

Introduction
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A close reading of *Precisions: On the Present State of Architecture and City Planning* (1930) means a discussion of the effect these lectures; these travels; these projects had on Le Corbusier throughout the 1920s. While Corbu was certainly influential in the region—Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Reidy, Emilio Duhart are just three names for whom Corbu’s work and discussions of the region were extremely important—the lectures that make up the book were not especially warmly received by the Latin American cities that hosted them. The theoretical projects that resulted from this decade of travel and lecture are more important than any built project: this book represents a chronicle of growth. Through looking closely at the evolution of his visuals; his lectures; translations of his plans from site to site; experimentation; and copies of his work at the time, it becomes clear that these travels were impactful in terms of how Corbu thought about regionalism and landscape, and the methods through which he represented his work in particular, all within the context of a greater culture of artists working and influencing each other at the time: a loose reading of poet Oswald de Andrade’s cannibalism, as well as a close one.

In terms of Le Corbusier’s new approaches to landscape, the way he was able to observe a given region and environment—initially at least—was at least as important as the environment he was observing. Flying for the first time over Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo with Antoine de Saint Exupéry changed both Le Corbusier’s way of thinking about design as well as his way of drawing and writing: through his writings we see a more playful tone emerge that is almost reverential to the landscape. Describing the globe as a poached egg as viewed from above and musing about the differences between regional characters via Italian macaroni and German strudel is something not seen in his prior writings, and can be attributed to a certain extent to this new experience of air travel. This also lead him to accept and work by “la loi du méandre,” which he espoused stemming from his observations from above: and allow for conceptualizing ideas of urbanism that may not follow formal problem solving but rather need to be unknotted based on experience, as a river may wind. His drawings become less traditional around this time as well (using these as illustrations during lecture already being a change from photography), and we can see his evolution from realistic sketches and photography to purism and surrealism over the course of these travels. This evolution not only draws a link to changes in his writing, but therefore to the artistic community around him: a similarity in thinking between Corbu and poet Vicente Huidobro is clear (specifically his views on poetry as “modern enterprise”), as well as to Oswald de Andrade’s cannibalism and the artistic practice of Matta.

Visual influence was not only visible in artistic practice though, but also in his

drawings that led to proposed plans for the area. Air travel led Corbu to approach landscape in an entirely new way, one example being his proposal for Rio de Janeiro: Corbu photographed and drew its mountains and landscape extensively and became interested in documenting the favelas and their environment. His attention to materials here would also influence later projects such as Casa Errazuriz in Chile. Corbu’s plan for Rio came to him in the air—“in the plane I had my sketchbook, and everything became clear to me as I sketched”—and aimed to connect the sea to the urban center through a viaduct that would sit on top of and wind between (not destroy) the existing landscape, over existing urban and natural fabric, which was a departure from past plans that were based on a site without pre-existing qualities.

While we can trace these evolutions within Le Corbusier’s work, tracing the influence of his work at this time leads to the observation of a Corbusian language whether it be through direct collaboration or indirect copy and influence. Niemeyer’s Pampulha Modern; Reidy’s Pedregulho; and Duhart’s CEPAL complex, as well as the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Health, to name just a few projects, speak to his influence, and the pervasive interests within the architectural discourse at the time. His thinking was certainly part of a larger artistic community of the time in addition to the architects he was in contact with: Matta, as mentioned previously, as well as Huidobro, de Andrade, Josephine Baker, and Tarsila do Amaral were all visiting the same cities between Latin America and Europe at this time, and no doubt were of a circuitous interest to each other’s work in their respective disciplines. De Andrade’s ideas in particular are important to talk about in terms of Corbu’s larger ideas on the city-scale and arial view that informed his urbanism, arranging the forms below to “create poetry,” in some ways in common with De Andrade’s ideas regarding the “cannibalising” of other cultures as desired to make something new and unique, though with vastly different results.

Through observing both built and unbuilt projects—both most important in their theoretical and abstract legacies—these connections and influences are traced visually on the appendices timeline (verso), as well as the attached visual representation of his trajectory and work before and after the influential 1929, through these common themes. These materials need not be read chronologically, and can follow the law of the meander in the way they are read and thought through, much like they were for Le Corbusier himself.

