

CULTURAL EXCHANGE IN THE HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE

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1. Foreword

Thinking about the Silk Road, I refer to the globe again and again. Even if my knowledge is very poor, the name spurs my imagination of our vast history.

As is well known, the etymology of such naming does not go back any further than the end of the 19th century when the word: "*Seidenstraße*" was defined by F.Richthofen. However, in 5th century BC, Herodotus already knew the road along which not only cultural or economic exchange, but also political conflict between Greece and Persia, had been engraved. He wrote that one of "the first architects," Mandrokles, had led the construction of a pontoon bridge beyond the Strait Hellespontos [1]. Some four hundred years later, ancient Rome dominated ancient Greece and imported many goods and much loot, as written in Horatius' famous poem: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio* [2].

In the era of Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, Vitruvius also made reference to "Asia," a land foreign to him. This name is derived from the ancient Assyrian "as," which designated "the direction of the rising sun," as opposed to "era," Europe. He used the name only seven times in his book, but it is extremely important that one was involved precisely in the "origin" of a Greek temple style. According to him, *«Eeustyli ratio...huius exemplar Rmanae nullum habemus...eas autem symmetrias constituit Hermogenes»* (Ionian architect, born in Asia) [3].

2. Subjects of our "Architecturo-logy"

There are already three subjects: The first is the definition of culture; the second concerns the center of the world; and the last resides in the meaning and reality of exchange. In order to clarify the problem, let us set forth the following questions:

1) What is human culture?

The concept of culture may contain our ideas, sentiments, values, objects, behaviors, tendencies, and accumulations. Various art and technology may be included. In any case, it is essentially significant to recognize some continual tendency to "realize ourselves through contact with others." One of the fundamental characteristics of human beings seems to be defined as "ex-sistere," analyzed by M.Heidegger.

2) Where is the center of the world positioned for each time?

The Asia referred to by Vitruvius was limited to a small coast of the Near East, though, after his age, the Romans came to glorify "*omnes viae Romam ducunt.*"

Today, in Japan, the east-end of the Silk Road is situated in Japan, while the west-end is in Rome, far more west than the Hellespontos. Both ends are connected via three paths: the Step Road, Oasis Road, and Ocean Road. Why "the End of the East?"

In ancient China, "Toyo" meant the sea (or direction) of east, as they knew its end was an unknown area of the Pacific Ocean, which we can now traverse in only eight hours. This

fact lets me imagine another “Silk Road of the Airplane,” although, of course, in an abstract and symbolic sense. The younger generation may add many roads of information or technology (sometimes unfortunately including air pollution), such as a “rhizome,” exactly the same as the “World Wide Web.”

Our globe indeed tells us that east of Japan lies the United States, whose East Coast is connected to Europe across the Atlantic Ocean, and Europe is tied to the Orient, the vast Eur-asian continent, which finally circulates back to our country.

I am absolutely not advocating that our country is the only center of the world, but it is “one” of the centers exactly in the way all homelands are. If you agree with our opinion of “circulation,” it can be said that the concept of the Silk Road is somewhat romantic and exceedingly historic, rather than geographic.

3) How can we exchange our cultures?

The Silk Road primarily consists of the exchange of goods. “Silk and Gem” were its symbols in the real sense of *συν-βάλλω* (throw together). By so-called barter, our economic activity developed with the idea of “give & take”, yet, the meaning of the Silk Road is not limited to the dimension of things. For our country, as well as the Tang Dynasty in China, the introduction of Buddhism has had decisive effect. Needless to say, Chinese characters, methods of wood construction, and the historical influence of China on Japan stay remarkable even after the motto “Datsua-Nyuo (abandon Asia in order to join Europe)” and the Second World War. In any case, we tend to appreciate and introduce several aspects of foreign cultures that are supposed to be superior to ours.

