6 Controversy over UNESCO World Heritage List: Le Corbusier

17 July 2016: the Architectural Work of Le Corbusier (1887–1965) has been inscribed on the World Heritage List (UNESCO) as 'an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement'[400], one year after the 50th anniversary of his death, and four years after UNESCO's initial rejection in 2009. What was supposed to be a consecration has provoked a movement of opposition to this patrimonialisation. It unleashed a stigmatising campaign against the Franco-Swiss architect.[401] A smear campaign ran from 2005 to 2020. Instead of building consensus and 'resilience', heritage has produced the opposite: controversy, polemics and accusations.

This leading figure in the modern architecture movement was the subject of a grassroots memory war campaign, of the type that is widely-reported in the media and is freed from the constraints that govern the slow work of historians. The proposed serial inscription of Le Corbusier's works was met with accusations of the architect being a 'fascist', a Vichy 'collaborator', and even a 'Nazi sympathiser'[402]. Le Corbusier is attacked for his supposed role under the Vichy regime (1940–1944) following the defeat of France. This case presents a blurring of the boundaries that separate opinion from knowledge, denigration from criticism, judgement from analysis. It's an

400 Chosen from the work of Le Corbusier, the 17 sites comprising this transnational serial property are spread over seven countries and are presented as 'a testimonial to the invention of a new architectural language that made a break with the past'. The Complexe du Capitole in Chandigarh (India), the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo (Japan), the House of Dr Curutchet in La Plata (Argentina) and the Unité d'habitation in Marseille (France) 'reflect the solutions that the Modern Movement sought to apply during the 20th century to the challenges of inventing new architectural techniques to respond to the needs of society'.

401 Ronan Audebert, « Le Corbusier en procès : état des lieux d'une polémique », Mémoire de master, École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Nantes, septembre 2017. https://dumas.ccsd.cnrs.fr/dumas-01655579

402 What is also at issue is the misuse of the word 'fascism' and the epithet 'fascist'. I also reacted to this anti-Le Corbusier campaign because I wrote my doctoral thesis on the subject: Robert Belot, *Lucien Rebatet. Le fascisme comme contre-culture*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2015. See also: Serge Berstein et Michel Winock (dir.), *Fascisme français*, Paris, Tempus, 2020.

illustration of the rise of a kind of pessimistic moralism[403]. Morality is now established as a criterion of truthfulness, emotion supersedes rationality and contrition has become a supreme value. The commemoration of the worst seems to have relegated scholarly history to the rank of a subservient discipline. Gradually, a highly mediatized *populism of memory* has supplanted the patient and thorough work of historians. UNESCO, supported by historians, resisted this denunciation campaign, which is in line with the worldwide trend of deposing 'heroes' but may ultimately be to the detriment of history.

On the pretext of the need to destroy the myth that UNESCO was accused of propagating, the promotors of the anti-Corbu campaign wanted to impose a new memory grid that does not respect historical ethics. How to analyse without minimising? How to demystify without indulging in biases and easy imprecation? How can the history of historians inform and frame the processes of heritagisation? These are the three fundamental questions addressed in this issue.

The 'venom' of 'memorial correctness

Every generation experiences such a *depatrimonialisation* phenomenon. Interestingly, Le Corbusier's magazine *L'Esprit Nouveau* launched a survey in the 1920s entitled 'Faut-il brûler le Louvre?'[404] (Should the Louvre be burned down?). Today, it is Le Corbusier they want to burn. He was well aware of this typically French self-deprecatory attitude, this tendency to debunk innovators. He told students at architecture schools in 1942: 'Lately, France, this laboratory of ideas, has been taking pleasure in crushing, despising, ignoring, rejecting and discouraging its inventors.'[405]

This indictment of history and of memorial myths has now reached France and specifically how the French experienced WWII, Vichy and the Nazi occupation. Since the late 1970s, it has been a constant source

403 See Perrine Simon-Nahum, *Les déraisons modernes*, Paris, L'Observatoire, 2021, p. 12–13.

404 Yann Rocher, « Faut-il brûler le Louvre? Pensées de la destruction dans une enquête de *L'Esprit nouveau* », *in* Esteban Buch, Denys Riout, Philippe Roussin (dir.), *Réévaluer l'art moderne et les avant-gardes*, Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS, 2010, p. 137–151.

405 Le Corbusier, « Entretien avec les étudiants des écoles d'Architecture », Paris, 17 octobre 1942, in *La Charte d'Athènes. Avec un discours liminaire de Jean Giraudoux*. Groupe CIAM-France, Paris, Plon, 1943 (éditions de Minuit, 1957), p. 137.

of controversy and dissensus. Rarely has a period aroused such interest in historical research, and so soon after the events. Major advances have made it possible to better understand these 'dark years'. Every European country has been concerned with this historicizing effort. The work is still in progress. It has evolved, naturally, with the changes in mentalities, the issues at stake and the availability of archival resources. However, in parallel to this work —which must face the difficult question of the complexity of societies and of behaviors in extreme situations, where the slightest gesture may have dramatic consequences— a form of social memory is developing, between affect and emotion, which gives rise to political and moral misappropriations. This memory is often at odds with, and even opposed to, history as it is seen by historians. It develops in a context where the effects of opinion and media coverage prevail, and where the vulgate may take liberties with knowledge and its protocols. This phenomenon, increased by the viral power of the so-called social networks, is supported by a general postmodern movement marked by its obsession for the moral revision of the past. In a context which points the finger at legitimate bodies and actors of knowledge, retrospective judgement tends to serve as the 'truth'. Recalling the 'dark years' and focusing on dissonant heritage (such as colonialism) has become a playground for those who would 'raise the dead to put them on trial' and who claim to reveal what historians supposedly refused or were unable to show and who, in the name of a 'denunciatory virtue', undo reputations, qualify or disqualify. The latest book by Pierre Laborie, a historian of French opinion during the Vichy regime, is devoted to analysing the 'venom' of 'memorial correctness'[406] and its 'unquestionable power': how do the construction processes of the relationship to the past invoke 'uses that are sometimes as akin to impostures as the impostures they claim to unmask?'[407] This widespread symptom is manifest in how the memory and the work of one of the world's most famous architects, Le Corbusier, has been treated in recent years.

In his eulogy to his 'old master' and 'old friend' on September 3rd, 1965, André Malraux recalled the tradition of hatred that hounded Le Corbusier during his lifetime: 'No one has ever been so long, so patiently insulted. Glory finds its supreme brilliance in outrage, and this glory is addressed more to a lifetime's work, than to a person who did not much care for

406 Pierre Laborie, *Le Chagrin et le venin. La France sous l'Occupation, mémoire et idées reçues*, Paris, Bayard, 2011, p. 11.

407 *Ibid.*, p. 279.

it.' This did not prevent Charles de Gaulle's Minister of Culture from entrusting this unusual man with the project of creating a museum of contemporary art which was to be part of the new district of La Défense. Malraux thought that death would finally allow for propitiation and that the architect's memorial posterity would be kinder. He was wrong. The fiftieth anniversary of Le Corbusier's[408] death was a pretext to slander the memory of the world's most famous urban architect. His penchant for provocation and controversy, which made him famous from the outset, turned on him and made us forget that his ultimate ambition was to restore 'the human fundamentals of the architectural issue'[409] and that, above all, he was an 'idealist'. However, Malraux was mistaken in thinking him beyond the scope of criticism. Nowadays, this hatred is as much directed at the man as it is at his work. Gleefully, his detractors search for the 'embarrassing document'[410], the sentence or the 'encounters that would have been better avoided'[411] that will reveal this man's 'true' personality and certify (what we already knew) that he was neither hero nor saint, but that he was (what we didn't know) a 'fascist'; a closet fascist because 'he himself never affirmed it, nor proclaimed it, whether publicly or privately'.[412]

Reconsidering Le Corbusier's past

The dossier for Le Corbusier's architectural and urban works was initiated by the French Ministry of Culture in 2003, drawn up by seven countries and submitted in January 2008. The World Heritage Committee meeting in Seville in 2009 demanded a 'postponement'. It seems that this decision was independent of the controversy, which began a year later.

For Art historian Gilles Ragot, the problem was an opposition between two visions of heritage: 'a monumental vision that is essentially artistic, based on iconic works of art, and a vision in which heritage is considered more for its value as a testimony to the major changes in society, and more

408 His real name was Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris. He was born on 6 October 1887 in La Chaux-de-Fonds, in French-speaking Switzerland, and died on 27 August 1965 in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin.

