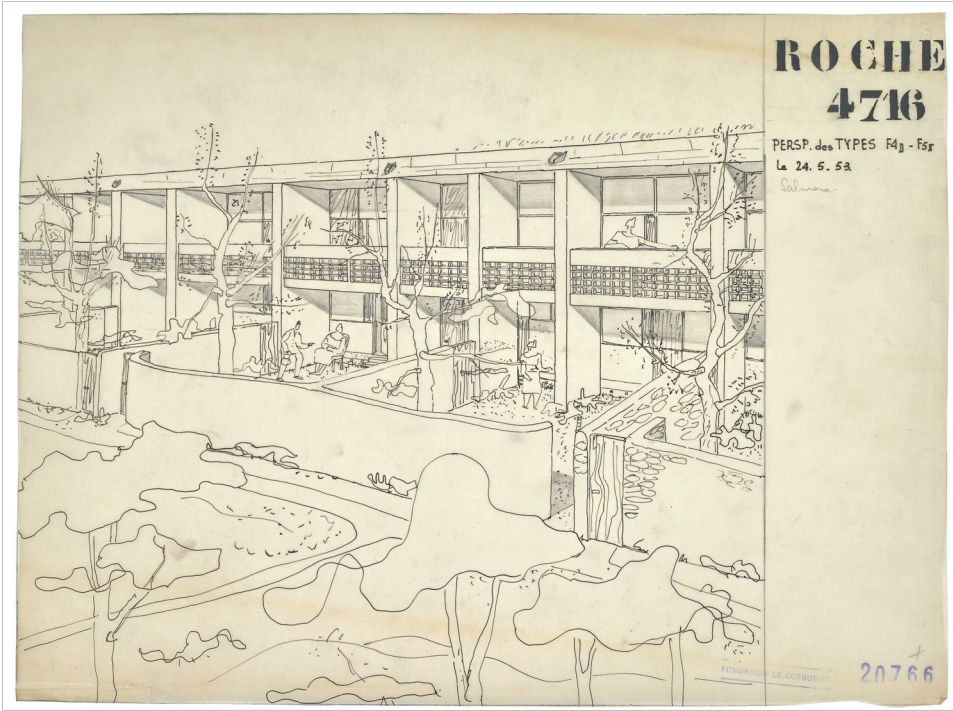


Fig. 11. Le Corbusier, Maison type La Rochelle, 1953 © FLC/ADAGP, 2015

While juxtaposing Odysseus's *thalamos* and the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, I do not claim that Le Corbusier must have chosen Homer's ekphrasis as an inspiration for his 1925 design, even if Homer sometimes did appear as a reference for his architectural practice.⁸⁰ Frank Lloyd Wright's domestic architecture, for instance, has been considered a source of Le Corbusier's treatment of vegetation in his *immeubles-villas*.⁸¹ One may also argue whether Le Corbusier's concept of respecting the trees growing or planted on construction sites is characteristic of all of his designs. As Dorothee Imbert suggests in her interpretation of Le Corbusier's *petite villa au bord du lac Léman* (1925), the architect "seemed to dislike grass as well as the shade created by trees"; the trees were constantly trimmed or cut down in order to provide an appropriate

⁸⁰ "A landscape worthy of Homer" is an expression that appears in the caption accompanying the photograph of the roof garden of Unité d'Habitation in Marseille. See J. Williamson, *Acropolis, now!*, in: *Surrealism and Architecture*, ed. T. Mical, London–New York, 2005, p. 332.

⁸¹ See P. V. Turner, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Young Le Corbusier", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1983, vol. 42, no. 4, pp. 357–359; idem, T. L. Doremus, Le Corbusier, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Young Le Corbusier: An Addendum", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 1984, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 364–365.

distribution of sunlight on the site.⁸² Even if Le Corbusier's attitude toward trees may sometimes resemble that of the 18th-century *jardin anglo-chinois* with its carefully arranged picturesque views and its *fabriques*⁸³, there is still something primordial about building a house around a growing tree, an act that is similar to that of placing a hearth in the middle of a household.⁸⁴

In Volume III of *Modern Painters* (1856), John Ruskin emphasises the "delight which the Greeks had in trees" while interpreting the Homeric landscape.⁸⁵ In a passage from the chapter entitled "Of Classical Landscape", Ruskin paraphrases Homer's description from Book 5 of how Odysseus looks for a safe place to pass the night:

After his first grateful kiss given to the corn-growing land, he considers immediately how he is to pass the night [...]. He decides for the wood, and finds in it a bower formed by a sweet and a wild olive tree, interlacing their branches, or – perhaps more accurately translating Homer's intensely graphic expression – "changing their branches with each other" [...], and forming a roof penetrated by neither rain, sun, nor wind. Under this bower Ulysses collects the "vain (or frustrate) outpouring of the dead leaves" [...] and, having got enough together, makes his bed of them, and goes to sleep, having covered himself up with them, "as embers are covered up with ashes".⁸⁶

In Homer's descriptions of Greek woods Ruskin values not so much the beauty of the poetic image but rather the utility of the wild olive tree, its intertwined branches forming a perfect roof.⁸⁷ It should also be emphasised that the scene in Book 5, as referred to by Ruskin, can be seen as a "prefiguration" of the celebrated scene of recognition which includes the ekphrasis of Odysseus's *thalamos*.⁸⁸

82 Imbert, op. cit., p. 174. See also Le Corbusier, *Oeuvre complète, 1910–1929*, pp. 74–75.

83 Ibid. pp. 151–155.

84 I refer here to Anthony Vidler's argument of "finding the center of the home in the fire: a tradition of settler origins, rooted in the anthropology of [Gottfried] Semper and finding its architectural expression in the Prairie homesteading of Frank Lloyd Wright". A. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, Cambridge MA–London, 1999, p. 42. For a comparison of Le Corbusier's and Wright's architectural concepts, cf. e.g. P. Blake, *The Master Builders: Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright*, New York, 1961.

85 J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. III, London, 1856, p. 189.

86 Ibid. p. 190. Ruskin paraphrases here a fragment from the *Odyssey*: "Then, [...] he set out for the wood, and he found his spot near the water beside a clearing; there he crept beneath two bushes which grew from the same place, one of thorn and one of olive. Through these the strength of the wet winds could never blow, nor the rays of the bright sun beat, nor could the rain pierce through them, so closely did they grow, intertwining one with the other. Beneath these Odysseus crept. [...] Odysseus covered himself with leaves. And Athene shed sleep upon his eyes, that it might enfold his lids and speedily free him from toilsome weariness". See Homer, *Odyssey*, I, Books 1–12, pp. 217–219 (5.474–493).

87 Ruskin, op. cit., vol. III, p. 190.

88 See Juszczak, op. cit., p. 162.

During his formative years, thanks to Charles L'Eplattenier's teaching, Le Corbusier was urged to study the works of Ruskin; the latter is known for his analytical descriptions and drawings of trees (Fig. 12).⁸⁹ However, it is neither Ruskin's description of Homeric landscapes nor Homer's ekphrasis of Odysseus's *thalamos* but the Parthenon juxtaposed with the 1921 Delage sports car that has become the symbol of Le Corbusier's Hellenism.⁹⁰ By juxtaposing Odysseus's *thalamos* and the Pavillon de L'Esprit Nouveau, I am not searching for an alternative source of Le Corbusier's Hellenism but for a kind of primordality, or existential constancy, defined by Dalibor Vesely as a "paradigmatic nature of a typical situation" which has to be acknowledged in the process of architectural creation:

The term "paradigmatic" refers to the power of typical situations to bring and hold together a vast richness of human experiences and give them relative stability. The stability of situations is revealed in habits, customs and traditions. It is a source of constant surprise to see to what extent our life is structured by the typicality of situations of our everyday life, such as eating, work, learning etc., situated in typical places. The process that constitutes and preserves the typicality of situations can be described as a continuity of reference to the ultimate source of stability in the given natural (cosmic) conditions of our world and its history.⁹¹

Isn't it a "typical", i.e. "paradigmatic" situation that we look for breathing space under a tree, just as Odysseus who found both his temporary shelter and his dwelling around the olive tree?

"What importance do the humanities retain in our post-technological, global and market-oriented society? Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe

89 On Ruskin, cf. Le Corbusier, *L'Art décoratif d'aujourd'hui*, pp. 134–138; Brooks, op. cit., pp. 68–69. In her analysis of a possible Ruskinian influence on Le Corbusier, Mary Patricia May Sekler focuses mostly on Ruskin's *Elements of Drawings* and Volume V of *Modern Painters*. cf. Sekler, op. cit., pp. 61–69.

90 The architect visited the Athenian Acropolis in 1911 during a tour through Europe and Asia Minor. Le Corbusier sees the Greek temple as an ancient example of standardisation: "The Parthenon is a product of selection applied to an established standard. Already for a century the Greek temple had been standardized in all its parts". See Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 133. The main theme of the chapter entitled "Eyes which do not see, III Automobiles", included in *Towards a New Architecture*, is the evolution of the automobile presented as parallel to the perfecting of Greek architecture, from the Doric temple at Paestum to the Parthenon. As Richard A. Etlin argues, Le Corbusier's concept of the perfecting of Greek architecture owes much to the nineteenth-century French Hellenism that was manifested not only in the establishment of the École Française d'Athènes (1846), but also in Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc's *Entretiens sur l'architecture* (1863–1872) and Auguste Choisy's *Histoire de l'architecture* (1899). See R. A. Etlin, "Le Corbusier, Choisy, and French Hellenism: The Search for a New Architecture", *The Art Bulletin*, 1987, vol. 69, no. 2, pp. 264–278.

