The interior capture of life. Le Corbusier and André Malraux

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2. Jean Dubuisson.

3. Encargo que pierde su efecto con el alejamiento del General de Gaulle del poder. Su sucesor, Georges Pompidou, decide una nueva ubicación para el museo de arte contemporáneo en el barrio histórico parisino Beaubourg, dando origen al proceso que termina con la construcción del actual Centro Georges Pompidou, proyectado por Renzo Piano y Richard Rogers.


6. por André Malraux /qui sait de quoi la vie est faite / et combien il est / patétiques de faire / quelque chose / Avec toute mon amitié / Le / Corbusier / 11 / 1 / 61.


9. ibid. (…) d’exposer et de faire connaître par l’écrit, par l’objet et par la parole : Comment les Hommes, de leurs humbles origines, se sont élevés jusqu’à la splendeur de leurs Génies, de leurs Héros et de leurs Saints (…) – Comment, depuis que le temps et l’espace ont été graduellement vaincus, toutes les âmes et tous les âges, s’entrelacent, ont leurs répercussions du Nord au Sud, de l’Orient à l’Occident, et constituent désormais une Pensée collective faite de toutes les pensées particulières, une Activité générale faite de toutes les activités spéciales ; (…)­


11. Los Museos de India –Chandigard (1952) y Ahmedabad (1951)- y Japon –Tokio (1957)- son una tímida formulación de esta idea.

12. Les arts dits primitifs dans la maison d’aujourd’hui


Les arts dits primitifs sont ceux des périodes créatives, quand une société construit son outillage, son langage, sa pensée, ses dieux, quand une civilisation éclatait de sève (...) Les arts dits primitifs expriment les âges d’action.


17. ibid. P1.


André Malraux and Le Corbusier often met during their lives. There are several testimonies of their encounters. Photographic records show how Le Corbusier explaining his architectural Works to Malraux at Chandigarh in 1958 or both chatting at Le Corbusier’s office at Sèvres Street in 1964, when the architect received from the Minister of the Cultural Affairs – André Malraux - the French medal of Legion of Honor.

Several reasons allowed the gathering of these two characters. Near 1962 André Malraux, as Minister, demands a project of a Cultural Center in La Défense area to Le Corbusier. This project should contemplate a XXth Century Museum6, an Architectural School, a Museum of Decorative Arts and a Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers. This project was firstly permitted by the architect’s death in 1965 and was finally dropped in 1969, the moment André Malraux left the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.

Partially the contacts between these two characters were of private nature, so it is difficult to describe exactly their approaches. However, it is known by the correspondence between them, found in the archive of the Le Corbusier Foundation, that were numerous the attempts from the architect to inform and sensitize the Minister of the state of the decay of some of his more emblematic buildings, such as the Unité d’habitation de Marseille or the Villa Savoye. André Malraux’s library4 also reveals the relationship between these two actors of their times, showing personal affinities beyond the known official ones. Until his death Le Corbusier, showing personal affinities beyond also reveals the relationship between these two actors of their times, international associations, library, University, University campus, Stadium, among others. The World Museum should exhibit the human work, considered in the time and place of its conception, in order to collect the products of human activity throughout the history of Le Corbusier. Furthermore, a trip made in 1941 that should progress along a descendant spiral, forming a sort of Ziggarat. Visitors would begin their journey looking at the prehistoric civilizations at the top of the pyramid. The descendant spiral movement would cover different times; in the descendant movement the visitor would approach his time. This spatial conception would also allow visitors an increased overview of the several times traveled in the descendant movement, as the empty space in the interior of the pyramid, caused by the development of the spiral, would increase. Le Corbusier, describing, the World Museum project, says: In the middle of the time and place, the human soul, constant, vibrating between its reason that attempts to correct what his passion unleashed, produced these works that are, for us, immortal, - works of art, unadulterated testimonies.10

This project’s idea -the Museum conceived in a spiral structure- emerges again in a proposal for a Museum of contemporary art in Paris in 1931. In this proposal, explained in a letter to Zervos in December 1930, the spiral (such as container of the men’s works) will allow an increased overview of the several times: in the descendant movement the visitor would walk around according to his individual choice. This project for the world Museum and the Museum of unlimited growth, Le Corbusier organized in conjunction with Louis Carré, lawyer and famous gallery owner who, at the time, also lived number 24 of the Nungesser et Coli street, an exhibition entitled Les arts express des ages of action.13

With the Museum of unlimited growth Le Corbusier proposes a model where it is possible to a visitor to traverse the spiral space, by projecting transversal communications between the different ‘layers’ that surround the central point in the spiral scheme. In a sense, Le Corbusier’s architectural design anticipates the conception of the ‘Musée Imaginaire’: it is unlimited, open, unfinished, allows crossed passages along the exhibition space, also allowing the visitor to walk around according to his individual choice.

