

Preface

The Suisse-Romande pedagogic magazine *L'Éducateur* published in its issue number 4 of 1890 a new educational program on the subject of history at the elementary schools. The author, Paul Jacquet, a teacher from La Chaux-de-Fonds and the magazine's secretary, proposed to include in the curriculum of the canton of Neuchâtel the then freshly discovered phase of Swiss prehistory. These discoveries, which immediately produced an enormous European echo, concerned the so-called lake-dwellers (Culture Lacustre or Culture des Palafittes) from the Lake of Geneva eastward to the Lake of Zurich and the Lake of Constance. The findings changed the picture of prehistory and early history so profoundly that Paul Jacquet wanted to preserve in the curriculum the freshly discovered earliest horizons of human culture.

Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, who later called himself Le Corbusier (and to whom we will refer by the signet LC that he chose himself and used innumerable times), was born on October 6, 1887, in La Chaux-de-Fonds. Thus he was just three years old when the government of the canton of Neuchâtel responded to Jacquet and completed the suggested supplementation of the curriculum, astonishingly quickly, in the same year of 1890.

When three years later little LC finishes the Froebel kindergarten and goes into the first grade, he belongs to the pioneer class, the first to be taught the new material. But why were the youngest grades confronted with the topic, at the urging of Paul Jacquet and a large number of other teachers? This is hard to understand today, but at that time it evidently seemed appropriate. Today archaeologists like Christin Osterwalder-Maier understandably plead for the contrary, for assigning the topic of prehistory to more mature students.

Such matters will occupy us in chapters 28 and 29. But in February 1991, when I was giving a paper on the topic of LC at the annual conference

of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I knew nothing about such details, and if I had I would have considered them odd or abstruse. Yet I saddled myself with the difficult job of research by my rather offbeat choice of theme: “LC and Swiss Lake Dwellings of the Neolithic Age.” Only after I delivered my paper did it dawn on me: I had started to investigate and to ask questions at the opposite end of what LC represented or had seemed to represent until then. Instead of further researching axiomatically the topic of progressivity, I had started to address the archaeology of this work. Archaeology of a great European avant-gardist—is there such a thing? Can it be? In my short and sketchy lecture in the Piper Auditorium I had proposed the thesis that even the avant-garde has its archaeology or can have one. With the present book I should like to unfold my thesis and flesh it out. If Stanford Anderson and Francesco Passanti and also Helen Lipstadt, Marc Angelil, and Spiro Pollalis had not encouraged me in a friendly way, nothing would have come of my attempt to read LC’s vector in the opposite direction.

If one is asked what distinguishes LC from the other avant-gardists of his generation—I am thinking, for instance, of Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, André Lurçat and Robert Mallet-Stevens, Hans Schmidt and Mart Stam, Hugo Häring and Alvar Aalto, and also, of course, Frank Lloyd Wright and the engineer Robert Maillart—one possible answer might be that, while LC’s house is white and cubical and “cool” like the houses of the other avant-gardists, *only he* insisted to the end of his life on lifting his house if possible completely on stilts (*piloris*) and thus making it a *boîte en l’air* (box up in the air). This is what I explore here.

Not unexpectedly, I was hampered by all sorts of obstacles set in my path by LC himself, who, I might add, is a great master of covering his tracks to a horrifying degree. Had there been moments when LC felt some misgivings about his tirelessly celebrating and parading before the amazed devotees of modernism what was most ancient on his cultural horizon as if it were the latest and newest? Mightn’t this be one of the reasons for his obstinately covering his tracks?

In other words, the regional history I present here shows that, thanks to the general enthusiasm of that time for lake dwellers, the young boy was led to accept as absolutely proven that people at the beginning of culture

had lived above water on pile-work. Even though the present state of archaeology relativizes this view, what was held to be scientifically valid at LC's time in school remains of interest for us.

