

# The interior capture of life. Le Corbusier and André Malraux

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1. MALRAUX, André, 'La conquete interieur de la vie'. Écrits sur l'art II. Gallimard, Paris, 2004. pág.1097.
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.
4. MALRAUX, André. 'Bibliothèque André Malraux: inventaire sommaire des publications sur l'art'. Editorial Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1986. p.45/p.59.
5. Ibid pour André Malraux / page 12, *ici, déjà la dedicace/ amicale et confiante avait été / apposée, à Bruxelles, 26 Juin 58, dans / le Pavillon de France, au bas de un grand / dessin fait sous les yeux des auditeurs. Et / ce dessin je l'avais fait porter dans votre / ministère, à mon retour / avec mon admiration / avec mon amitié / Le Corbusier / 9 / nov/ 59.*
6. pour André Malraux / *qui sait de quoi la vie est faite / et combien il est périlleux de faire / quelque chose / Avec toute mon amitié / Le Corbusier / 11 / 1 / 61.*
7. RODRIGUES, José Miguel; Silva, Ana S. P., "Le Corbusier y la restauración de la Villa Savoye", en CAH 20thc: Conferencia internacional "Criterios de Intervención en el Patrimonio Arquitectónico del Siglo xx", ETSA - Madrid, Junio 2011
8. OTLET, Paul (Publication de l'Union des Associations Internationales. « Palais Mondial », Bruxelles 1928, en Le Corbusier, 'Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret: oeuvre complete, vol.2'.Editions d'Architecture Artemis, Zurich, 1975
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 idées et tous les actes, s'enchaînent, 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 ; (...).*
10. LE CORBUSIER, 'Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret: oeuvre complete, vol.2. Editions d'Architecture Artemis, Zurich, 1975. Au milieu du temps et du lieu, l'âme humaine, constante, vibrant entre sa raison qui tente de rectifier ce que sa passion déchaîne, produit ces œuvres qui sont, pour nous, immortelles, - les œuvres de l'art, témoignages inrelatables.
11. Los Museos de India -Chandigar (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*
13. LE CORBUSIER, 'Les arts dits primitifs dans la maison d'aujourd'hui'. FLC B1-15-332. *Les œuvres de l'esprit ne vieillissent pas. Par périodes, cycles, séries, les retours s'opèrent; les mêmes heires passent, une fois encore, aux minutes de concordance. Ainsi sont apparentées, sont unes, les œuvres qui anima le même potentiel d'énergie. L'unité n'est pas dans l'uniformité des styles; elle est dans l'équivalence des potentiels. Le contemporain s'établit dans la profondeur des âges. Les arts dits primitifs sont ceux des périodes créatives, quand une société construisait son outillage, son langage, sa pensée, ses dieux, quand une civilisation éclatait de sève (...) Les arts dits primitifs expriment les âges d'action.*
14. MALRAUX, André. Écrits sur l'art II. Gallimard, Paris, 2004. p.1098.
15. LE CORBUSIER, The final testament of père Corbu (a translation and interpretation of "Mise au point" by Ivan Zaknic). Yale University Press, cop., New Haven [etc.], 1997.
16. MALRAUX, ANDRÉ. Primer discurso de clausura, Nueva cultura, nº 5, Junio, 1935. p. 3.
17. Ibid. P1.
18. MALRAUX, ANDRÉ. Le musée imaginaire: les voix du silence. Gallimard: Paris, 1965. *Un crucifix roman n'était pas d'abord une sculpture, la Madone de Cimabué n'était pas d'abord un tableau, même l'Athéna de Phidias n'était pas d'abord une statue.*
19. Oración fúnebre de Le Corbusier pronunciada por André Malraux en el 01.09.1965. *En même temps qu'il disait, avec raison, que les rues n'ont pas été faites pour les autos, mais pour les piétons et les cavaliers, il révélait un langage millénaire. Parce qu'il annonçait l'avenir, il métamorphosait tout le passé des morts, pour l'apporter aux vivants... Le Corbusier, 'Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret: oeuvre complete, v.8'. Editions d'Architecture Artemis, Zurich, 1975.*

André Malraux and Le Corbusier often met during their lives. There are several testimonies of their encounters. Photographic records show 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 Museum<sup>3</sup>, an Architectural School, a Music Conservatory, a Cinema School and a Decorative Arts School. This project was firstly perturbed 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 library<sup>4</sup> also reveals the relationship between these two actors of their times, showing personal affinities beyond the known official ones. Until his death Le Corbusier devotes short messages to Malraux in his books. In 1959, in *L'Urbanisme des trois établissements humains* one can read a self-reliant Le Corbusier<sup>5</sup>, interested in maintaining an active contact with the Cultural Affairs' Minister. In 11th January of 1961, Le Corbusier writes another inscription in his book *L'Atelier de la recherche patiente*, writing: *to André Malraux who knows what life is made of and how it is dangerous to do something.*<sup>6</sup>

In the period between these two inscriptions, in 1959, begins the international mobilization demanding the salvation of the Villa Savoye.<sup>7</sup> Beside its advanced state of degradation, the Villa Savoye was endangered by the proposal of the city of Poissy to build an Institute on its site. The Villa Savoye, one of the most emblematic buildings of Le Corbusier, saw its existence ruled by several painful episodes. Conceived as a domestic building, was only inhabited by the Savoye family for a short period of time, due to construction problems, that made it inhabitable. The house was occupied by Nazi officials during the war and subsequently used as a granary, supporting the cultivation of the property by Mrs. Savoye. In 1959, Le Corbusier recognizes, in its advanced state of degradation, the pretext to rehabilitate the house, and considered giving it a new use (in a first phase Museum Corbu and later Museum of architecture and urbanism). The classification as historical monument, granted to the Villa Savoye by André Malraux, ensured its salvation from the threats of the city of Poissy. Nevertheless, this measure barred Le Corbusier from authoring the rehabilitation's project of the Villa.