Thus, our third question should refer back to the first. As a structure of cultural exchange, we will find some currents spreading to “the peripheral” from “the center.” Each is supposed in each time, just like the wave theory of Ch.Huygens. However, our problem is “where is the true center?” Sometimes, we do not know what we do not know. For our individual body, is the center always closed and separated from its surroundings?

Absolutely, not. Our physiological body is always related to our natural surroundings. The phenomenology of the 20th century tells us that our human nature should be achieved through contact with others. If this is the fundamental reality, we must state that the most important for our cultural exchange is to know, from the outset, what our differences are.

3. Beyond the Exchange ?

Now, we must return back to the history of architecture and consider more precisely these subjects. Vitruvius himself longed for ancient Greece, but not for his daily surroundings. Also, in the Middle Ages, the Christian world often sought its origin in the East or in another world, the Heavenly Paradise. In contrast, architects of the Renaissance returned to ancient Rome and Greece. Their “theories of order” were derived principally from the text of Vitruvius and then resonated to the French Academy and Beaux-Arts educations.

In my opinion, it is surely possible to establish a concept of “Travel of Architects” in a large sense. In fact, we remember many examples: Villard de Honnecourt, J.W.von Goethe, Fr.von Schlegel, A.W.N.Pugin, J.Ruskin, A.Laprade, and so on. If Lord Elgin had not visited Athens, the Parthenon Marbles would not have been seen in the British Museum.

The architect’s profession does include the aim to create some new world beyond the habitual surroundings. A variety of foreign experiences sometimes bring a decisive influence. The world of architecture does not remain in the “exchange of goods.” Moreover, an entire architectural space can be created with a new way of dwelling.

We now recall a famous example of modern architecture, the case of Charles-Edouard Jeanneret. It was because of his “Voyage to the Orient” that he decided “to become an architect” (Le Corbusier).

4. Six Sketchbooks of Jeanneret: History, Meanings, Motifs and Structure

4-1). It is well known that Le Corbusier was polishing his manuscript “*Le Voyage d’Orient*,” just before his death in August, 1965. The book was published the following year with a preface by Jean Petit as follows: «*Voici donc ce “Voyage d’Orient” que Le Corbusier considérait comme une documentation importante et significative sur l’année décisive de sa formation d’artiste et d’architecte*» [4].

This book is based on his journey in 1911 to the Orient and the Mediterranean. He was only 24-years-old, intending to be an ornament artist, who still made himself called Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris. Referring to letters from that time period, his itinerary can be followed in detail. After his death, six sketchbooks of his journey were found in 1982 and *La Fondation Le Corbusier* printed all of their pages. His sketchbooks include various styles and expressions. You often find false spellings, deletions and corrections. Furthermore, some involve daily life topics such as travel expenses and addresses of acquaintances. However, these also include attractive sketches and measured drawings, as well as interesting descriptions. Various expressions represent the dawn of Le Corbusier and the dynamic course of his mental formation.

4-2). Jeanneret’s sketchbooks are neither edited conceptually as architectural theory nor organized in a united language. Philosophically reflected as well, the core of architectural theory is not to be constructed by some essays or everyday journalism, yet, the six books include an essential *θεωρία* (observation×contemplation) for Le Corbusier and therefore they became a significant source of his architectural creation in later years. If classic architecture explored the verification between *θεωρία* and *πράξις*, in the “*harmonie préétablie*” (Leibniz), there is room to estimate a way of modern architecture. The traditional concept of “truth” itself, i.e., «*adaequatio intellectus et rei*» [5] is part of our question here again.

Some sketches became very famous, through quotations and transcriptions in his various books and works. Many examples are already known, such as “*Vers une architecture*” (1923), “*L’art décoratif d’aujourd’hui*” (1925), “*Urbanisme*” (1925), “*Le Corbusier et Pierre Jeanneret; Ihr Gesamtwerk von 1910 bis 1929*” (1929), “*Le Modulor*” (1950), “*L’Unité d’habitation à Marseille*” (1946-52), and “*La Chapelle de Ronchamp*” (1956-60).