409 André Chastel, *Architecture et Patrimoine. Choix de chroniques du journal* Le Monde, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1994, p. 169 (article nécrologique).

410 François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, Paris, Seuil, 2015, p. 176.

411 *Ibid*., p. 271.

412 *Ibid*., p. 119.

particularly in this case, the responses that architecture can provide'[413]. A heritage of modernity? Inconceivable to the average public. When it came to listing the reconstruction of the city of Le Havre (a victim of the 1944 bombardments), the popular magazine *Paris-Match* (11–17 August 2005) ran the headline: 'Has UNESCO fallen on its face?'[414] Don't forget that Auguste Perret, the architect in charge of this reconstruction, was considered a master by Le Corbusier. The Le Corbusier project was the first time that UNESCO had been asked to recognise a 'serial property' with an international dimension. Perhaps the idea was too innovative. The other criticism was that the heritage project concerned the work of a single man. And it was precisely this man that his detractors wanted to destroy.

The second version of the nomination was presented at the 35th World Heritage Committee meeting in Paris in June 2012. ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) recommended that the nomination 'should not be inscribed', on the (spurious, in my view) pretext that 'outstanding universal value' had not been demonstrated. It is impossible not to see this as an indirect effect of the launch of the anti-Corbu campaign. Did Le Corbusier's work deserve UNESCO recognition? Art historian Gilles Ragot says yes. He highlights the fact that 'Le Corbusier is the first architect in the general history of architecture to have built in so many countries: eleven in all on four continents'. Moreover, the architect was the inspiration behind the Modern Movement, which aimed in particular to achieve a balance between individual and collective housing. UNESCO's second rejection delights the architect's detractors. In 2015, referring to the 'Maison radieuse' in Rezé (a housing unit created by Le Corbusier), François Chaslin wrote, ironically: 'And here it was being proclaimed everywhere that it should be loved, that it was a monument, a masterpiece, a heritage of humanity, that UNESCO was perhaps going to include on its lists, as the regular flow of visitors reminded us.' The inscription was finally obtained on 17 July 2016: 17 Corbusian buildings or sites are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, as part of the series

413 Gilles Ragot, « L'inscription de l'Œuvre architecturale de le Corbusier au patrimoine mondial », *Conservation-restauration de l'architecture du mouvement moderne*, Presses universitaires de Perpignan, 2012, https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pupvd.6957.

414 Maria Gravari-Barbas, Cécile Renard, « Une patrimonialisation sans appropriation? Le cas de l'architecture de la reconstruction au Havre », Norois [En ligne], 217 | 2010/4.

'The architectural work of le Corbusier, an exceptional contribution to the Modern Movement'[415].

The suspicion came from Switzerland in 2005, two years after France launched the heritage process with a view to World Heritage listing.

In a text published in the magazine of architecture *Tracés*[416], the Geneva-based writer and architect Daniel de Roulet wonders why Le Corbusier moved his office as well as his home to Vichy in the early 1940s. 'I was astonished to learn that my favorite architect had been a collaborator of the Nazis in France,' he writes. According to the writer, Le Corbusier served Marshal Pétain directly and many letters testify to Le Corbu's admiration for the French regime under the thumb of the Third Reich. In essence, these claims were based on three letters from the architect's private correspondence which were disclosed in 2002[417]. In fact, it was a purely subjective, undocumented journalistic article. Only four pages. The paradox is that it all started from there. All the ingredients to launch a controversy were there: Le Corbusier as an anti-Semite, a follower of the Vichy regime and collaborator. What legitimacy did the author of these serious claims have, and what are the sources to support them? This was a writer who had no expertise in history, an amateur researcher. His account brings together all the methodological biases that teachers warn history students against: 'Such claims, which are very serious and based on the use of fragments of correspondence taken out of their biographical and historical context, were taken seriously by some people and they call for a clarification regarding the positions of one of the greatest figures not only of architecture, but also of modern culture'.[418] More importantly though, the initial premise is linked to a moral point of view which purports to denounce, accuse and not to debate. The writer, although a refined dilettante, is a conscientious objector. It should be noted that the bank knew Daniel de Roulet very well because it had awarded him a grant of the UBS Foundation for Culture in 2001 to honor 'his career's work'. In 2010, the UBS bank put a stop to an advertisement campaign centered on the famous architect from the

415 François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, *op.cit.*, p. 599.

416 Daniel de Roulet, « Sur les traces du Corbusier, un voyage à Vichy », *Tracés*, n° 20, octobre 2005, p. 32–35.

417 *Le Corbusier, Choix de lettres* (Selection, introduction and notes by Jean Jenger), Basel, Birkhaüser, 2002.

418 Jean-Louis Cohen, « Le Corbusier, les Juifs et les fascismes. Une mise au point ». Octobre 2012. Stadt Zürich. https://pavillon-le-corbusier.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/ktr_2012-le-corbusier-zurich-report-jlc.pdf

La Chaux-de-Fonds, whom the Swiss press had accused of anti-Semitism. After the bank's collapse following the banking and financial crisis of 2008 and its rescue by the Swiss national bank, UBS saw this as an opportunity to reinstate its image[419].

This attack was relayed by a former professor of architectural history from Lausanne, an admirer of the vernacular theories dear to Ivan Illitch, whose anti-modernist (even reactionary) origins differ diametrically from what Le Corbusier represents[420]. In 2019, he was convinced that reconsidering Le Corbusier's past would lead to the removal of the architect's work from the World Heritage List[421] and as a result, now the UNESCO is in the sights.

France took it from there. An editorial opportunity (2005: the 50th anniversary of Le Corbusier's death) would fire up the ardors of those who would 'raise the dead to put them on trial'. This marked a radical change compared to the 40th anniversary of the architect's death which was very consensual in terms of admiration. A series of highly publicized accusations aimed to make one of the founders of the Modern Movement appear as a follower of fascism, whose very work was based on a totalitarian vision. Le Corbusier would have been contaminated by the sad passions of his time, specifically anti-Semitism. He would have made a pact with the Vichy Regime, putting his genius at the service of a wrongful cause, and would have only escaped thanks to the failure of the purge at the Liberation, based on the hypothesis that the trust placed in Le Corbu by the great

419 https://www.rts.ch/info/2527611-lubs-retire-le-corbusier-de-ses-publicites.html

420 Pierre Frey, *Learning from Vernacular : pour une nouvelle architecture vernaculaire*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2010. See: Valéry Didelon, « Pierre Frey. Learning from Vernacular : pour une nouvelle architecture vernaculaire », *Critique d'art* [En ligne], 37 | Printemps 2011. Pierre Frey told the press that 'Le Corbusier was a radical theorist', a 'violent anti-Semite', who would have 'built for Hitler without a second thought'.

421 In spring 2019, when the Le Corbusier Pavilion reopens in Zurich, the controversy will flare up again. See : « Le Corbusier, fasciste ou pas? Les points de vue opposés de Pierre Frey, professeur honoraire à l'EPFL et Patrick Moser, fondateur et conservateur du musée de la corbuséenne Ville Le Lac », *24 heures*, Lausanne, 10 mai 2019. Moser said: 'A historiectomy (sic) is therefore essential. The inter-war period is far too complex to be left in the hands of amateurs. On the contrary, it takes all the science and analytical finesse of seasoned historians to manage to sketch a somewhat resembling portrait of the reality of that era. It is an offence to take statements out of context in order to cause harm. If Le Corbusier were alive today, he would sue for libel – and win.'

Resistance fighter Eugène Claudius-Petit[422] was only a 'mysterious' 'rehabilitation'[423]. And so, he would have deceived everybody regarding his deepest intentions. His contemporaries would have been duped. Such is the basic common plot, albeit some differences, of a few books published in France that aimed at finally revealing the truth about the hidden vices of a life's work and thought. Suddenly, a veil of dishonor shrouded Le Corbusier's reputation.