The Villa Savoye project coincides temporarily with the conception of the Mundaneum's project in Geneva. Paul Otlet, one of its proponents, defines the Mundaneum as: *an intellectual center of union, liaison, cooperation, coordination; a representation of the world and what it contains, mirror and sum; a synthetic expression of universal life and a comparator of civilization; A symbol of intellectual unity of the world and humanity; (...)*<sup>8</sup> Still according to the words of Otlet, the Mundaneum would have as objective: *(...) to expose and publicize by writing, by the object and by the word: how men, from their humble origins, raised to the splendor of their geniuses, their heroes and their Saints. (...) - How, since the time and space were gradually defeated, all the ideas and all acts, enchain, having implications from North to South, from the East to the West, constituting now*

*a collective thought made of all special thoughts, a general activity composed of all special activities; (...)*<sup>9</sup> The Mundaneum complex, designed by Le Corbusier, envisaged a world Museum, Plaza of the modern 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. Le Corbusier designed a triple nave that should progress along a descendent spiral, forming a sort of Ziggurat. 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.*<sup>10</sup>

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 develops in a horizontal plane elevated from the ground, moving apart from the Ziggurat's image. From the same year, 1931, there is record of a project from Le Corbusier to a Museum of the living artists, at Nesle-la-Vallée. In this last project the preservation of the Museum in a horizontal spiral scheme can still be observed. Already implicit in the previous proposals, arises in 1939 Le Corbusier's project for the Museum of unlimited growth, a proposal that presents a deepening and more sophisticated approach to the idea previously present at the end of the twenties in the project for the world Museum in the Mundaneum. The Museum of unlimited growth also based its composition in the spiral space that matches its central point with the entry point. The development of the exhibition space in spiral would allow a possibility of continuous growth, from the inside to the outside. Designing a Museum of unlimited growth implies the belief that a Museum (such as container of the men's works) will never be complete and must be available for the new products of the human intellect. The growing in spiral opening movement could attenuate the traditional museum's condition of permanent incompleteness.

Between the project for the world Museum and the Museum of unlimited growth a refinement of the same idea can be observed. The circumstances of life did not allow Le Corbusier a consistent materialization of this idea<sup>11</sup> that comprehends the conception of a specific man (creative being) before the production of the other man and, simultaneously, an architectural formulation of the same idea. Between the descendant spiral that formed the Ziggurat - world Museum -and the horizontal spiral space elevated from the ground - Museum of unlimited growth - there is a substantial difference that results in the corresponding architectural formalization. In the Ziggurat (ancient form), Le Corbusier conceived the exhibition of human works in a chronological order, limited to the available space of the Museum. In the Museum of unlimited growth, Le Corbusier tried to anticipate the permanent accumulating of works (corresponding to the permanent human production) with the possibility of growth of the Museum, bypassing the need for a chronological hierarchy. While the project of the Museum of unlimited growth of Le Corbusier is earlier than the conception of the 'Musée Imaginaire' of André Malraux, an affinity can be identified between what the architectural model of Le Corbusier and the conception of Malraux proposed, although it is clear that the latter consisted of a non-spatial conception.

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 several '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 dits primitifs dans la maison d'aujourd'hui (Primitive arts in the modern house)*<sup>12</sup>. 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.*<sup>13</sup>

Existing photographs of the exhibition show the overlay of works (and times), allowing the understanding of the notion of contemporaneity that Le Corbusier expressed in his text. The exhibition showed the coexistence of a Peruvian vessel, a bronze from Benin, a painting by Le Corbusier, a statue of Laurens, one tapestry of Léger, among others... Le Corbusier associated the primitive arts with the primitive periods of invention. His idea of the contemporary isn't reconciled with a linear conception of time. On the contrary, the contemporary is associated to an equivalence of the inventive impulse, and thus to the parity of potentials. Belonging to the same era, or being contemporaneous, is consequence of the fact that *the works of the spirit do not age*. Accordingly 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.*<sup>14</sup>

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 on itself, a certain capital. Individual and 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...*<sup>15</sup> 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, through its capacity to be transmitted.

With the same sense, in 1935 André Malraux refers: *A work of art is an object, but is also an encounter with the past. I know that we have discovered the history. Works passing from love to the barn, can pass from love to the Museum, without implying any change, since every work of art is dead when love has withdrawn from it. And therefore, that great movement has a sense. And if we need, to live, of art, of thought, of poems, of all old human dreams, they, to revive, also need us. They need our passion, our desire; they need our will. They aren't there as furniture in an inventory after a death, but as those shadows avidly awaiting the living in Hells of classical antiquity. Like it or not, we recreate them at the same time that we create ourselves. (...) and there isn't a single sublime individual creation that isn't as told*

through the centuries, that do not drag the dormant greatness in his birth. The inheritance is not transmitted, it is conquered.<sup>16</sup>

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 1935, 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 inhabitant 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.*<sup>17</sup> 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.*<sup>18</sup> 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 idea of contemporaneity elaborated by Le Corbusier on the pretext of the exhibition *The primitive arts in the modern house*. Before the inevitable death of Le Corbusier, the attitude of Malraux managed to keep, for now, the life of the Villa Savoye.

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...*<sup>19</sup> Le Corbusier recreated the latent potentials (inheritance, transmitted thought) while creating, projecting the future. Malraux understood him well.



CREATION  
INTERIOR TIME  
THOUGHT  
TRANSMISSIBILITY  
RE-CREATION