Between the date of the project of the world Museum in the Mundaneum and the Museum of unlimited growth, Le Corbusier organized in conjunction with Louis Carré, lawyer and famous gallery owner who, at the time, also lived number 24 of the Nungesser et Coli street, an exhibition entitled Les arts express des ages of action.13 At the occasion of the exhibition, which took place in the summer of the year 1935, Le Corbusier wrote: the works of the spirit do not age. By periods, cycles, series, returns are operated: the same hours pass, once again, in minutes of concordance. Thus, they are related, are unite, works animated by the same energy potential. The unity is not in the uniformity of styles, it is in the equivalence of potentials. The contemporary is set in the depths of the ages. The so-called primitive arts are those of the creative periods; when a society built their instruments, their language, their thinking, their gods, when a civilization exploited vigor. (...) The so-called primitive arts express ages of action.13

In his last writing in July 1965, Le Corbusier said: nothing is transmissible beyond thought. Over the years, the man gradually acquires by his struggles, his work, his efforts, a capital. This is the individual personal conquest. But all individual’s passionate research, all of his capital, this hard paid experience will disappear. Law of life: death. Nature closes all activity with death. Only thought, fruit of the work, is transferable. Days elapse in the course of the days, in the course of life.15 Both referring to the collective inventive potential (the sum of all past individual inventive potentials) as referring to his own capital, Le Corbusier reinforces that, before the fatal material degradation – from the bodies and the works - only the spirit’s works show a resistance to the degradation, which is not through luck but through a spiritual concretion.

With the same sense, in 1935 André Malraux says: an art limited to the time of its creation is not conceived; all art of the past is present, and all the art of the present, promise of the future.14
through the centuries, that do not drag the dormant greatness in his birth. The inheritance is not transmitted, it is conquered.  

Le Corbusier, a few weeks before his death, hoped that the essence of his work wouldn’t be lost with his departure, and so he claimed, that nothing spreads beyond the thought. Malraux, in 1933, sensed an active role of the creative man before the heritage left by their predecessors: to Malraux the inheritance should be conquered. Considering the conquest as a necessary procedure to the transmission will allow the observation of the affinity between these two thinkers. The transmissibility of the thought that Le Corbusier referred could, in this sense, correspond to the conquest through the recreation that allows new individual creation. Malraux took an important role in the last period of Le Corbusier’s life. In the observation of the correspondence of these two characters it is clear that Le Corbusier, before the scenarios of degradation of his masterpieces, asked Malraux for help. The influence of Malraux, possibly through its relationship with Nehru, in the appointment of Le Corbusier as Adviser of the Government of Punjab for the realization of the new capital can also be sensed. Even as Minister of Cultural Affairs, André Malraux tried to give Le Corbusier the opportunity to design and build a significant work - the Cultural Centre in La Défense – possibly trying to correct a sort of negligence of the French State to the internationally recognized and acclaimed architect. Around those same years, Le Corbusier, before the degradation and the danger that hung over the Villa Savoye, proposed to Malraux to rehabilitate the Villa Savoye, with the aim of installing a museum Corbu or, latter, a museum dedicated to the architecture and town planning. The action taken by André Malraux, the classification of the building as a historical monument, ended up interdicting Le Corbusier’s will, prohibiting him even the possibility of being the author of the rehabilitation of the building. It is possible that behind what seemed to be a rather self-centered desire of Le Corbusier in taking advantage of the rehabilitation of the Villa Savoye to build a museum to exhibit the work of his life, could exist another a more obscure reason.