Regional history? A sensitive issue. In contrast to the group of scholars who investigated the creative development of the artist in his early works (Patricia Sekler, H. Allan Brooks, Francesco Passanti, Stanislaus von Moos, Sambal Oelek, Marc Emery, Jacques Gubler, Paul V. Turner, and, for LC's younger years above all, Marc Solitaire and Giuliano Gresleri), I wanted to go far beyond the years of LC's apprenticeship, higher studies, and early artistic accomplishments, back to his boyhood and, if possible, to his earliest childhood. My central question was, *what imprinted itself on the little boy, on young Jeanneret while he was still defenseless?*

LC's mother has been discussed almost to the total exclusion of his father. But what was *he* like? What educational concepts guided LC's kindergarten teacher at that time (Marc Solitaire's study on this subject is important for me; I expand on it); what educational concept guided his elementary school teachers? In what kind of region was he growing up? It certainly was a lonely borderland between Switzerland and France, at an altitude of 1,000 meters. Yet at that period, around 1900, La Chaux-de-Fonds was nothing less than the world capital of watch production. Its high-tech concentration could be compared with that of Chicago or Detroit, but high up in the snow-covered mountains, a mixture of provincial seclusion and cosmopolitan, up-to-date professionalism nothing short of the miraculous.

Add to that the larger framework of LC's youth. Western Switzerland, the so-called Romandie, had the specific culture of a French borderland that for us Swiss Germans is an object of admiration as something highly spirited. This region between the high Alps of Jura and Valais, between the Lake of Geneva, the Lake of Neuchâtel, and the Lake of Bièvre, belongs to the small number of European landscapes that have become famous as *paysages parlantes*. A certain portion of the work of young LC has to be seen as an *architecture parlante* for the *paysages parlantes* of these lakes so dear to his heart. One might call these sites "celebrated landscapes," and their most important eulogist was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His voice was one that LC was intimately familiar with from his earliest childhood and one that he never ceased to resort to, as the list of his later book acquisitions conclusively proves.

The risk of succumbing to the dubious or narrow-minded aspect of regional history can best be mastered by undertaking a parallel study of the history of exoticism. For the student LC, the central notion of the exotic was embodied by a far-away thrice-named city: Byzantium—Constantinople—Istanbul. This was the destination of his trip to the Orient with his friend Klipstein in 1911. They stayed fifty-three days on the Bosphorus, far longer than the time they spent on Mount Athos, in Athens, or in Rome. Sometimes I treat these fifty-three days as having the same importance as the thirty years of LC's youth in the Jura. For if the totally foreign, half seemingly barbaric and half dazzling in its strangeness, captivates one and engrosses one deeply, a single day of travel can mean as much as a series of months at home.

Perhaps among the readers of this book there are some who knew and experienced LC personally who might disapprove of my refusal to fully spell out his pseudonym. They might consider the use of the initials to be solely the privilege of the Master himself, something a historian should leave alone. But those who note how emphatically his father, Edouard Jeanneret-Perret, prided himself on the abbreviation of his own name, J'-P', might view the question of self-designation and signature differently. LC's father signed this way in his capacity as president of a section of the Swiss Alpine Club and felt justified in doing so because of his function in that organization. The son begins to sign himself as LC as early as 1929 in the first volume of the *Oeuvre complète* (and to refer to himself with the third person singular "he"), because he views himself as a missionary. But this very stance remains today LC's most dubious aspect. For thereby he saddled himself with such an excessive burden of promise that he assumed the role of an institution, with the inflexibility and hardening an institution usually entails.

Perhaps I began to look for his earliest possible developmental beginnings because I wanted to break down and remove the encasements, the defensive encrustations that had coalesced into the LC cliché. Where does he come from? This question seemed to me as crucial as asking: where is he leading us? And astonishingly enough, the answer emerged increasingly as a double echo. Initially I had wanted to follow up only the early period of LC himself. But this early period of an individual proved to be full of intense images, testimonies, and dreams of the early period of a human collective

going back several thousand years. I realized that I had to trace a double or twofold archaeology.