The man was attacked, his work disqualified. This foretold the end of a myth. One of the authors explains: 'Three books were indeed published that year, fortuitously and independently. Three books of a very different nature and which display different attitudes, different points of views also, which can be quite distant. Then, admittedly, a viral campaign was launched, and it was mainly the doing of the press and digital networks'.[424] Other authors have tried to ride this wave to take advantage of a good digital presence. This sent the social networks into a frenzy, and the press as well, on a global scale, given the architect's notoriety. Because I am in charge of a Master's degree on cultural heritage with classes held at the housing unit in Firminy-Vert (Loire, France), the guides who organize visits to this district —designed by Le Corbusier in this former mining town— ask me what they can answer tourists who ask them if Le Corbusier was indeed a "fascist." The same questions come up among the students. As part of an EU project, our faculty organizes joint seminars on this subject with the School of Architecture and Urbanism in São Paulo[425]. Students conduct

422 Eugène Claudius-Petit was an admirer of the Franco-Swiss architect before the war, when he was a drawing teacher; even then, he was already fascinated by his plan for a 'Cartesian, harmonious, lyrical city'. After war, he was an influential supporter of Le Corbusier when he succeeded Raoul Dautry as Minister of Reconstruction and Urban Planning. It was him he chose to design 'Firminy-Vert', in the town where he was mayor. This was the only urban complex Le Corbusier was commissioned to create in France (and which he did not finish). Benoît Pouvreau, *Un politique en architecture. Eugène Claudius-Petit (1907–1989)*, Paris, Le Moniteur, 2004.

423 Marc Perelman, *Le Corbusier. Une froide vision du monde*, Paris, Michalon, 2015, p. 65–66.

424 François Chaslin, « Le Corbusier : les objets non identifiés », 9 mars 2020. Electronic memo.

425 This programme 'COOPERA' (2025–2017), financed by the Région Rhône-Alpes and supported by the Erasmus mundus DYCLAM master (Dynamics of Cultural Landscape and Heritage Management) and the European strategic partnership Pro-Peace, has been rolled out thanks to the support of the Jean Monnet University in Saint-Étienne (France) and the University of Sao Paolo (Brazil). See Robert Belot, « *Firminy-Vert* ao risco da História: Uma época, uma política, um novo espírito

field investigations on the history of Firminy-Vert and on sociability in a housing unit (there is a project underway with the University of Laval in Quebec). The idea for this socio-historical survey did not come about by chance; it came from there. But it is also rooted in my experience living in a Le Corbusier housing unit for two years, and thus realizing the abyssal gap between my experience and the bleak discourse the anti-Le Corbusier have always held on this type of housing.

The fact that a series of the architect's achievements were added to UNESCO's World Heritage list (2016) did not suffice to counter this smear campaign which was launched without taking any scientific precautions. The word of the few was taken at face value. Nowadays, at the slightest event, 'whistleblowers' appear. Some so-called intellectuals have called for an end to all public support for the work of Le Corbusier. When a statue of the architect was erected in Poissy, in the Yvelines, on January 24, 2019 with the support of the French Ministry of Culture, one of the promotors of the anti-Corbu campaign declared that: 'His ideas on urbanism, his social project are truly fascist. He wants to raze the older districts, centralize power in the towers and push the workers to the outskirts'. In a tribune published in the press, the filmmaker Jean-Louis Comolli accused the French Ministry of Culture of 'being an accessory to the rehabilitation of a man who rejoiced in the French defeat of June 1940 before he was recruited by the collaborationist regime of Marshal Pétain' thus revealing all the pitfalls of historical ignorance and of a case on which historians have been working for a very long time now. Blogs and social networks have relayed, by caricaturing them, these stigmatising and incorrect statements in order to censure the erection of the statue, considering that 'the fascist's friend deserves neither statue nor museum'.[426] In the course of ten years, it seems

urbanístico », Anais do Seminário *Live Modern Heritage I*, São Paulo, Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo, 2017, p. 21–40; *Id.*, « Le Corbusier, um fascista? Elementos de refutação dos principais erros de uma polêmica », *Live Modern Heritage II*, São Paulo, Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo, 2021, p. 52–92.

426 It would be useful to analyse the reactions to this blog. For example, one person said: 'I never liked Le Corbusier's architecture. That is to say, I'm pleased to learn that his thinking and behaviour were also poor and hateful towards Jews and other groups, to the point, in particular, of rejoicing in his country's defeat in 1940.' That's what those who don't know Le Corbusier and that period remember. And those who didn't like his work have finally found the real, unconscious reason for their detestation. Once again, the polemical mode is demonstrating its capacity to

as if the memory of the architect had gone from adulation to detestation, from glory to shame.

Le Corbusier, 'the dishonest Architect'

What we are witnessing here is a brutal revision which caused a 'shock of shame'. The global myth was attacked from an ideological angle, with the following polemic and moral accusation: Le Corbusier would have embodied, in his work practice, in the company he kept and throughout his life's work, a liberticidal and anti-humanist ideology. An anarchist blog, drawing inspiration from one of these inculpatory books where one can read that 'as early as 1913, Le Corbusier was already vomiting his hatred (of the Jews)'[427], ran the following headline on June 21, 2019: 'Le Corbusier antisémite, pétainiste, pro-hitlérien et architecte' (Le Corbusier: anti-Semite, Petainist, pro-Hitler and architect). We are witnessing a display of one-upmanship with insulting terms that have less to do with rational discourse than with something out of the pamphleteering rhetorical tradition. Slander is highly and effectively contagious. It crosses borders but it also crosses the limits of simple intellectual honesty. This is how Malcom Millais, in a book *Le Corbusier, the dishonest Architect*, published in 2017, turns him into a 'Nazi collaborator'.[428] The attacks are *ad hominem*. They target the man himself. Held responsible for and guilty of the 'misdeeds' of modernity, an accomplice of the worst that happened in the twentieth century, Le Corbusier has become a 'sinister individual'.[429] The theorist of a new concept of urbanism is reduced to the dismal figure of a 'hygienist crow'.[430] Under the pretext of warning against the 'blindness' of Le Corbusier's "admirers"

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generate what I would call 'de-knowledge' (dé-connnaissance), all this, of course, in the name of 'historical truth'.

427 Marc Perelman, *Le Corbusier. Une froide vision du monde, op.cit.,* p. 39.

428 Le Corbusier 'was a Nazi collaborator', according to Malcom Millais, *Le Corbusier, the dishonest Architect*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, p. 103.

429 Anselme Jappe, *Béton. Arme de construction massive du capitalisme*, L'échappée, 2020, p. 47.

430 F. Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, *op.cit.*, p. 140. The style of this book (a 'stroll' that aims to 'simply break some enchantments') is deliberately disrespectful, colloquial and vulgar, with possessive adjective full of disdain: 'our exalted Corbu', 'our architect from La Chaux-de-Fonds', 'our cronies', 'our great crony', their 'faces', etc. It's a book that's not just a 'stroll', it's a 'stroll' that aims to 'simply break some enchantments'.

(the 'believers'[431]) and blaming the 'professors' who supposedly did nothing but 'preach the master's good word' to their students without restraint, a black legend is in the making which depicts the architect as a 'fascist militant'[432]. He is blamed for the 'modern districts built between the late 1950s and the early 1970s' which are seen as 'the monuments left by French fascism' insofar as they would be the achievement of 'one of Le Corbusier's wishes: the mass expulsion of the most vulnerable individuals and their confinement outside of the city centers'.[433] The 'unprecedented brutality' he is accused of also shows in the manner of the accusation. Most of all, though, he is turned into a fascist, a follower of the Vichy regime, and a traitor to the country that welcomed him. The first outbreak of war in François Chaslin's book starts as follows: 'Already in August 1940, Charles Édouard had written to his mother and his brother to rejoice in "the defeat of arms" which appeared to him as a "miraculous French victory"'. Taken out of its context, this statement sounds like a fatal blow. The sentence is pronounced without any preliminary inquiry that the reader should be entitled to know of, all the more so as the author announced his intention of drawing up a portrait and not starting a trial. In this, he strays from the field of knowledge to adopt a hostile point a view. We are invited to follow 'the dark flight of the corbusant corvus' (sic) and chase after his 'demons'. The violence and bitterness of the tone considerably diminish an originally valuable project which aimed at better understanding Le Corbusier's protean facet, 'changeable, elusive'[434].

The radical re-visitation of an emblematic character, of which editorial strategies are particularly fond thanks to the effect of commemorations, is a well-known phenomenon. It occurs regularly, usually three decades after the death of the person concerned. The generation who lived (with) World War II and the oppressive regimes that prepared it, could not escape the question of personal involvement (or absence thereof) because it was also an ideological conflict which led to civil wars within each country. Every individual was affected by the challenges of this tragic event which upset European societies. Every man was confronted with the questionings and

431 *Ibid*., p. 341.