The domestic program of the Villa Savoye is clear in its conception. However, it is possible to recognize a certain affinity between this house and the model developed for the Museum of unlimited growth. Similarly to the Museum of unlimited growth, the Villa Savoye is elevated from the ground. Its entry is made below the high plan where the noble part of the domestic program is located. It is possible to circulate throughout the House, moving in a spiral circuit through the system of ramps, without disturbing the domestic spaces. Contrary to the horizontal spiral developed by the Museum of unlimited growth, the Villa Savoye ramp’s system forms an ascending spiral. The last section of the set of ramps, allows access to the higher plan, the garden terrace. This ramp is confronted, at the end, with an exterior window which is associated with a table (indicating a living space) that allows the visitor to look beyond the specific limits of the house, inducing in the inhabitants the feeling that the house is incomplete or open to the existing world beyond. The Villa Savoye is proposed as a clear model, Le Corbusier suggested its reproduction, as it is known by the proposal for the implementation of the model for a set of twenty villas in the suburbs of Buenos Aires, Argentina. The possibility that Le Corbusier saw in the reproducibility of the Villa Savoye finds similar correspondence in the model of the Museum of unlimited growth. For the author of these projects, both were adaptable to different realities, unlinking partially from the place’s importance. The parallel observed between these two projects suggest the recognition that the ideas animated of potential belong anywhere (or, in the limit, nowhere). The notion of the idea’s universality (of projects’ universality) found resonance in the notion that the same ideas animated of potential find temporal brotherhood over time, without obeying to temporal linearity. If it is often associated with the modern movement, and specific to the discourse of Le Corbusier, the detaching of the place as imperative in the project process, perhaps it has not been given the same importance to the dissolution of the authority of the chronological time. It is perhaps necessary to add this data to define sharply the idea of modernity that also connects Le Corbusier and André Malraux.

Le Corbusier could have seen, in the rehabilitation of the decadent Villa Savoye, a pretext for trying to give new life to an idea that he had not been able to fully realize: the formal affinity of the Villa Savoye with the Museum of unlimited growth would make it possible to transform the house into a museum easily. Moreover, Malraux in his action of salvation, and sensitive to the work of the architect, classified the house making it untouchable (in terms of transformation), inhibiting the author to be in charge of the renovation works.

It is possible that André Malraux, sensing the transformative personality of Le Corbusier, decided to protect the master piece from his own author. To Malraux: Every work of art is created to satisfy a need, a need passionate enough to give it birth. Then, the need is withdrawn from the work, as the blood of the body; and the work starts its mysterious transfiguration. Enters then in the domain of the shadows. Only our same necessity, our same passion will make it out of them. André Malraux begins the introduction to the book ‘Musée Imaginaire’ writing: A Roman crucifix was not initially a sculpture, the Cimabue’s Madonna was not initially a picture, even the Fidias’ Athena was not initially a statue. In the same way, the Villa Savoye was initially conceived as a house, however the classification, that saved her, removed definitely its functional value, making it, in the likeness of the works cited by Malraux, a work of art. With this condition it was sent to the world of shadows, turning to be work of Museum and, at the same time, the museum itself. It is true that it has been rescued from that world every time any subsequent architect made it to be reborn. It is possible that for André Malraux, this protection of the Villa Savoye was the best way to ensure the eternity of its author. It was perhaps a way to resist both biographical and chronological time, seeking to set an internal timeless time, corresponding to the formal affinity of the Villa Savoye with the Museum of unlimited growth, the pretext for trying to give new life to an idea that he had not been able to fully realize: the formal affinity of the Villa Savoye with the Museum of unlimited growth would make it possible to transform the house into a museum easily. Moreover, Malraux in his action of salvation, and sensitive to the work of the architect, classified the house making it untouchable (in terms of transformation), inhibiting the author to be in charge of the renovation works.

In the funeral eulogy to Le Corbusier (1965), André Malraux refers: at the same time saying, rightly, that the streets were not made for cars, but for pedestrians and cavaliers, he revealed an ancient language. Because he announced the future, he metamorphosed all the past of the dead, to bring it to the living. Le Corbusier recreated the latent potentials (inheritance, transmitted thought) while creating, projecting the future. Malraux understood him well.

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CREATION
INTERIOR TIME
THOUGHT
TRANSMISSIBILITY
RE-CREATION