I remain greatly indebted to the specialists on LC's youth named above. In this book I had intended to discuss also their most important tenets. But the documentation of my own theses demanded more and more space. It is to be hoped that what I have presented will spark necessary debates.

LC thought, dreamed, and designed in French. Over a certain period of the research boom of Anglo-American and recently also of Latin-American scholarship, this simple fact was almost forgotten. This is why I worked with the original texts whenever possible. With few exceptions, the primary formulations are given in French. For their translations I alone am to be held responsible. (A list of LC's work available in translations is not provided, in view of the present state of computerized information.)

Acknowledgments

My research led me often to La Chaux-de-Fonds (Bibliothèque de la Ville), repeatedly to Paris (Fondation LC), to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Istanbul, and to Dublin. I feel a lasting gratitude for the welcome and generous assistance I received there.

In La Chaux-de-Fonds I received above all invaluable help from Mme. Françoise Frey-Béguin, head of the archives of the public library, whose knowledge of local facts relating to the Jeannerets remains unsurpassed; from the LC scholar Marc A. Emery; from Mme. Musy-Ramseyer, conservator of the Musée d'Histoire; from Marcel Jacquat, head of the Musée d'Histoire naturelle; and from Edmond Charrière, director of the Museum of Art.

Jacques Gubler (Lausanne) surprised me in our dialogue by letter with his elaborations on the theme of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and architecture, which offers a rich amplification of my own commentary on Rousseau in this book but which I regret I learned of too late to include here.

In Neuchâtel, at the municipal archives, I was advised by Jean-Marc Barrelet, and in the Musée d'Ethnographie by Roland Kaehr. At the Institute of Prehistory of the University of Neuchâtel, Michel Egloff showed a lively interest in my special problem. In Paris, at the Fondation LC, its director Mme. Evelyne Tréhin and her assistants facilitated my tracking down of some elusive details; Jean-Louis Cohen, whose book on LC and his Soviet

Russian patrons (*Le Corbusier et la mystique de l'URSS*) served me as a kind of compass, immediately comprehended my basic concept and gave me important advice.

In the professional circles of archaeologists specializing in Swiss pre-history and lake-dwelling research, my unusually formulated question was met with astonishing professional interest and curiosity. Next to Michel Egloff, Hans-Georg Bandi-Klipstein and his wife showed a sensitive acceptance of my viewpoint, admittedly because of special favorable circumstances: Mrs. Bandi is the daughter of Auguste Klipstein, who went with LC to Istanbul in 1911 and remained his friend ever after. The Historical Museum of Bern was an especially rich source for the history of the reception of the Swiss lake-dwelling discoveries. Its archives were made accessible to me in the most engaging manner by Karl Zimmermann.

In Zurich I was able to turn again and again to LC's former partner Alfred Roth and to the prominent LC scholars Stanislaus von Moos and Arthur Rugg. In the early stages of my project Marie-Louise Lienhard, Benedikt Loderer, and Sambal Oelek proved helpful partners in many a lively discussion; my colleague and friend André Corboz enlivened its continuance with critical questions.

Two areas were hard to access and particularly challenging: the reconstruction of LC's and Klipstein's experiences in Istanbul, and the clarification of LC's unexpected interest in the *crannoges d'Irlande*. For important references and documentary material relating to Istanbul, I am highly indebted to Ulya Vogt-Göknil and Turgut Vogt, to whom I extend my very special thanks. For clearing up the Dublin question relating to Oscar Wilde's father, who studied the crannogs in his country and made contact with Ferdinand Keller, discoverer of Zurich lake-dwellers, the decisive evidence was found by Radka Donnell. I thank her moreover for her unceasing, lively, supportive professional interest in my projects during all these years.

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Adolf Max Vogt

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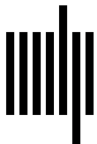
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