However, it is more important that he discovered the true value of architecture during his journey. A life experience of voyage significantly changed him. The journey led him, so to speak, from the dark shadow of the forest of Jura to the bright glitter of the Mediterranean Sea. As pointed out in an excellent paper by Giuliano Gresleri, his sense abroad is seen here and there along the itinerary. Although he was with Auguste M. Klipstein, who studied under W. Worringer, his own inquiry was purified all the more.

A “tour” often makes the sense of the “tourist” especially keen. At the same time, it brings essential recognition of the universal principles of human nature. Our travels can give us fecund opportunity to reflect on our habitual way of thinking. The six notebooks, in this sense, maintain his original decision toward “une architecture” in the glitter of his incisive sensitivity.

4-3). An investigation into the modern current in Germany was the commission given to Jeanneret by *L’Ecole d’art de La Chaux-de-Fonds*. He stayed in Munich from April to May of 1910 and visited the Exhibition of Modern Houses and, at the end of April, went to Vienna to see the Secession movement. He also met such valuable people as Th. Fischer, P. Behrens, and William Ritter, but this travel was not as satisfying as his visit to Italy in 1907. A letter to Ritter proves his strong desire to visit the Classic World inspired by the writings of this great intellectual: «*Mon esprit s’est, ... tant ouvert à la compréhension du génie classique... Toute*

l'époque actuelle, n'est-ce pas, regarde plus que jamais vers ces terres heureuses où blanchissent les marbres rectilignes, les colonnes verticales et les entablements parallèles à la ligne des mers... je prépare un voyage très grand....» [6].

Following Gresleri, his plan was a tour toward the metaphorical past as well as the true past. We find here only some reference to the fundamental elements of architecture without structure. Thus, his tour of metaphor has been developed along the course of seeking the origin of architecture. It is this awareness that acted as the motivating power behind his journey to the Orient. Later in life, Le Corbusier said that no decoration can arouse the inspirations of a traveler. Under inspiration is only the pure form and unified construction of architecture. In other words, works of art exist there.

As discussed later, a sort of “reductive thinking” is recognized here. Even the universality found by Le Corbusier underwent a return and, seen from the other side, the viewpoint is nothing else but an architectural world assessed by his own eyes. Such an understanding of the origin of architecture bloomed into various works in his later life.

4-4). Thus, the six sketchbooks are positioned as a step to investigate the nature of architecture. His awareness of the essence in architecture is no less his standpoint as “an architect.” Therefore, the structure of the six books should be traced.

The first book was written between June of 1910 and July of 1911 when he visited Istanbul. His memories of Prague and Vienna and the voyage on the Danube are described. The second book is concerned with almost the same period. Special interests that struck him in the Danube, Balkan districts, Prague, Adrianople, and Istanbul are described therein.

Generally speaking, his writing styles are like the reports of a journalist and the same types of passages were sent to “*La Feuille d'avis de la Chaux-de-Fonds*.” Yet the sentences from the second book are widely referred to in “*Le Voyage d'Orient*,” elaborated later in his life, and sometimes reveal an obvious “literal intention.” It is full of depictions of landscapes, folk customs, and shapes of foreign houses that attracted this “traveler.”

The third book covers the days from August 21st, when he visited Bursa, to October 5th, when he arrived at Brindisi. This is the most organized and descriptive of the books. It corresponds with the guidebook “*Baedeker*” that he was carrying. The topic of this book is Bursa, its green mosque, and the famous profile of Istanbul. Numerous impressive drawings of Athos, Acropolis, and Delfi are also included here.

The fourth book concerns Pompeii, Napoli, and Rome. It includes notes from October 5th to the 20th when he visited the *Villa di Adriano*. Here, his intention of “*Hermeneutic*” as a creator, his professional concern to the forms of architecture, is particularly demonstrated. According to Gresleri, here we find a clear expression of his desire to restore ruins destroyed through history. The fifth book, for the most part, is about the Villa, and is the most “architectural.” His interest in the grand monuments of the past is strengthened. We find decisive motifs of later creations of architectural space, such as *La Chapelle de Ronchamp*. The fifth sketchbook covers the week of October 20th to the 26th.