432 Xavier de Jarcy, *Le Corbusier, un fascisme français*, Albin Michel, 2015, p. 270. The process of 'revising' and 're-ideologising' Le Corbusier's work has been a slow one. See: Daniel Le Couedic, « Les fondements idéologiques du planisme de Le Corbusier », *Urbanisme*, février 1988, n°223, p. 56–63.

433 X. de Jarcy, *op.cit.,* p. 267

434 F. Chaslin, *op.cit*., p. 42–43.

the injunctions of his conscience because it was the idea of Man and a conception of freedom which were at stake. Every man had to take on the difficult burden of his own responsibility, because 'rarely had History been embodied in people less conditioned by economic or social facts, less predetermined'[435]. Every man had to account for, in one way or another, his attitude during the 'dark years' of Europe. And one could say that the people who research these questions nowadays are hard put not to wonder about what their behavior might have been in such circumstances; which is surely a humbling thought[436].

Artists, intellectuals and writers alike have been, at one point, caught up by history when the memory of those tragic times started becoming 'a duty' to the point of morphing into a 'haunting' which turned historians into 'prosecutors of the past'[437]. Hannah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot, Cioran, Mircia Elliade, Ionesco, Lucien Febvre and so many others. Even Marcel Pagnol, although he was a member of the purification committee for his trade in 1945, was summoned before the court of memory because of the brief excerpt from Pétain's first speech following the French defeat, and which appeared in *La Fille du Puisatier* (released in 1940), excerpt which would mark the 'beginning of cinematographic Vichyism' and testify to a 'fascist temptation'.[438] Of course, myths are grounded in history and they must be subjected to the arduous test of science to become secularized and put into perspective. Every myth has its limits. The scientific approach requires intellectual freedom and must not bow down to totems or taboos. I have shown this by trying to historicize the 'Resistance myth'. But freedom comes with duties and must answer to a moral code, or else it will be demoted to the rank of opinion and drift into prejudice. One can (and must) question dominant paradigms and *epistemes*, but not without method, and certainly not in the name of replacement doctrines. This requires ethical and intellectual prerequisites which have nothing to do with moralism and retrospective imprecations. Descartes laid down the foundations of rational-critical thought: 'the methodic doubt'. This is the

435 Jean Lacouture, *Le témoignage est un combat. Une biographie de Germaine Tillon*, Paris, éd. du Seuil, 2000, p. 84.
436 Pierre Bayard, *Aurais-je été résistant ou bourreau?*, Paris, éditions de Minuit, 2013.
437 Henry Rousso, *La Hantise du passé*, Paris, Textuel, 1998.
438 Joseph Daniel, « Tentations fascistes », *Le Monde diplomatique*, octobre 1980. He produced a documentary commissioned by the Vichy propaganda services in 1941. See Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, *Les Documenteurs des années noires : les documentaires de propagande, France 1940–1944*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2004.

ethics of knowledge which seems to elude the very people who seek to reveal the hidden truths about Le Corbusier and condemn the conformism of the representants of academic culture in order to rewrite history.

Disregard for the academic ethos

It seems rather unusual that one of the representatives of the anti-Corbusier movement should take the liberty to write to a recognized American historian, Robert Paxton, a great specialist of the Vichy regime[439], to 'warn' him against his possible presence at the colloquium on the architect in 2016:

> 'Although the campaign against Le Corbusier 'the fascist' has taken on an absurd and disproportionate dimension, I would like to warn you against certain circles whose faint-heartedness regarding this case is exactly the same as that which you encountered and fought against in the early 1970s. Naturally, we are quite delighted with the news of this presidency, but your notoriety should not be used to endorse the actions of those who systematically skirt around the gray areas or tread lightly where the floor creaks'.[440]

One of the unfortunate effects of this threat or pression is the fact that Robert Paxton withdrew his participation in the conference. His insight would have been a very useful addition to the debate. According to François Chaslin, a former member of the Le Corbusier Foundation, any researcher who dares, in the name of science, question the statements of the neo-detractors suffer from 'faint-heartedness'. They fall under the category of 'experts in self-censorship who will be invited to debate the subject blithely among themselves'. He himself, in the first lines of his book made a point of clarifying that it was not 'the fruit of academic research', in order to free himself from 'conformist grandeur'. The detractors of 2015 seem to share a prophetic-paranoid syndrome: they would be the only ones to reveal facts that others would refuse to hear, and for that they would be opposed by a certain Establishment suffering from faint-heartedness and blindness, and above all anxious to protect the Corbu 'brand' and exclude any dissidents.

439 Whom I know well because he was a member of my PhD defense jury.

440 François Chaslin, Lettre à Robert Paxton, 2 mai 2015, *La République des livres*. Blog de Pierre Assouline. https://larepubliquedeslivres.com/lettre-ouverte-robert-paxton/

However, historical reality clearly indicates that there has always been a debate about the architect and that he has been the subject of 'thorough' research that did not avoid the matter of his relationship to fascism, but, rather, which was concerned with respecting the *ethos* of historical research. I will just take two examples. Robert Fishman's book (*Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century*, 1979) where one can read that 'Le Corbusier's hostility towards democracy was closer to Platon's than Pétain's', or Mark Antliff's latest book *Avant-Garde fascism, The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France, 1909–1939*, published by Duke University Press in 2007, which goes back on the impact of the Sorelian theory of cultural revolution in the emergence of the artistic avant-gardes. There are few, if any, new elements in the writings of today's detractors[441].

Biographical writing is an exercise which requires certain qualities and is not without risks[442], especially when writing about a figure of global stature. How to analyse without banalising? How to demystify without indulging in biases and easy imprecation? By respecting the professional ethics that befits the scientific approach or merely by showing intellectual honesty. Exercising easy moral judgment and incriminatory analysis are the surest way to fail in this endeavor. Neo-detractors often tend to think they are the only ones to glimpse the light of truth about the architect's thought, which might explain why they have been criticised. However, they themselves adhere to a tradition of denigration which has never ceased to hound Le Corbusier throughout his life, it being noted, as I propose to show, that the grammar of denigration evolves with time and context. Le Corbusier's *post mortem* consecration tends to make us forget that, all his life, he was prey to hostility, unfounded accusations, and invectives.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Le Corbusier was the representative of 'Judeo-Bolshevism', the 'destroyer' and the black sheep of the exponents of academism. During the Vichy regime, he was the expatriate globalist who

441 Just two examples. Jean Plumyène et Raymond Lasierra, *Les fascismes français, 1923–1963*, Seuil, 1963 : 'Fascism dreamt of a city of the sun, a radiant city, which Campanella had dreamt of before him, and to which Le Corbusier, who was a member of the Faisceau in 1926, strove to give architectural expression'. See also: Robert Fishman, *L'utopie urbaine au XX^e siècle : Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier*, Paris, Mardaga, 1979, p. 183. The American historian acknowledges that the architect was 'neither a fascist nor a collaborator'.

442 Robert Belot, « La biographie, entre mémoire et histoire, affect et concept », *in La biographie en histoire. Jeux et enjeux d'écriture,* Antoine Coppolani, Frédéric Rousseau dir.), Paris, Michel Houdiard éditeur, 2007, p. 56–67.

did not understand a thing about the land of France. At the WWII Liberation, he became the 'fada' (crackpot). In the 1960s, he was the enemy of the proto-environmental libertarian movement. In the 1970s, he was branded a 'crypto-Stalinist'. And now he's become a 'fascist'. Michel Foucault lamented such "cruelty" which he deemed 'perfectly useless': 'Le Corbusier, I'm certain, was full of good intentions and what he did was in fact intended to produce liberating effects'.[443] Such benevolence is no longer appropriate. Le Corbusier has crossed over to the other side of the ideological spectrum. The actual consensus (judging from the very positive reception that this thesis has received from the media) aims at destroying the myth, but in doing so, it is taken from a very specific, and even delusory, angle. What is new is the opportunistic editorial conjunction around an anniversary, the media frenzy and their docility in relaying, without any perspective, theses that are no usual exercises in thought[444].

Demystification is a laudable operation, but it is also a difficult and perilous one. It must conform to the ethics of intellectual debates. Now, the accusatory front (since this is not an isolated case but a 'trend' and it should be analysed as such) develops a pseudo-argumentative logic which takes surprising liberties with the most elementary rules of the academic *nomos*. The lack of mastery of certain concepts (in other disciplines than architecture) produces cognitive biases which lead in turn to assertions that have nothing to do with the scientific realm or, quite simply, with knowledge. More, the detractors seem to show a desire to free themselves of the scientific *ethos*, which results in an attitude that consists in disqualifying historians, their methods and their results[445]. Hence a marked disregard

443 « Questions à Michel Foucault sur la géographie », *Hérodote*, n°1, janvier-mars 1976, pp. 71–85. See also: Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 270–285.