Le Corbusier’s Unfinished Projects
Taylor Zhai Williams

The shifts in Le Corbusier’s thought following his excursion to South America have been widely discussed. Moreso, his influence on the development of modern architecture on the continent has also been subject to close scrutiny. Given the reach and pervasiveness of Le Corbusier’s legacy, not only strongly received in South America, but also in Northern America, Japan, Yugoslavia and, of course, in Europe, and the degree to which his production has been already imitated, alluded to, corrupted and developed over the span of the twentieth century, it may seem odd to suggest that ‘projects’ within his oeuvre still have yet to be fully played out. However, our analysis leads us to believe that there are still two themes within Le Corbusier’s work, both springing from his trip of 1929, that are possible to develop in the twenty first century, and perhaps what may be gained from them are of more use today than before.

The urban strategy that Le Corbusier proposed for Rio de Janeiro, later developed as a proposal for Algiers, would be invariably stripped of its meaning and widely imitated as a formal gesture. In the city of its origin, Rio, we find the plan’s meandering form assumed as a topographic gesture in Alfonso Reidy’s Pedregulho Social Housing Complex of 1951. The Forte Quezzi housing project in Genoa of 1956-68, led by Luigi Carlo Daneri and Eugenio Fuselli and realised as a late entry into postwar Italy’s mostly populist INA-CASA development project, would interpret the Rio/Obus plan in a similar way, not only in terms of the project’s relationship to topography, but also to the extent that both projects would free the strip’s middle-storey as an open-air street of public space. Seemingly sympathetic to their sites, both projects actually diminish the hilltops they straddle as their forms uncritically take the “line of best fit” along the contours, failing to engage with the landscape in a meaningful way. By contrast, we see in Le Corbusier’s projects for Rio and Algiers that the form of the meander is in fact defiant to the topography; it captures the spirit of the landscape which it then represents in its own formal unravelling, culminating in a dialogue between the two. In the case of Reidy’s and Daneri and Fuselli’s projects, their buildings are markedly mute.

The ‘form of the meander’ would be utilized for organizational purposes in Jaap Bakema’s project for Tel Aviv of 1963. Taking on the form of an occupiable city wall that both encloses the historic center and, along its exterior edge, forms a datum out of which a modern housing fabric can emerge, this project, unlike Le Corbusier’s, thoughtfully considers how natural light would be affected by such a megastructure, as seen by his placement of housing on its south side. On its north side we see large, empty plaza’s as any such space would be overcast by shadow throughout much of the day; Bakema’s ‘solution’ actually reveals a major fault in the Rio/Obus strategy. Perhaps the most convincing development of this plan is seen in Vittorio Gregotti’s Uni-

versity of Calabria project, completed in 1979, which takes the form of a straight line. More similar to Le Corbusier’s plan for Sao Paulo, than to that for Rio/Obus, Gregotti’s obtuse intervention, which persists along its path at a constant elevation, even if this means plunging through the heart of a hill, actually reveals the landscape. Furthermore, it forms a non-monumental core that stitches together the town’s loose rural fabric.

The full potential of the Rio/Obus form is revealed by Manfredo Tafuri in his book *Architecture and Utopia: Design and Capitalist Development*, wherein he writes:

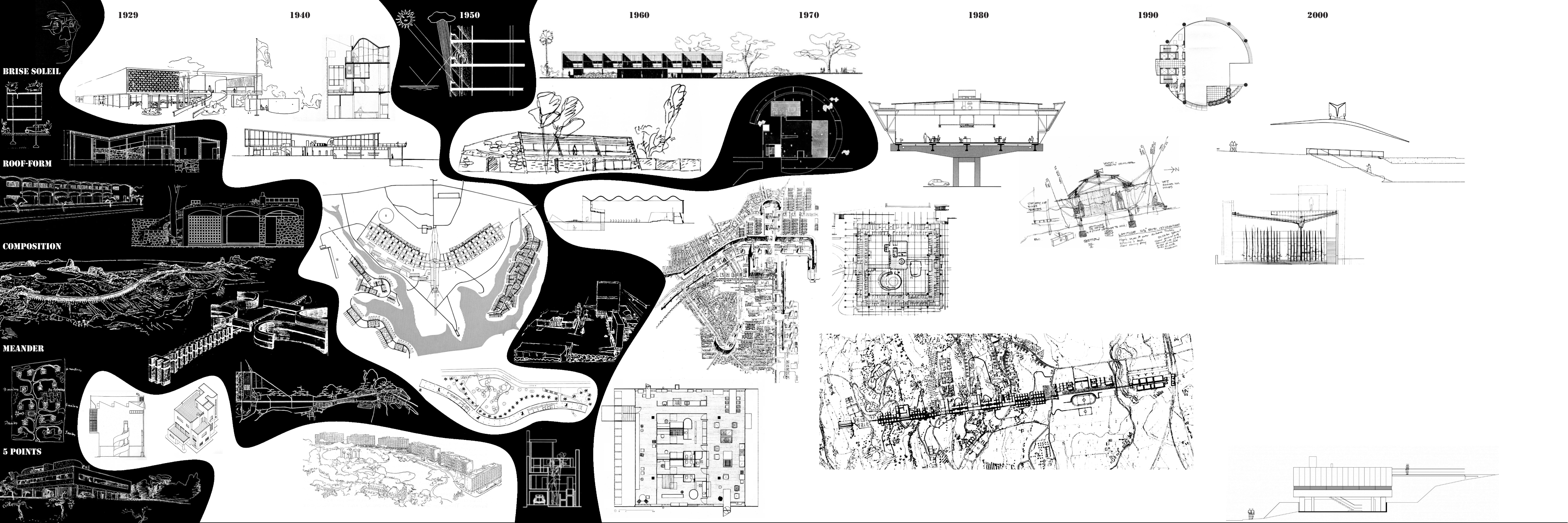
From 1929 to 1931, with the plans for Montevideo, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Rio and finally with the Obus plan for Algiers, Le Corbusier formulated the most elevated theoretical hypothesis of modern urbanism. It is, in fact, still unsurpassed from the point of view of both ideology and form.... what emerges is the positive quality of contradictions, the reconciliation of the rational and the irrational... the reign of necessity fused with liberty... On any level that it might be read or used, Le Corbusier’s Algiers imposes a total involvement with the public... [foreseeing] the possibility of inserting eccentric and eclectic elements into the network of fixed structures... permitting the proletariat to express its own bad taste. (pp. 127-132)

With such a strong form Le Corbusier preemptively negates the ‘kitchness’ of popular taste, allowing such to proliferate without offense. So far, few architectural or urban realizations in the city have considered the potential of public participation, despite the clear value of such, making this a so far an ‘unfinished’ Corbusian project.

The second unfinished Corbusian project concerns how climate can shape a building’s ‘deep-form’. From the Errazuriz House, to the Mandrot House, to the Weekend House, we see a conscious critique of technology, as the representation of such is suppressed. With Lucio Costa’s introduction of the brise-soleil to Le Corbusier’s oeuvre, the status of technology is further diminished as air-conditioning is no longer posited as the primary source of thermal comfort. Le Corbusier will not treat the brise-soleil as a ‘product’ to be attached to a building for a singular purpose, but rather he will develop it differently in different projects, in each instance rendering it as a fundamental element. In the unites the brise soleil forms the unit terraces. In the Villa Shodhan and in the Curuchet House the brise soleil forms a fixed limit within which a complex volume-void composition may play out. The brise soleil it proportioned to evoke civic authority in the case of the assembly building, Chandigarh and at Firminy it begins to directly affect the plastic form of his sports center. Missing in contemporary practice is a cultural, as opposed to technological, approach to ecology, such as is demonstrated in the work of Le Corbusier.



ARCHITECTURE AFTER 1929



1929

1940

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

BRISE SOLEIL

ROOF-FORM

COMPOSITION

MEANDER

5 POINTS