The sixth book describes the last days of his journey, from his arrival at Florence (October 26th) to his homecoming. The description begins with the *Campo Santo* in Pisa, followed by the sketches of *La Chartreuse d'Ema* in Florence. Various sketches here are “drawn with surprisingly inclusive silhouette lines.” That is to say, an object is returned to its intuitive form by trifling lines, relying on his drawing technique to grasp the object as a whole.

5. Seeing, Writing, Drawing and Thinking

These properties of his sketchbooks promote our considerations regarding his writing style. His attitude of grasping an object gradually changes from extremely literal descriptions to

some “*sachlich*” observations with measurements, and then to the drawings seasoned with his own architectural imagination. At the same time, his writing style considerably varies from descriptive expression, allowing a third person to understand, to rather personal notations of his professional consciousness. His emotional experience around the Danube, intoxication in Istanbul, and sensational impression in Athens and Rome allowed him to represent plentiful visual images. In Athos, he wrote that «*l’œil était l’avant courir de l’esprit* ». It can be said here that, before literal processing, his description became more adherent to the reality of architecture. Soon after, «*des yeux qui ne voient pas*» was so violently accused.

It is reckless to attempt to understand a simple linear transformation and yet the transfiguration of his sketchbooks in fact traces vivid trails. Therefore, these phenomena shall be demonstrated here in contrast (more images will be shown in our conference). You will find an essential procedure of architecture, i.e., seeing, writing, drawing, and thinking.