444 These 'theses' have also been emulated. It is now taken for granted that 'Le Corbusier's involvement with French fascists lasted twenty years and led him to work for the Vichy regime', which would explain his 'totalitarian' theories: Olivier Barancy, *Misère de l'espace moderne : la production de Le Corbusier et ses conséquences*, Marseille, éd. Argone, 2017. Xavier de Jarcy et Marc Perelman have come together to coordinate the book which sets out their accusations: *Le Corbusier, zones d'ombre*, éditions Non-Standard, 2018.

445 The historian Remi Baudouï is criticised for 'his ability to moderate or even excuse the fascist and pro-Vichy political positions of his herald'; his 'historiographical objectivity' is said to be no more than the admission of an 'ideological *a priori*'. In short, anyone who tries to examine the 'fascist Corbusier' thesis becomes *ipso facto* a 'patent thurifer' and an ideological suspect. See M. Perelman, *op.cit.,* p. 59, note 33,

for 'professors'. The times seem to mark the triumph, in every domain, of a type of *anti-intellectual populism* and of a form of distrust towards the institutions and protocols of knowledge. Insinuation, suspicion, extrapolation and finally, judgement, are favored over the production of proof. Prosecution and inquisitorial modes are preferred to methodical doubt and nuance, because they encourage media coverage. As a result, the foretold 'demystification' operation is caught in a vicious circle and becomes a negative mystification which produces a black legend in the name of the supposed battle against the legend. The anti-Le Corbusier operation is interesting to analyse because it refers to a more fundamental concern regarding our entry into the era of 'post-truth'[446], 'alternative facts', and 'fake knowledge'[447].

The particularity of this phenomenon is that it affects academic circles. And it is not only a question of handling concepts, methodological biases or of straying from scholarly *ethos*. More often than not, the style is aggressive, accusatory and sometimes vengefully rhetoric. Such is the rhetorical style found in Marc Perelman's book, for example, who can be credited for pioneering the accusation of 'totalitarianism' prior to the 2015[448] wave, for which he would have been 'professionally banned' and ostracised[449]. Le Corbusier becomes the 'Father of the horde of Architects'; 'appointed or self-proclaimed specialists' are under attack; one scholar's article is dispraised as 'damning' and the author as the victim of his 'fascination' for his 'herald'; another is shown as 'permanently enamored of Le Corbu', suffering from a 'fervent hysteria towards his idol'; the denunciation of the epistemological failings of the 'adulators, worshippers and other sycophants' (of which some might say that they only mirror their own failings) takes a turn for the worse when the author accuses his colleagues of 'delving and wallowing in the mire of hollow, petrified, concepts' and of 'wandering around the cemetery of dead categories'; Le Corbusier himself is psycho-

et p. 67. See also R. Baudouï, « L'attitude de Le Corbusier pendant la guerre », *in Le Corbusier une anthologie*, Paris, CCI Beaubourg, 1987, p. 455–459.

446 Ralph Keyes, *The post-truth era: dishonesty and deception in contemporary life*, New York, St Martin's Press, 2004.

447 Henning Hopf, Alain Krief, Goverdhan Mehta and Stephen A. Matlin, "Fake science and the knowledge crisis: ignorance can be fatal", *Royal Society Open Science*, Volume 6, Issue 5. Published: 01 May 2019 https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.190161.

448 Marc Perelman, *Urbs ex machina. Le Corbusier (le courant froid de l'architecture)*, Paris-Lagrasse, Les éditions de la Passion/Verdier, 1986.

449 Marc Perelman, *Le Corbusier. Une froide vision du monde, op.cit.*, p. 61.

analysed in his relationship with women and placed in the 'category' of individuals suffering from a 'neurotic emotionally-troubled shield'; scholars who explain that 'the work must be seen in the context of its time' are nothing more but the 'valets' of the master, prey to an illusion that keeps them from understanding that Le Corbusier was trying to give birth to a 'monstrous urban behemoth'. Fortunately, he admits to a certain faith in 'rigorous historians who will be able to put things into perspective' (which might be my ambition), even though he 'mistrusts some historians who are often indulgent with history and with those who were its more or less servile protagonists'. A 'rigorous' historian must, precisely, understand that 'truth' is dialectical and inaccessible, that it evades binarism, judgment and imprecation. In that sense, he is modest because he adopts the words coined by Lucien Febvre who, when presenting the collection 'Esprit de la Résistance' in 1954 to the Presses Universitaires de France, recommended remaining aware of the "terrible complexity of everything that concerned man, his dreams, ideas, passions'[450]. He also explained that 'history is a perpetual reworking of the past by successive generations'.

Le Corbusier 'a notorious fascist and collaborator'?

What is most surprising is that this attempt at reinterpretation is not based on any new fundamental source which would justify this reconsideration endeavor and shift in paradigm. With one exception, however: Le Corbusier's private correspondence, published in 2013 (letters to his family from 1926 to 1946) thanks to the Foundation Le Corbusier —which was accused of guarding the Corbusean temple, although it made this part of the architect's private life public— letters that reveal some of his judgments and which will, ironically, fuel the smear campaign in question[451].

In the preface to the edition, the part devoted to the ideological or political questions is limited, precisely because it is proportional to the place and

450 Lucien Febvre, « Avant-propos », H. Michel, B. Mirkine-Guetzévitch, *Les Idées politiques et sociales de la Résistance*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1954, p. VIII.

451 Le Corbusier, *Correspondance. Lettres à la famille, 1926–1946*, t. II, Paris, Infolio/Gallimard, 2013. An edition compiled, annotated and presented by historian Rémi Baudouï and Arnaud Dercelles. I would like to thank Arnaud Dercelles, archivist at the Le Corbusier Foundation, for the invaluable support he gave me in my investigation.

role that these matters held in the architect's life and correspondence. It is reported that Le Corbusier was culturally sympathetic to the authoritarian right, although such an orientation is inconsistent with the deep contempt he felt for bourgeois conservatism, his loathing of 'plutocracy' and his freedom of spirit. His 'hatred for the Hitlerian regime' is also put forth, and the editors explain that his Vichy period, beyond the 'sycophantic and presumptuous remarks' could be, more than anything, attributed to his professional opportunism. This preface makes no mention of the few anti-Semite remarks that can be found in the letters. In fact, in this 1,000-page volume, there are only 7 occurrences of the term 'Jew'. Nevertheless, it is precisely some of these letters that will fuel the anti-Corbusean verve of the authors whose books will resound worldwide on the occasion of the 50th anniversary. Based on this disproportionality bias, a counter-narrative is produced which, against all odds, turns Le Corbusier into a follower (open or secret) of anti-Semitic Hitlerism, which led him to becoming a supporter of the Vichy regime. The main quotes from his letters are, 'Money, the Jews (who were partly responsible), Freemasonry, everything will be subjected to fair law. These shameful fortresses will be demolished'; 'Hitler can crown his life with a great accomplishment: the planning of Europe'; 'The Jews are going through a very bad time. I am sometimes contrite about it. But it does seem as if their blind thirst for money had corrupted the country'.[452] According to François Chaslin, these excerpts show that Le Corbusier was 'steeped' in anti-Semitism, and that this was not only a 'brief' reaction[453]. Once again, this manifests the tendency to essentialize the architect's (explicit and implicit) thought in view of morally discrediting him.

Everything that is highlighted and used as incriminating evidence (the architect's presence in Vichy, for example, the main focus of the accusation) had already been known for a very long time. Conversely, other and also well-known information was set aside. This selective choice reveals one of the most obvious biases which structures every revisionist approach: the *congruence bias*. What is at work here is a heuristic of congruence which does away with anything that doesn't fit in with the new doxa. It is a way

452 See my analysis in Robert Belot, *Le Corbusier, fasciste? Dénigrement et mésusage de l'histoire*, Paris, Herman, 2021, p. 43–56.