91 D. Vesely, "Architecture as a Humanistic Discipline", in: *The Humanities in Architectural Design: A Contemporary and Historical Perspective*, eds. S. Bandyopadhyay, J. Lomholt, N. Temple, R. Tobe, London–New York, 2010, p. 198.

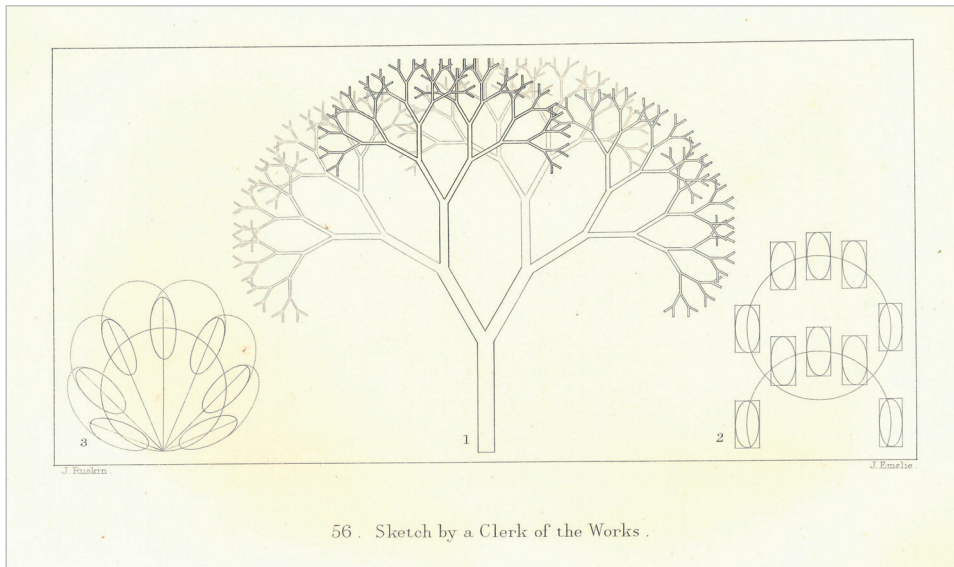


Fig. 12. John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. V, London, 1860, plate 56, p. 63, The Library of the Institute of Art History, University of Warsaw

– who still reads them?” – asks Karsten Harries in his essay discussing the contemporary tension between “design creativity” and “the humanities”.⁹² Le Corbusier – not only the master of modern standardisation and *béton brut*, but also a reader of Homer and Ruskin – was still able to picture Odysseus wandering in the villages of the Cyclades.⁹³ We may also assume that, like Odysseus, Le Corbusier tended to look for a safe shelter under the trees. Thus the Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau would not only be an example of a modern *paradeigma* (standardisation) – as a villa prototype that would be inserted into Le Corbusier’s *immeubles-villas* – but also a manifestation of a “paradigmatic” situation (*mythos*) of designing a dwelling around a tree.

Abstract

The paper presents some comments on Homer’s ekphrasis of Odysseus’s *thalamos*, as presented in Book 23 of the *Odyssey*, and Le Corbusier’s Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau which was built for the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes

⁹² K. Harries, “The Responsibility of Architectural Design”, in: *The Humanities in Architectural Design: A Contemporary and Historical Perspective*, p. 7.

⁹³ See Le Corbusier, *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches. Voyage au pays des timides*, Paris, 1937, p. 65. For more information on Le Corbusier’s reading list, cf. e.g. P. Turner, “The Beginnings of Le Corbusier’s Education, 1902–1907”, *The Art Bulletin*, 1971, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 241–224.

and held in Paris. Both works imply a specific architectural situation of designing a domestic space around a growing tree. The architectural nature of Odysseus's *thalamos* (his and Penelope's nuptial bed and the bedchamber built around an olive tree in the palace of Ithaca) is revealed, for example, in the interpretation of the *daidalon*, i.e. the epithet that Homer uses in his ekphrasis which is associated with the name of Daedalus, the first mythical architect. Le Corbusier's pavilion, which included a tree in its garden terrace, is seen not only as a standardised unit of *immeubles-villas*, but also as a "paradigmatic" situation of designing a dwelling or a breathing space around a tree.