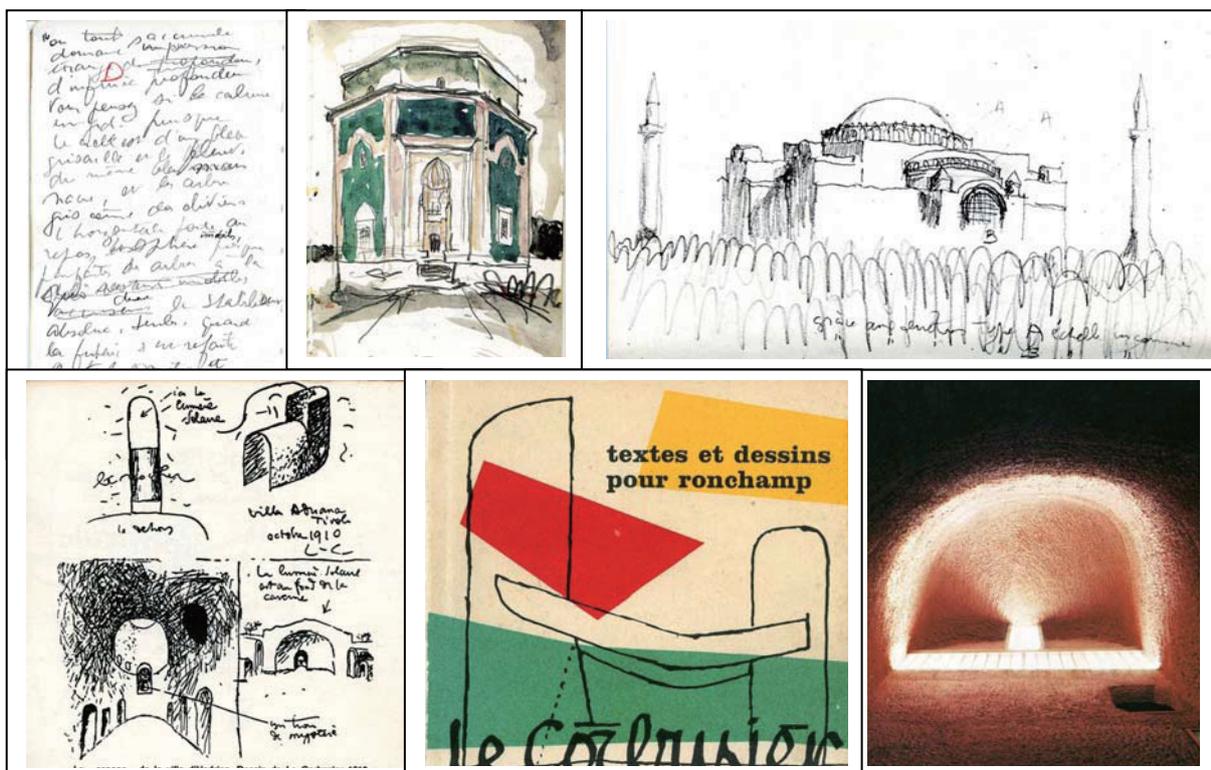


Fig. 1: Pages from six sketchbooks 1911 / Texts & Works of Le Corbusier 1960
(Famous images, but even now they stimulate our thinking on architectural theory)

6. An Interpretation

This change in writing styles and expression forms seems to hold an important architectural meaning. According to Gresleri, Jeanneret had the means and tools to direct himself within visible matters, such as his stenography similar to a reporter, the tour guide *Baedeker*, his excellent skill of “*croquis*,” binoculars, camera, and specifically the six sketchbooks.

Such tools or, strictly speaking, techniques, are to be the basic criterion for an architect to identify himself. Out of them, the overlapping relationship between the “*Lebens-Welt*” and architecture is shaped. It can be said that the abstract work of measuring historical buildings already indicates an introduction to the world of architecture. These technical prospects are

based on a process that allows the real architectural space to be represented in mathematics. They must assure a common way in “*architectonique*” in order to grasp architectural phenomena, while cooperating with aesthetic criteria such as “*sym-metria*,” “*proportion*,” “*échelle*,” or “*le modulator*.” But, is this all that we should consider?

I have attempted to argue some points on the structure of the sketchbooks. Some references were provided concerning the standpoint of Le Corbusier. As mentioned above, the tour to foreign countries had surely stimulated his interest in culture, especially in Istanbul, where he admired the entire city. Then, in Athos and Athens, sketches without comments showed his deep inspiration. The adventure to the Orient led Jeanneret to the sparkling sky of the Mediterranean Sea. However, from our viewpoint, it is essentially significant that such a transition was achieved as an experience of ἀ-λήθεια, i.e., to “dis-cover and find” the true origin of architecture. This transition is neither a simple reflection of culture shock nor a technical result of translation from one style to another. It is not a problem of listing up the historical styles. Moreover, this transition is not a state of so-called empathy, where foreign features are found in the mere exoticism, rambled and imitated immediately.

Even though he had the writings of Worringer during his journey, Jeanneret’s architectural experiences exceeded the old frames of applied art and modern aesthetic. The change in writing styles indicates his decision toward “*une architecture*” prior to literal processing. An ancient relic can be regarded as the primary structure of the building left as time goes by. Nature and our art interact with each other, and historic incidents can logically lead to solid principals of structure. “*Firmitas*” was the primary requirement by Vitruvius.

Jeanneret’s sketches, however, do not stay simply as observations of old constructions. Sketching itself extracts the essence of space in ruins and derives from there the source of an architectural idea. Here, his sketches sublimate from a pictorial means of describing objects to an architectural tool of designing and his drawings develop into architectural extractions. Just at this point, his sketchbooks come to be regarded not as a sightseeing diary, but as “*esquisse*” of his architecture.

For my conclusion, I must quote a significant concept of Vitruvius. The essential point of architecture seems to be “*conlocatio rerum aptis locis* (put all the elements in their proper places)” i.e., δίαθεσις. Whether in foreign countries or in his homeland, the task of an architect remains to find the most appropriate space, since all works of architecture should be situated somewhere in our dwelling place.

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