453 F. Chaslin, *op.cit.*, p. 97. But unlike Jarcy and Perelman (and many others), to the question 'By the way, was Le Corbusier a fascist?', he replies: 'He himself never affirmed, proclaimed or admitted it, either publicly or privately. Which is not to say that he was not part of a fascist spirit'.

of blocking access to the 'frightfully complex' nature of the figure that was Le Corbusier, who, besides, was less of a 'maker' than an intellectual, something which his corporation will reproach him for with remarkable consistency. The particularity of disqualification endeavors lies in the liberty (license, sometimes) they take to disregard the complexity of reality and to avoid acknowledging the contradictions they bring up. How can one maintain that Le Corbusier 'a notorious fascist and collaborator'[454], should have been sentenced at the Liberation, when he refused to put his name on the cover of *Athens Charter*, published in 1943, so as not to jeopardize the success of the book and the ideas it supported, with his name being such a deterrent? How can anybody declare that Le Corbusier's thought was anti-humanist when he never ceased to proclaim that his ultimate ambition tended towards an 'exclusively human program, replacing Man at the center of architectural concerns'[455] and making housing one of the foundations of human rights? How can he be accused of organic anti-Semitism when the pre-war far right-wing pictured him as the embodiment of the "anti-France", supposedly for being at the service of the 'métèques' and 'international Jewry'? Why does this pervasive noise around Le Corbusier's alleged sympathies for Vichy (although he held no responsibilities and received no commissions from the regime) contrast so starkly with the silence regarding his master, Auguste Perret, a member of the honorary committee of the Arno Brecker exhibition in 1942, elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1943, appreciated by two of its successive directors[456], an influent member of the Order of Architects (founded by Vichy and who was not purified, so to speak, at the Liberation[457])? How can one have been a 'pro-Nazi' and a 'collaborationist' and then be celebrated as one of the figures of the renewal of France by a political power born of the French Resistance? These are all contradictions that one is tempted to reveal and endeavor to unravel.

As a historian who has researched the commitment of intellectuals, the issue of fascism and the socio-political construction of memory, I suggested an exercise to elucidate and refute the new black doxa against Le

454 O. Barancy, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

455 Le Corbusier, « Entretien avec les étudiants des écoles d'Architecture », Paris, 17 octobre 1942, in *La Charte d'Athènes, op.cit.,* p. 140.

456 The conservative Louis Hautecœur and the extremist Georges Hilaire, a close friend of the fascist collaborationist writer Lucien Rebatet.

457 Voldman Danièle, « L'épuration des architectes », *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, n°39–40, 1995, p. 26–27.

Corbusier[458]. Between the myth and the emerging counter-myth, I believe it might be useful to reframe the controversy in terms of historicity for a necessary and healthy perspective on the issue. The aim here would not be to defend Le Corbusier and his memory (I do not belong to the category of the 'Master's' worshippers) but rather to defend a certain ethics of criticism.

The recent interpretations of Le Corbusier's thought and work are based on a triple assumption (or belief, rather) which produce cognitive biases and distort the comprehension thereof. First of all is the belief that such a complex (and contradictory) thought as Le Corbusier's could be ascribable and reduced to a political ideology, ideology which would be the point of convergence and congruence of his life's ambition and that would explain everything. Second, is the assumption that this ideology would be governed (whether consciously or not) by the adherence to the vision of the world promoted by fascism, which developed in Italy in the 1920s, then by Nazism, which took hold of Germany starting 1933, it being noted that the theory (unanimously criticized) at work here is that of France set up as a doctrinal laboratory of fascism. Finally, the historically attested proof that Le Corbusier's mental universe would have been structured by such an ideology (the third assumption) would be his involvement with Vichy and his sympathies with the regime's politics. This triple assumption forms a system because it proceeds from a *heuristic of congruence*: anything that is unlikely to fuel this thesis is occulted and despised. It imprisons the reader in a unequivocal interpretation and traps the destiny of the architect in a pre-determined vision.

Demystifying the demystifiers

The new wave of attacks against Le Corbusier is part of the long history of denigration to which the architect and his theories have been subjected. What is new about this latest salvo, compared to the others, is that it targets the man and seeks his moral condemnation in the name of his supposed pro-fascism or pro-Nazism. He is said to have been involved with the worst ideologies that brought bloodshed to Europe, or even embodied them in his urban designs.

458 R. Belot, *Le Corbusier, fasciste? Dénigrement et mésusage de l'histoire, op.cit.* I have only presented the main conclusions of this work here.

Four main types of anti-Corbu denigrators can be broadly identified and presented chronologically. The first came from the French far right. It stigmatised Le Corbusier as a 'Bolshevik' and an internationalist, a harbinger of world Judaism and a destroyer of French identity[459]; Le Corbusier's militant rationalism clashed with a culture that was critical of the Enlightenment heritage. The second type emerged during the Occupation. It included part of the previous category, which incorporated conservatives who favored a misoneist form of regionalism often found in Vichyist propaganda. This anti-Corbu front was more heterogeneous than it seems since it included the technocrats (who had nothing but contempt for this 'intellectual' who was disconnected from reality and out of control) and the guardians of the corporation, along with the new Order of Architects who despised this pretentious autodidact. The third type consisted of certain libertarians in the early 1960s. As pioneers of proto-ecologism and the return to an anti-statist and regionalist pre-industrial state, they cultivated mistrust towards the standardizing power of technology and denounced a violent philosophy marked by the rejection of history ('historiectomy') and inclined to totalitarianism and barbarism. The fourth type brings together those who recognize themselves in an ideologizing hermeneutic of Le Corbusier's writings. Postulating that the architect had a structural affinity with the liberticidal concepts embodied by fascism and Nazism, they strike out at him with a moral stigmatisation directed at the man himself, intended to topple his statue and tarnish his memory. This last wave differs from the previous ones in being deployed at an incomparable level of virality through the new communication system. There is therefore a risk that this new campaign of denigration will have a lasting impact on people's perception of Le Corbusier's work and thought, but also that it will paralyze real debate (*disputatio* is always necessary in a free system of knowledge) on the basis of moralistic presuppositions.

459 His concern for modernity and 'rational organization' in view of attaining social well-being, together with the criticism of capitalism as the expression of the control of private interests over public interests was a permanent feature of Le Corbusier's thought. On the subject of Soviet Russia still, he wrote with uncharacteristic lyricism, such as on October 16, 1928, after a trip to Moscow: 'I am witnessing the birth of a new world (…). I am curbing my optimism so as to see things just as they are. Oh, blind Europe who lies to herself to flatter her indolence! One of the clearest monuments of human evolution is being achieved here, and generosity here is as big as selfishness over there'. Nicholas Fox Weber, *C'était Le Corbusier*, Paris, Fayard, 2009, p. 337.

It is quite astonishing that a type of reasoning can result in turning a man who never claimed to be a fascist into the embodiment of fascism. Le Corbusier, a fascist without knowing it. Sartre said that anti-Semitism created the Jew. Here, it is anti-fascism creating the fascist. This accusation has always stuck to his reputation. He noted it himself in May 1941, in a biographical note sent to Vichy to attest to his qualifications: 'Never engaged in politics, but was alternately accused, as needed, of communism and fascism'[460].

Perhaps we are living through a turning point in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Is the new general economy of the publishing world, faced with the competition of social networks and so-called 'e-knowledge', leading to works being brought to the knowledge market without any expert appraisal attesting to their intellectual reliability? For sure, we are seeing a move away from the ethos of academic culture, which is paving the way for fake knowledge. Polemics and personal attacks are ideally suited to the new modes of electronic communication and their power of virality, thriving in a race to the bottom. The conspiracy dialectic is extending its domain: claiming to demystify by creating new mystifications. This new ecosystem produces a lack of knowledge, even a state of de-knowledge, because it rejects complexity in favor of populist simplism, an open door to prejudice. It is also the shadow cast by the generalized blaming of legitimate bodies in the fields of knowledge and power. Through Le Corbusier, the 'professors' are the ones being targeted. The academic Jean-Louis Cohen, a world-renowned Le Corbusier expert, is viewed with suspicion. His detractors do not hesitate to refer to his 'family connections with the Jewish community in La Chaux-de-Fonds'[461]. They explain to us that he 'hid' the fascist nature of the Vichy regime and that ultimately, historians have understood nothing despite 40 years of academic work on the subject. Why? They were supposedly protecting the 'bourgeoisie' that 'betrayed' itself[462]! Here ridicule and incompetence become the best proof of a will to harm

460 Nicholas Fox Weber, *C'était Le Corbusier, op.cit.*, p. 508.

461 According to François Chaslin, *Un Corbusier*, *op.cit.*, p. 181. See also: 'Cohen, who has family connections with the jewish millieu in La Chaux-de-Fonds, acknowledged the antisemitic statements by Le Corbusier but adds: Le Corbusier's friendship with certain Jewish clients, the sculptor Chaim Jacob; and, the presence in his office of architects who will emigrate to Palestine, like the Belarusian Shlomo Bernstein or Sam Barkai, and his apparent sympathy for the Zionist project.' Simone Brott, 'The Le Corbusier Scandal, or, was Le Corbusier a Fascist?', Online Publication, 08 Dec 2017.

that no longer has anything to do with a will to know. Historical reality is bent to serve the obsession of anti-Corbusian debunking. If Vichy is not a fascist regime, the inner workings of the re-reading mechanism seize up. Vichy must be fascist (or even better, pro-Nazi), for the architect's stay in the spa town to become an event and a scandal, and for his whole life's work to be called into question.

This deviance of thought is what historian Gérard Noiriel wanted to react against in his book *Le Venin dans la plume*[463]. What is at issue in both cases is the status and impact of pamphleteering on public opinion and a disregard for the authorities and ethics of knowledge[464]. It is the hyper-mediatized vulgate of a cowardly, collaborating and non-resistant France that the historian Pierre Laborie wanted to decipher in his book, which is also about 'venom'. What he says about the mechanisms of imposture (which takes advantage of the knowledge of history to better delegitimize the producers of this knowledge) applies perfectly to the efforts being made to deconstruct and defame Le Corbusier's memory:

> 'A whole set of questions brings us back to the way in which conforming thought is constituted by referring to the key notions of *demystification* or *demythification*. They may concern their use – with respect for methodical doubt – or concern, more commonly, their exploitation for various purposes. In the latter case, the processes are well-known and are called amalgams, false analogies, anachronisms carrying retrospective judgments, displacements of meaning by shifting from the part to the whole, reversed readings of teleology, confinements in binarity, suspicion, omissions and denials… All serving to further manipulative methods of persuasion or objectives foreign to the search for the truth. Insinuation, intimidation, disqualification, shaming, switching from de-

462 According to X. de Jarcy, 'France never admitted it's fascist past. President Chirac admitted only in 1995 the responsibility of the French State in the deportation of the French Jews. But most French historians still don't consider Vichy as a fascist regime. Why? Because that would mean admitting the treason of the French high bourgeoisie. Also, many historians have turned right wing, and they try to say Vichy was not so bad, or to whitewash some collaborationists.' Email from Xavier de Jarcy to Simone Brott, 13 February 2017, *in* Simone Brott, 'The Le Corbusier Scandal' https://eprints.qut.edu.au/114569/8/114569.pdf

463 Gérard Noiriel, *Le Venin dans la plume. Édouard Drumont, Eric Zemmour et la part sombre de la République,* La Découverte, 2019.

464 Marc Angenot, *La Parole pamphlétaire. Typologie des discours modernes*, Paris, Payot, 1982.

> facement or discrediting to sacralization as needed, are some of the characteristic means of influence of a tried-and-tested system. It could be seen as a kind of catalog of the stylistic devices of this painless venom which blurs the vision, obstructs the ears, creates confusion in judgment, enslaves to the norm, incites to self-censorship and paralyzes critical thought'.[465]

This remarkable analysis by one of the top specialists in the history of opinion and social construction of memory applies perfectly to the case of Le Corbusier. This affair has all the hallmarks of a false 'demystification', duped (perhaps) by the non-historical presuppositions of its approach which is a kind of mystification. It resonates with a very current trend towards conspiracy theories and populist thought. It was necessary, ethically and deontologically, to expose this illusion of demystification. Behind this controversy, a battle is underway: between knowledge and vulgate, between the patient search for intellection of the complexity of reality and the moralist-populist arrogance that tells us what is 'correct' to think.

The dangers of a decontextualised memory

The current re-readings of Le Corbusier's thought and work are marked by an ideological-moral viewpoint and affected by a square of methodological and heuristic deviance: *anachronism-overdeterminism-decontextualisation-congruence*. Anachronism (and its corollary: teleology) is a patent sign of a lack of historical culture and mastery of the methods of historical science. Disdain for context (whether material or immaterial) is another tangible sign: this disdain is necessary to avoid taking account of the complexity of behavior and enable Manichaeism to assert itself unrestrictedly. This phenomenon of 'decontextualisation' is also evidence, in a subliminal and unconscious way, of an outdated conception of the architect's work and more generally, of the conditions of creation and innovation. This conception portrays the architect (or the artist, politician or intellectual…) as free from his environment, as untied from the connection to reality, as a pure inventor of reality, whereas he is often only its cast shadow. It quite simply forgets that 'complexity', in Edgar Morin's sense of the word, is at the heart of the social phenomenon. Therefore, those who go on the warpath

465 Pierre Laborie, *Le chagrin et le venin, op.cit.*, p. 279–280.

against Le Corbusier are objectively (and unwittingly) instituting him as a myth, an incarnation of the heroic-romantic myth of the solitary creator and the absolute origin. Sociology has taught us to keep our distance from 'the mystique of the creation and the creator'[466]. This mystifying logic, even when negative, also tends *a contrario* to exaggerate his impact and influence. It develops in a heuristic of congruence that rejects anything that does not support the theory pursued. We are in a simplifying and reductive pseudo-paradigm that sets little value on a 'protean, complex, paradoxical and contradictory'[467] body of work.

Reason, distance and relativity must be maintained. Le Corbusier's influence must be put back in its place. Admittedly, in the Liberation era, his wishes were granted with the creation of a Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning. As a leading light of the renewal of France, he can be seen in the film of Nicole Verdès, *La vie commence demain* (1949) alongside the physicist André Labarthe, Jean-Paul Sartre, Daniel Lagache, Jean Rostand, André Gide and Picasso. He appeared in *Le mémorial de la Renaissance française* (The Memorial of the French Renaissance). However, it is generally agreed that his role in the saga of the rebuilding of urban France was modest[468], and that a 'large number of his ideas in fact reflect long-established thinking in urban planning circles'[469]. For Françoise Choay, although Le Corbusier was seen as the face of utopia, he did not manage to put forward 'a global vision of society' and was part of 'a (progressivist) current that already existed'.[470] The myth has overtaken the man and his achievements.

To read Le Corbusier through an ideology-centric prism is to presuppose that political ideas have the power to transform minds (and reality…) and structure the field of social creation. Historians learned long ago that this approach is outdated and that politics does not have a monopoly on progress and innovation, which follow multiple and often unexpected paths.

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466 « Résumés des cours parus dans l'Annuaire du Collège de France », *in* Pierre Bourdieu, *Manet. Une révolution symbolique*, Éditions Raison d'agir/Éditions du Seuil, 2013 (rééd.), p. 808.

467 Gilles Ragot, « Une Œuvre irréductible. À propos du cinquantième anniversaire du décès de Le Corbusier », Critique d'art [En ligne], 46 | Printemps/Été 2016.

468 Bruno Vayssière, *Reconstruction déconstruction*, Paris, Picard, 1988.

469 Michaël Darin, *La Comédie urbaine*, collection Archigaphy, Gollion (C.H.), 2009, p. 395.

470 Françoise Choay, *La règle et le modèle. Sur la théorie de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme*, Seuil, Paris, 1980, p. 319 et p. 312.

'The progressivist and modernist current has no exclusive connection with a political sensibility, any more than expressionism does in art'[471]. Those who postulate the existence of a 'conceptual unity' of Le Corbusier reducible to a political ideology refuse to admit that reality is always complex, evolving, and cannot be reduced to formulas, models or moments. They also forget that 'Le Corbusier is full of contradictions, he wrote so much that he said everything and its opposite', adds Guillemette Morel Journel: 'There is not one Le Corbusier, but many'.[472] This does not mean there are no lines of intuition and loyalty in his work, or any metapolitical ambition furthered by his thinking as an urbanist who had plenty of time to express himself (for which his colleagues reproached him so much). In April 1939, he expressed the heart of his 'doctrine' that we find to the word in *The Home of Man*, published in 1942: 'It was then that "The Radiant City" was born, a theory, a modern doctrine of the urbanization of the machinist civilisation, to replace the unspeakable misery of the dwellings in the cursed zones with the "radiant dwelling", the dwelling decreed to be the center of urbanistic preoccupations (CIAM Congress of Athens, 1933)'[473]. And the CIAM program of 1933 was published in 1943[474]. Everything happened as if Le Corbusier were placing himself in relation to an epiphanic horizon (rebuilding cities in harmony between man and nature) on which the event of the war and the advent of Vichy would have no hold. Beyond his opportunistic flatteries, he was outside the political field, and proclaimed it, while being aware that only the political ('the authority') could allow the change of legislative framework required for the implementation of a large-scale urban planning policy. Full of 'contradictions' but faithful to a conception of the evolution of the man/city/housing relationship situated in a long-time frame and thought of on a metapolitical scale: his aim was nothing less than to prepare for the advent of "the second era of the machinist civilisation'. His friend Wogenscky accurately

471 Pierre Le Vigan, *Inventaire de la modernité, avant liquidation : au-delà de la droite et de la gauche, études sur la société, la ville, la politique*, Avatar Éditions, 2007, p. 228.

472 Guillemette Morel Journel, « Le Corbusier, l'écrivain. Arpenter Sur les 4 routes », PhD thesis directed by Jean-Louis Cohen, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 2010.

473 Le Corbusier, « L'urbanisme et le lyrisme des temps nouveaux », *Le Point*, n° 20, Colmar, avril 1939, *in Le Corbusier. Un homme à sa fenêtre. Textes choisis 1925–1960*, *op.cit.*, p. 95.

474 Eric Paul Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960*, Cambridg/London, MIT Press, 2000.

described his character as 'the meeting of opposites' and the man as a being in the making, 'committed but free, and alone'.[475] A 'free researcher', as Le Corbu defined himself, who thought that 'the city of today must be classless, simply human'. Yet the ultimate ambition of this man, who felt like and strove to be only a painter and artist, was to make urban planning a poetic gesture. Everything was based on the observation he made in 1942: that cities 'are sick because poetry left the heart of the professions generations ago'[476]. Beyond rationalism and technicism, there is 'Poetry, leader of the economic and mistress of the social'.

It is time to reintroduce Le Corbusier into a regime of historicity, to ballast him with the weight of his time and the currents that run through his professional environment. We must therefore avoid being misled by the pride that transpires in his writings and relationships with other people. His stay in Vichy shows the limits of his influence. His pre-war detractors were in a dominant position, favored by an anti-modernist and xenophobic cultural wave. The anti-Semitic prejudices of Camille Mauclair were what survived in a defeated France. Likewise for Auguste Perret (bizarrely protected by Le Corbusier's detractors). While the latter had no responsibility under Vichy and never showed any anti-Jewishness[477] during this tragic period for the Jews, Auguste Perret did not openly object to the measures taken to exclude Jews, freemasons and communists. He was typical of his profession: 'few well-known names in architecture among the declared opponents of Vichy, and no more among "ordinary" practitioners'[478]. The denunciatory discourse turns on itself, in a solipsistic manner, without bothering to refer to reality and its viscosity. It claims to tell the 'truth', allegedly hidden from us until now, in order to better distance itself from that 'truth'. The conspiracy rhetoric follows the same demagogic and populist approach; it participates in the same way in the defeat of thought and in the 'treason of the intellectuals'.

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475 André Wogenscky, *La main de Le Corbusier*, Paris, éditions du Moniteur, 2006, p. 29.

476 Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger,* Paris, éditions Falaize, 1950 (written in 1942), p. 11.

477 It is true that before the war, traces of a 'anti-Semitism class culture' stemming from his background can be found in his private correspondence (to use the formula of Jean-Louis Cohen, *La République du Centre*, 8 mai 2015).

478 Danièle Voldman, « Les architectes en France dans la première moitié du XX^{e} siècle », *in* R. Baudouï (dir.), *Le Corbusier 1930–2020. Polémiques, mémoire et histoire*, Paris, Tallandier, 2020, p.197.

Le Corbusier remains the symbol of a progressivist and internationalist culture against which is deployed a backward-looking and conformist discourse, that of his lifelong enemies. Enemies who knew very well how to build on his provocations and his polemics. André Chastel saw that 'the Picasso of modern architecture' 'was for a long time more famous and more loved abroad than in France'[479], his country of adoption, and that he remained 'misunderstood'. He suggested that the 'insufficient artistic culture' of the French was perhaps why they struggled to appreciate what the man brought to the way we think about architecture, in other words his attempt to reconcile technological precision with poetic intuition. But another factor must also be taken into account: the insufficient technical culture among the so-called men of culture who remained imprisoned by an imaginary which viewed culture, in the words of Gilbert Simondon, 'as a defense system against technics', supposing 'that technical objects do not contain a human reality'[480]. Hence the ritual opposition between technicism and humanism deployed by the heralds of the struggle against machinist alienation, an opposition that is no more than an updated, ecologized and moralized form of the reactionaries who were contemptuous of technical progress.

The Moderns are no longer in fashion, they are stigmatised as the scapegoats of a world that mass-produced housing and destroyed people's ability to live together. Le Corbusier's road is blocked. Ignorance and malice join hands to bypass what Le Corbusier was and wanted. His psychology tells us more than his own discourses, perhaps, about his inability to be instrumentalized and fascinated by power, whatever its forms. Although he was opportunistic, he was above all faithful to his vision of architecture and the architect, confident in his genius: 'But he never adjusted his architecture to his interlocutors nor did he compromise. He firmly accomplished a work of freedom'[481]. His modernity meant he could never have been inclined to the technophobia that the famous biologist Marcel Prenant saw as inherent in Nazism's 'philosophy of despair'[482]. His optimism and his faith in humanity protected him against the fascist temptation and its agonistic and crepuscular culture[483].

479 André Chastel, *Architecture et Patrimoine, op.cit.,* p. 170.
480 Gilbert Simondon cité par Jean-Hugues Barthélémy, *Penser la connaissance et la technique après Simondon*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2005, p. 156.
481 Jean-Louis Cohen, *Le Temps*, 24 septembre 2012.
482 Marcel Prenant, « Pas d'humanisme sans la technique », *Les Lettres Françaises*, 2 septembre 1948.

To counter the catastrophic discourses of those who see his work and thought as an example of the 20th century totalitarian temptation, one need only read his *Poésie sur Alger* (Poem on Algiers), in particular this passage on the freedom of man written in 1942: 'Elevating men above platitudes and clearing before them the path of discovery of the heart, where everyone is their own master, a free harvester of the riches that are life'. It is not insignificant that this little-known book was initially written at the request of Max-Pol Fouché, who directed the valiant *Fontaine* magazine (but he did not follow up on it). Le Corbusier saw this magazine as 'a haven open to the poetic vessels of a France stunned by the consequences of a strange defeat'[484]. We know that *Fontaine* was censored by the Vichy and German governments and later became the tribune of the French intellectual resistance.

By returning him to his historical reality, in other words to his environment, his time and the systems of influences and *epistemes* that conditioned him, we will avoid the excesses of adoration or detestation. It is a question of defending not a man and his work but a way of thinking and transmitting knowledge, at a time when conspiracy pseudo-theories and the fashion for systematic denigration are developing dangerously. The Le Corbusier affair goes beyond Le Corbusier: it is a new aspect of the 'doxa of France's murky past'[485] that is lastingly attached to the memory of the 'dark years'. The 'treason of the intellectuals' today is perhaps characterized by the absence of the 'courage of nuance'[486].

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483 In 1948, one of the leading characters of the academic world, the communist Marcel Prenant, embarked upon the adventure of the *Encyclopédie de la Renaissance Française* (Encyclopedia of the French Renaissance). The project, ideated by Paul Langevin before his death, 'represents for our century the effort at scientific rationalization undertaken by Diderot and the Encyclopedists.' Le Corbusier was invited to participate in this endeavor precisely because he embodied this sense of progress and faith in rationality. He was to write the article on the Modulor. In a letter to Le Corbu, whom he invited to sit on the committee of honor, he presented the philosophical stakes of the project in the following manner: 'dialectical materialism shall be our underlying theme, just as the mechanist materialism of the philosophers of the 18th century was Diderot's guideline.' Letter of Marcel Prenant to Le Corbusier, mars 1948. Archives of the Le Corbusier Foundation, FLC, F2–7–93.

484 Le Corbusier, *Poésie sur Alger, op.cit.,* p. 9. Of course, this does not allow Le Corbusier to consider himself as a 'Resistance fighter'.

485 Pierre Laborie, *Le chagrin et le venin, op.cit.*, p. 57.

486 Jean Birnbaum, *Le courage de la nuance*, Paris, éd. du Seuil, 2021.